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**The American University in Cairo**

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**Between Family and Market: the decline of professional employment  
among Egyptian female university graduates**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies:

In Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies

in the Middle East and North Africa Specialization

By

Magda Aboul Ela

Under Supervision of Dr. Hania Sholkamy

June 2012

The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

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## **Chapter One: Introduction:**

In recent years, there has been a remarkable decline in the number of middle and upper middle class female university graduates joining the formal labor market (Walby 2002). This has resulted in the regression of female participation in the labor market, especially for those careers in the professional and the public spheres. Indeed, it was expected that increasing the rate of female education in general, and of higher education in particular, would result in a corresponding increase in the number of women pursuing professional careers within the Egyptian labor market, but such has not proved to be the case. The Egyptian female employment participation rate was 24.4% in 2008, in comparison to the male participation rate of 76.4% (World Bank report 2008).

The rate of the Egyptian Female Employment participation is very low in comparison to the rates of other countries worldwide. Egypt's gender gap places it 120<sup>th</sup> out of 128 countries for female labor force participation (Hausmann et al., 2008) and (Barsoum 2010). This low rate of employment is even more pronounced among female young people, since around 87 % do not participate in the labor force (Assaad and Hamidi 2009). Some researchers attribute the low labor female participation rate mainly to cultural norms or to women's exit from the labor force when they start a family or become discouraged after a long and unsuccessful search for work (Hassan 2008).

According to the Egyptian Human Development Report (EHDR 2010:144), the rates of female unemployment increase because more women opt not to join the labor force. The report notes the existence of the gender barriers that compelled women to drop out of the labor market subsequent to the deterioration of the public sector that, for a long time,

provided the kind of egalitarian work environment that encouraged and supported female employment in Egypt.

I argue that to understand the decline of the participation of women in professional employment, all the related aspects should be considered. We should reflect on the articulation between the gendered state, the labor market and the family in the creation of this phenomenon. I argue that the traditional gendered norms in the socialization of upper-middle class Egyptian women have created a new form of domesticity that reinforces the patriarchal ideology that dictates female dependency and advocates that a woman's place is in the home (Hoodfar 1997; Assaad and Hamidi 2009). Meanwhile, this new domesticity is being vigorously promoted by the new extremist Islamic ideology that emphasizes the traditional restriction of the mobility of women and which seeks to keep women out of the labor market. In addition, the gender discrimination in the work place and the indecent work conditions push women out of the labor market and discourage them to join the labor market (Assaad and Arantz 2005) and (Barsoum 2010). Moreover, since the 1980s, the socio-economic changes in Egypt that have accompanied globalization and the structured adjustment policies era have had an adverse effect on female employment in general and on female professional employment in particular. That is, they have not only reduced female employment opportunities within the existing public sector, a situation which has been exacerbated by the effect of the current freeze on public sector job creation. Simultaneously the new economic system has failed to create jobs suitable to the skills and qualifications of highly educated young Egyptian women (Moghadam 1998 & 2005).



For my research, I adopted a qualitative methodology in order to explore the participants' experiences and to interpret these phenomena in terms of their own perceptions. I also depended on theoretical background and the related literature, relevant statistics, media releases, informal and formal interviews. I started by using a snowballing tool to assign the participants. I conducted interviews (in depth and semi-structured interviews) with three groups of participants.

I considered the following facts in the selection of my field work. First, Information Technology is a very important sector that has a high economic value. On the other hand, Information Technology has become a very important industry in the world and in Egypt as well. Egypt is increasing its investments in this field. Recently, Egypt has invested heavily in that sector. Universities are making an effort to improve and develop programs that prepare graduates to face society's challenges using IT skills. However, several female IT graduates in this study have preferred to stay at home, although, in the last five years, the IT market has been flourishing in Egypt. Some might claim that this decision is affected by the need to depend economically on a male in the family or by a prospective husband who requires the female graduate to quit her career. However, this might not be the case, especially in the middle and the upper classes where the basic needs of the individuals are already satisfied, and women have the financial resources to both work and see to the needs of a family without compromising the financial situation of the family. Such a situation raises many questions about the real reasons that prompt female IT graduates to abandon their careers.

A significant aspect of this research is its use of gender perspective to investigate the decline in the professional employment of Egyptian female university graduates in

relation to their education and class status. In spite of the abundant studies on women's employment, the available literature has not provided adequate analysis of the decline of technical professional employment of women in Egypt. This research seeks to highlight the gender barriers and disparities that women face in this field. In addition, I investigated the participants' perceptions of womanhood, marriage, and work as challenging factors in their life's choices. Such an investigation could help young Egyptian women to identify and avoid negative consequences resulting from the regression of women's social, economic, and political status.

I became interested in this research when I encountered the attitude of some colleagues who, when speaking about planning the future of their daughters, stated that their daughters, who were recent university graduates, would get married and choose to stay at home and be housewives. In the Friday Mail column in the Friday, October 16, 2009 edition of al-Ahram, I read the story of a woman who studied pharmacy and then willingly withdrew from her professional career when she got married and became pregnant, and rather than return to the work place after delivering her first child, she was planning to have more children and stay at home.

### ***Questions to be answered:***

The questions of my thesis revolved around three main domains: the family and self, the labor market, and the state. I explored the socio-economic background of the participants to identify whether it is a free personal choice to opt out of the labor market or whether it is the socialization of those graduates within the patriarchal gendered Egyptian society that leads to this situation. In the domain of the family and self, I investigated how far the current socio-economic situation affected the changes on gender

relations and how much gender norms shape relations within the family, with a special focus on the gender division of roles and its causal relation to the high rate of unemployment among young women. I probed the participants' perceptions of stereotyped roles of wife/mother and child caretakers. I investigated the socialization of young women and how the overemphasis on the importance of marriage, family, and private life affects young women's careers. I explore the participants' perceptions of marriage and family making in light of the current the increase of divorce rate, rising age of marriage, and spinsterhood. I investigated their perceptions of work and its relation to self actualization, autonomy, and economic independence. I investigated their employment preferences-- full time versus part time opportunities, choices based on observing their family responsibilities that may change with the passage of time.

In examining the second domain of the labor market, I considered how the current job quality in the Egyptian labor market excludes women pursuing or remaining in paid employment. I explored the recruitment, retention and promotion procedures of the employers in Information Technology companies to assess how much these gendered processes filtered women out early in the stages of resume screening and interviewing. I investigated how gender segregation is created in job types or prevents advancement on the career ladder. I sought to discover also how far companies acknowledge family responsibilities and support such needs.

In the third domain, I investigated some relevant macroeconomic dimensions to find an explanation of this decline, such as the effect of globalization, neoliberalism, and structured adjustment projects and the regression of the public sector that used to be the main employer in Egypt. I also looked at the failure of the private sector to create decent

jobs that match the excellent acquired qualifications of these young women, as well as the role that state legislation plays in increasing the unemployment rate among women. I also investigated the role of the religious extremists in reinforcing the values of women's exclusion from the public sphere and in the pressure that the Islamists are exerting on women to return to the home to carry out their roles as housewives and mothers.

The research attempted to probe the articulation between the patriarchal structures and institutions of the state, labor market and the family that resulted in significant numbers of the Egyptian young women abandoning the pursuit of professional careers. The feminist perspective used in the research helped to give a comprehensive gender sensitive understanding of that phenomenon.

### ***Literature review:***

#### ***Gender norms and Gender relations:***

Looking at the literature, we find that there is an abundant production available on female unemployment, most of which deals with the economic factors that lead to this phenomenon; however, it does not give much attention to social and cultural factors. Furthermore, gender disparity in the IT industry has not been examined yet in Egypt. In my research, I gave more emphasis to the gender norms and gender relations within the framework of the macro political economy. My preliminary interviews indicated that in spite of the change in the Egyptian social environment, traditional gender norms still control relationships in the family. There is a male dominance over female members, that is, males exploit biological differences to naturalize gendered social structure. This corresponds exactly to Bourdieu's explanation that the social vision is based on biological difference, which becomes the basis for justifying the social principles that

constitute gender roles (Bourdieu, 2001: 11). Gender norms dictate certain social expectations for both men and women. They define the gender roles and relations in the society. It is the society that defines masculinity and femininity. The society also constructs gender traits that define men as leaders who are aggressive and independent, while women are passionate, gentle and dependent. As Bourdieu (2001) puts it:

“.....Inscribed in the things of the world, the masculine order also inscribes itself in bodies through the tacit injunctions that are implied in the routines of the division of labor or of collective or private rituals (consider for example, the avoidance behaviors imposed on women by their exclusion from male spaces)”.

I found that in adopting a feminist interpretation of social reproduction there is a strong relation between the economic development and the reproduction of new household relations. Folbre (2000) puts forth the idea that the social groups are organized according to sex, age, race, and sexual preferences, so that the collective action may reinforce institutional arrangements that may favor one category over another. Accordingly, we can posit that the undervaluing of reproduction activities (bearing or rearing of a child or even caring for the sick elderly) in Egypt and the cost of the social reproduction is unfairly borne mostly by women. Considering women's domestic work as a natural or moral responsibility eliminates it as economic activity. There is a paradox of the economists' appreciation of “human capital”, when, at the same time, economists omit from their lists of economic activities the time allocated to rearing and educating children. She advocates that in acknowledging the moral responsibility inherent to bringing up children, social institutions have an obligation to bear the cost of this process. Folbre raises the question of whether the children are an individual or a social

investment that the society should support and justifies her call for a new social contract to secure public policies that support children and family.

Scott presented gender as a useful category in historical analysis. She denounced the biological implication of the word “sex”, calling for an interest in the history of the man as well as the woman (Scott 1986:1054). She uses the term “gender” to indicate an entire system of relations that may include sex but is not directly determined by sex. Gender is one of the elements that constitute social relations based on observing the difference between the two sexes. She considers gender as a primary way to signify the relationships of power, and changes in the organization of social relations means change in the representation of power (ibid 1067).

One of the interviewees indicated that most employment policies in Egypt are male-biased. In line with this point Elson (1993) points out that a close investigation reveals that public policies are not gender neutral but male-biased, as the majority of those policies, whether in the public or private sector, are constructed with an explicitly gender bias. She attributes the problem of ignoring the reproduction role as an economic activity to the definition of economic activity as the process of earning money for work which, in turn, leads to the labeling of all the unpaid work women do within their obligations as mothers, daughters, wives as non-economic activity. She goes on further to identify “the economic man” who heads the household as a bread winner and to whom women are subordinate and dependent (Elson, 1993: 8).

My thesis investigates the economic and social changes that have accompanied the new era of globalization and the regression of the state services and responsibilities towards the vulnerable categories, especially children, women, and the disabled. Moghadam

(2005) criticizes globalization and its neoliberal philosophy for its short and long term social effects. She describes them as unfriendly to full employment, social rights, and public goods especially when the issue concerns women. She examines the changes in women's employment and its related social policies in the Middle East and North Africa. She compares two periods: the first, 1960s-1980s, and the second from late 1980s up to the current decade. She records the change of the state from a directed economic development to one that is open and liberalized. In the first period, the oil boom produced opportunities for female labor which were characterized by the reinforcement of the cultural gendered roles. Women were not ready for the open era as they lacked education and training. Thus they gained jobs in some areas and lost them in others. I think the points that Moghadam highlighted would help in investigating the female employment in the IT sector, as it is a totally private sector where women are less secured in respect to wage, social, or health benefits.

Sadasivam (1997) highlights the impacts of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) on women. These policies were applied in developing countries which were granted conditioned loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This resulted in increasing poverty on a large scale. The gender and feminist analysts presented a framework for understanding the impact of those SAPs on women. Sadasivam demonstrates that while the effects of SAPs are invisible in the standard policy evaluation, they constitute empirical proofs of heavy adjustment cost on women and deprive women of their international right in development. They target the "productive economy" that achieves profit and ignore the "reproductive economy" that maintains human beings. This is a distinctly male bias which ignores women's unpaid

work. Also, the feminist analysis uses gender as an analytical tool and a differentiation category, as well as a basis for dividing labor into productive and reproductive.

Although Gilbert (2008) “A Mother’s work: How Feminism, the Market, and Policy shape Family Life”, deals with the American upper class, the book helped me to explore my thesis. Gilbert indicates that married life is now more fragile than before and marriage is no longer a source of commitment or care giving (Gilbert, 2008:1). He records the decline of the pursuit of motherhood. He included a reference to the “Opt-Out revolution” in an article in the New Times Magazine on professional, upper class women leaving highly powerful jobs to stay home with their children. He refers to the emotions that push mothers back home and ignores workplace discrimination and unfriendly policies related to child care. He also refers to the flow towards more traditional norms which encourage a new domesticity and discourage participation in the labor force. The clear drop in the rate of participation of university graduate mothers in the labor force is confusing. Gilbert points out that those women who opt out of professional jobs to stay at home represent a new life style trend that is celebrated in the media. He describes some American serials; “Desperate Housewives”, for example, dramatizes the adverse aspects of the lives of mothers who stay at home. He worries about the decline in fertility and the increase in childlessness. He points out that the degree of education affects the rate of fertility: those who have more than two children are less educated, more religious and have more traditional values (ibid 12-23). He indicates that women in the American society enjoy rights and educational achievements that should guarantee gender equality in family life. Yet the male dominance in family life is clearer in the traditional family category. He points out that traditional mothers who have one or two children and who work are not so committed to career that they are



willing to sacrifice motherhood. They are trying to balance the loads of work and family. They are more physically and emotionally attached to their family lives than to their jobs. Preference theory can be used to describe the tension between family life demands and full time career demands that affects women's lives. He concluded that there is no single factor that determines the differences in women's choices (Gilbert, 2008: 31-41).

### **Marriage and Family formation:**

Family is an important corner stone in the social and cultural reproduction of the individual. For Bourdieu (1996), the family is responsible for generating and reinforcing the cultural capital; and that the cultural capital could be transmitted during the mothers' free time (Bourdieu 1986). Mothers' experiences have a great effect on children's self-making. This perception of the mother/daughter relationship directed me to investigate this component in my thesis, and to assess the extent of the effect of mothers who are supposedly working women on their daughters' perception of family and work.

Marriage is an important issue, as the research investigates the choice of young women between family and work clearly demonstrates. Many scholars have studied marriage in the Arab countries in general and in Egypt in particular (Hoodfar 1997, Joseph 1999 & 2000, Ghanem 2002, Singerman 1999, 2007, Rashad, Osman & Fahimi, 2005 ). Since people in Egypt cannot live alone, Hoodfar perceives the importance of marriage in forming the structure of the household, and in defining the position of the individuals inside it. In the Egyptian society, where it is socially unthinkable for single young people to live alone, marriage is the entrance to adulthood and complete independence. Therefore, marriage and starting a family are key milestones on the road to full social inclusion and the formation of gender ideology (Singerman & Hoodfar 1996:4).

The rising of age of marriage is a frequent topic of discussion in the research literature (Singerman and Hoodfar 1996; Hoodfar 1997 and Singerman and Ibrahim 2002).

Singerman and Ibrahim viewed the rising age at marriage as a consequence of declining economic opportunities for men accompanied by increasing marriage expenses. The reasons behind the increase of costs of marriage are: first, the goal of newly married couples is now to live in their own household, the purchase of which requires the participation of both families. Second, the increase of the standard of living which necessitates purchasing durable goods has resulted in the considerable increase of the marriage costs. This increasing consumerism has been encouraged by the open door policy of the economy, since it provides the market with many goods. The migration of Egyptian men to Gulf countries could explain the change of values and the aspirations to achieve higher standards of living. Migration secured an increase in income without an associated increase in the national economy. In addition to the rising of the standard of living, migration had a great effect on family and inter-household relations. Migration also brought with it conservative attitudes acquired in the socially regressive, conservative societies where these Egyptians were working. Egyptian society became extremely vulnerable to influence of “Saudi Islam”. Many Egyptian women began to adopt the veil; they began to name their children conventional Islamic names and even wedding parties and birth celebrations began to include Islamic features (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2003: 9).

Hanan Kholoussy (2010) “For Better, For Worse: The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt” introduces an historical sociological account of the crisis of marriage in Egypt in the early twentieth century that could also explain the current crisis of marriage in the middle class in the beginning of the twenty first century. Kholoussy concludes that

the reasons for the crisis included the idle and immoral behavior rampant among young men, the rise of materialism among the middle class which led to high cost of marriage, the domination of the western model, and finally, the spread of unemployment among the well educated. She refers to the perception of marriage by the middle class at that time as a civic duty of men and women as subjects of the modern state, and that these middle class Egyptian considered the marriage contract as a state intervention to secure political independence (ibid 6-10). A very important point in women's unemployment is that the Islamic law assigned to mothers the care of the children while they are dependent until they grow up enough to learn religion and morals at the hands of the fathers who are totally responsible for their teaching and ethical guiding (Kholoussy, 2010:100).

Marriage is an ideal arena in which to study gender, since the structure of gender is created within the borders of marriage by assigning certain roles of husband and wife. Kholoussy stressed that individuals are constrained in using their gender identity by religion, politics and socioeconomic processes such as law (11). Kholoussy considers the highly desirable characteristic of the new modern Egyptian women to be educated:

“The new generation of men prefers bachelorhood to marriage. . . . They refuse to be committed to a wife whom they have never seen. What they would like in a wife is a friend whom they can love . . . [and who is] educated. Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*” (quoted in Kholoussy, 2010:49).

The reasons for the marriage crisis of the early twentieth century were political, economic, and social. The ideal of marriage was used in the struggle against the colonial troops and to create the new masculinity of the middle class by associating marriage with national struggle against the British imperialism. However, the high rate of divorce

which resulted from the male unilateral right of divorce discouraged bachelors from participating in the institution of marriage, institution that was so subject to breaking. The crisis was explained by bachelors' concerns over the inability of the Egyptian women to rise the good future generations. Kholoussy pointed out that Nasser's era guaranteed social, political, and economic stability that reassured people about their country's independence which, in turn, helped in ending the marriage crisis. Furthermore, the abolition of the Islamic courts in 1955 assured the control of the new state over the Egyptian marital life. Such a study explains how people use marriage as a metaphor to diagnose the problems of the nation, and that marriage is the basis of the modern nation.

Bourdieu (1996) perceives family as "the social reality" because it is associated with a group of words: house/home, household. Bourdieu describes family as a set of individuals who may be linked by marriage, filiations, or adoption. He observes that the properties of family are transcendent, giving to its members a common life spirit and vision of the world. Second, it has its sacred private world separated from the external world by its doors that preserve its privacy and intimacy. Finally, family is associated with the residence which is a permanent unit. He describes it as a "place of trusting and giving", where one's personal interest is suspended in favor of the market that is based on exchangeable interests. The common vision of family is instilled through socialization. He refers to this element as the first constituent of the "habitus" which is the mental structure inculcated in the individuals who are socialized in a certain manner (Bourdieu, 1996: 19-21). He identifies family function in maintaining the social order through biological and social reproduction, since it provides the place for the structure of social relations. The family is one of the ways to accumulate capital, and the first

element in this hereditary organization is the transcending name of the father which is then accompanied by the material heritage. He considers family to be a collective subject rather than aggregation of individuals. In the perception of Bourdieu, the family's integrity and the forces involved in the blending of ethical personality makes its members identify their personal interests with family collective interests. This family's integrity depends on the power of relations among its members (ibid 23-24).

Family is an essential unit of the survival and stability of society. Women provide the reproduction of new generation of the labor force through bearing and rearing children. This concept does not challenge the gender division of roles and reinforces women's unemployment as a natural result, on the basis that it is their secondary responsibility. Marx perceives that the capitalist labor process reinforces patriarchal relations. The only way to liberate women is by wage work. Capitalism asserts male dominance. Capital gets benefit from women's position in the family. Women perform all the unpaid domestic responsibilities, they reproduce and care for the next generation of workers, and, finally, they are consumers of the capital production. The nuclear family is the capitalist tool for the control women by men. Family is the cheapest place for production and reproduction (Elson 2002: 1-2). Women are the reserve army, as Elson describes them, because they are easily hired, fired, and rehired. They are dismissed and then recruited according to the need. The explanation offered for their secondary status in the labor market describes it as a natural result of the fact that women are ultimately economically dependent on men within the context of the home.

## **Marriage and women's work:**

The conflicting roles between marriage and work have been discussed by many researchers. Amin et al (2004) indicate that there are two attitudes relevant to the relation between marriage and work. The first is the increasing female labor force participation and the second is the delay in the age of marriage after the World War II. In the past, marriage was just a reflection of gender roles which assumed that men and woman each possessed the superior skills needed for their specific roles dictated by traditional views of marriage: men specialized in the market economy while women specialized in the domestic economy of the home. The stability of this social arrangement was endangered when great economic growth opened many opportunities for women to become financially independent. This economic independence raised women's expectations towards their accepted standard of living and asserted the benefits of a marriage in which women contribute financially to the expenses of the household. Amin et al point out that the change in the gender norms has a very important role in changing the characteristics of marriage, and that these changes emerge with the structural changes in the economy. In addition, the influence of Western ideas and the spread of education have promoted new values in regard to the nuclear family, to delaying the age of marriage, and in regard to the opportunity for the free choice of the spousal partner (Amin & Bassausi, 2004:5).

One of the important concepts that the research encountered in investigating female unemployment is the concept of gender role assignment. It is important to differentiate between sex and gender. Anker et al (2003) differentiate between sex and gender as follows,

“Sex is biological characteristics determined at conception. It is fixed for a person’s life. And, the same biological differences between men and women exist in all countries of the world and do not change over time”. “The word ‘gender’, on the other hand, refers to differences between men and women that are learned. It is not fixed but determined by social and cultural values. This means that gender differences between men and women vary across countries and regions as well as over time within countries - and consequently (and unlike sex) can be changed by education, government policy, media, images and opinions” (Anker et al , 2003:9).

From these two definitions, it is clear that, according to the structure of gender assumed by a certain society that constrains the behaviors of its individuals, both men and women are assigned certain responsibilities that match with the social and cultural values of that society, but, at the same time are subject to change over time.

Risman (2009) criticizes, in her discussion of “doing gender”, the concept of assuming that the couples who observe traditional gender roles are happier, as she remarks on the assumption of more egalitarian concepts of masculinity and femininity among youth.

Risman also points to the existence of gender structure on the levels of the individuals and their interactions, as well as on the institutional level, and that there may be consistency or conflict among the levels. She predicts the change in gender structure with the youth who do untraditional gender or when they are undoing gender. Such points were important in my research when considering the dimension of change in the understanding of the participants of traditional gender norms related to marriage, family and work. Risman has called for an end to the deployment of gender to affect inequality and to consider sex in reproduction only (Risman, 2009: 81-84).

The same concepts are confirmed in Agarwal (1997) “Bargaining” and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household”. She identifies gender relations to be the relations of power between women and men, and maintains that their importance is based on their

reflection of the material and ideological. She asserts that they are neither uniform nor static; they are socially constructed and not biologically fixed. She questions the effect of the gender norms on the bargaining process. She includes the factors of bargaining power inside the household and outside in the labor market. She identifies gender and gender norms as determinants because gender defines perceptions about potentialities (Agarwal, 1997:7-11). She finds that gender norms set limits and constrain bargaining on the basis of what is legitimate and what is uncontested. As per the term “dox” as used by Bourdieu (1977:167-70):

“... which is accepted as natural and self-evident part of the social order, which goes without saying, and is not open to questioning or contestation: the undiscussed, unnamed, admitted with argument or scrutiny”.

Agarwal points out those gender relations are constituted and contested within the household, family, the market, the community, and the state.

Young et al (1988) “Of Marriage and the Market”, introduces the linkage between gender and economy as a tool to transform the existing structures. The book is important because it points out the deficiency of traditional Marxism in explaining the gender relations that people experience daily. It provides important insights for an investigation into the employment situation of young women because Young’s work confirms that gender relations are not fixed and that they could be subject to change. It is remarkable also that there are common elements in these relations at the universal level in spite of cultural specialization or differences in the area of the concepts of women’s subordination and social relations of gender. The literature on young women’s unemployment makes the proposed theory of the sexual division of labor, which is tied to



Marxist materialist perspective, more comprehensive and capable of explaining the phenomenon.

Marriage as a conjugal contract reflects the conflict of interests between man and woman. The work inside the household is based on the exchange of interests between man, the breadwinner, and woman, the performer of the unpaid domestic labor. Elson and Pearson (1986) remark on the failure of wage work in achieving the emancipation of women within the context of such rigidly unequal gender relations, and that gender inequalities exist not only in the head but in the practices (Young et al, 1988:25). The inclusion of women in wage work is not sufficient to emancipate women, since, when considering the relations between women and men, it is in the household where the subordination of women occurs. The social construction of gender dependency is reinforced in the household. The hierarchical relations are expressed and accepted within the household as natural. One important point Whitehead makes is that women's participation in wage work does not guarantee the same kind of power in the intra-household relations that men always derive from the same economic resource, which is wage and income. Women's failure to gain power in the household has resulted from the dominance of the ideology of males as breadwinners that labels women's work as secondary and trivial, and holds that their income is not essential for the household (Whitehead, *The Politics of Domestic Budgeting*, edited in Young et al 1988: 109-110).

Gender division of labor is clear in the domestic work that women carry out and which is socially devalued and which restricts their ability to access wage work. Mackintosh challenges the concept of accepting the gender hierarchy as natural rather than as a social reality. Economic change is the tool that changes such concepts. The constructed

concepts of masculinity and femininity express the gender identity. It is important to investigate gender and its articulation with the economy. Mackintosh relates the subordination of women to sexual division of work. She considers the assignment of certain tasks to men and others to women as a kind of sex-typing activities. This categorizing of activities extends to the labor market where women are segregated in certain sectors within which they are crowded in certain occupations that are low paid, require less skill, and have very poor work conditions. She argues that the sexual division of labor reinforces women's subordination (Mackintosh's *Gender and Economics: the Sexual Division of Labor and the Subordination of Women*, edit in Young et al, 1988: 14-15). Harris drew attention to the link between the sexual division of labor and the subordination of women. The biological reality is that women bear children, but there is no forceful necessity to compel them to feed and care for them (Households as natural units of subordination edited in Young et al, 19988, p. 142).

Mackintosh points out that there is a clear relation between capital and women's subordination, whether in the private sphere or in the public sphere. In the public sphere, women are considered a cheap labor force. They are paid less and are used as a reserve army of labor because they are flexible workers who can be absorbed in times of expansion and be fired in times of contraction since it is assumed that they will return home to their original situation of economic dependency. Meanwhile, in the private sphere, capital benefits from the unpaid work women perform, such as cooking, cleaning and caring. Women's domestic performance guarantees raising the class of their families above the received wage and maintaining unpaid socialization and care for the children who are the future labor force that the state and the capital should provide at high cost.

On the other hand, after excluding women from the labor market, men's wages are to be raised to maintain their dependents, the wife and the children (Young et al, 1988:5-9).

The articulation between capitalism and patriarchy gives an excellent entrée to a clear understanding of the sexual division of labor. (Young et al, 1988:114-5). The total restriction of women to the work of child and adult care is defined as the reproduction work which is related to sexuality and reproduction of human life. The assigning of the domestic activities as natural and correct tasks to women reinforces women's subordination and weakens their status in the labor market. In this way, it restricts their access to full time employment and limits them to part time employment. Mackintosh considers such division of work an expression of the inequality of the marriage contract. Furthermore, the state's legislation reinforces this unequal position of women within the household because women are treated as dependents of men which, then, weakens their social and economic position (ibid 11-14).

### **Women's secondary status in production economy:**

Wage gap is a very critical point in discussing women's employment. Women's lower wages can be explained within their secondary status in the labor market, which is perceived as a natural consequence of their primary task of bearing and caring for the children. Furthermore, women are socialized and trained for their primary task which is domestic work that is invisible, private and needs no skills in what Whitehead perceives,

“... is a process of the subordination of women as gender and it is a material process that runs in our thoughts and practices which needs the change in the practice rather than have verbal propaganda. Such thoughts exclude women from the public activities and confine them to the private “(Whitehead, 1979) quoted by Elson and Pearson, (Young et al 1988).

Men are free to dispose their commodity of labor force in whichever way they choose, while women are not free because they are restricted by their domestic responsibilities. Moreover, women may use their labor commodity outside the labor market to exchange their labor power with men in sexuality or caring activities in order to survive (Young, 1988:25-28). Elson and Pearson do not deny the social reality of the secondary status of women in the labor market but disagree with the contention that it can be considered natural. Although women may assume a full time job, they continue to carry all domestic activities-- an indication that no change in gender division of roles has occurred. Molyneux finds the situation of male resistance to domestication has its roots in the way masculinity and femininity is constructed and in the connection of the first to the public sphere and the second to the private sphere. She suggests raising awareness among men and women to break these barriers ( Molyneux's Women in Socialist Societies, edited in Young et al, 1988: 85-87).

Molyneux suggests five items with which to measure the change in women's position, which includes legislation, family policies, education, employment, and, finally, political representation. She considers that the insistence on the continuity of the unequal division of labor, where women are allocated jobs with lower wages and value than men, along with the failure to redistribute the burden of domestic activities, makes women's work outside home a "double shift". She attributes the failure to redefine men's roles in a way that is comparable to the change in women's roles to conservative social mentalities. This conservative mentality reflects a structure in which the father is the breadwinner and the mother is the caretaker. In this environment, men meet the requirements of jobs, such as skills, education, dedication and commitment to work, better than women, who have pressure and conflicting demands on their time due to the assigned domestic work.

Men have one responsibility towards the state and their families. Women cannot benefit from the equal opportunity to access the labor market because of their burden of family responsibility. Molyneux calls for the destruction of the identification of women with the domestic arena to achieve full gender equality. She goes on further to claim that what is required is a guarantee of social transformation rather than the provision of better public services or advanced domestic machinery. Such a social transformation will cancel gender stereotypes of the association of femininity with inferior traits, and of masculinity with superior ones, and the preference for economic growth over the social and political concerns (Molyneux's *Women in Socialist Societies* edited in Young et al 1988:85-87).

The feminist hypothesis that women's subordination originates in the home explains the low status assigned to women in the labor market. Whitehead considers the conjugal contract exploitive due to the exchange of the wage earned by the husband in the public sphere for the unpaid domestic labor performed by the wife in the private sphere, the household. She recorded a significant remark that assigned the payment of basic expenses such as rent, food to the husband, whereas the wife was to pay for the extras. Such assignment perceives the secondary status of the wife's income. Moreover, women lose full control of their income because decisions about spending issues are subject to family considerations. That is, the conjugal contract and maternal altruism restrict women's freedom in disposing of the money they have earned. Whitehead explains the situation in the frame of the sexual division of roles: when the husband's gender identity is threatened by the entrance of his wife into the realm of breadwinners, the mode of controlling her income restores him to his role as a breadwinner. The conjugal contract has within itself a material conflict of interest that is embedded in the social relations.

Whitehead observes that women's relation to money is always mediated by men (Young et al, 1988: 112-117)

Assigning to women the responsibility for the wellbeing of the household members frames their life in a way that excludes them from participating in the wider social and political life. Harris (1988) argues that the domestic sphere is the place where gender subordination is produced and reinforced. The sexual division of labor identifies women with the domestic sphere, the sphere of reproduction, and men with the public sphere, the sphere of production. Nature is an ideological tool to justify hierarchy and subordination (Young et al, 1988:151-2). Following the same reasoning, Stolcke holds the institutions of marriage and family to account for the subordination of women. The family is a patriarchal unit in which women carry the heavy load of domestic responsibility, and which defines women's employment decisions, and these decisions are related to their family obligations. She concludes that independence, emancipation, and gender equality will be merely illusory if the woman in the home suffers the same lack of freedom that is suffered in the work place (ibid 163-175).

The articulation between capitalism and patriarchy is an important construct for understanding the cultural and economic context of women's unemployment. There is no satisfactory explanation for the assignment of domestic duties exclusively to women. The demands of the market economy are not sufficient reason to account for it, unless giving priority to motherhood activities and housewifery legitimates the male perception of the inferiority of women's participation in the labor market. Patriarchal ideology defines work through the role of the worker in the family, a definition that is based on the sexual division of labor. Gender related ideologies are significant in the segmentation of the

labor market (Elson and Pearson 1986). To take the work on young women's unemployment a step further, we should investigate occupational segregation.

Occupational segregation is the result of discriminatory practices in hiring that obstruct women's access to the labor market. On the other hand, the preponderance of women in certain jobs leads to the increase in their unemployment rates. We must recognize that the direct, as well as the indirect, discrimination shown by the devaluation of women's economic contribution, is the result of the kind of socialization and education that are reflected by the choices women make. Cultural norms restrict women's physical movement. Feminists define the type of "acceptable" work for women as a type of sex stereotyping; in addition, sexual harassment is a male strategy to control the labor market. Women's fear of attack in the public sphere may limit their access to employment (Anker 1998:29).

Occupational segregation is discrimination because women are restricted from accessing certain jobs. Occupational segregation is a universal phenomenon, whether in the developed or developing worlds, averaging 50% worldwide (Ankler et al 1998). It is even prevalent in the United States, where jobs such as nurses, teachers, and secretaries are almost entirely female occupations, while nearly all engineers and construction laborers are men. The harms of occupational segregation are not confined only to women, as it reinforces and perpetuates gender inequality. It reduces job opportunities for the individual and increases the rigidity and inefficiency of the economy. It crowds women into a small set of jobs with low wages, and this has an adverse effect on women economically, reducing investment in women's education and skills. It also increases poverty rates and this is reflected in the welfare of the children, since women's wages add to their well being (Anker 1998:403). It is important to promote women's

participation in the labor force and to improve their opportunities for equal employment. Using occupational segregation to explain male-female differentials in pay is not enough. Human capital highlights the pay differential accumulated by men and women. In most cases, women have less education in fields of study that are relevant to the labor market; they also have shorter periods of employment as they withdraw for marriage, or they assume part-time jobs in order to allot more time to the care of their children. Barsoum (2004) discusses the crisis of “less privileged” female graduates’ employment in Egypt. The exclusion of those graduates on the basis of the quality of education has a discriminatory basis. She stresses the idea that the labor market in Egypt celebrates females from the upper classes, since their education is enriched by proficiency in foreign languages, computer skills, and a well educated family background. She tackles the case of the “symbolic violence” against those low-middle class graduates which has not only provided them with second-rate education, but also deprived them of the opportunity for acquiring the “capital” of learning foreign languages (Barsoum 2004).

Anker (1998) introduces the concept of the dual market. The labor sector is divided into two sectors: the primary and the secondary. The primary sector has good jobs in terms of payment, promotion, security, and working conditions. The secondary has poor quality jobs with low pay, null opportunities for promotion, and very poor working conditions. The feminist explanation of this occupational segregation indicates that patriarchal hierarchy in the society makes women collect less human capital. (ibid 19-20). There is a distinction between horizontal segregation, where men and women are distributed across the occupations, and vertical segregation, where the distribution of men and



women in one occupation with one sex is likely to be at higher level or grade (Anker, 1998: 35).

Although Egypt was a leading country in the modernization project in relation to education and employment, we now find that Egyptian women's status is regressing at the hands of the Islamists. The reforms introduced by Abdel Nasser that helped increasing the number of educated women, and hence, the increase of the employment among women in general, have been thrown away by the fundamentalist calls of the Islamists. The blow is great, especially as the new Islamists target the middle class. They are reframing the private and public roles of women within these fundamentalist views that define women's roles only as wives and mothers (Munson 2001).

This chapter presented the thesis questions investigated in order to understand the decline of professional careers among graduate university young Egyptian women. The literature review available dealt with the decline of female professional employment as a sub topic which urges me to try to explore the issue through my research fieldwork. I think the available literature makes it obligatory to investigate the case on three dimensions: the family and the socialization of the young women, the labor market and its policies of hiring and firing; and finally, the state with its public policies and legislation. I argue that the unemployment of young Egyptian women is created on the articulation among those three actors of the family, labor and market. These three sides of the problem triangle are responsible for the gendered supply and demand mechanics of the labor market. The gendered public and private spheres that encompass young women's lives are confined to the articulation between neoliberal economic system and the patriarchy. It determines their micro sphere and the macro sphere as well. I used

feminist perspective to examine the articulation between the family, the labor market and the state. I examined the social construction of gender norms, the unequal gender relations. I investigated the sexual division of labor as the basis of women's subordination and its role in the extension of sex typing to the labor market and resulted in wage gap and occupational segregation. The articulation between capitalism and patriarchy restricts women access to production activity and confines them to the reproduction activity. This reinforces their subordination and makes their status secondary in the private and public spheres. The traditional male ideology does not welcome redistribution of domestic activities to equate women's work in the labor market. Marriage contract is exploitive as it allows the husband to exchange his earned income in the public sphere by the unpaid domestic labor performed by the wife in the private sphere. The literature review presented the theoretical frame to answer my research questions in such a way as to help the reader understand the phenomenon.

Chapter Two presented the methodology and the framework of my research. I clarified the necessity of feminist approach to highlight the inability of other approaches in constructing the background of studying the decline of female professional employment. I also introduced the limitations and challenges of the research conducted. Chapter Three constructed the theoretical background of the private life of young Egyptian women and their perceptions of marriage, family and work. The chapter also traced the impact of schooling and Gulf migration on socialization of the young Egyptian women. It also focused on the reinforcement of gender norms and its effect on young women's choices between family and work.

Chapter Four focused on the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and its gendered programs. This chapter provided a close vision on the macroeconomic system and its implications on the position of young women in the labor market. Special attention was allocated to SAP's characteristics such as privatization, informalization, flexibility and feminization on women's employment. Chapter Four finally provides the experience of Egypt in the application of SAP's and its reflection on women's unemployment.

Chapter Five discussed young women's choices between family, employers and the state using a gender lens. It elaborated the gendered state's legislation and public policies and how they reinforce the social gender roles and create the political context for gendered employment in Egypt. Then the chapter investigated the employer's perception of women work and the haunting of the male ideology on the processes of hiring and firing and their negative impact on women's employment. This chapter finishes with the bargain of young women in the gendered labor market.

Chapter Six presented the findings of my research and introduced the recommendations of the study.

## **Chapter two: Methodology and Framework**

This chapter explains the methodology I used in my research. I explain in detail how I started recruiting my key informants on the assumption that they would be of benefit for my research, as well as how I selected the research participants. I have included the questions presented in the interviews. I also present to the reader the site of the research, the Computer Science and Engineering Department at the American University in Cairo. The interviewing process was designed not just to seek answers to the basic research questions, but also to bringing out for reflection and discussion as well, the demographic and spatial environment of the research participants. In this part of my research, I outlined the tools of ethnographic fieldwork and its ethical principles which I applied in my research. I have also presented the challenges and limitations that I encountered throughout my journey of research. The main concern was time limitation, whether in the duration of the research, the availability of the participants, as well as the tension and worries associated with the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution that took place during the research period.

### ***The Fieldwork:***

My research investigated the decline of Egyptian female professional employment among university graduates. I dealt with the social, cultural, economic, and psychological elements that could explain this phenomenon. I dealt with the macro as well as the micro world of my participants. When I began my research I noticed that the topic had not been thoroughly investigated, especially in the area of Information

Technology in Egypt; accordingly I dedicated my research to this area. The goal of my research is to contribute to social change and to advance the adoption of more gender-sensitive policies in education and work. The IT sector occupies a larger sector in Egypt than in any of the other Arab countries. In addition, the IT sector is an important resource of economic growth. Its contribution to the GDP of Egypt reached 3.6% in 2007. In addition, since 1985, Egypt has increased the IT infrastructure to the extent that it has become the platform of economic growth (Mandour, 2009). The theoretical background has framed the macro world of my research and answered some of the thesis questions on gender norms, neoliberalism and labor market segmentation. However, the micro world of my participants, their perceptions of their identity in public and private, in the production and reproduction spheres were investigated during interviews which revealed the diversity in their perceptions.

### ***The Site:***

In the very beginning of my research on the subject of assuming a professional career in Egypt, I intended to conduct a comparative study of the American University students/graduates with those of one of the National Universities. I started snowballing the topic of considering gender in the professional career of Egyptian women. My first informant, who preferred not to mention her name “as the world is so small”, referred to her views that she expressed as “fadfada”. She is around 35 years old. She had excelled in her studies and she chose a major that should have lead to a brilliant career. But, in the end, she chose a job in a trial to establish a balance between work and family, since she was married and now has a four-year-old child. For the purposes of the study, she chose “Farida” as her pseudonym. In the early part of the interview, Farida accused the

new Labor Law of exercising gender discrimination. She explained that if a contract is signed for one-year's duration, to be renewed annually, the employer frequently takes full advantage of this opportunity to cancel the contract if the female employee decides to exercise her right to have children. In many cases, the employers do not renew the female contract after the maternity leave. My second informant graduated from one of the "top faculties", and, immediately after graduation, married one of her colleagues. He started to "abuse" her effort in view of promoting his own personal interests in running his own project. He treated her badly; he began to look down on her and lamented that he had not married another, younger woman. Finally, they divorced with 2 children whom she kept in her custody. She had to take work as a teacher in preparatory schools. She told me that she would never forget her dream of having a career and running her own enterprise. These two stories aroused my curiosity as a researcher to investigate this area of female engagement in the workplace: Do women choose to opt out of professional careers or the gendered labor market, or do gendered institutions and structures exclude them? I also noticed that a number of the department graduates opt out of working in their field, an observation which prompted me to pursue this topic more closely and to record the life history of some Computer Science & Engineering students (CSE)-- freshmen, graduating and graduated.

As I thought more deeply about the topic, I decided to conduct the research at the Computer Science and Engineering Department at the American University in Cairo (CSE) where I have been working for a long time. In 1975, Computer Science was introduced at AUC as a minor program offered by the Mathematics Unit of the Science

Department<sup>1</sup>. In Fall 1985, AUC expanded the 10-year old minor in Computer Science into a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science. In the Fall of 1988, Computer Science was established as an autonomous department at AUC. The B. Sc. degree was accredited by the Supreme Council of Egyptian Universities in 1988 and by CSAC, Computer Science Accreditation Commission/Computer Science Accreditation Board /CSAB in 1999, and reaccruited by CAC/ABET Computing Accreditation Commission/Accreditation Board of Engineering & Technology in August 2005. In the Fall of 2008, the department introduced an undergraduate program in Computer Engineering, which was thus renamed Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

Computer Science and Engineering programs at AUC provide students with a modern education that emphasizes creative applications of scientific knowledge in the analysis, design, and implementation of computer software and hardware systems relevant to the needs of society. This is achieved by providing the relevant skills in theory and practice, as well as an awareness of the social implications of their applications. Computing ethics and professionalism are important components of the programs and are emphasized at all levels.

Throughout the Computer Science and Engineering programs, students are kept current and updated on technological developments and professional standards, and especially so in late junior and all senior level course work. In addition, the department regularly invites outside experts from industry and academia to give talks that link the program to the outside world. Students are also encouraged to attend national and international

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<sup>1</sup> Computer Science and Engineering Departmental Review Document, February 2010

conferences that are held locally. The graduates of AUC’s Computer Science and Engineering programs receive an education that is very similar to that offered in comparable institutions in the US. They secure excellent jobs in competitive local, regional, and international markets, and many are able to pursue graduate studies at leading institutions in the US and Europe. Its graduates enjoy a good reputation at the national and international levels.

I had been working in the department for a long period of time. I had been living with the students (males and females), listening to their dreams; sometimes announcing job opportunities or programming contests which allowed me to record some attitudes in regard to female students’ reactions to such events. I noticed that the participation of the girls in the contests related to programming and coding was less than that of the boys. For example, in this year’s Academic Computing Machinery contest (ACM), the participation of the girls was only one third of that of the boys. In spite of the similar ratio of the male to female at AUC, enrollment in the department of Computer Science and Engineering does not reflect the same ratio as shown in the following table:

	<b>Computer Science and Engineering Undergraduate Majors</b>					
	Computer Science			Computer Engineering		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
<b>Fall05</b>	154	92	246	na	na	na
<b>Fall 06</b>	142	93	235	na	na	na



<b>Fall 07</b>	117	69	186	10	16	26
<b>Fall 08</b>	91	46	137	35	28	63
<b>Fall 09</b>	75	41	116	49	33	82
<b>Fall 10</b>	76	31	107	49	34	83
<b>Fall 11</b>	58	24	82	67	40	107

***Qualitative methods:***

The research involves three different groups: the first group consisted of 14 young women who are either students or graduates of the Computer Science and Engineering Department at the American University in Cairo, and whose ages ranged from 20-42 years. I intentionally chose this range of age to measure the availability of the work opportunity over the passage of the time and within the change of the socio-economic context. The sample contains middle class and upper middle class as some participants secured scholarship and were from governorates outside the capital. The familial background of those participants includes diplomats, faculty members, bankers, administrative staff and housewives. The sample includes 11 Muslim girls and 3 Christians. In addition to one of the employers who is Christian. This diversity in social background would help in investigating the societal perceptions of family and marriage from different social as well as religious views. I interviewed them to understand their dynamics of choice between work and family and how they perceived them within the frame of the social, economic and political environment in which they are living. The second group was a mother of one of the participants of the first group. She has been

working at AUC since her graduation from Faculty of commerce in an administrative position. She married to an engineer, in an arranged marriage as she described. She has only one daughter, the participant Amina. The purpose of the interview with the mother was to assess the role of socialization in reinforcing gendered cultural norms concerning gender division roles. The third group, consisting of two IT employers, was interviewed to obtain an employer's view of the phenomenon of declining female employment, and to explore the employment system and its liability to gender sensitive policies. One of these male employers, Yasser acted as a participant in order to have his voice to unpack male perceptions concerning marriage, family and work.

Due to time limitations, I used qualitative methods such as open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews, observation, data recording and data analysis. My interviews explored the importance of the private life of the participants in the research, and the gender barriers and disparities in the IT field.

From the research sample I concentrated on three participants as case studies to examine as much as possible their life journey and to investigate the interactions between their private and public life in such a way as to reveal the dynamics of choice between private life and career. I chose them as different cases: Randa 42 years, married with two children; she was on the top of her class graduated from CSE in 1989, worked for around 9 years, had been on LWOP for 6 years and finally resigned to care for her 2 children. Hanaa, 42 years graduated in 1992, married with 2 children but she was able to continue successfully her career and be the CEO of one of the biggest IT companies; she attributed her success to the support she received from her family and her employer. The third one is Dalia; newly married and pregnant; she left the IT big company and joined AUC to

work as a web developer in one of the departments. She explained that working in IT market consumed her time and left no space for her private life. This diversity in their choice could explain the different reasons behind the professional career “choices” at the level of family, labor market and the state. The interviews highlighted the participants’ perceptions of work, marriage, womanhood, and domesticity. In these intensive interviews exploring the life history of my participants, I considered each one as a member representing a special aspect of culture and capable of giving account of her unique life journey. I tried to locate the role that the other factors played in her social transmission and knowledge, especially the role of the family. I explored and analyzed their cultural world to reveal the rules of their conduct and dreams of the future. I focused on each participant’s experience over time passage to define their personal development. Finally, I combined the phenomenon under study to place them in the context of the political, economic, and cultural world (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 152).

The interviews focused on perceptions of the participants about the meaning of marriage and work as a way to estimate the balance between their private and public lives. The feminist concept of women’s diversity enables me to understand the different participants’ experiences and not to deal with them on generic basis. This appreciation of diversity of experience also extends to the cycles and experiences of the same woman and helps me to interpret the change that may occur in her decisions, perceptions, and beliefs. One of the most important findings of this research is the importance of considering diversity in investigating gender related issues, because the generic concepts could not be applied on different and changeable perceptions of the participants concerning marriage, work, and family.

My research has practical as well as scholarly targets: I explored the phenomenon of the decline of female professional employment. At the same time, I investigated the kind of action needed to be taken to effect social change in gender roles and relations in the Egyptian society. In such research, I believe that the most suitable methodology is the feminist method because through raising consciousness and by making recommendations based on this phenomenon, social change can occur. Feminist methodology encourages me to start my research at my workplace where I have interaction with most of my participants. It helps me to understand the participants in the context while I am listening to them carefully (Reihnharz, 2006, 231-253).

### **In-depth interviews:**

I began my research by snowballing the topic. I started some kind of open-ended interviews to access my participants' perceptions, ideas and memories. Throughout the interviews, I listened to them as proficient, productive, and reproductive actors. To encourage each participant to say what she meant, I identified certain areas related to the research topic to be covered such as career plans for the future, mother-daughter relationship, womanhood, domesticity, and work. The first snowballing interviews helped me greatly in framing the questions of the semi-structured interviews. This tool helped me compile the views of the university graduates of the upper middle class and their mothers, along with the views of the employers on the phenomenon to be investigated. This approach helped me to analyze the social and economic environment that affects the participants and which is materialized in the phenomenon. I started with informal interviews of some graduates, mothers and employers. These preliminary interviews framed the basis of the cultural gendered perceptions of female education and

work. However, once the frame of the research was complete and the need arose to include parts of their informal talks or to further interview them as participants in the research, I returned to them to get their approval on the “Informed Consent Form”. I confirmed securing their privacy and anonymity throughout the research. I planned to interview the mothers of the three female graduates whom I chose as case studies to investigate the role of cultural factors in the self-making of the female university graduates and its effect on their perceptions of work, career, marriage and family. In addition, I investigated daughter-mother relationships to probe the girls’ decision making, whether in work or marriage, and how it is affected by their mother’s identity. I conducted structured interviews with two IT employers. I conducted a case study of one of the three companies to investigate women’s positioning in recruitment, promotion and training in the IT sector. I met the HR Manager, Mr. Sameh. During the interview, I was able to investigate the company’s system and strategies of recruiting, interviewing, promotion, and retention. I also located gender streamlining in policies such as maternity leave, leave without pay (LWOP) to care for children at home, and part time positions. As my research deals with the macro and micro worlds of my participants, the theoretical frame answered some of the questions related to the macro level such as gender norms and the segmentation of the labor market. I interacted with the micro world of my participants as I listened to and analyzed their life trajectories to understand their cultural context, the self and agency. In short, I investigated the relation and the interaction between the participants and their social context that would account for and explain the current phenomenon. The interviews were a narration of the life history of my participants that clarified their social discourse and social relations. The participants were informants when they were describing social culture and behavior, and at the same

time, were respondents when recounting how they react to these cultural norms. They often went back-and-forth between the two modes to clarify the spaces of conflicts and coherence (Levy & Hollan, 2000, PP 333-8).

Although I have a considerable general knowledge about my participants, I preferred to start informal interviews by discussing the topic to break the ice, as well as to encourage them to be enthusiastic about expressing their personal viewpoints. However, the formal interviews were not without some challenges. One of the intended interviewees who is a successful figure in the IT sector was very enthusiastic in the beginning and told me that she would write me a short report on her case as a divorced professional woman with an eight-year daughter. However, her written report simply consisted of general statements on how to achieve balance in life. I think this can be attributed to the situation of the individual in traditional societies as described by Levy and Hollan in which face and reputation matter greatly and no one threatens one's private world unless there is deep trust (ibid 339). In addition to needed trust, I think the participants should be motivated by an understanding that the goal of the research is to bring about social change and to make possible more gender friendly policies in their private and public spheres. This motivation urged one of the first explored participants to disclose her private experience in the hope of protecting her daughter from the sufferings she went through.

All the interviews were conducted on the New Cairo campus due to the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution except the interviews with Hanaa, the CEO of the IT and with the HR Manager of the same company, which were conducted in the premises of the company. My interviews took the form of a kind of discussion on possible issues related to the life history of the participants interviewed. In the first stage, the questions were

formulated to help them describe their own experiences with these different issues. Accordingly, these stories explained their personal perceptions, their social context and their relational personal context. The interviews discussed variant topics to observe the variation of the categories in age and in experience; this variation reflected the role of the interviewee: daughter/mother or employee/employer. The interviews delineated their current social context and outlined their past experiences in a developmental way (ibid 334). The informal interviews and the discussions with the mothers of the participants were intended to collect information on education, identity, and cultural context. The interview questions also addressed the mother's perceptions and the way the mother adapted it to the bringing up her daughter as to frame her social context.

The first interviews with the participants were in the nature of an informal social interaction. I listened to the participants as a friend with no interruptions or expressed judgments to help them reveal their thoughts. In the second stage of the interviews, I moved to more personal topics to investigate personal feelings and perceptions. Each participant was interviewed for one hour. Case studies participated in two one hour-long interviews. I also interviewed one mother to probe more on the gender norms in the socialization of Egyptian young women. In the early stages of the research, I planned to start my interviews at the end of January, 2011. However, once I received the approval of the IRB, the explosion of the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution made it impossible to carry out the schedule as planned. I made use of every opportunity of the availability of my participants on the New Campus of the AUC to conduct the interviews. Thanks to the extensive area of the New Campus, I managed to secure a calm place with no interruptions in which I interviewed my participants. It was very difficult to make audio recordings of the interviews, so I was obliged to write my notes by hand. However, my

participants were very understanding of the process of recording their responses on paper. Immediately after the interview, I typed these up, preserving the participant's unique voice as much as possible. (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 156).

### **Observation:**

During the interviews, I made observations on the participants' behaviors, as well as interactions which were useful in interpreting and understanding their behaviors.

Observations of the voice tone, eye contact and the body language reflect the attitude of the participant towards certain issues.

### **Focus group:**

I conducted a group discussion in the Graduation Projects Presentation of Spring 2011, for nearly one hour. The group was able to provide different layers of information and perceptions due to the variety of the categories employed. The group included the Director of the CAPS Office, one of the faculty members in the Computer Science & Engineering Department, the AUC, one of the Executive Directors, some Computer Science students (male and female) and some IT employees (male and female). All participants gave their personal explanation of the phenomenon. Since they represent different categories of intellectual, professional, social background, they provided diversity of opinions. I started the discussion with open-ended general questions such as: Do you think CSE is appropriate career for a girl? What obstacles do you expect girls would face after graduation? Do you think girls can excel in coding positions? The analysis of the responses of the focus group helped in framing the research discussion.



## **Ethics and confidentiality:**

As ethnography ethics dictate a relationship transparency and mutual trust, I began my research by disclosing to my informants and intended interviewees the purpose of the research and the amount of time needed for participation. I believe that conducting a research necessitates being honest, open and enjoying full trust. This helps to open the channels of communication between researcher and participant. By the time the study was to begin, and during the informal interviews, I became sure I would be encountering some personal and private areas in the life history of my interviewees that might be awkward as regards their privacy. I am fully confident that research ethics start from the very beginning of the research and do not end by signing the “Consent Form”.

However, I developed an “Informed consent” to be signed by all the participants (Appendix A). I started my interviews by orienting the participants on the purpose of the “Informed Consent Form”, and offered it to them to sign. Many of them laughed at the idea of signing such a form on the basis that I, the researcher, was considered to be a person worthy of trust for them. Throughout the research, I committed myself to securing the privacy and confidentiality of my sample (although some of them expressed their willingness to be known).

I used code names to protect the participants’ identity and privacy, and I encouraged my participants to choose their own pseudonym. I began my interviews by stating my tools of research -- interviewing, observation, and focus group. I assured the participants that I would protect their identity by not using their real names, and that the coding would be used in taking notes. I also confirmed my responsibility to destroy all the notes after completing the research. I also highlighted their right to stop answering any question at

any time during the interviews. I did my best to maintain comfort and trust throughout the interviews and to assure them that no other person would have access the notes. I started my interview by orienting my interviewee to the purpose of the research. I described to her/him the process of asking the questions and taking down the notes. I assured them of their right to request the elimination of any part that may she/he consider inappropriate to record. I developed a codified list of my interviewees to conceal their personalities. I confirmed that I would respect the requests of the interviewees and make sure from time to time that the interview was conducted at their convenience whether in regard to time or place.

### ***Research challenges and obstacles:***

One of the main challenges of this research is the limited number of studies allocated to this topic, as it is always treated as a subtopic in the discussion of female employment. This study represents an expansion of the usual scope of research on this subject in the effort to discover the reasons underlying the issues of reduced female employment rates..

The second challenge is gender discriminative statistics which makes it hard to achieve real and accurate reflection of young women recorded employment rates in regard to the different issues to be investigated. However, the qualitative method helped in clarifying the related issues.

The final challenge was selecting the work field in the location of my permanent employment. It was a real challenge to my objectivity as a researcher, and my ability to build trust with the participants to the extent that they were willing to communicate their personal stories and conflicts to a researcher who was not part of their social circle of family and close friends, often for the very first time.

## **Chapter Three: The Familial self of Young Egyptian women and social determinants of professional employment:**

This Chapter provides an analysis of the private life of the Egyptian young women of the middle and the upper middle class to investigate their choices between marriage, family, and work. The first part of the chapter investigates marriage's importance, cost, and arrangements in regard to personal and familial concerns. It also seeks to trace the "imperative" of marriage in Egypt, where the families support their children until they marry, and endure a heavy financial burden to achieve this goal.

The second part of the chapter investigates the pivotal role of the family in the life of the young women, and how the patriarchal family reinforces the traditional gender roles, as well as the effect of family connectivity on self-making and choice making. It also investigates the economic and political factors that interfere with the family in the socialization of the young women, such as employment motivated migration to the Gulf and role of the Islamists in the formation of a new domesticity and their reinforcement of the traditional norms. In sum, this chapter attempts to help the reader understand the mechanics of the choices that the Egyptian young women make between the private life and the public life. To pursue a career, they are forced to bridge the deep cultural divide between family and work based on the perception that the private life is more valuable for Egyptian young women because it is the primary source for them of social inclusion and respect. .

## ***Marriage:***

Throughout the scholarly literature on women's employment and in the conducted interviews, I realized the importance of marriage as a religious obligation, a social, economic, and sexual necessity for the individual, especially a woman, in a conservative country such as Egypt. Marriage carries great weight in a woman's decisions concerning work.

*"I truly have never been worried about getting married. On the contrary, I always think it is there in the horizon. I mean that I am going to get married "someday", but there are so many things I thought I should do first. I should finish my studies; then work for some time and by then I can think of getting married,"* Marian said shyly.

She is a Lead student<sup>2</sup> (Assuit governorate) who graduated Fall 2011. She expressed her intention to get married and have a family, even if she had to sacrifice her career for a while. She was hoping that she would be able to find a part-time job or take leave without pay (LWOP) in order to make space for her dream of marriage and family life. Marian's statement above expresses the importance of marriage for Egyptian young women and shows how they are socialized to this life choice from their childhood.

Abdelaal clarifies this further,

*"They ask young girls here when they are three or four, who would you marry?... they implant the idea your only purpose in life is to get married . Even after she goes to school they tell her that a girl's only future is in her husband's home. So what happens when a girl for any reason cannot get married? Should she set fire to herself?"*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Leadership for Education and Development Program (LEAD) offers full tuition scholarships to 54 students annually. Each year, one male and one female from each of Egypt's governorates are selected for the scholarship. LEAD is a joint program between with the United States Agency for International Development, the Egyptian Ministry of International Cooperation and The American University in Cairo.

<sup>3</sup> Ghada Abdelaal, the author of 'Ayza Tgawwiz'. (BBC News, August 2008).

The literature on marriage in Egypt (Hoodfar 1997, Joseph 1999 & 2000, Ghanem 2002, Singerman 1999, 2007, Rashad et al 2005 ) discusses the importance of marriage as an individual and familial issue from religious, economic, and social perspectives.

### **Marriage's importance from religious perspective:**

In Egypt, marriage is associated with religion and is regarded as a religious obligation needed to fulfill one's religious commitments because some of the Holy Quran verses<sup>4</sup> urge men and women to get married. It is the way of morality and chastity, as it is the only acceptable way to engage in sexual relations. One's religious obligations are not considered complete except by consummation of sex within marriage. Any violation that goes beyond this border is considered a sin, "zina".

O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another. (Qur'an 4:1).

Dowry is the most important element in the responsibilities of the groom. From a religious view point, some people consider dowry as the "bride price" which confirms the dominance of the male ideology whereas others view it as a strong protection of girls against the whims of the male and as a part of a woman's wealth. (Barakat,1993).

In spite of the importance of marriage in the Arab countries, there is a current trend that youth marry at a later age--around 31 years for men and 23 for women. In fact, there has been a dramatic decline of early marriage for young women in Egypt. Due to political,

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<sup>4</sup> All the translations of the Holy Quran verses are quoted from Barakat (1993)

economic, and social changes, the age of Egyptian female early marriage dropped from 22% in 1976 , and to 10% in 2003 (Rashad et al 2005). The age of marriage for the participants in this research is consistent with these findings. Randa married at 29, Hanaa was 27, and Ghada was 28; Naglaa was the only case who married at the age of 22. This situation could be explained as having an economic basis due to the inflation in the cost of marriage.

### **Marriage's importance from economic perspective:**

The Islamic law dictates distinct gender roles within the household, where the male is responsible for providing financially for the household, and the female is responsible for providing care for the children and the husband. Most of the participants shared this belief. Naglaa, who had been working for more than twenty years, explains

*“My husband is totally responsible for all expenses of my children, and of course, mine. My contribution is optional, I may pay or buy but never in a way that spoils his role as the MAN of the house”.*

The political and economic changes reinforced these gender roles. Hoodfar argues that the adoption of the market economy and the decline of public subsidies and services make women more dependent on family male figures; consequently, the balance within the household shifted in favor of men (Singerman and Hoodfar, 1996: 13- 46) .

In Egypt, marriage is the principal path for the transfer of wealth; it is the biggest source for transferring assets for a Muslim woman because, according to Islamic law, she inherits half of what man does. However, a woman has the absolute right to enjoy economic support from her husband apart from her personal financial possessions. The Holy Quran states:

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (to support women)” (*Qur'an 4:3 4*).

The dowry (the bride price) is considered an unconditional right of the woman. She has also the complete right to control her own property which she may possess through inheritance or earned income. Such a situation could be held accountable for women's limited access to the labor market and the devaluation of the employment opportunities they have and the wages they receive. The custom of the dowry is still observed by the majority of Egyptians. It has religious roots because it is mentioned in holy verses of Quran and considered as an obligation of the groom to hand over the agreed upon sum of money to the bride "And give the women their Mahr as a free gift...Quran [4:4].

Furthermore, Islam gives the bride the absolute right to keep the dowry. "*But if you had given the latter a canter for dower (mahr) take not the least of it back*" Quran [4:20]. In Egypt, the dowry is used to help furnish the flat and is not kept by the bride. There has been no change in the practice of dowry. The participants considered their right to Maher (dowry) from a religious point of view and as a traditional norm.

In return for recognizing these financial rights, the husband has his own specific rights in marriage. The most important of them is to restrict the wife's physical mobility, which is often exercised to prevent the wife from working outside the home. He has also the right to unilateral divorce and the custody of the children. The Islamic responsibility of the husband to maintain his family is promoted by the breadwinner ideology of modern capitalism and has contributed to the decline of women's employment in Egypt.

(Singerman & Hoodfar, 1996 :4). The findings of the research are consistent with this perception of the economic responsibility of the husband. In some cases, the participants

earn more than their husbands, but they confirm that their income is their own and it is not obligatory for them to participate in the basic expenses of the household – they do so by their own choice. The Islamic perspective that the husband is obliged to maintain his family has spread throughout the Egyptian society as a social norm rather than a religious perception. Sally, a 23 year old Christian CS graduate who has not yet married confirms this,

*“I am fascinated by the idea that “my husband” cares for me, to be the provider. I am convinced to share in house expenses but he should show he cares”.*

Women’s marital financial rights in Islam make women dependant on the husband but do allow them some independence in regard to their own money. Nevertheless, they impose obligations on women to the extent of restricting their mobility whether in moving to the public sphere or in making choices which will result in restricting women’s access to the labor market.

### **Marriage’s importance from a social perspective:**

She was condemning marriage for the miserable time she experienced when divorced from a “mean” person (as she described her ex-husband). The response of the participants to my account of this conversation, which took place recently during the daily AUC bus commute, confirmed the importance of marriage for Egyptian women. One of the participants observed, *“Marriage is a must to be accepted in the society and it is the way of respect and trust”*. Both in the literature, and in the interviews for this study, marriage is viewed as the corner stone of the social life of Egyptians and as a primary concern for both men and women. Marriage is the entrance to adulthood and



complete independence in Egyptian society. Moreover, marriage and forming a family are key objectives on the way to full social inclusion. (Singerman & Hoodfar1996:4). Marriage is associated with two phenomena prevailing in the Middle East, the increase in the number of youth, and the increase in the rate of unemployment which is estimated at 20% in Egypt (Singerman 2007). The current situation has a serious impact on delaying the age of marriage, considering the importance of marriage in a conservative society such as Egypt. The delay of marriage is considered as a social exclusion because the unmarried adults continue living with their families. In such a case, the individuals are dependent on their families and living what Singerman called “wait adulthood” (Assaad and Barsoum, 2007:29).

The increases in the number of youth in the Arab countries and the extension of their years of education have greatly influenced the change of the demographic file of marriage. It is noticeable that Singulate Mean Age At Marriage (SMAM) for both men and women is rising and that many Arab women remain single for a longer time or never marry (Rashad, Osman & Fahimi, 2005). The rise of SMAM, or the never marrying, is a concept in conflict with the dominant cultural norms in the Arab region, such as the traditional value of female virginity and family honor. This change in marriage demographic patterns reflects economic, political, and social issues. The status of women in the Arab societies is mainly associated with their roles as mothers or wives. The failure to achieve either of these roles places single women, especially those without education or some form of employment, in a situation of dependency on male family members. Women who enjoy successful careers may go beyond the traditional stereotyped roles of wives and mothers to achieve self fulfillment. They are not

considered a failure for not getting married; on the contrary, they may be excused for remaining single by the assumption that there were no suitable candidates for marriage available to them (Rashad et al 2005). The highly educated youth have very limited resources to marry, especially in their early years of employment because they are obliged to share the cost of marriage. Randa, 42 years married to work colleague, explained the situation,

*“I was 29 and he was 31 when we got married, which means we were grown up enough. No, it was not arranged; he was working in the same company. Marriage cost was shared. Why so late at marriage? Because I did not meet the person who could convince me to get married. You know I got engaged when I was 25 but I did not continue the project because I was not really convinced. This incomplete project hindered somehow my marriage”.*

The economic and political changes in Egypt have contributed to the growing tendency to delay marriage. The demographic changes that the Middle East has experienced have made it a youthful region. Marriage is one of most necessary basic needs for constructing one’s social and economic life in Egypt. Thus, it is important to consider economic changes in the light of the importance of marriage because the required cost of marriage requires years to accumulate and this, in turn, influences the transitions from adolescence through the successive stages of schooling, education, employment, and identity shaping (Singerman 2007:79). Naglaa, who married her colleague immediately after their graduation, when they were 22 years, comments on marriage arrangements, saying:

*“No, there is no difference of marrying out of love or arranged marriage: we went through all the steps of getting married in Egypt. Shabka, mahr, flat and furnishing it. Yes, there were certain assignments for him and his family and others for my family”.*

The process of selecting the spouse is very important in Egypt because of the cultural and religious significance ascribed to marriage and family. Egyptians seek social status and compatibility of the partners. Mensch et al (2000) referred to the family's continuous discussions on the qualities and expected traits of a suitor to make the youth aware of the required and prevailing norms of good spouse. Marihan a 29 year old Christian CS graduate specifies the traits she wants in her future husband, *"I want to marry someone who is presentable; he must know how to dress himself, he must be chic"*.

### **Marriage cost and dynamics of power:**

The cost of marriage is increasing in most Arab countries, especially in Egypt (Rashad 2005, Hoodfar 1999, Singerman 2007, 2008). Marriage is a considerable economic burden on families. They have to provide financially for celebrations, dowry, jewelry, housing, and furniture. The average cost of marriage in Egypt is around the same amount as the country's per capita annual income—US \$5,460 in 2008 (Singerman 2007). The inflation in the cost of marriage could be attributed to modernization and consumerism. The interviewed participants showed no change or any readiness to lower the ceiling of their requests. Amina, 22 years old and a fresh graduate of CS, expresses her point of view,

*"Elshabka is a must, it should be a valuable present. You see the dowry goes to the family to furnish the house; the furniture is there, the couple enjoy together; what is left is Elshabka. You know women love gold. Yes, these many requests make men abandon the idea of getting married. But what can we do, men must provide all the requests"*.

On the other side, young men do not approve this trend; they accuse girls of being materialistic and illogical, as they want to marry young men who will be obliged to pay

for marriage expenses that exceed their present financial capacity. Yasser, 28, who justifies remaining unmarried by claiming that he cannot find an appropriate intellectual partner, comments on Elshabka,

*“Shabka , yes, I can buy shabka (Jewelry) as an investment; not for her nor for me; it is for the family. But farah (celebration) is not mandatory, we must think to save money on the reception because you will never please all people. We can travel for honeymoon better than having silly reception”.*

The increase in the cost of marriage and overloading the groom with requests that are beyond his means reinforces the traditional gender norms and the patriarchal family that recognize the man as the head of the family and as responsible for maintaining his family.

The inflation of the amount of the dowry could be among the reasons for the increase of the numbers of unmarried women. Age and the level of education have their strong effect on marriage cost. It is estimated that each additional year of female education increases the real cost of marriage, which means that the higher education the female receives, the higher the cost of marriage will be (Singerman, 1999). The research participants whether married, or single asserted this conclusion. Marian, 28, not married yet, disapproved the marriage of one of her colleagues, an AUC graduate who married someone who graduated from a national university. She described the man to be “ordinary”.

*One of my AUC colleagues married a graduate from Cairo University, Faculty of Commerce who was in French schools till the preparatory stage. She bore all the costs of the marriage, the flat, the furniture and he did not even buy a valuable shabka. I want a well educated person, he must know English, proficient in English; he must be smart not “Ktm” which means to be dull. I cannot accept to get married and live in a flat in Talbia, it should be in New*

*Cairo, Rehab or nearby residence, it is my right. I am living in Heliopolis; I cannot live in a lower standard”.*

Marihan is emphasizing the image of the male as a responsible breadwinner who has to provide the flat and shabka. She is aware that whatever the marriage type is, eventually marriage is a social arrangement that must suit her class, and her social and economic status. She commented that being an AUC graduate gives her the right to be selective. Marian is assessing her level of education as an asset that gives her the right of choice to select her spouse that comes up to her perceived personal standard.

### **Marriage as an incentive for women to work:**

The incentives of women to join the workforce vary. Amin & Al-Bassusi (2003) find that a primary reason that women work is to prepare for marriage, although marriage in Egypt is usually a matter of family arrangement. The family's responsibilities even extend to the choice of the partner and the timing of wedding. The girls and their families believe that work guarantees a better chance for girls to get married, and they can marry sooner than unemployed girls. They also believe that working and getting married are not conflicting roles, because women are expected to quit work and abandon their career aspirations after getting married since women are responsible for all domestic household tasks. Many researchers remarked on the trend among the Egyptians is to postpone marriage. The extension of the engagement periods is meant to bridge the current gap between their aspirations regarding the timing of marriage and the economic necessity of postponing marriage. They perceive the most suitable age for a young woman to get married is around 20. Amin and Al-Bassusi explain that the idea of the best age at

marriage maybe related to the notion that a young woman reaches her prime at that time (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2003: 18).

Moghadam (2005) attributes high rates of women's unemployment to Muslim perception of women exclusively as wives and mothers. The traditional gender roles are perceived to be responsible for economic provision. Women must marry to gain full social status, and even then, women must get written permission of their male guardian to work or travel. The findings of my research have showed some inconsistency that could be interpreted within the frame of the social and educational status of the research participants as highly educated upper middle class members. Self-actualization and assumption of full independence were among the top priorities set by the participants.

Farida, one of the participants summed up the feelings of others saying,

*“My current objective is not focused on building a career, but rather to find a job that suits my family conditions and at the same time keeps me in touch with the world and enables me to enrich my knowledge base. It is also a source of funds for me. For me, work is not a source of self-actualization, life is the main source. However, work is still an area for acquiring new skills and experience”.*

Farida expressed her incentives to work as secondary ones. Since none of them is to earn for her family, she needs only to feel some monetary autonomy and to gain skills and experience. She is socialized in the acceptance that she is not the principal breadwinner. In their perspective on choice, women may drop a career to care for their family.

### ***The importance of the family in Egypt:***

*“I want to get married just to make a family and have children”*, said one of the first informants of the research as she explained her reasons for getting married. This answer reflects the importance of family in the Egyptian society. Most the constitutions in the

Arab World identify family as the basic unit in the society, in contrast to the Western constitutions that recognize the individual as the basic unit of the society (Joseph, 2000:23). The family has been always valued more than the individual. In Arab countries, individual identity is formed and defined within the family terminology (Barakat, 1993:98). The Arab individual is socialized in the importance of being connected to the family and that the familial relations are the only way to successful society inclusion. Randa, Hanaa, Naglaa, Amal, Sally, and Dalia unanimously confirmed the importance of the family in their lives; they all asserted that they are ready to abandon any professional commitment to protect their familial relations. All of them asserted their sense of belonging to their parents and siblings and their feelings of responsibility towards all of them.

“Speaking about Arab Children, dependence on peers or on siblings or on an extended family is not ordinarily referred to as “dependency”. The “other oriented” child is said to have a strong affiliative impulse, or strong need for affiliation, rather than to have a great deal of dependence.” Edwin T. Prothro, *Child Rearing in the Lebanon*, Rugh, 1997:172

In Egypt, as in most of Arab countries, the family is the fundamental unit of the society. Family is considered the natural entity necessary to the survival of society because it provides the environment for reproduction and childrearing. Moreover, family is a supportive economic and social unit because all its members work together towards its survival and continuity. It represents security and support in hard times. Barakat (1993) interprets the word for family in Arabic, ‘aila or usra,’ as a reflection of mutual commitment and interdependency between family members. Within the family, women are to carry out specified roles such as caring for the family members and performing domestic chores, while men are to provide an income suitable to the needs of the family.

Children are the central concern and goal of the family as a social, cultural, and religious institution. The parents are ready to shed their identity as individuals to assume their roles as the father or mother and to be called “abu or Umm” of their first child. The parents support their children until adulthood, and the children became the support of their parents when they got old (Barakat, 1993:98). The participants in the research all expressed their connectivity, gratitude and loyalty to the family. Randa simply summed up her experience as a wife, mother and worker by saying, “*Yes my family help me a lot. Mum took care of my children when they were infants*”. All the research participants confirmed the importance of the family in providing security for their lives. The three participants who had pursued successful careers expressed their gratitude for the support of their families which made possible their fulfillment in both professional and family life.

### **Patriarchal connectivity and family:**

Connectivity highlights the significance of others in the social environment. The socialization of youth in Egypt, as in other Arab and Middle East countries, is very much concerned with teaching youth how to use the social networks with which they should affiliate, rather than teaching them how to achieve autonomy (Mensch et al, 2000:6-7). The family in Egypt, as in other Arab societies, has a patriarchal nature. The father has the complete authority and responsibility for his wife and children. The wife is associated with her husband. The hierarchal structure of the family dictates the family roles: the father is the head of the family and he is the breadwinner and the mother is assigned the role of the caretaker. The children are socialized to be dependent, totally attached to their families and feeling guilty whenever they fail their families’ hopes or



expectations (Barakat, 1993:101-106). This pattern reinforces the male ideology of breadwinning and results in the decline of female employment because women do not feel personally responsible for earning income.

Throughout the interviews, I remarked the strong attachment between the participants and their families in what Joseph called “Connectivity as central to the psychosocial dynamics of the families”. She defines the term to include those relations that have no limits. That is, persons perceive themselves as extensions of the others and at the same time the others are the extensions of themselves. We can understand the importance of such type of relations in Egyptian and Middle East societies where family is always valued over the individual. This supports Joseph’s claim that the identity in such societies is framed within the family and kin relationships. Hence we are to understand that these relations are not only required, but also essential for even social existence (Joseph, 1999:452-455). In the interviews, I noticed that this kind of connectivity is mutual; it completely wraps the individuals in the intensive network of the family and helps in self making. The patriarchal nature of the society imposes ‘patriarchal connectivity’ in which the “self” of the individual is completely framed in the boundaries of gender and age. The male head of family and its senior members mobilize the family morals and structure to legitimize the gendered and aged domination. The individuals are socialized not to acquire autonomy but to be dependent. The importance of the family in self making and completing is highly recognized in the Arab societies. Amina, the only daughter, explains how the decisions are taken in the family, “No *real freedom, it is fake, they always watch me remotely; I cannot take a decision*”.

Of the three types of self that Joseph identified--the individual self, the familial self and the spiritual self-- most of my participants could be located in the category of familial self. They are prone to identify themselves with the family and derive self esteem from the mutual exchange of empathy and feelings with its members. They also have observed the traditional roles within this social context and they recognize family as the central axis of their lives. They are very close to their families and assume responsibility towards their parents and siblings. They feel complete self satisfaction within the context of the family. Furthermore, their survival depends on their families, since they greatly depended on their families in the areas of health, education, and financial security. In most cases, mothers of the married participants with children have taken on the responsibility of the child caring for their daughters (Joseph 1999:9). Hanaa, the CEO recognizes the role of her parents in supporting her in securing balance between her private and business life,

*“My children always go to their grandpa’s after school till I pass by to pick them as I am always late in the office. It is their great chance to eat healthy food, to be oriented to do’s and do not’s. I am really satisfied that they have this chance. From the very beginning mum took care of both of my children once I delivered so I was able to resume my work with no big breaks.”*

Patriarchy connectivity has a positive side in reinforcing the social solidarity that sustains social and political survival and helps to produce persons who are locally considered mature and responsible (Joseph, 1999: 477-480). Amel, 23 years old, speaks of her experience as an elder sister, *“Now, I am taking care of my youngest sister, she is ten years younger than me, I feel I am responsible for her. I do practice a natural role.”*

It is clear that in Egypt, as in other Arab societies, the individual participates in the household according to the traditional gender roles. Rugh (1997) pointed that in Arab societies, males and females make meaningful contributions to the household. The female are to perform domestic chores and it is the man's responsibility to earn the income. She perceives that the children know that their parents know better what is good for them, so they naturally willing to allow their parents to make decisions for them. The children are sure that their parents have more experience and have sincere interest in their welfare. They recognize that when parents make decisions for their children they save them much trouble, especially in adolescence. (Rugh,1997: 176).

The role of the family in the Egyptian society is pivotal. The "familial ethos" consists of the norms and traditions that guarantee family solidarity and survival (Bourdieu, 1996:19). They help families to provide the material as well as the social needs for all their members. They also settle conflicts among individuals; furthermore, they maintain the ideas and norms of the community. Family is the medium not only of reproduction but also of economic production. Amina, 23 years (recently got engaged to the son of one of her mother's friends) gives her opinion,

*"I do believe that I should get my parents approval for getting married, 100% approval; even if I fall in love; I witnessed some bad experiences of getting married for love sake without the family approval and they end up by divorce or continuing a miserable life for the sake of the children. The girl needs her family's support; marriage is a social arrangement; you cannot rely only on love".*

The interviews showed that most of the participants are torn between their aspirations to build a career and their commitments to their families. Women are trapped in double conflict: on the one hand, economic desire or need pushes them into the work place on

the other hand, gender ideology pushes them out. Randa chose, after fifteen years of work and six years of LWOP, to opt out of work:

*“It is my choice; life is an equation; what’s to consider? Work over the children or the vice versa. I chose my commitment towards my children as IT is a very demanding career”.*

Macleod (1996) confirms that women who try to play the double role of housewife and worker find themselves in deadlock as it is impossible to play the two roles simultaneously at the same level of perfection (Macleod’s Transforming Women’s Identity: the Intersection of Household and Workplace in Cairo, edited in Singerman & Hoodfar, 1996: 40). Hanaa feels regret for missing being with her children during their vacations. This midyear recess, she decided to have two “complete” weeks off during which she would close her mobile phone and take her small family to a trip, something she missed many years ago. We hear the same cry from Randa who chose to be on LWOP,

*“I want to raise my children, I want to socialize with them. You know, I enjoy participating in social activities that my child’s school organizes; these activities I missed while I was working; working till 5 PM daily keeps mothers away from watching their children growing”.* Hanaa, CEO of one the biggest IT companies in Egypt.

### ***The socialization of gender norms and young women’s employment:***

Gender stereotyped norms play an important role in the socialization of youth in Egypt, as they dictate the conception of gender identity within the family. Those gender norms guide the individuals to the social behavior accepted for their gender without enforcing it as a law, and promote the development of the identity (Mahalik et al, 417: 2005). These stereotypes perceive man to be an authoritarian person who always keeps an emotional

distance from his wife and children, whereas women are perceived submissive, emotional, and more restricted to household chores (Kandiyoti 1994). Traditional religious Muslims view women as subordinate to men, since men are superior to them, according to Quran verses. The traditional gender norms define the traditional feminine roles. In the interviews, most of the participants expressed their conformity to accepted feminine traits and roles. Naglaa, 42 years married with two girls and full time employee at AUC, thinks that, *Yes, some jobs are suitable only for men while others are more suitable for girls. Girls are more accurate, patient, have more ability to endure working*". Amina, 23 years unmarried and part time employee at AUC, agrees with this, and believes that:

*"Women now enjoy liberty. They can work at whatever they want. But they cannot join some occupations and position because of the biological limitations. During menstruation period, women became very nervous, irrational. It is difficult to imagine a pregnant woman as a judge, or a president, biological restriction should be observed"*.

While Marihan, single 29 years Christian, finds:

*"It is difficult for a man to do domestic chores. But if he wants to do it, OK, he's more than welcome"*. She expresses her dream to marry a person who *"I must feel he is the man; I need to feel secure; I need to depend on him. It is a moral issue. He must be able to solve problems"*.

A considerable number of the research participants lived with their families in one of the Gulf countries for most of their childhood and adulthood. They attended single sex schools, and most of them are veiled. The Gulf religious and cultural environment, one that is dominated by conservative Islam, has helped in reinforcing the male ideology of breadwinning and confining women to the role of the mother and care taker. Egyptian

migration to the Gulf reinforces consumerism and has exposed Egypt to Wahabi Islam with its conservative, patriarchal, and gendered view of women.

### **Socialization and reinforcement of gender norms:**

In Egypt, as in other Arab and Middle East countries, boys have full mobility and freedom to practice different activities outside the home while, in order to guarantee chastity and family honor, the family imposes greater restrictions on the mobility of adolescent girls. Girls must allocate much of their leisure time to helping with domestic chores, but schooling does give girls the chance to be out in the public sphere and it guarantees interaction between boys and girls (Mensch et al 2000: 12).

*“Mum keeps an eye on all of us, the three daughters; we are not allowed to be out after 10 PM. We don’t feel discrimination as we do not have a brother; if we had he might be allowed to be late outside”* said Amal, a twenty two year old CS graduate in the Fall of 2010. What Amal reported indicates that no change has occurred in girls’ socialization.

Moreover, parental direction of the career of their daughters is mainly based on gender societal norms. Father said *“Yes, join Computer Science to work in an office and don’t do like your sister”* said Basma who is an undeclared freshman aspiring to a major in Computer Science. She was referring to her elder sister who chose to declare Construction Engineering as her major, a choice that her father did not approve. Her sister complains that the laborers ignore her during her training on a field site and they do not even follow her instructions as an engineer. Her father has observed that this situation is normal and that girls should not work in a construction site and should not be engineers. It is noteworthy to mention that the father is an engineer. Sarah’s family

strongly advised her to major in a discipline sufficiently feminine, such as “Business Administration”.

The socialization of the adolescent in Middle East and Arab countries has been a hot topic for many scholars such as Mensch et al 2000, Singerman 1997, 2008, Hoodfar, 1997, Joseph, 1993. Their scholarship confirms that family socialization is greatly responsible for reinforcing the traditional gender roles. The socialization of the social gender norms in Egypt is mainly carried out through the family. The parents are deeply concerned with conveying these values as reflected by a gendered division of household tasks and by controlling the mobility of their children, especially the girls.

### **Schooling and socialization of Egyptian young women:**

Formal schooling is a normal tool to socialize youth in the acceptance of cultural norms. It is well established in the scholarly literature that the curriculum, the text contents, the student-teacher interaction both within and outside of the classroom, teaching and extracurricular activities, and the policies of the school administration are all effective tools for the transmission of gender and cultural norms. (Mensch et al, 2000:5). Wassef (1996) points out that the school curriculum supposedly teaches gender equality, but in reality, it reinforces gender inequality by assigning specific gender roles to certain social occupations. Women are always wives and mothers, while men are out in the public sphere. In many governmental curricula, women are always portrayed as family supporters and not as leaders. The context of Egyptian formal education reinforces the gendered patriarchal system, since the primary pedagogical method in Egyptian schools is memorization and not the acquisition of critical thinking skills. She claims that the authoritarian control of the parents is replaced by that of the teachers during the school

day (Rugh, 1997: 174). Most of my research participants had attended private national/international language schools; most of these schools were not mixed, which may make it difficult to identify gender segregation in school environment.

### ***The Gulf migration and the reinforcement of gender norms:***

The beginning of the oil boom in 1973 initiated the phenomenon of Egyptian labor migration to Arab countries. The great number of migrating men introduced to Egypt the concept of the female-headed household and reshaped the traditional gender division of labor and the family relations. Hoodfar (1996) finds the influence of male migration positive in the lower classes as it opened the door to the improvement in the standard of living, allowing women to enhance their position within the family and with their husbands. They acquired self-confidence as they became responsible for many activities that were previously assigned to the male, and were able to achieve financial independence. In contrast to the improvement in the situation of these groups, Hoodfar observes that in the marriages of better educated women who were white collar workers and were already enjoying self-confidence and financial independence, it was more likely that the balance of power in the marriage relationship would shift in favor of the husband. The significant increase in the husband's income reinforced the traditional gender ideology which considers women as dependent on males economically in spite of some of change in gender division of labor inside the household.

Migration has a profound impact on the social and economic relationships between men and women in the household. The relationship between the change of Egypt to a market-oriented economy and the change of the gender ideology in Egyptian society accounts for



a great part of the discussion of this subject among scholars. Kamphoefner (edited in Hoodfar & Singerman, 1996: 66-67) argues that Egypt's move towards the Western industrialization system moves away from the traditional patriarchy to a social system of "sexism". In the new system, women lose their power over the domain of the household which the traditional Egyptian patriarchal system guarantees them. They no longer enjoy the respect and traditional status traditionally awarded to them as housewives and mothers. They are also deprived of the political and social mobility implicit in the traditional system which assists them in building political and social alliances for the benefit of their families and of themselves. She concludes that the movement of the center of women's activities towards the workplace deprives them of power both in their household and in the society as a whole. The findings of the research support this trend, as most of the participants experienced the effects of family migration to the Gulf countries. In most cases, the father remained alone to work in the Gulf country, and the mother returned to Egypt and took over responsibility for the household. The mothers had to abandon their work, even though most of the mothers were physicians, engineers, or had PhD's. Some of them had to change careers and choose another job that would help them manage the balance between their domestic responsibilities and their work responsibilities.

I conclude from the literature and the interviews in this study that the importance of the private life is reinforced in girls in their early years and is reflected on their choices in life. This has a great effect on the rate of young women's unemployment in Egypt and the decline of professional careers among young women. Egyptian society values marriage as a religious obligation and as the entrance into full social inclusion once they

begin to form a family. The older participants were around twenty nine years of age at the time of their marriage. However, the research for this study revealed the return to an earlier age—mid-twenties or younger-- at the time of marriage among newly graduate participants. This could be a response to the new Islamic calls for women's return to the home, or may simply be a characteristic of a gendered society that considers that the natural role of women is caring for children. Upper class Egyptians still adhere strongly to these social and cultural norms. The female participants perceive “shabka” as a precious present to the bride herself that the woman is not obliged to give up, whereas male participants view it as a family investment. In spite of the great political and economic changes in the society, there is no tangible change in the traditional gender roles within the Egyptian household. The participants, although sometimes earning incomes that exceed those of their spouses, are not obliged to share in the basic expenses of the household, and so are free to use it to pay for optional or luxury items for the children or the house. The study's male participants have adopted more liberal gender norms: they expressed their willingness to share household responsibilities. They also call for women to participate in the financial support of the family. The Islamists are reinforcing the traditional male role of the breadwinner; for them, the only available social role for woman is that of wife and a mother. After the January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution, the once banned Muslim Brotherhood group, together with the Salafi, has been of a significant presence on the Egyptian political stage. These groups completely ignore the right of women to work outside the home, which produces a cultural and political environment that threatens the status of Egyptian women after the revolution.

## **Chapter Four: The Economic Transition in Egypt and its effect on young women's unemployment:**

This Chapter focuses on the macroeconomics needed to understand the determinants of women's access to employment in Egypt. I investigated globalization and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) to analyze the economic environments that control women's employment. The first part of this chapter analyzes the characteristics of neoliberalism, globalization, and structured adjustment policies (SAPs) and their role in reshaping the economic, social, and political scene in Egypt. It investigates Neoliberalism as a political and economic approach that advocates a kind of market fundamentalism and gender-blind policies that ignore the effect of women's unpaid domestic work on the production economy and on the rate of unemployment for young women. The second part of this chapter focuses on the political economy. The chapter concludes with a description of the trends in female labor participation in Egypt under the influence of globalization and structural adjustment policies. This chapter also presents to the reader an explanation for women's unemployment in light of the correlation of neoliberal capitalism and its gender blind policies with the patriarchal Egyptian society in an attempt to contextualize their impact on female unemployment.

Egypt was among the high borrower countries which were forced to apply strict economic measures, referred to as Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP's), in response to instructions from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. A steep increase in the population and an intensive migration of population from the rural to the urban areas resulted in the excessive concentration of unemployed Egyptians in the big cities. The lower-middle class faced deterioration in their living conditions. In contrast to the

positive situation for labor during the 1960s and 1970s, Egyptian wages declined in spite of this attempt at economic reformation. As a solution to this challenging economic problem, the state adopted a shift from a policy of state directed strategy that favored the public sector to the neoliberal strategy that promoted the private sector. The neoliberal economic reforms advocated economic openness in capital, trade and labor, and the reduction of state control over the economy (Mogahdam, 2005:124).

### ***Globalization and reshaping the role of the state:***

Globalization has been the object of much scholarly study (Mogahdam 1999, 2002, 2003 & 2006, Elson 1992). Moghadam defines globalization as "... a complex economic, political, cultural, and geographic process in which the mobility of capital, organizations, ideas, discourses, and peoples has taken on an increasingly global or transnational form" (Moghadam, 1999: 367). Structural Adjustment Policies or what are called free-market policies have been interrelated with globalization. Under the leadership of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) have been in force since the 1980s. SAPs seek to create balanced budgets and increase competitiveness by promoting the balance between trade and price liberalization. The structural adjustment policies resulted in the reduction of the public-sector expenditures and the privatization of social services, encouragement of foreign investment, and the production of export-oriented goods and services. These processes require "flexible" labor procedures.

SAPs were first applied in some countries in Latin America to solve the debt crisis of the early 1980s. Later on, the application of SAPs was adopted in some Middle East countries such as Jordan and Egypt in the 1990s. Structural adjustment has been a

controversial issue in the literature; some scholars praise its success in some countries, even though it has clearly failed in others. Other scholars believe that SAPs have had catastrophic effect on their target countries--that they demolish the state's sovereignty and threaten people's welfare. Moghadam (2005) points out that the feminist literature has not only severely criticized SAPs, but also has held the SAPs account for increasing the sufferings of the poor and the vulnerable, especially women. Under the SAPs, women have to exert greater efforts in the productive as well as the reproductive spheres in order to survive the severity of these newly adopted policies. They have had to endure higher prices, the decline of subsidized food and services in health and education.

### ***Neoliberalism:***

Neoliberalism calls for driven-market solutions for social as well as economic problems (Gellecum et al 2005). It calls for the liberation the economy from state control and for a greater openness to global trade and investment. Unfortunately, there was no consideration of the the social harm that this kind of economic approach can produce. Neoliberalism has eliminated this consideration for the welfare of the community, replaced it with the imperative of "individual responsibility". Such ideology holds the poor accountable for their poverty and responsible for finding solutions for their needs in health or education (Onyejekwe, 2004:27). The two ideological bases of neoliberalism, individualism and competition, challenge the assigned gendered roles of women, especially in developing societies such as Egypt, where the role of the state has declined in achieving the improvement in the welfare of its people. Family assigned responsibilities have proved to be the main obstacles to women's efforts to enter the labor market. They must redefine their choices and preferences to maintain the even

balance of domestic responsibilities with their responsibilities in the workplace. The concept of gender competition is unfair, as women play double and sometimes triple roles as wives, mothers, and workers, whereas men have one accepted and assigned role as the family breadwinner. The increase of the working hours that has accompanied the market driven economic policies has locked women with heavy family responsibilities out of the labor market and denied them the possibility of pursuing a career in Egypt's current wave of new entrepreneurial private projects.

The first wave of neoliberalism principles in the 1980s attacked the government and the bureaucratic state. It focused on restructuring the public sector and increasing privatization. In terms of the economy, it focused on opening global markets and on adopting a number of economic policies to adjust the socialist economies and force them to acknowledge the important role economic competition plays in creating wealth. By the 1990s, the adverse social consequences of globalization began to be apparent. At that time there was a call for individual responsibility to replace state subsidized services in health and education. Neoliberalism called for the market to replace the state in the distribution of public resources. It advocates a primitive individualism, economic efficiency, and self-ethical responsibility. Moreover, the local governments lost their autonomy in designing the policies of public welfare in employment, education, and health, since they were now obliged to design them according to the recommendations of global organizations such as the World Bank. Neoliberalism resulted in a shrinking of the state and in the reeducation of its citizen subjects to a new perception of individual responsibility (Ong, 2006).

The loss of the state support for family basic needs forces women to exert more effort to compensate for the state's inability to provide suitable employment. They were obliged to join the informal labor market when the public and governmental sectors, with their family friendly environment, ceased to be the primary providers of female employment. The rate of unemployment increased, because the state did not perceive its responsibility towards this aspect of the public welfare. I agree with Elson (2002) that neoliberalism worked on the physical and financial capital and ignored the human and social capital. The cut of public expenditures in the health sector transferred its cost to the household. Most of the resulting financial burden for the family was shouldered by women who now had to divert scarce resources to care services. Thus, the family welfare is compromised because it is forced to provide many services that should be assigned to the state. Moghadam (2005) explored the positive changes that SAPs brought about, such as producing better qualified workers by improving education and vocational training. Furthermore, opening opportunities for women's employment in tourism and the private sector presents a challenge to the conventional norms. She refers to the negative aspects of the stagnation in the labor market, especially the loss of adequate investments, which contribute to the increase of poverty. Women were excluded from the labor market with the shrinking of the economy and the increase in the overall employment rate, a rate that for the most part reflected male dominated jobs. The absence of gender sensitive awareness and influential organizations with a focus on women's problems in the labor market only served to decrease the rate of female employment. The paradox is that globalization and the change in the political economy caused an increase in potential jobs for women, and at the same time, was the cause of female unemployment. In Egypt, as in other developing countries, 80 % of the unemployed are first time job seekers, and a

significant number of these are educated new entrants to the workforce. (Moghadam 2005:22).

### ***Structural Adjustment Policies:***

Many researchers (Moghadam 2003, 2005, 2007, Anker 1998, Beneria 2001) consider that the economic transformations brought about by SAPs and global neoliberal systems resulted in gendered systems, since there is strong relation between gender inequality and productivity based on gender segregation. The SAPs' sought to change the current economic policies in their target countries to balance the deficits between the payments and budgets in these countries. On the other hand, these countries would be able to increase the growth rates through efficient use of resources and the guaranteed participation of the private sector in investment. The World Bank called for the adoption of various specific strategies to help the vulnerable categories, among which are women. The vision of the World Bank regarding the SAPS stressed a reduction of the role of the state in procedures such as decreasing the public expenses and eliminating state imposed policies for wages and prices. These strategies were meant to encourage the owners of small and medium enterprises, with the ultimate goal of "empowering the people". However, the success of these small and medium enterprises has been completely dominated by the market policies meant for the large capital enterprises. The owners of the small and medium enterprises find themselves struggling to survive in a market that is controlled by the macroeconomic policies (Elson, 1995:1851-8541).

It is now well-established that (SAPs) have worsened conditions of poverty for large sections of the population. Several researchers have also shown that these macroeconomic policies are not class-neutral or gender-neutral. In all sectors of paid



employment, women suffer a continuous wage gap that cannot be always explained in terms of differences in the human capital of skills, experience or even the full time nature of the job (ILO 2009:32). In developed countries, women may opt out of the labor market according to their own preference. But in developing countries women may not be allowed to enter the labor market because of the traditional norms that assigned gender roles of caring for domestic activities to women and financial support of the family for men. The patriarchal capitalist ideology also does not consider women's domestic activity as an economic activity. This patriarchal mentality reinforces the economic dependency of women on men and reduces women's employment to a secondary issue, consolidating the perception that men's work is obligatory, whereas women's work is optional. This perception extends to the recruitment process: the employers do not perceive women as serious candidates. They question women's commitment to work because women are not the main breadwinners. For their part, women themselves are so restricted by their domestic responsibilities that working hours and decent working conditions become their priority in considering paid employment. I thoroughly investigate this point in Chapter 5, which discusses the gendered state, gendered labor market and gendered family.

### ***The characteristics of Structural Adjustment Policies and their impact on women's unemployment in Egypt:***

The SAPs' targets of privatization, informalization, and feminization were achieved in some countries, whereas in others, such as Egypt, SAPs resulted in the decrease of public investment, with no equivalent increase in private investment. They had adverse effects on the vulnerable categories of the poor and women because liberating prices to meet the

global prices and the promotion of intensive growth did not meet the needs of these categories (World Bank 1990). Neoliberal capitalism does not depend on supply and demand but encourages the replacement of laborers with machines. Elson quotes Marx's comments on the accumulation of capital in the nineteenth century, "It is not a case of two independent forces working on each other... Capital acts on both sides at once ( Marx, 1976, p. 793, quoted, Elson, 1995:1853). With the SAPs, processes and capital that works "on both sides" and the feminization of the labor market have become the prevailing characteristics of the markets of Asia and Latin America, but not in Egypt and MENA countries for reasons that will be discussed later.

### **Privatization:**

In the 1980s, Egypt started the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) under the control of the IMF and the World Bank with the main target of applying principles of the market oriented economy and allowing the private sector to lead. However, the public sector continued its control of the Egyptian economy, making up 37% of GDP, 55% of the industrial production, and controlling over 80% of import and export, and nearly 90% of the sectors of banking and insurance. It is clear that the private sector drastically reduced its paid employment for women in Egypt: the statistics show that there was an increase of 3.7% in male paid employment, whereas the decline in female paid employment reached 0.5 percent per annum. Eventually, female participation in that important part of the labor market declined to 9.6 percent (Assaad, 2002:11). This decline in women's employment in the private sector could be explained by the application of high technology that resulted in restricting the access of women to the new labor market because they failed to secure the required skills. However, the interviews revealed a

distinctly gender biased attitude in recruiting women in the private sector stemming from traditional gendered norms in respect to the perceived conflict between domestic responsibility and work responsibility. This point is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Informalization:**

There is a growing literature that acknowledges the informalization of the labor market (Beneria 2001, Anker 1998 and Moghadam 2005, 2007). Globalization caused tremendous growth in the informal sector of employment, an environment that is not conducive to the active support of the rights of the employees to fair wages or to good working conditions. This resulted in increasing poverty and economic insecurity for a considerable proportion of the population affected by these forces. Employees are more likely to suffer from stress and depression in such an insecure and unstable work environment, especially with the decline of job security in general (Beneria, 2001:27). Contradictory forces in the labor market push women towards the informal labor market. The shift from the predominance of manufacturing industries to that of service industries resulted in decreasing opportunities for formal employment, while, at the same time, increasing the numbers of part-time and temporary jobs.

Egypt, as one of the developing countries that applied SAPs, was obliged to downsize the public sector and state-controlled industries, and this resulted in the rapid expansion of the informal sector and temporary employment. This also increased the rates of unemployment and of poverty due to cuts in the cost of production which were intended to help Egypt compete in the world market. The replacement of permanent employment that paid a family wage with low paid, unstable work reinforced the feminization of the

informal employment sector. This reflects the correlation between neoliberal capitalism and traditional patriarchy; both perceive women's labor as secondary. Women are more vulnerable to unemployment as they are the first to be laid off when a company downsizes the cost of production. SAPs caused dramatic changes in employment relations that worked to the benefit of the employers by promoting the adoption of "flexibility" in developing new labor contracts that do not guarantee employment continuity. The Egyptian Labor Law of 2003 opened the door for institutionalizing labor policies that worked to the advantage of the employers. It replaced the indefinite duration labor contracts that secured the employee lifetime employment by the definite duration contracts that are subject to cancellation or renewal according to very loosely defined conditions (Assaad & Barousm, 2007:31). A further investigation of Labor Law 2003 is included in Chapter Five in the section on "Gendered State and Legislation".

### **Feminization:**

There is a strong relationship between the feminization of the labor market and the informalization of the labor market (Moghadam 2005, Elson 2002 and Beneria 2001). Feminization refers to the increase of female participation in the labor force and the deterioration of the work conditions in positions that were previously occupied by men (Beneria, 2001: 28). Beneria ties the feminization of the labor market to the dependence of women on the informal sector as they seek to balance their primary affiliation to domestic activities and work activities. He considers this domestic affiliation the main source of vulnerability and inequality. Domestic work is unpaid work and it limits women's mobility and autonomy; the commitment to market strategies has a strong gender impact on women's employment (ibid 41).

To lower the cost of labor, the SAPs encouraged the investors to increase the use of female employment. The decline of the household income due to the high prices of goods and the shrinking of the wage increased the number of women seeking jobs. The new global open economies depend greatly on the work of women. Although they participated in the labor market in dramatically increasing numbers, their low wages and the denial of work privileges placed them at a disadvantage both in the work world and the family. Although they increasingly participated in the labor market, with the decline of the social power of labor and the increase of unemployment, women's labor market participation did not mean a redistribution of household responsibilities (Moghadam, 1999:370).

The feminization of labor has roots in some gender perceptions of women's participation in the labor market, especially the demeaning attitudes that equate women's work with cheap labor. Elson (1981) referred to the gender ideologies revolving around the "nimble fingers" of hard working young women which are used to justify recruiting women in unskilled work in intensive industries at lower wages and in very adverse work conditions. At the worldwide level, women's participation in manufacturing is around 30-40 %, while women's participation in export-oriented industries reaches 90 % in some industries. The feminization of the labor market in the public service sector has reached approximately 30-50 %. The job opportunities of women in public-service employment increased in jobs such as teaching, nursing, and administration professionals. Nevertheless, wages have continued to decline in this sector, just as they have in the manufacturing and export-oriented industries (ILO 2009).

In the Middle East and North Africa there was a defeminization of employment in the new evolving private sector. The SAPs opened the door for greater female participation in the labor market in many other regions, decreasing the female unemployment rate from 21% in 1989 to just 16.3% in 1999 (Moghadam, 2005:137). The feminization of the labor market during the SAPs period could be analyzed on two levels: the first is the supply, and the second is the demand. The supply trend is explained by the great pressures on women to join the labor market to make up for the deterioration of the household income which resulted from decreasing wages. This demand occurred when the SAPs created deregulated types of employment in export-oriented industries that absorbed a great number of women. Until then, the feminization of the labor market had not been a universal phenomenon (Moghadam 2001, 2005).

Some scholars attributed the disappearance of feminization of the labor market in some countries—Egypt, for example-- to patriarchal norms which place obstacles in the way of the participation of women in the labor market. These prevailing patriarchal social norms assign income earning to the male in the family, whereas the care of home and family is assigned to females. Assaad (2002) explains that these countries faced defeminization during the SAPs period due to oil remittance that reinforced the pattern of the patriarchal family in which the male is the breadwinner and female is the caretaker. Secondly, the oil revenues, and their effect on the exchange rate, placed other sectors at a disadvantage, sectors that had profited from employment feminization, such as export-oriented and manufacturing. This development resulted in a disproportionate growth in male dominated sectors. Finally, educated young women had less mobility in comparison to that of young men, who entered the private labor market not only with the willingness, but the physical and social ability to make an increasingly long commute to

their place of employment. (Assaad, 2002:20). Aspects of mobility will be elaborated in a separate section of the chapter devoted to its importance in framing women's unemployment.

### ***The implementation of SAPs and gendered unemployment:***

Changes in the economies brought about by applications of the SAPs also change the required skills sets now required for the job market, employment dynamics, and wages earned. As Beneria (2001) points out, these changes are gendered. Women, as members of the labor force, have the potential to help promote economic growth, but the new market economy is hostile to women. The ILO recommends social protection and social dialogue to secure women's full representation in searching for solutions to the economic crisis. To guarantee women's participation in the labor force should mean providing equal opportunity for decent work for both men and women. A large number of women are most likely to be vulnerable to insecure employment, low wages, and low productivity. At the other hand, women who secure paid employment are often not paid at the same level as men having the same qualifications. Gender wage gaps could be attributed to different factors, such as the prevalence of women in low paying jobs and having fewer skills and less work experience (ILO, 2009:34). Sally, a CS 2006 graduate who spent 3 years searching for a job in the IT, says,

*"I know well that the male employees receive better salaries. They do not exert more efforts or work overtime to be paid more; she continued angrily, "No, young women do the same tasks but the boys know well how to report their product without exerting more effort. I know, that happened with other young women, they hired me at a lower salary package." Farida expressed the same opinion.*

Women suffer more than men in the economic crises and as a result of the new economic reforms. Gender relations and the nature of the economic reforms of the SAPs are the main factors behind their adverse situation. Women are always suffering the effects of traditional biases and inequalities within the household that lead to economic insecurity. The free market economy requires physical mobility, that is, the ability to commute to places of employment in the outlying districts, where the SAPs have encouraged construction of new industries, without any consideration for the geographical limitations of women due to gender perceptions and domestic responsibilities. Because of traditional gender roles, women are perceived to be dependent on the family's male figures; accordingly women's participation in the labor market is not viewed as a must but as a task secondary to their primary task of care taking. Most of the married participants reported that their personal struggle to face the difficulties in coping with working conditions which have resulted from the new reforms.

Most jobs in the projects under SAPs increase women's total labor time by encouraging women's greater participation in the productive labor force to compensate for the cut in the household budget due to the deterioration in wages. At the same time, these women endure more burdens in the sphere of reproduction activities because of the cuts in public healthcare and education services. Women, in their position as caretaker, bear the much of the weight of the family's need to compensate for this cut in public expenditures by taking care of the ill family members to save medical expenses. They also carry the load of teaching their children, or try to secure money required to have private tutorial classes. The downsizing of the public sector has had adverse effects on women as well, especially on women whose access to decent paid employment suffers with the shrinking of the public sector, while, at the same time, they are denied access to the private sector, due to



its harsh working conditions and its discriminatory attitude towards women with family responsibilities. In most developing countries, women are concentrated in government jobs because of its egalitarian environment and because the private sector is “unfriendly” to women and unwilling to provide support for working mothers. Women also suffer the adverse effects of privatization, especially that of being the first to be laid off because they most probably occupy jobs at the lower levels of the economic hierarchy, or because they work in already overcrowded job categories that are clerical or administrative in nature.

### ***The trends of female labor participation in Egypt under the SAPs:***

Female participation in the Egyptian labor market is growing rapidly, increasing from 7.3 % in the 1970s to 15.3 % in the 1990s, then rising to 24.7 percent in 2008 (CAPMAS 2008). But the rate of female unemployment is high as well, four times higher than the male rate of unemployment. Women are restricted to employment in certain fields such as agriculture, education, public administration, health, and social work. The public sector remains the main provider of women’s employment, accounting for 36.2 % of women’s employment in 2007. The employment in the private sector grew slowly to include 74 % of men and 62 % of women in 2007(Nasr, 2010:11-12).

Egyptian legislation stipulates equality between men and women as stated in Article 88 of the constitution:

“All employment policies and regulations should apply to female employees, equalizing their status to that of their male counterparts without discrimination as long as their work conditions are analogous”.

However, the same constitution imposes restriction on women as shown in Article 90, “the concerned minister shall issue a decree determining the works that are unwholesome and morally harmful to women, as well as the works in which women may not be employed”.

Amina experienced this gender discrimination, observing,

*“The situation is different in Schlumberger. It was a panel interview, the interviewer asked us--we were a number of girls-- why do you apply for such positions; are you planning to work in drills? What do you think-- how do you imagine working there? Most probably you have the vision of the Egyptian films. He decided to offer a one-week training to filter the applicants for the position. I think the interviewer’s questions were illogical. He must understand that once you apply, you know the work conditions and you accept them”.*

The difference she was referring to was in her application to work as a software developer for IT Company in the USA,

*“I had the opportunity to apply to work as a Developer in New York, USA. I have no objection to traveling. My mother approved on condition that she would accompany me. But there was a condition for working there—it would have to be without any leaves or chance to have a break in Egypt. I rejected it as I felt I would be excluded. No, they did not ask me during the interview if I could travel because it is understood that if I applied I would be able to travel”.*

### **Occupational segregation:**

The structural adjustment policies also did great damage to women’s employment opportunities by encouraging occupational segregation that assigns women to unskilled jobs with low wages and to work in the informal sector (Moghadam 2005, Elson 2002).

The Egyptian labor market is gendered by occupational segregation according to sex and the difficulty in accessing the private sector. Moghadam expressed her contention that

“Egypt’s labor market is highly segmented with differentiation along a number of axes ... It is my contention that gender is central source of differentiation and inequality, including occupational sex typing in the formal sector, barriers to entry in the private sector, and lower wages for women” (quoted, Assaad 2005:432-3).

Gender stereotyping and the prevailing social and cultural norms result in gender occupational segregation. This gender stereotyping causes women to crowd together in certain forms of employment, mainly in the service sector, whereas men mainly work in the production sector. This occupational segregation devalues the wages of women in these positions and decreases their training opportunities and their chances to acquire job skills. The social and cultural norms specify particular gender behaviors that restrict women’s job opportunities. I argue that these norms, along with the geographical mobility restriction, eventually result in limiting women’s job searches to a narrow range of jobs in the nearby community. The prevalence of women in the public sector, with its short working hours and light work load attracts women to jobs in the public sector, work which will make possible achieving a balance between work and home activities.

Another advantage in the public sector is that it is less gender conscious, both in recruiting and promotion. Accordingly, the adverse effects of the cuts in the governmental expenditures that accompanied the SAPs had a strongly negatively effect on women’s employment. In addition, the state withdrawal from supporting public services such as education, health, and food subsidy had added much to burden on women to provide more home production and services. This requires, then, more unpaid labor on the part of the woman, and at the same time hinders their natural response to the changes that structural adjustment programs have made in the labor market. The confinement of women to their domestic responsibilities and the limitations placed on

their geographical mobility made them unable to take advantage of the changes in the labor market, especially new types of jobs, or jobs in more distant locations. Women's gendered roles as wives and mothers restrict their work opportunities because employers perceive women to be less committed and less productive—a definite risk during a period of worrisome economic retrenchment .

### **Gender gap in public and private sectors:**

The rate of women's employment in the public and private sectors decreased from 70 % in 1988 to 63 % in 1998 (Assaad 2005). In spite of the cut in the public expenditure during the period of structural adjustment programs, the growth of employment in the government reached 4.8 %, double the rate of overall employment in Egypt. The total employment within the government increased from 21 % to 31 % during the period 1988-1998. Women benefited from this increase more than men did. Women's participation in this sector grew from 28.7 % to 30.8 % in the period indicated. This increase reflects the increase in the number of the university and vocational secondary graduates who were, under the long term laws passed during the Nasser regime, guaranteed employment by the government. However, there was a sharp decrease in the rate of hiring; employment in government jobs had slowed down considerably in comparison to the rates of the period from the 1970s to the 1980s. The decade of 1988-1998 witnessed a decrease in the rate of young people joining the governmental sector, while older female employees continued in their jobs in that sector for a longer period. This reflects a positive self image of women of this period as participants in the labor force. This positive perception of work outside the home, especially for those working in the governmental sector, encouraged them to remain in the workforce even as mothers

with family obligations. The structural adjustment programs had a different effect on the nongovernmental sectors. These witnessed a definite decline in female employment participation. This decline fell to 1.4 % per year compared to an increase of 2.4 % per year for male employment in the same sector (Assaad, 2005: 438). Analyzing these figures, I conclude that the continuous cuts in the public expenditures decreased any possibility in the growth of employment in the public and governmental sectors. This created a gender gap represented in women's inability to enter the wage and salary labor market of the private sector.

In analyzing women's unemployment, it is dangerous to deal with gender simply as a form of classification of agents, because gender inequality is located in the economy, in social norms, and in personal psychology. In addition, the issue of women's lack of independent economic entitlements is excluded from the analysis. Women face many restrictions in gaining access to the labor market, such as discrimination against women outside the household, the traditional perception of gender-specific roles, and the unequal rights and obligations within households. These factors weaken women's incentives to undertake any role in the production economy. Finally, the burden of reproduction activities confines women to a restricted range of economic activities that are compatible with their reproduction responsibilities.

Throughout the literature and the interviews, I came to believe that the constraints working against women's access to the labor market are created outside the economy by the social traditions and the conventions that create the gender roles and impose their application. These constraints also exist in the individual preferences which clearly militate against women's aspirations for assuming a higher rank in life (Collier et al

1991). The tendency of women to remain at a social and economic disadvantage is clearly explained by a natural cultural inclination of children to model their behavior and self image on that of the adults of the same sex in their homes and immediate social environment. Women lose cultural and social status due to their confinement to their domestic roles of wife and mother. They have no way to counteract this social oppression or to struggle against the deprivation of economic resources that restrict their activities. They are denied any opportunity to challenge the traditional gender roles. Assigning different rights and obligations within the household according to the fixed gender roles discourages women in male-headed households from entering the labor market, since it can be assumed that the financial return for their work will be placed in the hands of the male head of the household. (Elson,1990: 159).

Women's high unemployment in Egypt can be explained as the result of a unique combination of social, economic, and cultural factors. The 1980s era witnessed emergence of the Islamist movements who offered their own alternative solutions to the economic and social problems of poverty and unemployment. Egyptian women now had to challenge both the economic restructuring and the Islamist's rigid ideology (Moghadam, 2005:124). The growing Islamist movement in Egypt began to call for women's domestication and decried the increase of women's participation in the labor market which implied gender conflict in the labor market. Women had to dress with a modesty dictated by distinctly Islamic ideals and to wear a veil in response to the different calls of the Islamists that they conform to religious regulations if they were to be permitted to continue working and not be forced to withdraw from the labor market. Many women who were seeking jobs in the public as well as the private sector found themselves obliged to comply with the calls for Islamic modesty (Moghadam, 1999:

373). Egyptian women now had to face the new restrictive economic system with its hostile gendered privatization as well as the conservative Islamists who view home as the only appropriate place for women. Sarah, a CS 2006 graduate, also refers to the control of the brotherhood members on IT companies in Egypt. She said,

*“One of the conditions to join their companies is to be veiled, girls are admitted to interview only if they are veiled, something which she had to resort to although she is not completely convinced. “It is the Friday prayers that helped me get the job”. They need me as a girl to carry the shift of Friday prayers as the guys are away praying. Once she heard the question: “Do you think there is any gender discrimination in IT labor market?” she continued “the discrimination is there from the first moment of recruiting. Girls are investigated to find out if they are married, engaged or planning to”.*

The ignoring of the reproduction economy in the assessment of SAPs continues to be a controversial issue in much scholarship. Indeed, the literature presents convincing evidence that the invisibility of unpaid labor in the reproduction sphere results in misleading records of successful SAP outcomes in the public sphere (Elson 1981, Moghadam 2005 and Assaad 2007). Gender discrimination is not just an equity issue; it is one that also promotes a condition of social inadequacy. Women are forced to take on an increasing number of responsibilities, without the corresponding social and financial support needed to carry them out. Gender perspective is needed to analyze some related unemployment issues such as gender disaggregation, since it accounts for women’s position between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings. The use of gender perspective helps women to find their appropriate place in the public and private spheres.

This inherent conflict for Egyptian women, pulled as they are between production and reproduction spheres, forces them to make choices, whether in education or work, that will enable them to achieve equilibrium of their public and private responsibilities. This conflict is the result of what Anker et al describe as “self discrimination”, a decision that women make to avoid certain types of employment because they expect discrimination or because of their socialization to the gender division of labor (Anker et al 2003:3).

Naglaa, a 1991 CSE graduate, sums up the situation. She has peacefully accepted the traditional assigned female role to the extent of declining her early dream of being a physician and pursued a course of study that would allow her to perform her natural role of wife and mother.

*“When I got Thanaweyaa Amma there was a family pressure to join the Faculty of Medicine as my father was a physician. But I thought of my future life role as a wife and a mother; I decided to go to a university that would be suitable for my natural role, so I chose to go AUC, CS. I hope my daughter will think the same way. You’ve noticed divorce rates are increasing dramatically. The reason behind it is that girls do not think about their responsibilities as wives and mothers; they think only of their jobs and building careers. Sure, my first priority is home. To achieve balance is a very difficult task. I do not prefer the style of “career woman”.*

Naglaa’s attitude reflects her socialization to the gendered norms that dictated her behavior. She even went so far as to wish that her daughters would assume the same attitude in preferring their private life over the public life, the family over the career.

Some of CSE, AUC graduates expressed their wishes to work in teaching, stating that it would be more convenient for balancing their private and public lives. One of the informants who completed her post graduate studies and earned her PhD degree has had to quit working in the IT sector. She observed that the competition in that market makes



it a war zone rather than a labor market. The correlation between schooling and access to the labor market is an important element in investigating women's unemployment. The increase in education and the decrease in chances or quality of employment reflect gender gap. Education is a step towards human equality that is capable of removing gender discrimination and enhancing the advancement of women. However, this has not been translated into labor market gains due to occupational segregation and gender discrimination. (Beneria, 2001: 47)

### ***Geographical Mobility and young women's unemployment:***

Women's restricted geographical mobility may worsen this discrimination by an even greater limitation of job access in comparison to men's free accessibility to the labor market. (Assaad, 2005:441-444). Geographical mobility is one of the characteristic requirements of SAPs, because most of their projects are located far away from traditional centers of population in new towns. This fact produces different outcomes for men and women according to their different mobility opportunities, that is, access to affordable and efficient means of transportation that would make possible for them to respond to this development in the labor market created by the SAPs. It is clear that women are commuting to work less than men. In comparison to men, women are either unable or unwilling to make long commutes. Male geographical mobility recorded in 1988 was 10 % greater than that of married women. This gender geographical mobility was more pronounced in 1998, with more males commuting but no increase in the number of female commuters. The Egyptian women at every level of education, married or unmarried, working full time or engaged in irregular employment are less liable to commute to work than their male counterparts (Assaad, 2005:446).

Dalia, who left her job in an IT company to work at AUC, recalled her experience with commuting before having her own car:

*“It was a nightmare to be at work for late hours, we, girls do not feel safe. You know, a girl could be exposed to bad situations at any moment; you may hear bad words; or be vulnerable to harassment. But now, I can commute at any time, even late hours. I just lock the windows of the car and enjoy feeling safe to the extent I listen to music. This was before 25<sup>th</sup> of January, now the whole country is unsafe and it is not advisable to be out even day time. I prefer to decrease my commuting. Even IT companies consider the security of the girls after the revolution; they exclude girls from late hours work or night shifts”.*

There is another dimension of geographical mobility that has become increasingly significant since the revolution of January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. It is the concern for security. Most of the participants expressed their worries and fears about traveling long distances for work, or to work until late at night. Moreover, the employers began to exclude girls during the recruiting process on the pretext that the working hours necessitate night shifts and sit would not be safe for girls. The limitation of women’s geographical mobility is clearly related to the social norms and gender roles that allocated domestic responsibilities to women and breadwinning to men, in addition to the social concerns about female sexual vulnerability in the conservative society of Egypt (Assaad, 2005: 450).

An examination of the Egyptian labor market shows that it is clear that the unemployment of women in Egypt varies according to age. The unemployment of young women reaches its lowest rate of 15% at the age of 24 as women transit into marriage. Another likely explanation is that young men finally move from unemployment to employment whereas young women move from unemployment to economic inactivity

and then eventually to reproduction activity. The decline of job opportunities in the public sector in recent years has contributed to the withdrawal of young women from the labor market. It is taken for granted that the increase of young female participation in labor market is associated with the level of education attained. Since 1998, the rate of participation has declined to a low of 18% in 2009. CAPMAS Report released in August 2011, reported that the rate of unemployment in the age category 18-29 reached 11.5 % among Egyptian males and 46.4 % among Egyptian females. The report also observed that the unemployment rate among Egyptian females who completed a university education or above is 61.4 %, whereas it is 38.6% among males (CAPMAS 2010). This report contradicted the general concept that education has a positive effect on improving the female participation in the labor market. This decline in female employment, in spite of the fact that women are securing higher levels of education, can be attributed to the deterioration of job opportunities in the governmental sector and in the public sector.

In 1998, most of the employed young women enjoyed permanent work contracts in these sectors, whereas now the only available opportunities are temporary contract jobs, hardly a great incentive to join the labor market. This decline could be a gender response to the deterioration of the public sector that guaranteed equal opportunity for women whether in recruiting, wage, promotion, and in all work related benefits which are not offered in the private sector (EHDR, 2010: 155). In considering Assaad's justification, I conclude that the new fresh graduates are having difficulty in finding the same kinds of jobs in the public and government sectors that allowed an earlier generation of women to build satisfying careers in those fields.

To conclude, since the application of the structural adjustment policies in Egypt in 1990s, there has been an increase in the rate of employment in general. However, this increase was not equivalent to the increase of women who, having attained a higher level of education, are eager to enter the labor market, for both professional and economic reasons. Neoliberalism, the dominant economic ideology of this era, is a new version of the traditional capitalist economy that advocates individualism and competition in order to bring the free market-driven policies to the social, political and economic areas. Like traditional capitalism, neoliberalism has gender blind policies that completely ignore the reproduction economy.

It is useful to analyze the unemployment of young women in the context of the principles of supply and demand. The new SAPs promoted the export oriented sector and the service sector, sectors that do offer employment opportunities to the unskilled, but at the same time fail to create jobs suitable for highly educated young women. The application of the SAPs required drastic cuts in the public expenditure. The result of this austerity measure was the freezing of employment in the public sector, the favored employment sector for women with its family friendly working hours and benefits. It is important to analyze young women's unemployment from a gender perspective on the grounds that the private sector has not welcomed women with their traditional burden of domestic responsibilities, activities which push women into the informal sector with its lower wages, nonexistent or limited benefits, and loss of opportunities to pursue a career. The conceptualization and implementation of policies should guarantee equal opportunity for work, good working conditions, and, most importantly, the recognition of the contribution of women to reproduction economy. The impact of SAPs is obvious in the feminizing of marginal jobs as shown by the data on female labor participation.

Furthermore, gender inequality in the division of social and economic roles, and its effect on the determination of social status, makes it necessary to reform the SAPs to promote the participation of women as equal partners in an economic growth that reflects principles of equity and human rights. I conclude that policies that address labor market problems of insecurity and gender inequity will benefit not only women, but the whole society.

## **Chapter Five: Young women's choices: between family, employers and the state: a reflection with gender lens:**

This chapter analyzes the traditional gender norms and their effect on young women's unemployment. It investigates work as a concept and environment from three points of view: that of the Egyptian young women, as job seekers, that of the employers, as job opportunity providers, and that of the legal and governmental environment that forms the background for employment. The chapter identifies young women's perception of work, their motives for work, their personal and familial decisions related to work, and the effect of the traditional gender norms on their choices. It also considers their human capital and its influence on their employment. This chapter also investigates the employer's perception of women's work, and to what extent the male ideology affects the rate of female employment in the processes of hiring, promoting and firing. An investigation of state policies and laws will provide the institutional and structural framework for defining the political context of young women's unemployment.

### ***Gendered state and legislation:***

Women have a vital role in economic growth but gender inequality restricts economic growth in developing countries. Accordingly, economic progress could be more easily achieved if the gender inequality barriers are removed and women's full participation in the labor market is guaranteed. In Egypt, the role of women in economic development was considered as one of the landmarks highlighted in the presidential campaigns of the ex-president, Hosny Mubarak. Moreover, the ex-First Lady used to promote gender equity in all her local and international speeches. There were many recommendations

issued by the National Council of Women (NCW) that were considered in the reform program.

At the legislative level, the constitution, although currently suspended after the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution and the political events which have followed, has retained intact the items that concerned women's status and their economic participation. Even women representatives or women's interest groups have not raised any concerns about any item that related to women's position in society. This research deals with the above-mentioned constitution as the status quo, as long as there is no intention or call to modify women-related items. The Egyptian constitution guarantees equal opportunity for all the citizen in its Article # 8 and, as Nasr (2010) gives more protection to women in its Article # 11 which states that:

*“the State shall guarantee the proper coordination between the duties of women towards the family and her work in the society, considering her equal with man in the fields of political, social, cultural, and economic life without violation of the rules of Islamic jurisprudence” (Nasr, 2010:40).*

In fact, this state protection of women, guaranteeing their ability to see first to their families' welfare and secondly to work responsibilities, reinforces the social gender roles and creates the political context for gendered employment in Egypt. It confirms the economic status of women as secondary breadwinner; and confirms that their work is not a primary but rather a secondary option in their lives. It reinforces and deepens the gender perception of the primacy of the male breadwinner. The official state perception that women are primarily wives and mothers frames the male ideology in the labor market. That domestic responsibilities must take priority over those of work are limitations set by the gendered state to restrain women's access to the labor market.

Furthermore, the new Labor Law of 2003 ignores any family policies to support the reproduction of new generations. The Egyptian women suffer from many forms of discrimination, which are reinforced by their low representation in the parliament and which prevents them from assuming higher legislative positions. These forms of discrimination are the result of the traditional gender norms that diminish the status of women. The government reinforces such perceptions by enacting laws that decrease women's access to the labor market. In the area of maternity leave and child care policy, we should compare the Egyptian 2003 Labor Law with the Tunisian Labor Law that has been in force since 1983 and which allows female employees four months leave at half pay to care for their young children without losing seniority. Furthermore, since 1988, a mother could take up to two years to care for children disabled or below the age of six (Moghadam, 2005:138). The Egyptian Labor Law of 2003 deprived women of many rights and privileges that they enjoyed under the previous law. For example, Article # 91 stipulates that the female should work ten months to be eligible for ninety days of maternity leave. The old law of 1981 required only six months of work to be eligible for 50 days of maternity leave. Furthermore, Article #94 stipulates that an employer with at least 50 female workers is only obliged to grant them unpaid leave for child care for a maximum of two years twice during that female employee's whole service period. The strangely specific nature of this requirement of this article--that of having at least 50 female workers-- would seem to be an open invitation to abuse and it is clearly a gender insensitive condition. Article 95 required the employer who has five or more female employees to affix a copy of the women's work order, which means that institutions that have fewer female employees are not obliged to observe the rights of women as workers. The old and new labor laws stipulated that places of employment having a minimum of



100 female workers must open a child care center. By the slightest decrease in that number, the employers are able to avoid the cost of opening care centers<sup>5</sup>. Farida, 35 years old and a brilliant scholar who graduated from AUC and continued her studies to earn a MPA, comments on the new Labor Law:

*“A very important issue to consider in this regard is related to the labor law, as the new work contracts are only for one year. In many cases when a woman wants to extend her maternity leave to more than 3 months, this is not accepted. Many employers manipulate the issue of 1-year contract to end contracts of new mothers”.*

But Randa was lucky because she started employment earlier in the 1990s and according to the old Labor Law of 1988 she was eligible to have LWOP (unpaid leave). She tried in every way possible to continue in her job but the fact that she was struggling alone without the structural and institutional coverage she needed made this impossible.

*“After my first LWOP, I changed my schedule of work. The company was very understanding, I avoided team projects. Now, I am considering returning work, I may resort to e-work; distance work is prevailing. Moving about in Egypt consumes a lot of time; roads are very crowded and it is hard to be on time, daily trips are very hard. It happens that my work is in the Smart Village, 6th of October and I live in Maadi and my mother lives in Zamalek. I used to drive around these 3 points daily when my first child was a baby. But when I got pregnant for the second time, I considered taking LWOP. First I was about to resign but my boss encouraged me to take a leave. He was also enthusiastic to start e-work. But I decided to take LWOP because e-work may be controlled, I mean the person can allocate a place at home and adjust working hours according to daily life chores. However I decided to be on leave. ”.*

This is the experience of Randa who was the top of her graduation class in 1989 and worked continuously for 9 years in one of the biggest IT companies in Egypt.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.egypt.gov.eg/english/laws/labour/default.aspx>

## ***Gendered Labor Market:***

The discrimination in extending social and health insurance to women in the private sector is one of the characteristics of the work environment in Egypt. Nasr (2010) observes that the gender gap accounts for the 10 % difference in favor of men for social insurance and a 3.5 % difference in favor of men for social insurance. However, in the public sector, all women enjoy the benefits of social and health insurance (ibid 7). In the private sector, women suffer the lack of suitable accommodation at the workplace. A small number of companies and firms offer daycare centers to help women balance their personal life needs and their business life requirements. Moreover, some employers consider employing women expensive because of the maternity leave and the related time lost to the employer which the female employee consumes to care for her child in his first years. Employers are suspicious of women's commitment to their work. They avoid recruiting women on the basis that women may quit at any time to accommodate their families' responsibilities. They perceive maternity leave as an additional cost to the employer. This attitude illustrates the ways in which employers both demonstrate and perpetuate biased gender perceptions.

In Egypt, there is a gender gap in employment in spite of such statements released by the ex-president:

*“The government is committed to implementing all measures likely to achieve equal pay for men and women with the same job and education to assist women (to) reconcile their family obligations (with) their work commitments. The government also seeks to achieve equality between men and women in all fields” (Speech at the 35<sup>th</sup> Arab Labor Conference, February 2008- Quoted from Nasr, 2010:9).*

These statements may explain the paradox in achieving great advances in women's education without achieving a similar impressive level of women's participation in the labor market, to the extent that Egypt is the lowest country of the MENA in the rate of women's employment, with a percentage of less than one third (Nasr, 2010:9) . Job quality and work environment in Egypt are threatened by the new policies of market economy. The high rate of unemployment in Egypt, due to the control of the labor market by the private sector, creates concerns about the violation of the right to a decent job environment, or the kind of job quality called for by the ILO in 1999 which reflects principles of "freedom, equity, security and human dignity". The ILO stipulates the provision of decent working conditions which will preserve the employee's rights and guarantee adequate income with suitable social protection (Barsoum, 2010). It is clear that the issue of job quality challenges the participation of the Egyptian young women in the labor market and these concerns for a decent job are mainly gendered.

### ***Gendered Family Relations:***

Many researchers discuss the change of gender profile in Egypt and among them are Yousef (2004), Assaad (2002), Walby (2005), Barsoum (2010) and Nasr (2010). The increase in women's employment is one of the characteristics of the change in gender relations. Yousef remarked on the decline of male participation in 2000 to 67 % from 77 % in 1970, whereas, women's participation increased from 23 % in 2000 to 36 % in 1970. He expects women's labor participation to reach 43 % in 2020 (Yousef, 2004:27). This rise in women's labor participation may be attributed to the change in gender relations. There has been a definitive change of gender relations, from a complete confinement of women to the private sphere, to an acceptance of women in the public

sphere. Walby indicated that the important factors affecting the transformation in gender relations are the increases in the rates of women's education and paid employment, and in the political representation of the interests of women. She goes further to assume that these changes have a great impact not only on women's positions in the society, but also on the overall economy and polity (Walby 2005). In the following section, I discuss the effect of the increase of education on women's employment.

### ***Gendered human capital:***

The relation between education and women's employment rate is strong. The increase of the educational level of young women has a positive impact on the possibility for employment. The increase of women's labor opportunity is the result of economic development, the adoption of state gender equality policy in employment and education, and, finally, the change in gender practices within the family. Education is always a tool for bringing about social and economic development. There is also a change in the gender perception of education. For example, females surpassed males within area of education. However, there is gender specialization that takes the form of channeling boys into the study of technology and girls into the study of languages and the humanities. Samer, HR Manager in one of the biggest IT companies in Egypt comments on gender education specialization:

*“I can highlight that there are a lot of women in IT positions in the company. Most of them are in the analysis and technical departments. In most multi-national companies almost 50% are women. However, women increase in administrative offices while they do not in technical offices. The reason is simply that more girls join the literary section and fewer join the scientific section. They believe that girls at the end will get married and they may work and they need to work for fixed hours to balance home domestic responsibilities and work responsibilities”.*

This vision of gender education specialization demonstrates that employers are the principle bearers and producers of gender bias as articulated by the dominant male ideology.

The change of gender relations in education is strongly associated with age. Assaad revealed that Egyptians born in 1985 received an average of ten years of education, while those born in 1950 received only four years of education (EDHR 2010: 155). These figures relate the decline of gender gap in education to age. The educational background of young Egyptian women reflects this change, since they also began their formal education at a younger age than did women of previous generations. In spite of the strong relation between the degree of education and employment, highly qualified educated young women are not guaranteed the unlimited access to professional advancement. Statistics on ratios within education estimate the participation rates at the secondary stage at 79% in 2002 (World Development Indicators, 1991-2006). According to official figures, total enrolment in private universities is still very low, with only 36,961 enrolled students in 2005/2006, compared to 1,386,715 students in the 17 public universities that same year (Amer, 2007). The rate of education attainment increased in the region of MENA to reach 150 percent in the last 30 years. As the level of education increased, the rate of women's participation in labor increases. ELMS 1999 recorded that women's labor participation reached 70 percent among female university graduates and 80 percent among post graduates.

The attainment of education does not guarantee finding a job in the Egyptian formal sector, whether public or private. Some young people are forced to accept any job in the informal economy. In some cases, the problem is worse for young women who are

forced to drop out the labor market. Sally, CS, AUC graduate B. Sc. Fall 2006 and M. Compt. 2011, took a job at the AUC Day Care center. When I asked if the position related to IT, she said she is a teacher for the babies. She said she needs to work to pay for her graduate studies since she cannot bear the idea of overloading her parents with these fees. The predominant norm of assigning gender roles controls the Egyptian formal labor market. I am convinced that the perpetuation of gender roles in the Egyptian society is the deciding factor in young women's unemployment profile in Egypt. These gender roles reinforce gender stereotypes that underestimate the value of women's work and consider it secondary while men's work is considered mandatory and of greater economic value, thus perpetuating the traditional gender roles of women as caretakers of family responsibilities and men as the breadwinners. The statistics bear out this observation, since all male youth eventually join the labor market whereas less than 20% of female youth enter paid employment. The Egypt Labor Market Surveys of 1998 and 2006, in addition to the Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) 2009, record the decline of the unemployment rate, which gradually declined from 25.6% in 1998 to 16.9% in 2006, and to 16.7% in 2009. The most striking figure to be obtained from these statistics is that more than one of every two active young women were unemployed in 2009 (EHDR 2010, 148-149).

The change in the demographic map of Egypt has also added to this increase, as more youth continue to enter the labor market, and this explains the rise of young women's labor participation to 55 % in the last 20 years. The increase of the labor force in general has exceeded the increase in employment growth in many MENA countries. The situation has been exacerbated by the drop in the economic performance of these countries which has led to the chronic problem of a high unemployment rate. The youth

unemployment rate is double the rate of the other categories in the region, in spite of higher education attainments of this group. Youth unemployment in Egypt reached 63 % in 2000 ( Yousef, 2004: 30-42). The private sector has failed to create new jobs suitable for the qualities and skills of highly educated youth. Simultaneous to the shrinking of the private sector has been the reduction of new job opportunities in the public and governmental sectors, in accordance with the structured reforms of SAPs in the 1980s, which were the primary causes of the increase of unemployment rates. Women's working conditions are not equal to those of men, and the great strides that women have made in education have not yet been adequately recognized. Nevertheless, even though education and access to the labor market have reduced gender inequality in the work place, new forms of inequality are now appearing (Walby, 1997). I argue that the inflation of the rate of women's unemployment should be explained within a gender perspective.

### ***Gendered perceptions and women's unemployment:***

To understand the different levels of gender inequality, we should understand the patriarchal structure of the society. As a concept, patriarchy is the social system in which men dominate, repress, and abuse women. Walby (1997) takes us to a wider arena in discussing the intersection between the structural and biographical change. She points out that the change of the patriarchy's sphere of influence from private to public negatively affects women who have adjusted their lives to domestic patriarchy and oriented their lives around a household regime. In the past it was more likely to rely on the support of the husband, but today this support no longer exists for many women, and this is reflected in the increased rates of divorce.

Inequality in labor market practices is basically derived from the sexual division of labor and the traditional gender roles. It has a dangerous impact on both women and men; it encourages violence of men against women. This inequality means that the voice of women and their interests will be underrepresented in the polity because work conditions of women are extensively framed by the polity (Walby, 1997: 8- 13). The control of the Islamists on Egyptian society, especially after gaining the majority of the Parliament of 2012 after January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011, confirms this new reality for women. Islamists strictly observe the traditional patriarchal gender norms and perceive no need for women to leave the home for paid employment. The secretary of the women's committee in the Islamic Party of Freedom and Justice (a female faculty member in Mass Communication Faculty, 6<sup>th</sup> October University) attacked women's participation in the demonstrations, wondering: "*Don't they have a husband, a father, or a son to defend their rights*".<sup>6</sup>

The participants in the research expressed a strong belief that job security is more reliable than marriage security. Most of them believe that marriage does not guarantee protection or security for women. Amina related the story of a CS graduate who married her colleague. The couple had been working in the same big IT Company for five years until the wife became pregnant and took leave for two years to care for the new child. After this leave, she became pregnant for the second time. After the birth of the second child, she was not granted leave and she had to resign. She went through a period of depression during which she was under the treatment of a psychiatrist. The marriage ended in divorce. In addition to the pain of her divorce, she had lost precious time in a significant

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<sup>6</sup> The speech was a part of the coverage of Al Jazeera Mubasher Masr during the first run of the elections on December 11, 2012.



period of her life which could have been devoted to building a successful career, whereas the husband was promoted to assume one of the highest positions in the company.

However, the achievement of economic independence as the result of work does not change the gender roles within the household. Most of the interviewees, whether married, engaged, or single, strongly believe that men are fully responsible for breadwinning and that they should bear all the expenses of the household. They unanimously agree that their participation in some expenses of the household is optional. They also believe that men feel offended if they insist on sharing the household basic expenses. This mentality reinforces the perception, even among highly educated young women, that they are secondary breadwinners. They work to achieve financial independence, but only to cover some extra expenses of their children. Noran, an 18 year old Junior CS major, confirmed this perception. She said

*“Mum is working; she does not share in the living expenses of the family. She may cover any extra luxury. For example, she may pay for a special trip for me; if dad does she will support my shopping. The reason is that Dad rejects her participation and insists that her income is a personal property for her. He is a religious conservative person. He is open-minded and eager to promote the life of his family”.*

The prevalence of patriarchal ideology and its gender-based division of roles is one of the main characteristics of gender ideology that reflects women’s dependence on men and which works against their aspirations to break the bonds of these economic attachments. In reality, this perception reduces young women’s access to employment and their opportunities for promotion and career building. However, there is a change of the structure of the traditional household such as the increase in the number of families headed by single mothers as a result of increasing rate of divorce. The rate of divorce

among Egyptian females has reached 49.6 % (CAMPAS 2011). There is an urgent demand to increase the political representation of women in the different bodies because the Egyptian women are dramatically under-represented in the parliament and the legal institutions. This would help to create a greater equity in gender relations. I agree with Walby (1997) that only an increase in women's political representation can cause a major transformation in gender relations. This will have far reaching implications not only for gender relations, but for social relations as a whole.

During the last decade, significant changes have occurred in women's employment around the world, a shift in the traditional gendered system that has affected both private and public spheres. This can be attributed to the remarkably rapid entrance of women into education and employment, especially during this period. Well educated and professionally qualified young women are able move into highly skilled positions, even in a competitive professional environment. The employment of women has been the subject of much debate. The UNDP 1992, in its gender sensitive index, recognizes paid employment, education, and longevity as primary indicators of human development. The UNDP considers that paid employment has great and positive impact on women because it enhances their capacities and potentialities. It concedes, however, that some observers view paid employment of women as an extra load for women, and that it may not result in giving them more power. To better understand women's employment, it is advisable to analyze it within its social context (Walby, 1997: 23).

### ***The Young women's gendered choices: between family and work:***

The choice between work and family life has become a subject of debate among scholars (Walby 1997, Hakim, 1999, 2005). Some scholars maintain that women have full

freedom in their choices as long as they have education and experience. Others perceive women's choices to be restricted by their social context, and they can choose only from what is available to them and not what they really aspire to. There is a scholarly trend that asserts that men and women choose between work, domestic work, and leisure according to their perception of the reward to be derived from each of them. This point is arguable, as women who have the kind of rich human capital of education, skills, and market experience that virtually guarantees them the ability to find work will, inevitably, earn more than woman who do not possess these advantages. Nevertheless, women whose husbands can support them are more likely to drop out of work. Walby suggests combining both the structural and institutional constraints because both of them affect women's employment. She concludes that women can make choices "but not under conditions of their own making". (Walby,1997: 24). This concept applied to some participants of the research who had to quit working in big IT companies and who chose to work at AUC with its family friendly working hours and environment that enables them to maintain a balance between their private and public life. Amina was satisfied with working at AUC on a part time basis while doing her post graduate studies. She found AUC an ideal work place for keeping her family and professional life in equilibrium, and appreciated its benefits, especially the ability to take LWOP, and then return to the same position without significant loss of income or status.

Even though marriage and child bearing and rearing may hinder women's participation in economic activity, there has been an increase of married women in the labor market.

Dalia reports her experience in the context of the conflicting demands of work and family when she got engaged and was preparing for marriage,

*“The working hours were very long, from 9 am to 8 pm. But I found I was wasting my life. I was registering in the M.Sc.; I felt I need a break; I need a time slot to make a family. I found a chance to return to the AUC as IT Administrator in Engineering services, I am responsible for EENG web site, a job related a lot to my last job. Yes, the career is on my mind, once I get the opportunity I will take it. Yes it is cycle of a woman’s life.”*

Although Dalia does not speak of facing any gender discrimination while working in the IT Company, it is clear that those gender biased norms made her leave her cherished ambitions of a career for which she had studied to take a “position”. She does not show any inclination to struggle to continue her career; she has simply surrendered to the Egyptian woman’s traditional cycle of life.

A significant number of women reduce the period of dropping out of the labor force after giving birth to the minimum necessary. These findings are consistent with the perception that the higher the education and the position the young woman attains, the greater the probability that she will continue her employment while rearing her children. Hanaa, a 1993 graduate, 40 years old with 2 children, related her experience:

*“When I delivered my first son, I worked on Part-time basis for six months after the maternity leave. I was very tired. I worked the same position while I was on leave. I did not enjoy my newly born son, I felt that he was an obstacle in my career. So, when I had my second child I decided to return work as a full time. I made the decision and I am ready for all its consequences”.*

There is a strong relation between age and level of position. Highly educated young women do not take part-time jobs; part-time jobs tend to be occupied by older and less skilled women. This attitude reflects change in the workplace, legislation, and within the household itself. There have been significant changes in the household, such as the increase in financial commitments and its effects on gender relations. In addition, the

availability of domestic goods and modern durable equipment and appliances help to reduce time spent on household chores. Women assuming upper level positions are able to secure all forms of child care and domestic services essential for enabling them to continue in demanding full time positions. Age represents an important factor in adopting the specific engagement with work which has its association with class. The higher the class of young women, the more likely they are to work, and that work is more likely to be full-time and not part-time. (Walby,1997:61). The findings of the research revealed that most of the participants depended heavily on the family to make possible the balance between their domestic responsibilities and business responsibilities as discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

There is a new phenomenon of women's earnings exceeding those of men. This has been the result of an overall decrease of wages as well as a specific decline in the rate of men's earning. This is reflected in a slight decline in gender inequality within the household. With this subtle shift in gender roles within the household, men's participation in household chores is increasing. Randa comments on her husband's participation in the household:

*“Yes, he shares; now he shares more but in the early time when our children were younger, just babies he did not share much. He can deal with them when they are older. He takes the kids to the club for training or studies with them”.*

She finds the idea of parental leave strange in the Egyptian society, as did most of the participants.

*“Parental leave is theoretically acceptable but socially is not. Some of the fathers of my child's class mates are on parental leave to take care of their children but they are foreigners, most of them are Americans”.*

Walby (1997) considers paid work an additional burden on women, after calculating the hours of paid work and the hours spent in doing household chores. There is also a change of attitude towards income control in the household. In most cases men do not completely produce or control the income, and there has been some shift toward a more equal participation of both husband and wife in decisions relating to the allocation of household income. But this does not reflect a true change of the locus of dynamic of power in the household of the study participants. The findings of the interviews clash slightly with Walby's conclusions because most of the participants perceive men to be fully responsible for household expenses. Naglaa commented on the point, "*My husband is totally responsible for all expenses of my children and of course of mine. My contribution is optional, I may pay or buy but never in the way that spoils his role as the MAN of the house*". Her experience is confirmed by Hanaa,

*"He covers everything; he pays big amounts such as school fees. When he is working well, he is a business man, he covers all the needs; sometimes his income drops, and at that time I can support. I participate by buying little things. I mainly buy my personal needs, assets. I change my car. No, I do not maintain basic needs, on the contrary, luxurious items"*.

In spite of the boom in the rate of education and social and economic development, women's employment is still considered as a secondary or marginal element in the economy. Women are perceived as flexible workers who are assigned less skilled jobs. The perception of women's employment as secondary and flexible has been the predominant subject of debate in the Egyptian labor market at every level of discussion, whether it concerns policy makers, employers, or young women as labor seekers. Samer, the HR manager asserts that women can change their positions according to their life cycles. He says,

*“Some positions need late shifts, business trips and working weekends. I was working in a pharmaceutical company; the big problem was sales representatives as the position needs different shifts: day and night, the meetings of the physicians in their clinics from 12-1 PM. This environment does not encourage girls to join, very few do but after a while they quit to HR to balance their personal life and their business life. The number of female graduates from Faculty of Pharmacology is big. Labor law is flexible. I developed a part-time contract on legal basis to give the chance for the employee to continue on part-time basis and not to lose his/her permanent position which s/he can resume whenever s/he is able. The staff applies for a leave without pay then joins the company as a part-time. This system guarantees security and productivity”.*

### **Gendered work environment:**

There is a growth in the rate of women who are employed, and the wage gender gap has been dramatically narrowed. However, there are still types of inequality between women and men, such as the increase of part-time work rates among women and gender segregation in employment. There is a recognized narrowing in the gender inequality gap in the area of full time employment. However, there is a significant inequality between full-time and part-time work, since part-time workers are less likely to be eligible for benefits and rights such as pension and healthcare. The increase of women in part-time work opportunities is a form of gender segregation, as women are pushed to accept part-time rather than full time work to accommodate their household responsibilities (Walby, 1997:34). Hanaa, CEO of one of big IT companies exerted considerable effort to keep the balance between her private life and career. She commented on part-time jobs in general:

*“Part-time jobs do not give the sense of achievement or fulfillment. It may give flexibility and it is more acceptable in technology. Work is a value in itself. Women dissolve in family, they sacrifice their*

*ambitions and dissolve in the family. I am keen about myself to achieve self actualization“.*

She chose to continue her career and she achieved her ambitions when she became the CEO of her company.

It is clear that gender segregation in employment concentrates women in a limited range of occupations and industries. These occupations are less well compensated and their remuneration is not likely to include employee social or health benefits. My research focuses on a well qualified sample of AUC Computer Science graduates and students. The participants possess excellent human capital: a world class university education, experience, and the kind of social status that would be expected to guarantee them excellent opportunities for successful entry into the labor market. However, most of fresh graduates interviewed have suffered the dislocation of unemployment in their attempt to pursue a career. Two interviews with employers confirmed their perception that employment opportunities in the IT industry are divided into specifically male and female jobs. For example, Yasser who is also an AUC, CS graduate spoke about the company for which he works. He noted that there is only one male employee in “*Total Quality Assurance Department*”. He explained that this department is a “feminine one as it needs good observation and accuracy”. He added, “*the nature of the work in this department does not need travel or changing shifts or long working hours; things that suit women*”. The same concept is confirmed by Samer, IT HR Manager.

The economic recession has had a negative effect on employment in Egypt. The manufacturing and construction sectors, which are considered male dominant sectors, were hard hit by the recession. On the other hand, the service sector tends to absorb female workers in health care and education at a fairly consistent rate. Most of these



statistics are gendered, since they do not include those who are not participating in the labor market, such as housewives or those who have given up the idea of joining the labor market. Hala commented on her three year job search after she had quit her job in a large IT company because she was, as she puts it “Masters’ discriminated.” She was enrolled in CS masters program at that time, but her employer refused to allow her to attend classes even though she was willing to compensate for any hours that might be missed. Hala said :

*“I gave up finding a job; I am going to get married and become just “setbait”. My wedding is in few days; then I will join my husband in Saudi Arabia; most probably I won’t find a job there as well. I expect that because I simply insist on working in my field of study, a Computer Science Specialist and it would be impossible to find there”.*

Thus, Hala’s decision, based on her unfortunate experience, moves her employment status into the category that is excluded from statistics, since she is now classified as a non-participant in the labor market. This situation also highlights the danger of gendering the statistics. A great number of women are not included in unemployment statistical figures because they move to reproduction activity; i.e. to be wives and mothers, performing labor which is only perceived as their “natural” role.

Job quality has great effect on the rate of employment, especially for women. Assaad (2002) specifies the job quality characteristics by referring to a job index that includes formality, monetary compensation, and the quality of the work place. Dalia, worked for two years for a big IT company, justified leaving her position in these words.

*“The working hours were very long, from 9 am to 8 pm. They froze promotions; you work a complete year with no increase. I must consider what job gives me, my earned money is decreasing. I considered changing my position”.*

There can be a remarkable deterioration of the job quality for the educated employee.

The deterioration in the job quality pushes women outside the labor market as they consider the rewards they gain do not constitute a fair compensation for their time and effort.

The employers' attitude towards employing women is male biased in most cases. In her study on "Egyptian women workers and entrepreneurs", Nasr stated that more than 50% of the managers do not encourage women's employment. Randa who has been on LWOP for the past six years recalled the first interview she went through, saying "*Yes the HR man asked me, 'What will you do when you get married?' I answered 'And what did you do?' Yes it is a discriminative question but a real one*". The employers cite as their reasons for not hiring women, a woman's commitment to her domestic and family responsibilities and her repeated absences from work for maternity leave and the care of children. The gender wage gap in the private sector is not related to education difference, performance, or absenteeism. The only reason for this gap in the private sector is that men spend more time at work and acquire more skills through training (Nasr 2010). Most of the employers have found no solution for this problem, while some suggested flexible hours, while others suggested providing nurseries. England (2005) attributes this gap to occupational segregation and the burden of women's responsibilities towards their families. Noting the remarks of some employers and employees, England observes that the argument that occupational segregation is the natural outcome of the gender differences only serves to reinforce the traditional male mentality in respect to female employment. Women choose jobs that are flexible enough to accommodate their

families' responsibilities at the expense of their own ambitions to pursue more lucrative careers.

Men dominate upper management, manufacturing, transportation and construction sectors, whereas women dominate education, nursing, and jobs of a clerical nature.

Many scholars explain concepts of occupational segregation on the basis of the principle of the supply and demand. England supports this trend but recommends socialization as a part of the supply cycle. She assumes that socialization creates the different preferences in males and females. Men and women gravitate to different job categories from the very beginning when they tend to choose different fields of study. A large proportion of the young female population targets careers in areas that involve human care and relationships, a natural extension of their socialization to their traditional future roles of wife and mother. Even when men and women attain same level of education they still more often than not choose different jobs. Women may aspire to long term careers but they take jobs that can accommodate the time needed for family responsibilities.

These findings confirm England's conclusion that women do not invest in their acquired human capital of education and training. Men and women choose their occupation in relation to what will help them in marriage market. (England, 2005: 271 & 81+).

The other side of occupational segregation is represented by hiring and placement decisions that the employers make in respect to the gender of an applicant. Many employers prefer men for some jobs, or what are called male jobs. Those employers are controlled by social and cultural ideas about sex appropriateness for certain jobs and these are the social ideas that direct the employees towards gendered choices. For

example, these social norms control hiring in the construction sector, since it is categorized as a male-appropriate job. Indeed, some male employees fight to keep women out of these male-dominated jobs. Statistical discrimination is another type of discrimination because it measures the productivity of the individual by predicting the performance of the group. The employers are very concerned with the issue of women quitting the work for the care of children, since the employer must bear the cost of training a new employee. There is a false claim that women have a higher rate of turnover than men; in fact, men are more likely to change the companies (England, 2005: 273).

England and other researchers come to several conclusions concerning the nature of gendered wage gap: The fact that males always have supervisory positions in preference to females is one cause of the gender wage gap. Women are also crowded into service sector jobs which offer lower pay with less training because they wish to avoid physical danger and work in a family friendly environment. Men concentrate on acquiring higher earnings, while mothers are extremely likely to earn less than non mothers. Women who try to join male-dominated jobs must struggle against gender discrimination in the hiring processes, a problem that prompts many to shift their attention to traditional female jobs. Another dimension of the gender problem is the devaluation of women's jobs and the deterioration of wages in this sector. The employers pay women less than men for comparable jobs requiring comparable training and experience. Such underestimation is the direct result of cultural and institutional norms. Traditional cultural norms in Egypt consistently devalue women's work.

It is essential to use the gender lens to investigate young women's unemployment because of the different roles demanded of them. Gita Sen puts it:

*A gender perspective means recognizing that women stand at the crossroads between production and reproduction, between economic activity and the care of human beings, and therefore between economic growth and human development. They are workers in both spheres – those most responsible and therefore with most at stake, those who suffer the most when the two spheres meet a cross purposes, and those most sensitive to the need of better integration between the two (Sen, 1995, p. 12) quoted from (Elson 1995:1863).*

As all the adopted structural adjustment programs are gender-blind-- that is, because they did not address gender issues-- Elson calls for the adoption of gender awareness in economic models from the viewpoint of women's lives, since women allocate much of the time not spent in productive activity to unpaid work in reproduction activity. She stresses the importance of carefully assessing the role of women in producing a very important element in production which is the human labor force. Gender relations are a social production that is based on the values and forms of a certain society and could be changed. Elson observes that:

“gender relations are those socially constituted relations between men and women which are shaped and sanctioned by norms and values held by members of a given society (but not necessarily held with same degree of firmness)” (Elson, 1995: 1864).

### ***The Tension between Production and Reproduction Economy:***

The new eras of neoliberalism and market economy are gender non-sensitive because they do not equally consider the activities of the production and reproduction economies.

Elson is among the researchers who considered the policies of macroeconomics to be

gender blind, as they fail to identify the underestimation of women's participation in the economy. Moreover, these policies fail to recognize the unpaid reproduction economy that women must bear to support human life and maintain the structure of the society. Additional burdens have been added to women's contributions to the liberalized economy as the result of decreasing the public support of this unpaid work of reproduction activity (Elson 2002:1). Elson supports UNIFEM's vision that the economy is based on the interdependency of four sectors: the public, the private, the domestic, and the voluntary. Elson 1994 & 2002 and Folbre 1995 observe that the cost of time and energy exerted in care activities in the domestic sector are not shown in the national budgets. When the activities of care workers are not well estimated, this lapse will be reflected in the private and public sectors in related issues such as low productivity, high turnover and absenteeism, and finally, health problems.

The traditional perception of male as the breadwinner and female as the dependent caretaker has an adverse result on female employment. Elson (2002) argues that the biased assumption that men are the sole providers for the family means that the public sector only extends indirect support to women's reproduction activities.

Accordingly, women have access to the social, health, and public services only through the husband. In such biased system, women are penalized for their investment in human capital. But the truth of this assumption collapsed late in the 20th century with the inability of many households to maintain a decent living on a single wage and which tended to push women into the labor force.

The bias of devaluing women's economic participation is based on a perception that men's work is more important than women's work. This perception results in raising

unemployment among women even when cuts in public services force them to generate the supplementary income needed to cover expenses for food, health and education. In the long run, this situation will lead to the depreciation of human capital due to an inability of economic policies to compensate for the failure of the market economy (Elson, 2002:4-5).

The economic recession affected women greatly. On the one hand, women had to join the labor market in the service sector due to the cuts in job opportunities in manufacturing and construction sectors. Women often had to support their laid off husbands psychologically and financially by working extra hours in the service sector. On the other hand, they have not received male support for carrying out their reproduction activities in the household. Since the liberalization of the market economy lead to erosion of work opportunities and wages and increasing unemployment, some researchers called for increased control the of capital flow as the principal plan of action for the reform of the international economy, thus enhancing production growth and securing sustainable employment. Taking these steps will benefit both men and women. But recognizing women to be more vulnerable to economic crises, it could be concluded that they would benefit more by these policies. There should be equal employment opportunities for both men and women that provide for the equal balance between family obligations and work, and guarantee the full provision of the state for pensions to cover their periods of absence from work due to family care activities. Policies stipulating decent job conditions and family friendly work policies should be adopted (Elson, 2002:11-13).

The relation between wage work and self autonomy is controversial in the literature on women's employment. Olmsted (2005) warns against considering paid employment as the panacea for the women's lower status, or even for the society as a whole, because most societies do not consider women's role in the reproduction economy as economically valuable. She calls for an examination of both the "social contract" and the "safety nets" to assess how the reproduction activities are included in the economy.

Even though women are entering the labor market in increasing numbers, their traditional load of domestic duties, assigned to them by traditional gender roles, has not decreased. In fact, women's access to paid labor may double or triple their workload and may not necessarily promote their well-being (Kabeer 2011) . Women's access to the labor market may also be a sign of the deterioration of economic conditions or women's exploitation as a cheap source of labor, and does not necessary reflect a trend toward the empowerment of women.

In discussing the benefits of paid work for women, Olmsted (2005) suggests an examination of the social contract to ascertain whether women's access to paid work represents real empowerment or additional hardship. The social contract, broadly speaking, expresses the expectations of the citizens as regards the contributions to the general social welfare required from the state in the fields of economy, wealth distribution and industrialization. In the social contract, the state uses all the monetary and financial policies at its disposal to achieve economic progress. There are two criteria to measure the implementation of the social contract: the public sector and the provision of a formal safety net (Olmsted, 2005:116). The safety net includes all the types of economic support to protect the poor from the worst effects of poverty. It covers food



subsidy; governmental support in education and health, and additional funds needed for the building and administration of the infrastructure.

Olmsted (2005) considers the original contract as a sexual-social pact. In the Anglo-American contract, only white males were considered citizens; and women were not included in the public contract. Women were subject to the sexual contract as the private responsibility of males—fathers, husbands, or other male relation or designated legal guardian. Accordingly, the access of women to economic resources was through marriage. Such a contract never considered women's needs and rights and, moreover, institutionalized their dependence on men (Olmsted, 2005:117). Some feminists criticized this contract on the basis that it creates dual dependency: women and children depend on men economically, while men and children depend on women to provide reproduction and domestic activities. But these activities were not considered contributions in the economy. Moreover, by the dissolution of the sexual contract, men could arrange to replace women's reproductive role by remarrying or securing paid service. At the same time, women may face difficulty in gaining access to the labor market because of their dedication to their reproduction role. Thus, Olmstead calls for the amendment of the social contract in such a way as to reward women for the reproduction activities or to make it the responsibility of the state to support reproduction activities for the sake of the well-being of women as well as society (ibid 130).

### ***Women and Reinforcing Patriarchy:***

The idea of the self as a factor that reflects the society's ideology in framing the social contract and socializing individuals has been discussed by many scholars. Some indicate that the notion of the self is related to political and economic products that reinforce

patriarchy. For example, socialization tends to make women relational and men individualistic. Joseph refers to the socialization of men and women as one of the components of the social contract since it reinforces the notion of connectivity. This connectivity assists in imposing the subjection of women to men (Joseph, 1999:118).

Folbre (1994) points out that the religious institutions had played an important role in assigning the gender roles and in framing the social contract in Europe and Latin America. A similar situation prevailed in Egypt because most of the family laws were controlled by Islamic law. There is some difference in the social contract of the Sharia law which demands full economic responsibility of men towards women. In return for the economic security provided by men, Sharia requires that women take primary responsibility for family care and domestic activities.

There is a relation between the state's role in the safety net and the contract of care that is reflected in the structure of the patriarchal family. Olmsted argues that right to work in most developing countries is imbued with that country's traditional cultural concept of the social contract. In Egypt, the social concept of the responsibility of the male patriarchal hierarchy for the family females is embedded in the social contract. Economic rights are confined to men, and women's needs are to be recognized through men.

Furthermore, the state's security net is to be viewed as a system to support the family, not as a system that provides women with their needs as individuals.

Olmsted argues that the safety net is based on price control and the ability to secure employment in the public sector. In Egypt, the subsidy of certain goods and services is considered a right for the citizens that cannot be waived, as it is a part of the social contract. The citizens riot to defend this right when the government raises the prices of

these items. Price control is important aspect of women's ability to care for their families, and such, is even more important to the welfare of poor families. The second component of the safety net, the public sector, is considered a primary source of employment, since it is part of the Egyptian social contract that all citizens have a right to government and public sector jobs. In Egypt, a governmental decree was issued in 1961 that guaranteed to all university graduates the right to employment in the public sector. Later, the same right was guaranteed to graduates of high schools and military conscripts (Olmsted, 2005:121).

The economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the increase of open trade and capital transfer but did not result in increase in the labor market. The reforms of 1991 ended with the reduction of government expenditures which resulted in the shrinking of the public sector and the subsidy programs. Olmsted argues that women in Egypt, as in some developing countries, benefited from the public sector directly as paid employees and indirectly as members of families headed by male public sector workers. The public sector provided around 28 per cent of labor opportunities in Egypt in 1990s and the majority of the beneficiaries were women (Olmsted, 2005: 126).

In Egypt, women's access to pension plans is low due to their low participation in the labor force and the fact that it is restricted to public sector employment. Olmsted criticizes the pension plan for reinforcing gender norms by remitting women's benefits from pensions through the family male figures. She points out that the policy makers depend on the informal family safety net as a form of family social insurance and that women do not have the right to state supported programs as individuals but only as dependents of a male relation. Olmsted points out that with the increase of women's

employment and a corresponding increase in their economic independence, women may avoid marriage. (Olmsted, 2005: 130).

To conclude, young women's unemployment should be investigated from the point view of the state, of the employers and of the young women themselves. An investigation of this issue would profit from the application of gender perspective as the principle tool of analysis, since the locus of the problem is the articulation of neoliberalism with the traditional gender norms, resulting in the perception of women's work as a secondary issue. The state's legislative institutions reflect this negative view of women's employment by promulgating laws that enable women to carry out their natural role as mothers. The family friendly laws requiring maternity leave and day care centers create significant and sometimes insurmountable barriers to the entry of women into the workforce, since the employers avoid recruiting women whom they perceive solely as future mothers who will waste work resources. Employment statistics for women are not gender sensitive because they ignore the reality of the large numbers of women who leave labor market to engage in the care of home and family. More gender sensitive policies and laws are urgently needed to guarantee equity in the labor market.

Since the social contract refers to what the citizen expects from the state vis-à-vis income distribution and economic issues (Olmsted 2005:116), I argue that Egypt should now, after the Revolution of January 25<sup>th</sup>, draw up a new social contract. It is critical to the stability of the nation to reexamine the public services and the safety net, as represented by food subsidies, education and health and infrastructure, to insure that all Egyptians have what they need, to rebuild what has been one of the greatest and most ancient civilizations of all time into a country where all have access to the opportunity to carry

out their personal and civic responsibilities in dignity –that is, as citizens with full rights and privileges that are shared equally by all Egyptians.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusions:**

My research has investigated the decline of professional careers among Egyptian young women university graduates, with case studies of the graduates and students of the Computer Science and Engineering Department (CSE) at the American University in Cairo (AUC). I used gender tool to investigate this decline, since the research participants were all highly educated, having acquired language and learning skills that qualify them to build a career in an equitable labor market. Gender biased norms at the societal, structural, and institutional levels were detected and which were found to restrict their employment and obstruct their career advancement. I argue that the retreat from a professional career is not merely a personal choice to be investigated in the realm of private life or the arena of marriage and family as much as it is the product of the neoliberal political economy in its articulation with neopatriarchy in the Egyptian society.

My conclusions have three directions: First, the importance of the feminist perspective in studying this decline, Second, the impinge of the private life on the professional life of young women. Finally neoliberal economic system has brought types of employment that do not tolerate women's families' responsibility:

### ***The importance of the feminist perspective in my research:***

The research adopted a feminist approach to frame the question of the decline of the professional careers among young well educated Egyptian women within the boundaries of family and society, because there is a strong relationship between the personal life

paths of women and their access to the labor market. I argue that the low rate of women's participation in the labor market in general, and in professional careers in particular, is a troubling response to the economic failure of the neoliberal economy that causes real economic dislocation. The interviews revealed that the choices between marriage and work are linked. They are made within the traditional gender roles assigned by the society, accepted by women, and framed by the economic and political alliance with neopatriarchy. Furthermore, when women drop out of the labor market; they are, in fact, demonstrating a complete commitment to their traditional gender roles (Sholkamy & Assaad, 2011:1).

I used the feminist perspective for my analysis, because other perspectives in sociology minimize and ignore gender relations. Moreover, the feminist perspective effectively removes the barriers between subjectivity and objectivity, and this helped me to focus on the private life of the participants within the framework of the gendered labor market and the state's biased gender legislation. In analyzing the results of my research, I sought to understand how the politics of globalization intersects with the personal dynamics of young women's unemployment. My objective was to listen to the young women's "silenced voices" to probe the truth. The interviews enabled me to listen to their experiences so that I was able to come to an understanding of the participants' life choices between family and work within the context of their personal and cultural experience (Reinharz, 1992: 241-245). The interviews focused on the participant's perceptions of the meaning of marriage and work as a means for understanding the ways in which they sought to balance their private and public lives. The feminist concept of women's diversity enabled me to understand the different participants' experiences, yet at the same time identify characteristics shared by this diverse group. The concept of

diversity also extends to the life cycles and experiences of the same woman and helps interpret the changes that may occur in her decisions, perceptions, and choices. One of the most important findings of this research is the importance of considering diversity in investigating gender related issues, because generic concepts could not be applied to the participants' perceptions of marriage, work, and family. I argue that their background, that of a well educated, middle and upper middle class Egyptian woman, gives the participants the freedom and ability to express themselves freely; they do not have the kinds of obligations or restrictions that might silence them. However, most of the research participants expressed their personal commitment to the traditional gender norms still prevalent in Egyptian society.

### ***Impinging the private life on the professional life of young women:***

From the literature on women's employment, I argue that the definition of the sexual division of roles is the most convenient social construct for explaining the conflicts inherent to the decline of female employment. It attributes the unequal status of women in the labor market and household to the assignment of labor roles according to biological differences. This division assigned the reproduction activities of bearing and caring of children to women and the production activities of earning to men; women are the care takers and men are the bread winners. The interviews revealed that even within the dual earner family, the traditional division of labor continues, there has been no tangible decline in the perception of the male as the traditional male breadwinner, and no corresponding sharing of household responsibilities. The interviews showed that the assignment of these stereotyped gender roles belonging to paid and unpaid work is still rigid. Women may become less dedicated to housework and men may become more



involved in domestic activities, but there is still a definite gender based assignment of some responsibilities within the household. The traditional division of labor assigns to women certain domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning and child care, even if they have responsibilities as breadwinners outside the home. Household activities for which men hold themselves responsible are home maintenance and shopping. It is noticeable that women's assigned household activities require more time and effort, and as a result, constrain women's ability to access the labor market and secure a career (Becker 1985, 533). The findings of the research confirmed that the married participants accepted the traditional role assigned to them and did not question their responsibility for reproduction and domestic activities. Although the time required for these activities has significantly declined, the gender gap in housework is still significant, as women are considered responsible for housework. However, there are varied degrees of housework participation that depends on different factors such working hours, having children, the couple's perception of gender roles, the percentage of shared income, age, and education (Baxter & Western, 2005). Based on these findings, I argue that the domestic activities have been slightly less gendered with the limited participation of the male in house chores

Throughout the interviews, I found the absence of bargaining the gender roles within the household remarkable. The participants never discuss their tacitly assigned roles with their partners-- they simply accept them. This negative attitude extended to the workplace where most of the participants reported that they were hesitant to discuss issues related to their salaries, promotion, or bonuses. Gender relations reflect the dynamics of power between men and women and they are reflected in the division of labor and the ideas that revolved around special gender traits and behavior patterns.

These relations are constructed by the cultural norms rather than determined by biological reality (Agarwal 1997: 2). Due to the loss of bargaining capability in gender relations, I conclude that women may be earning more, but without receiving the equivalent men's participation in domestic activities in return. The participants themselves were not ready to accept the change in gender roles that would make men the care takers and women the bread winners. That cash income may bring economic independence but does not change gender imbalance in the household is consistent with the findings of the research. The importance of marriage in Egyptian culture makes it, for many young Egyptian women, the easiest path to monetary and social security, as well as to the emotional fulfillment provided by a family. However, the choice between work and family depends mainly on the available choices, and the lack of a broad range of choices accounts for the rising rates of spinsterhood currently prevailing in Egypt.

The interviews revealed that marriage is highly valued in Egyptian society as a religious obligation, as an important means of social inclusion, and as the only accepted way to form a family. Family responsibilities and private life may help or obstruct women's work. Support appeared as a very important factor to achieve balance between the private and the public spheres in women's life; the support could be through family, employers, or the state. Most of the participants either secured the support of their families or attributed their success to the support of the employer who tailored work conditions to accommodate the difficulties of pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare in the early years. It became clear from the participants' interviews that the more education and economic independence that women enjoy, the more likely they are to remain married. The interviews showed that enjoying financial independence, in addition to

marrying at a later age, made the participants more selective in their choice of a spouse, which assures them, to a great extent, an egalitarian marital relation.

In spite of the increase of education among Egyptian young women, they accept the traditional relationship and responsibilities assigned to the parents by Islamic Law.

Traditional Islamic law assigns to mothers the task of caring for the children while they are dependent. Fathers are exclusively responsible for imparting religious and morals training to the children as they grow up (Kholoussy, 2010:100). However, the reality is that the married participants with children are fully responsible for their children's moral and ethical socialization as well as their education in cooperation with their natal family, which means that fathers do not strictly observe their assigned intellectual and moral responsibility towards their children. The limited or zero participation of the father in the family responsibilities burdens women in most cases with triple loads as wife, mother and worker. In spite of the active and positive role of women, the traditional identity of the husband as the head of the household is still acknowledged and respected by all participants. Such traditional gender norms are challenged by women's work and their ability to earn as much as men, yet the husband retains the control over his wife and children in his capacity as a breadwinner.

Marriage alone may not form an obstacle to young women's employment, but the responsibility for children restricts women's mobility, discouraging them from taking full advantage of opportunities in the labor market. The interviews revealed that the presence of dependent children increases the gender gap in performing house-related activities. They increase the burden on mothers that is not shared equally by both parents. Another point that was reported by some participants is the absence of reliable and suitable care

services in the Egyptian society. I stress that the social reality in the Egyptian society considers the children the total responsibility of the mother. Hence, I argue that the position of the young women in the labor market does not reflect their preferences or their lack of commitment; rather, it reflects their position in the gendered society.

### ***Neoliberal economic system and its non sensitive gender types of employment:***

Neoliberal economy and SAPs have increased women's employment due to the expansion of the service sector. However, in Egypt there is an inherent limitation in job opportunities for women because of the cultural gender norms that perceive women as caretakers and men as breadwinners. This secondary status of women does not allow full access of women to the labor market, since women in the labor market tend to seek only that employment which will allow them to carry out their domestic responsibilities. Educated young women are more adversely affected by the new transition to the privately led economy (Assaad et al 2000). The limited success of the export industries in Egypt and the reluctance of young women to join the private sector with its long working hours and often distant work locations often reduce young women's prospects in the private sector. I argue that gender ideology is fully responsible for the increase of young women's unemployment because it filters women out the labor market in the early stage of recruiting and interviewing. The first generation of CS graduates are currently working and enjoying IT careers, whereas the new graduates encounter difficulties in entering the IT market. Subsequently, they were obliged to look for work outside their field of specialization and found jobs in other fields such as teaching or administrative jobs. The gendered IT market reinforces the gender roles.

There are also claims that women's attitudes towards work compromise their commitment to a career, since feminine attitudes are associated with life goals that place family life first. Such claims are gender biased, because the findings of the research revealed that women are pushed to work without any institutional, structural or societal protection. Women's attempts at balancing their productive and reproductive activities represent, in fact, individual strategies to cope with this injustice (Sholkamy and Assaad 2011).

The state legislation regulating women's work results in a decrease of their opportunities in the labor market. Some employers resent the family friendly policies of maternity and infant care leave, and the obligation of opening care centers as an additional cost; accordingly they avoid recruiting women. Policies at the work place exclude women when they ignore their gendered roles and responsibilities at home. The Labor Law of 2003 offers fixed term contracts that are subject to renewal or cancellation but which the employers' abuse in firing a pregnant female employee or one who requests LWOP. Some mothers of the participants, who were working in the public sector, enjoyed all these benefits, in addition to LWOP (up to six years), to take care of their children in their early years, a right guaranteed them under the old Labor Law.

Flexibility, one of the characteristics of SAPs era, is an informal type of employment that benefits the employer at the expense of the employees, since it deprives them of work benefits such as social and health insurance. The employers perceive flexibility as a suitable path for women to achieve balance between their domestic responsibilities and work responsibilities. However, most of the participants rejected such employment that did not promote their future career prospects. I argue that work conditions are restrictive

factors in young women's unemployment. The concentration of women in part-time jobs is a form of gender discrimination because it reinforces the inferior and secondary status of women's employment (Moghadam, 2005:128). The trend to encourage part-time work or entrepreneurship for women in the labor market has negative implications for women's status (Bugra 2010:533). Thus, the participants were unanimous in their objection to such types of part-time employment, free lancing, or e-work. I conclude that informal employment is an articulation between the new capitalism and the patriarchy because it reflects the male dominance of the private and public spheres that has tightened subsequent to the state's withdrawal from the types of legislated welfare programs that both form a social safety net and help to create job opportunities. Traditional cultural norms do not encourage women to join the private sector.

Young women consider working in such positions as waste of their human capital, and this keeps the rates of their unemployment very high. The investment of human capital is positively correlated to the time allocated to a specific activity (Becker 1985:536. I argue that in some cases the participants find it is better to invest in their private lives and reject employment that offers only poorer working conditions and lower pay than the same work performed by a man. The total assignment of domestic activities to women lowers their earnings as it consumes their energy and limits their participation in labor market.

The freezing of new job creation in the public sector due to the cut in government expenditures has added to the complexity of the problem. The mothers of the participants have enjoyed working in the public sector, where egalitarian and family friendly conditions helped them to maintain a balance between their household

responsibilities and labor responsibilities, allowing them to remain in these jobs until retirement. The participants have not enjoyed the same opportunities because the IT industry is mainly dominated by the private sector which is currently controlled by the extreme Islamists who create rigid conditions for recruiting. Young female applicants must, by their demeanor, dress, and adoption of the veil, demonstrate their chastity, in order to join this sector.

In spite of all attempts to eliminate gender biased policies at the work place, male-dominated careers predominate in areas that Elson describes as “men intensive” in certain types of employment Elson (2002:5). These careers do not tolerate or support motherhood and perceive as a threat to the employee’s total engagement with the workplace, nor do they support the employee’s family responsibilities. The majority of research participants agree with this last point. Most of these women left work to care for their families. They found it is difficult to accept the family friendly arrangement of parental leave or to take part time employment because they believe that such arrangements only intensify the effects of gender gaps at the work place and restrict career advancement. These arrangements also amplify the problem of gender job discrimination. Participants in my research are also convinced that work responsibilities cannot be balanced with family responsibilities without an associated compromise in career aspirations. They believe that family friendly policies may help women to balance family work and paid work, but that they do not solve the problem of gender equality necessary for achieving a successful career.

The gendered policies of Neoliberal capitalism, the gendered family, and the gendered state have transformed the labor market and the workplace into a battleground for young

women seeking to win appropriate recognition for their education and skill. If they wish to work, they must often accept difficult working conditions that do not accommodate their domestic load. Prioritizing their choices according to their family needs is not a preference or a choice; it can be explained only in the terms of the gender ideology of male dominance. Recruitment in the private sector represents a bargain between domestic and work responsibilities. Questions about the personal attitude of female candidates in regard to marriage and plans for childbearing have become an ordinary part of the job interview, according to the participants. I argue that such recruitment procedures reinforce gender division of roles and make the contradiction between young women's priority and the employers' priority a gendered issue that eventually leads to the exclusion of women from the labor market. In spite of the fact that women have a high level of formal education and training, the rate of their unemployment among female of university degree and above has reached 54% in comparison to 46% among male (CAPMAS 2012).

Such inequity calls for the investigation of young women's unemployment within the framework of a patriarchal and gendered society. At the same time, it highlights the failure of the current neoliberal economy to create new jobs that are suitable to the excellent human capital of women. This failure restricts the access of highly qualified young women to the labor market. The contradiction between the human capital of young women and the labor market requirements creates a gender gap in experience due to the exclusion of women from the labor market and their gendered position in the family. Such ideology makes women search for jobs that suit the patriarchal positioning of woman as wife and mother. The married participants were forced to revise their career priorities to accommodate their family responsibilities in their working life. The trend to



marginalize young women's employment and even exclude them from the statistical records also reflects the male ideology of the gender division of roles and legitimize the exclusion of women from the labor market based on the idea that they are inactive economically and that they transit to reproduction activities when they marry and form families. This represents the correlation between the gendered society and new capitalism. The dominance of the new Islamists in the IT companies restricts young women's access this vital sector, although their human capital should guarantee them access to these jobs. I argue that such work limitations imposed on young women reflects the Islamist employers' gendered perception of domesticity—that the natural place of women is in the home as a wife and mother.

Throughout the research, and in considering the literature, patriarchy appears as the main determinant of women's employment. Patriarchal attitudes permeate family, labor market and state to form a powerful obstacle to women's equal participation in the labor market. In Egypt, these attitudes have evolved into a new type of Islamic ideology referred to as neopatriarchy. Neopatriarchy is a modernized version of Islamic ideology that seeks to reinforce the perception that women's need for protection of their modesty is met by their exclusion from the public sphere, which, in its updated version, is the workplace. The interaction between traditional patriarchy and modernity in the context of the capitalist system reflects the current gender ideology. The Egyptian society has not gone through the kind of demographic changes that would move it towards true modernization, since it has yet to slow fertility, reduce mortality, and improve women's employment situation. I strongly claim that neopatriarchy is "... *traditional patriarchy, which is intertwined with religion and is appropriated by the state to reinforce its rule*" (Haghighat, 2005:86). I argue that such a statement is a clear explanation of the political situation of Egypt before

and after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Revolution, when the state (The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, SCAF) allied with the different Islamic currents—the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi, and other Islamic Groups-- to reinforce its authority for controlling the period of transitional rule by correlating religion with the social traditions

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the findings of the research are consistent with the literature on mobility and its effect on women's employment. In fact, the restriction of the mobility of the participants by male figure in the family is absent because these women do have the freedom to move and travel. Although the literature on women unemployment recorded male consent for female work as an obstacle to entering the workforce and the cause of the high rate of female unemployment in conservative societies such as Egypt, the interviews are not exactly consistent with this point. The participants were not required to seek actual permission of male family members; rather, this process took the form of friendly discussion of, and agreement to, the type of work that the participant could consider. The male participants insisted on knowing the type and environment of a wife's potential employment in order to be assured of their safety and welfare. However, their movement and travel are restricted by their family responsibilities to the extent that some of them have had to drop out of the labor market or change careers due to the long daily commute to and from work. Another significant dimension of mobility that came out in the interviews was the concern for safety and security. Most of the participants expressed feeling insecure in their daily commuting, even in the downtown area of Cairo or in using public transportation or a taxi. This feeling of insecurity increased in the absence of public security and the increase of criminal activity after the events of the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Such an insecure situation makes women restrict their mobility even during the day time, and in some

cases, they are now accompanied by a male relative. Male employees are not as affected by the current political situation, and can easily work the late hours and night shifts assigned to them.

In spite of the significance of religion as a cultural factor in explaining female unemployment (Bugra 2010:517), I argue that the failure of the neoliberal economic system to cause economic change resulted in the stagnation of the gender relations in the Egyptian society. The failure of the new economic system to create suitable labor opportunities for young women reinforces the male ideology and asserts the dependency of women on men. In other words, the failure of the new economic system to provide jobs that are convenient and rewarding for women compelled young women to exit the labor market, reinforcing the traditional female gender roles of child bearing and care taker. At the same time, the employers who are the bearers and reproducers of the patriarchal gender roles applied this dominant male ideology in their recruiting and promotion policies in a way that eventually forced women from the labor market. I agree with Bugra in considering the importance of assessing the potentiality of increasing female employment and at the same time considering the kind of employment that could be created for women. The trend to encourage part-time or entrepreneurship for women in the labor market has negative implications on women's status (ibid 533). The participants unanimously expressed their objections to such types of part-time employment, free lancing or e-work, since, in the final analysis, they do not promote women's advancement in the work place. The patriarchal conservative trend against women's emancipation in Egypt has yet to diminish in any substantive way, and this is shown in the decrease of Egyptian female employment rates. My research seeks to relate the macroeconomic and micro social environment and to investigate their correlated

effect on young women's professional careers. It is my hope that this research will contribute to positive social change in the position of women in Egyptian society, and to the remaking of social policy to help women achieve gender equality as a human right.

## Appendix A

### Informed Consent form:

This is to certify that Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ approved to be one of the participants in MA research on the Decline of Professional Employment among Egyptian Female University Graduates which is conducted by researcher Magda Aboulela, Graduate student at Gender and Women' Studies Department, The American University in Cairo (AUC). The researcher guarantees the following rights for all participants:

1. The participation in the interviews is confidential and that the participant's identity will not be revealed to anyone. S/he can choose a fake name to be used in the research whenever needed. The participant has no monetary commitment throughout research duration.
2. The participant has the full right to abstain answering any question that s/he considers a violation or disrespect of her/his privacy and life account.
3. The interviews are recorded for the research accuracy. They will be transcript on a CD with a security password that is accessible only to the researcher. The tapes and the CD will be destroyed within one year of the completion of the research project.
4. The participant has the full right to read the transcript and request waiving any part that s/he considers a violation of her/his privacy.
5. S/he agrees to participate believing that such a research will enhance community awareness of change towards perception of gender norms and adopting policies that will be supportive to gender equality.
6. S/he is fully aware of the affiliation and contact information of the researcher.

Signed by:

Date

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

### **A set of questions for the interviewees the sample group:**

- What does it mean to you to be a CSE student/graduate
- How did your parents perceive your majoring in Science section during your secondary study?
- How do you perceive your relation with mother?
- How do you assess the cooperation between your father and mother in family commitments?
- How did the teaching crew perceive girls joining science/math section?
- Have you experienced any discrimination on the basis of gender, school, work place?
- How do you think about the texts you have studied are from the perception of gender bias?
- What are your plans for the future?
- In case of getting married, would you continue or discontinue working?
- How do you perceive work?
- How do you evaluate family making?
- In some time of your career life if you had to choose between them, what will be your preferable choice?
- What do you think about work, marriage, domesticity

### **Additional set of questions for the students to the graduate:**

- How do you find your experience in studying computer science?
- Do you recommend your sister to join CSE and why?

- How do you plan for future, for jobs, for studies and why?
- How do you perceive work, marriage, family commitments?

**Additional set of questions for the graduates who are working:**

- What about your marital status and work status?
- Have you ever been on leave without pay? Why?
- How do you assess the effect of this leave on your career advancement?
- How would you evaluate work environment from gender biased view in recruiting and promotion?
- Why/Why not did choose coding as a career?
- Have you ever suffered gender biased evaluation in the workplace?

**A set of questions for the mothers of the university graduate women:**

- Would speak about yourself, education background, marriage, work-life balance?
- How do you evaluate your work experience?
- Have you ever taken leave without pay or a part time position?
- How does your husband help you to achieve the balance between work and family responsibilities?
- How are the decisions related to the children's studies, personal choices taken at home?
- Would support your daughter's decision to work or prefer her to get married?
- What in your life journey would you like your daughter to avoid?

**A set of questions to the employer:**

- How does the company value the diversity in staff body?
- How do you evaluate the company's adoption of gender inclusive policy in recruitment, retention and advancement?
- What do you think about the accusation that in IT industry, women are filtered out during the process of recruiting and interviewing and that there are male positions?
- How do you evaluate women's performance in different IT positions?
- How does your company observe family responsibilities for female staff?
- In what stage of career ladder do women drop out?
- How much does the company observe the practices of part-time jobs, flexible schedule, free lancing to encourage women not to drop out?



## Appendix C

Name	Age	Religion	Marital status	Family	Profession	Remarks
Amina	23	Muslim	Recently she broke her 6 - month engagement	The father is an engineer, mother administrative job; Amina is the lonely daughter	P/T, AUC + M. Sc. student	
Basma	18	Muslim	Single	Father is an engineer, mother does not work. Two girls: the elder is a construction Engineer.	Freshman, CS major	
Dalia	27	Muslim	Married & pregnant  For the first time	Father and mother are faculty members + 3 girls. The Elder is a Medical PhD	Worked in a big IT company before switching to Web Administrator/	

				holder.	AUC	
Sarah	28	Muslim	Single	The family lived for a long time in Kuwait. She has a borther and a sister	She was able to join an IT once she adopted the veil	
Hanaa	40	Muslim	Married + a boy and a girl. Husband is a businessman	The mother does not work and they are 4 girls	She is the CEO of a big IT company. She enjoyed continuous work life	
Hala	29	Muslim	Married one year ago in Saudi Arabia. Husband was her colleague working in IT	The father and the mother are engineers ; they have two girls	She failed to find permanent IT position and decided to drop out of labor market to marry	
Nora	29	Muslim	Married to her colleague, got the first baby six months ago		She is on LWOP from her job at AUC; and leave of absence as a	

					Master's student	
Marian	23	Christian	Single		She is LEAD Scholarship recipient. Graduate Fall 2011	
Mariham	29	Christian	Single	Father and mother are retired physicians. They are two girls. The elder is married with one child. She is responsible for health care of her father as he is chronically and seriously ill.	Worked for a very short time in one of the national banks. But she quitted due to work environment. She is working at one of AUC academic departments. She is responsible for the web page.	
Amal	24	Christian	Single	Father passed	She is now	

				away when she was six yrs old. Mother is accountant with 3 girls	teaching IT subjects in an international school. She quit CS profession	
Mum of Amina	55	Muslim				
Naglaa	42	Muslim	Married + two girls (17 + 14 yrs)	Father is a physician. Mother never worked. Two girls	Worked first in IT company. She joined AUC first in administrative jobs then in IT position to balance her private and business life	
Sally	28	Muslim	Single	Father is an engineer in Saudi Arabia. Mother is a pharmacist. They have a boy and a girl	She does not work. Tried to work as a teacher in AUC nursery. She completed her degree in Computing and determined to	

					continue her M. Sc. in CS to secure an academic career	
Mariam	20	Muslim	Single	Father a faculty member, mother is a bank specialist. Two girls.	Junior CS/Math major	
(Randa)	42	Muslim	Married + 2 boys (11 & 6 years). Husband was her work colleague working in IT	Father is diplomat, mother retired after working as a teacher for short period. Family spent most of life time in England & Saudi Arabia. They have two girls	Worked in one of the biggest IT companies for 9 years. She has been on LWOP for 5 years. She started M. A. in Islamic studies	
Samer	35	Muslim	Married + two	His sister	His wife is	

			children	changed her IT career after having her first child as she was unable to catch its speedy changes	working a free lancer in editing articles for some magazines	
Yasser	29	Christian	Single		Team leader in one of the biggest IT companies. He is M. Sc. student	

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