
POLITICS OF PIETY

THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND THE FEMINIST SUBJECT

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The Subject of Freedom

Over the last two decades, a key question has occupied many feminist theorists: how should issues of historical and cultural specificity inform both the analytics and the politics of any feminist project? While this question has led to serious attempts at integrating issues of sexual, racial, class, and national difference within feminist theory, questions regarding religious difference have remained relatively unexplored. The vexing relationship between feminism and religion is perhaps most manifest in discussions of Islam. This is due in part to the historically contentious relationship that Islamic societies have had with what has come to be called “the West,” but also due to the challenges that contemporary Islamist movements pose to secular-liberal politics of which feminism has been an integral (if critical) part. The suspicion with which many feminists tended to view Islamist movements only intensified in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks launched against the United States, and the immense groundswell of anti-Islamic sentiment that has followed since. If supporters of the Islamist movement were disliked before for their social conservatism and their rejection of liberal values (key among them “women’s freedom”), their now almost taken-for-granted association with terrorism has served to further reaffirm their status as agents of a dangerous irrationality.

Women’s participation in, and support for, the Islamist movement provokes strong responses from feminists across a broad range of the political spectrum. One of the most common reactions is the supposition that women Islamist supporters are pawns in a grand patriarchal plan, who, if freed from their

bondage, would naturally express their instinctual abhorrence for the traditional Islamic mores used to enchain them. Even those analysts who are skeptical of the false-consciousness thesis underpinning this approach nonetheless continue to frame the issue in terms of a fundamental contradiction: why would such a large number of women across the Muslim world actively support a movement that seems inimical to their "own interests and agendas," especially at a historical moment when these women appear to have more emancipatory possibilities available to them?¹ Despite important differences between these two reactions, both share the assumption that there is something intrinsic to women that *should* predispose them to oppose the practices, values, and injunctions that the Islamist movement embodies. Yet, one may ask, is such an assumption valid? What is the history by which we have come to assume its truth? What kind of a political imagination would lead one to think in this manner? More importantly, if we discard such an assumption, what other analytical tools might be available to ask a different set of questions about women's participation in the Islamist movement?

In this book I will explore some of the conceptual challenges that women's involvement in the Islamist movement poses to feminist theory in particular, and to secular-liberal thought in general, through an ethnographic account of an urban women's mosque movement that is part of the larger Islamic Revival in Cairo, Egypt. For two years (1995–97) I conducted fieldwork with a movement in which women from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds provided lessons to one another that focused on the teaching and studying of Islamic scriptures, social practices, and forms of bodily comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self.² The burgeoning of this movement marks the first time in Egyptian history that such a large number of women have held public meetings in mosques to teach one another Islamic doctrine, thereby altering the historically male-centered character of mosques as well as Islamic pedagogy. At the same time, women's religious participation within such public arenas of Islamic pedagogy is critically structured by, and serves to uphold, a discursive tradition that regards subordination to a tran-

¹ This dilemma seems to be further compounded by the fact that women's participation in the Islamist movement in a number of countries (such as Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, and Malaysia) is not limited to the poor (that is, those who are often considered to have a "natural affinity" for religion). Instead the movement also enjoys wide support among women from the upper- and middle-income strata.

² In addition to attending religious lessons at a number of mosques catering to women of various socioeconomic backgrounds, I undertook participant observation among the teachers and attendees of mosque lessons, in the context of their daily lives. This was supplemented by a year-long study with a shaikh from the Islamic University of al-Azhar on issues of Islamic jurisprudence and religious practice.

scendent will (and thus, in many instances, to male authority) as its coveted goal.³

The women's mosque movement is part of the larger Islamic Revival or Islamic Awakening (*al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*) that has swept the Muslim world, including Egypt, since at least the 1970s. "Islamic Revival" is a term that refers not only to the activities of state-oriented political groups but more broadly to a religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies. This sensibility has a palpable public presence in Egypt, manifest in the vast proliferation of neighborhood mosques and other institutions of Islamic learning and social welfare, in a dramatic increase in attendance at mosques by both women and men, and in marked displays of religious sociability. Examples of the latter include the adoption of the veil (*hijāb*), a brisk consumption and production of religious media and literature, and a growing circle of intellectuals who write and comment upon contemporary affairs in the popular press from a self-described Islamic point of view. Neighborhood mosques have come to serve as the organizational center for many of these activities, from the dissemination of religious knowledge and instruction, to the provision of a range of medical and welfare services to poor Egyptians.⁴ This Islamization of the sociocultural landscape of Egyptian society is in large part the work of the piety movement, of which the women's movement is an integral part, and whose activities are organized under the umbrella term *da'wa* (a term whose historical development I trace in chapter 2).⁵

The women's mosque movement, as part of the Islamic Revival, emerged twenty-five or thirty years ago when women started to organize weekly religious lessons—first at their homes and then within mosques—to read the Quran, the *ḥadīth* (the authoritative record of the Prophet's exemplary speech and actions), and associated exegetical and edificatory literature. By the time I began my fieldwork in 1995, this movement had become so popular that

³ This is in contrast, for example, to a movement among women in the Islamic republic of Iran that has had as its goal the reinterpretation of sacred texts to derive a more equitable model of relations between Muslim women and men; see Afshar 1998; Mir-Hosseini 1999; Najmabadi 1991, 1998.

⁴ According to available sources, the total number of mosques in Egypt grew from roughly 28,000 reported in 1975 to 50,000 in 1985 (Zeghal 1996, 174); by 1995 there were 120,000 mosques in Egypt (al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies 1996, 65). Of the 50,000 mosques tabulated in the year 1985, only 7,000 were established by the government (Gaffney 1991, 47).

⁵ There are three important strands that comprise the Islamic Revival: state-oriented political groups and parties, militant Islamists (whose presence has declined during the 1990s), and a network of socioreligious nonprofit organizations that provide charitable services to the poor and perform the work of proselytization. In this book, I will use the terms "the *da'wa* movement" and "the piety movement" interchangeably to refer to this network of socioreligious organizations of which the mosque movement is an important subset.

there were hardly any neighborhoods in this city of eleven million inhabitants that did not offer some form of religious lessons for women.⁶ According to participants, the mosque movement had emerged in response to the perception that religious knowledge, as a means of organizing daily conduct, had become increasingly marginalized under modern structures of secular governance. The movement's participants usually describe the impact of this trend on Egyptian society as "secularization" (*'almana* or *'almāniyya*) or "westernization" (*taghar-rub*), a historical process which they argue has reduced Islamic knowledge (both as a mode of conduct and a set of principles) to an abstract system of beliefs that has no direct bearing on the practicalities of daily living. In response, the women's mosque movement seeks to educate ordinary Muslims in those virtues, ethical capacities, and forms of reasoning that participants perceive to have become either unavailable or irrelevant to the lives of ordinary Muslims. Practically, this means instructing Muslims not only in the proper performance of religious duties and acts of worship but, more importantly, in how to organize their daily conduct in accord with principles of Islamic piety and virtuous behavior.

Despite its focus on issues of piety, it would be wrong to characterize the women's mosque movement as an abandonment of politics. On the contrary, the form of piety the movement seeks to realize is predicated upon, and transformative of, many aspects of social life.⁷ While I will discuss in chapters 2 and 4 the different ways in which the activism of the mosque movement challenges our normative liberal conceptions of politics, here I want to point out the scope of the transformation that the women's mosque movement and the larger piety (*da'wa*) movement have effected within Egyptian society. This includes changes in styles of dress and speech, standards regarding what is deemed proper entertainment for adults and children, patterns of financial and household management, the provision of care for the poor, and the terms by which public debate is conducted. Indeed, as the Egyptian government has come to recognize the impact that the mosque movement in particular, and the piety movement in general, have had on the sociocultural ethos of Egyptian public and political life, it has increasingly subjected these movements to state regulation and scrutiny (see chapter 2).

The pious subjects of the mosque movement occupy an uncomfortable place in feminist scholarship because they pursue practices and ideals em-

⁶ The attendance at these gatherings ranged from ten to five hundred women, depending on the popularity of the teacher.

⁷ Unlike some other religious traditions (such as English Puritanism) wherein "piety" refers primarily to inward spiritual states, the mosque participants' use of the Arabic term *taqwa* (which may be translated as "piety") suggests both an inward orientation or disposition and a manner of practical conduct. See my discussion of the term *taqwa* in chapter 4.

bedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status. Movements such as these have come to be associated with terms such as fundamentalism, the subjugation of women, social conservatism, reactionary atavism, cultural backwardness, and so on—associations that, in the aftermath of September 11, are often treated as “facts” that do not require further analysis. While it would be a worthy task to dissect the reductionism that such associations enact on an enormously complex phenomenon, this is not my purpose in this book. Nor is it my aim to recover a “redeemable element” within the Islamist movement by recuperating its latent liberatory potentials so as to make the movement more palatable to liberal sensibilities. Instead, in this book I seek to analyze the conceptions of self, moral agency, and politics that undergird the practices of this nonliberal movement, in order to come to an understanding of the historical projects that animate it.⁸

My goal, however, is not just to provide an ethnographic account of the Islamic Revival. It is also to make this material speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature against which such a movement is held accountable—such as the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them, and so on. Thus, my ethnographic tracings will sustain a running argument with and against key analytical concepts in liberal thought, as these concepts have come to inform various strains of feminist theory through which movements such as the one I am interested in are analyzed. As will be evident, many of the concepts I discuss under the register of feminist theory in fact enjoy common currency across a wide range of disciplines, in part because liberal assumptions about what constitutes human nature and agency have become integral to our humanist intellectual traditions.

AGENCY AND RESISTANCE

As I suggested at the outset, women’s active support for socioreligious movements that sustain principles of female subordination poses a dilemma for feminist analysts. On the one hand, women are seen to assert their presence in previously male-defined spheres while, on the other hand, the very idioms

⁸ For studies that capture the complex character of Islamist movements, and the wide variety of activities that are often lumped under the fundamentalist label, see Abedi and Fischer 1990; Bowen 1993; Esposito 1992; Hefner 2000; Hirschkind 2001a, 2001b, 2004; Peletz 2002; Salvatore 1997; Starrett 1998.

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Topography of the Piety Movement

Once a week, in the quiet heat of late afternoon, one can see a stream of women—either singly or in small groups—making their way up a narrow staircase tucked away on one side of the large Umar mosque complex.¹ The mosque is an imposing structure located at one of the busiest intersections of a bustling upper-middle-income neighborhood of Cairo, Muhandiseen. Competing for attention with the relatively somber presence of the mosque is a long avenue of glittering shop fronts, American fast-food restaurants, and large hand-painted billboards advertising the latest Egyptian films and plays. The Umar mosque offers a relief from the opulent and consumerist aura of this thoroughfare, not only in its architectural sobriety, but also in the welfare services it provides to a range of poor and lower-income Egyptians. The women making their way discreetly to the top floor of the mosque are here to attend a religious lesson (*dars*; plural: *durūs*) delivered weekly by a woman preacher/religious teacher (*dā'iya*; plural: *dā'iyāt*) by the name of Hajja Faiza.²

¹ All the names of the mosques, the preachers, and attendees have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

² The term *hajja* (rendered as *hājja* in Modern Standard Arabic and as *hāgga* in Egyptian colloquial Arabic) literally means “a woman who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca (the *hajj*),” but it is also used in Egyptian colloquial Arabic to respectfully address an older woman. While not all the *dā'iyāt* had performed the *hajj*, and some were quite young, they were all referred to as *hāgga* as a sign of respect. Throughout this book, Arabic honorific terms (such as *hajja*, *sayyid*, and *shaiikh*), as with the proper names they precede, are neither italicized nor have diacritical marks. See my earlier note on transcription.

Hajja Faiza gives lessons in two other mosques, as well as in one of the private elite clubs of Cairo. She is well known in mosque circles, both for her scholarly erudition and for her dedication to providing lessons to women since the inception of the mosque movement approximately twenty-five years ago. Each week between fifty and one hundred women sit for two hours in an air-conditioned room listening to Hajja Faiza provide exegetical commentary in colloquial Arabic on selected passages from both the Quran and the *ḥadīth* (the authoritative record of the Prophet's exemplary speech and actions).³ The attendees listen attentively in pin-drop silence, seated in rows of brown wooden chairs, as Hajja Faiza speaks in gentle and persistent tones from behind a desk on a raised platform.

Some of the attendees are housewives, others are students, and a large number are working women who stop on their way home from work to attend the weekly lessons. While the majority of women are between the ages of thirty and forty, there are attendees as young as twenty and as old as sixty. Some of these women drive to the mosque in private cars, others arrive on Cairo's overcrowded public transportation, and still others come in taxis. The women's attire is striking in its variety. Many come dressed in finely tailored ankle-length skirts and tucked-in blouses, with printed chiffon scarves wrapped tightly around their heads, conveying an air of modest sophistication. Others, including Hajja Faiza, wear well-tailored, dark-colored long coats (*balṭa*) with heavy thick scarves covering their hair and neck. Still others wear the *khimār* (plural: *akhmīra*), a form of veil that covers the head and extends over the torso (similar to the cape worn by Catholic nuns), and that is very popular among mosque attendees. There are even bareheaded women dressed in jeans and short tops, with styled hair and face makeup, who attend Hajja Faiza's lessons—a sight almost impossible to find in other mosques. And yet, while a wide variety of attire is represented, it is rare to see a woman wearing the *niqāb*—a more conservative form of the veil that covers the head, face, and torso—at the Umar mosque; the absence of women wearing the *niqāb* is an indicator of the kind of audience that Hajja Faiza's lessons attract.⁴

In contrast to the Umar mosque is the Ayesha mosque, located in one of the largest and poorest neighborhoods on the outskirts of Cairo. Tucked between teetering cinder block residential buildings, in a narrow and darkened alleyway, the Ayesha mosque is surrounded by the sounds of roosters crowing,

³ Note that *ḥadīth* when written with a definite article refers to the entire collection of the Prophet's actions and speech (*the ḥadīth*), of which six collections are considered to be the most authoritative. "A *ḥadīth*" refers to an individual account of the Prophet's actions and speech. See Robson 1999b.

⁴ See chapter 3 on the spectrum of positions that the mosque participants take on the veil, and the doctrinal reasoning behind it.

children screaming, and vendors hawking their wares—offering a sharp contrast to the sobriety and order of the Umar complex. The Ayesha mosque is associated with the largest Islamic nonprofit organization in Egypt, al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya, and provides extensive welfare services to the neighborhood's residents. Religious lessons are offered twice a week by two women *dā'iyyāt*, and once a week by the male *imam* (prayer leader) of the mosque. In contrast to the reserved decorum of the Umar mosque, an informal and unceremonious atmosphere characterizes the Ayesha mosque. For example, women attendees often interrupt the teacher to ask questions or to put forward alternative opinions they have heard elsewhere. There is constant banter back and forth between the *dā'iya* and her audience. The *dā'iyyāt* here, as in the other mosques, also speak in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, but their speech is marked by street colloquialisms that are characteristic of their and their audience's working-class (*sha'bi*) backgrounds.⁵ Unlike the air-conditioned seclusion of the Umar mosque, the atmosphere of the Ayesha mosque is saturated with the sounds, smells, and textures of the neighborhood in which the mosque is located.

While the age spectrum of women attendees at the Ayesha mosque is similar to that found at the Umar mosque, their educational backgrounds are more limited: the majority have no more than a high school education, and a large number are illiterate. Women attendees sit on the thinly carpeted concrete floor, most of them dressed in crumpled ankle-length gowns (*galālīb*; singular: *gallabiyya*) and veils that cover their heads and torsos (*akhmira*). In contrast to the Umar mosque, where women wearing the full face and body veil (*niqāb*) are almost never present, here a full one-third of the attendees come so attired. A majority wear the customary printed headscarves, and others dress in what has come to be called the *baladi* dress, worn by the rural poor, comprised of a loose black gown and a thin black headscarf tightly wrapped around the head.

If the Umar and Ayesha mosques stand at two extremes of the Cairene socioeconomic spectrum, the Nafisa mosque, located in a prominent suburb of Cairo, represents a middle ground. This suburb is home to a large number of public and state employees, as well as to Egyptians who have returned from the Gulf States after working there during the oil boom years of the 1970s and 1980s.⁶ The Nafisa mosque is reputed to be the first Cairene mosque to have

⁵ Since both the Quran and the *ḥadīth* are written in a form of classical Arabic that is quite different from Modern Standard and colloquial Arabic, part of the *dā'iyyāt's* task is to render these texts into colloquial Egyptian Arabic that their audiences can easily follow.

⁶ Some scholars have suggested that the ascendant social conservatism of Egyptian society is partly a result of the "Gulf" form of Islam (sometimes called "petrodollar Islam") brought back by Egyptians who lost their jobs when the Gulf economies took a downturn in the 1970s and 1980s.

started offering lessons to women, around 1980, and it currently commands the largest female audience of any mosque in Cairo. About five hundred women attend the weekly lesson; a majority of them are housewives, although a fair number are students from one of the largest Cairene universities, located nearby. The lessons are delivered by a group of three *dā'iyāt*, all of whom were, at the time of my fieldwork, in the process of obtaining formal training in preaching skills from state-run institutes of *da'wa* (a key term in the Islamic Revival that I explore below). Unlike the women in the other two mosques, all three *dā'iyāt*, as well as most attendees (approximately 75 percent) wear the full face and body veil (*niqāb*). Women who wear the *niqāb* understand their practice to accord with a strict interpretation of Islamic edicts on female modesty, and often see themselves as more virtuous than women who wear the *khimār* (the veil that covers the head and torso) or the *hijāb* (headscarf). The sense of rigorous piety at the mosque embodied in the predominance of the *niqāb* is further accentuated by the fire-and-brimstone style in which the lessons are delivered, one that stands in sharp contrast to the gentle tones of Hajja Faiza at the Umar mosque and the more casual manner of the *dā'iyāt* at the Ayesha mosque.⁷

This brief overview of three of the six mosques where I conducted my fieldwork illustrates the broad-based character of the women's mosque movement, evident in the variety of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds represented among the audience as well as in the range of rhetorical styles, modes of argumentation, and forms of sociability employed by the teachers. Despite differences among the mosque groups, though, the participants all shared a concern for what they described as the increasing secularization of Egyptian society, an important consequence of which is the erosion of a religious sensibility they considered crucial to the preservation of "the spirit of Islam" (*rūḥ al-islām*). In what follows, I will examine what the mosque participants meant when they talked about "secularization," what aspects of social behavior they considered most consequential to this process, and finally, what form of religiosity they sought to restore through their activities. I will situate my discussion within the context of the various currents that comprise the current Islamic Revival, and the relationship of these currents to the history of Egyptian religious activism in the last century. My aim in this chapter is not only to provide a brief sketch of the historical developments against which the contemporary

(Beinin and Stork 1997; Moensch 1988). For the most part, this view is based on an association drawn between the rate of returning workers and the rise of the Islamist movement in Egypt, but I do not know of any sociological or ethnographic study that has tracked or verified this claim.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the rhetorical styles employed by the *dā'iyāt* at the three mosques, see chapter 3.

mosque movement has emerged, but also to critically engage with existing themes in the scholarship on Islamic modernism regarding such movements.

AIMS OF THE MOSQUE MOVEMENT

According to participants, the women's mosque movement emerged in response to the perception that religious knowledge, as a means for organizing daily life, had become increasingly marginalized under modern structures of secular governance. Many of the mosque participants criticized what they considered to be an increasingly prevalent form of religiosity in Egypt, one that accords Islam the status of an abstract system of beliefs that has no direct bearing on how one lives, on what one actually does in the course of a day. This trend, usually referred to by the movement's participants as "secularization" (*'almana* or *'almāniyya*) or "westernization" (*tagharrub*), is understood to have reduced Islamic knowledge (both as a mode of conduct and as a set of principles) to the status of "custom and folklore" (*'āda wa fulklūr*). While a handful of mosque participants used the terms "secularization" and "westernization" to refer to specific events in recent Egyptian history,⁸ most employed the terms more loosely to describe a transformative force beyond their control that was corrosive of the sensibilities and habits of a certain kind of religious life.

Hajja Samira from the Nafisa mosque was one of the *dā'iyyāt* who spoke passionately and clearly about the kind of religious sensibility that the mosque participants felt was under threat. This is what she had to say during one of her lessons:

Look around in our society and ask yourselves: who do we emulate? We emulate the Westerners [*gharbiyyin*], the secularists [*'almāniyyin*], and the Christians: we smoke like they do, we eat like they do, our books and media are full of pictures that are obscene [*fahhāsh*]. When you enter the homes of Muslims, you are surprised: you can't tell whether it is the house of a Christian or a Muslim. We are Muslims in name, but our acts are not those of Muslims. Our sight, dress, drink, and food should also be for God and out of love for Him [*ihna muslimīn wi lākin af'ālna mish ka muslimīn: il-'ēn, wil-libb, wil-shurb, wil-akl lāzim yikun lillah wi fi hubb allāh*]. They will tell you that this way of life [the one she is recommending] is

⁸ For example, some of the women I worked with used the terms "secularization" and "westernization" to refer to the adoption of the policy of *infiṭāḥ* (economic liberalization) by President Anwar Sadat in the 1970s, which they said marked a radical transformation in Egyptian social mores and lifestyles. The *dā'iya* Hajja Nur, for instance, argued that with increased displays of wealth on the streets, rising inflation, and an influx of imported consumer goods and Western media, she found Egyptians becoming more ambitious, competitive, and selfish, with less regard for their family, friends, and the larger community—a shift she characterized as "secular."

uncivilized [*ghair mutahaḍḍir*]: don't listen to them because you know that real civilization [*ḥaḍāra*] for we Muslims is closeness to God.

These remarks may be interpreted as abiding by a discourse of cultural identity, one through which contemporary Egyptian Muslims seek to assert their religious distinctiveness, as expressed in styles of consumption, dress, and communication. I would like to propose an alternative reading, however, that draws upon a set of debates taking place in mosque circles that express concerns quite distinct from those of national or cultural identity. In this alternative reading, Hajja Samira's comments can be understood as critiquing a prevalent form of religiosity that treats Islam as a system of abstract values that is to be cherished but that, nonetheless, remains inessential to the practical organization of day-to-day life. In Hajja Samira's eyes, this is demonstrated by the fact that one cannot tell Muslims apart from either Christians or non-believers, since the way Muslims organize their daily affairs gives little indication of their religious commitments. The *dā'iyyāt* and the mosque attendees want to ameliorate this situation through the cultivation of those bodily aptitudes, virtues, habits, and desires that serve to ground Islamic principles within the practices of everyday living. The mosque lessons provide a training in the requisite strategies and skills to enable such a manner of conduct, and the lives of the most devoted participants are organized around gradually learning and perfecting these skills. As the end of the quote above suggests, Hajja Samira's position is articulated against those Egyptians who consider such quotidian attention to religious practice to be *passé*, or uncivilized (*ghair mutahaḍḍir*), a judgment Hajja Samira challenges through her appropriation of the term *ḥaḍāra* (a term that carries the same Western-centric biases as the English term "civilized") to describe Islamically devout behavior.

Hajja Samira's concern about the way popular religiosity has been transformed by the process of secularization was shared across mosque groups, despite their disparate class and social backgrounds. Consider, for example, a similar sentiment expressed by Hajja Faiza, from the upper-middle-class Umar mosque, in an interview with me:

Currently, religion seems to have become separated from the texts or scriptures [*nuṣūṣ*], especially in issues of *mu'āmalāt* [commercial and social transactions]. The challenge that we face as Muslims right now is how to understand and follow the example of the Prophet, how to act in accord with the Quran and the *ḥadīth* in our daily lives [*biyī'mil bil-ḥadīth wil-qur'ān izzāy*]. All of us [Muslims] know the basics of religion [*al-dīn*], such as praying, fasting, and other acts of worship [*ibādāt*]. But the difficult question that confronts us today as Muslims is how to make our daily lives congruent with our religion while at the same time moving with the world [*muḥarrrikn ma'a id-dinya*], especially given that the present period

is one of great change and transformation. For me, proselytization [*da'wa*] means doing it from within ordinary acts and practicalities [*'amaliyyāt*], and translating worship [*'ibāda*] into everyday practices so that these are always directed toward God [*fahm il-'ibāda kullu yittagih ilallah*].

Note that the challenge Hajja Faiza regards as central to her work does not have to do with educating Muslims in the basic performance of religious duties (such as praying five times a day, fasting, and the like); as she says, most of the people she works with perform these duties regularly. She is concerned instead with those Muslims who, despite performing their religious duties, have lost the capacity to render *all* aspects of their lives—of which worship is simply one, albeit an important, part—into a means of realizing God's will. Hajja Faiza's emphasis on practice, therefore, addresses the problem of how to make moral precepts, doctrinal principles, and acts of worship relevant to the organization of everyday life. Her engagement with sacred texts is aimed at deducing a set of practical rules of conduct to guide others in resolving the mundane issues of daily life.

Like the other *dā'iyyāt*, Hajja Faiza recognizes that there are numerous aspects of contemporary life that are ruled *not* by the dictates of sacred texts (the Quran and the Sunna),⁹ but by laws whose rationale is independent from, and at times inimical to, the demands of pious living. The distinction Hajja Faiza makes between acts of worship (*'ibādāt*) and those actions pertaining to social transactions (*mu'āmalāt*)¹⁰ has been part of the Islamic juridical tradition since at least the tenth century. In the modern period, although *sharī'a* procedures (those moral discourses and legal procedures sometimes glossed as "Islamic law") were unevenly applied in Egypt, most acts in the category of *mu'āmalāt* came to be regulated by civil law, giving the distinction between worship and social transactions a new valence and institutional force. As was the case with most non-Western nations, Egypt adopted a European legal code (the French code) in the mid-nineteenth century, thereby restricting the application of Islamic law to matters pertaining to family law and pious endowments (Hill 1987).¹¹ For most of the *dā'iyyāt*, however, reinstatement of

⁹ The Sunna describes the practices of the Prophet and his Companions. In Islamic jurisprudence, the Sunna is considered to be the second most important source for the derivation of Islamic laws after the Quran. For debates among Muslim reformers on this issue, see D. Brown 1999.

¹⁰ The term *mu'āmalāt* may best be translated as "sections of the *sharī'a* concerned with transactions, including bilateral contracts and unilateral dispositions" (Messick 1996, 313).

¹¹ Personal status law (or family law), a legal category that emerged with the adoption of the European legal code, has become a key site of struggle over the identity of the Muslim community in a variety of national contexts. For contentious debates about changes in Muslim family law in India, where Muslims are a significant minority, see Hasan 1994; for similar debates in Egypt, where Muslims are the majority, see Skovgaard-Petersen 1997.

the *sharī'a* remains marginal to the realization of the movement's goals, and few lessons address the issue. Even though women like Hajja Faiza do not advocate the abolition or transformation of civil law as do some other Islamists,¹² this does not mean that the mosque movement endorses a privatized notion of religion that assumes a separation between worldly and religious affairs.¹³ Indeed, the form of piety women like Hajja Faiza advocate brings religious obligations and rituals (*'ibādāt*) to bear upon worldly issues in new ways, thereby according the old Islamic adage "all of life is worship" (*al-ḥayāh kullaha 'ibāda*) a new valence.

Secularism has often been understood in two primary ways: as the separation of religion from issues of the state, and as the increasing differentiation of society into discrete spheres (economic, legal, educational, familial, and so on) of which religion is one part (Berger 1973; Casanova 1994; Durkheim 1965; D. Martin 1978). Since participants in the mosque movement do not argue for the promulgation of the *sharī'a*, they do not constitute a challenge to the former aspect of secularism as do some of the more militant and state-oriented Islamist activists.¹⁴ The mosque movement's solution to the problem of Egypt becoming increasingly secularized does not directly confront the political order, even though the social transformations it seeks to bring about necessarily involve changing sociopolitical institutions and ethos. The piety activists seek to imbue each of the various spheres of contemporary life with a regulative sensibility that takes its cue from the Islamic theological corpus rather than from modern secular ethics. In this sense, the mosque movement's goal is to introduce a common set of shared norms or standards by which one

¹² For example, during the question-and-answer period, mothers often raised the issue of sexual intercourse outside the institution of marriage (*zinā'*), particularly premarital sex—an act that is considered to be a cardinal sin in Islam. In response, the *dā'iyyāt* acknowledged that the classical Islamic punishment for such an act (most commonly, a hundred lashes for each participant) was no longer possible and applicable in Egypt. Instead, it was required of parents that they inculcate a sense of modesty and knowledge of proper conduct in youth so as to prevent them from contemplating such an act. Thus the focus of the mosque lessons was precisely on those manners of thought, movements, and practices that needed to be policed in order to forestall the possibility of *zinā'*, not on the punishment that the act required.

¹³ I use the term "worldly" intentionally—instead of the term *mu'āmalāt* (social transactions)—to avoid the juridical connotations of the latter. By "worldly" acts I mean those behaviors that pertain to matters in life that are distinct from acts of worship.

¹⁴ The debate about the promulgation of the *sharī'a* peaked in Egypt after the passage of the new family law in 1985. In the mid- to late 1980s, distinct lines were drawn between the supporters of the *sharī'a* and those opposed to it, the latter being a loose alliance of intellectuals and journalists who came to be called "the secularists" (*'almanīyyin*). This debate cooled off substantially in the 1990s, and by the time I conducted my fieldwork (1995–97) the focus of the Islamist movement was more on preaching, welfare, and syndicalist activities. For a general discussion of this debate and the reasons for its decline, see Skovgaard-Petersen 1997, 205–208.

is to judge one's own conduct, whether in the context of employment, education, domestic life, or other social activities. The mosque participants' activities, therefore, pose more of a challenge to the second aspect of secularism, namely, the process by which religion is relegated to its own differentiated sphere, its influence curtailed to those aspects of modern life that are deemed either "private" or "moral."

For example, in the last three decades, supporters of the Islamist movement have established a number of "Islamic schools" in order to counter the secular character of modern Egyptian education.¹⁵ Their efforts have been directed not so much at creating a new curriculum (which continues to be determined by the Egyptian government) as at introducing practices that create an Islamic awareness (*al-wa'i al-islāmi*) within existing institutions (see Herrera 2003). This includes emphasizing the study of religious materials that are already part of the curriculum, creating space and time for prayer during school hours, hiring religiously observant teachers, and so on. Insofar as this strategy makes Islamic ethics central to the process of acquiring different kinds of knowledges and skills, it infuses the current educational institutions with a sensibility that is potentially transformative.¹⁶

the folklorization of worship

An important aspect of the mosque movement's critique of the secularization of Egyptian society focuses upon how the understanding and performance of acts of worship (*'ibādāt*) have been transformed in the modern period. Movement participants argue that ritual acts of worship in the popular imagination have increasingly acquired the status of customs or conventions, a kind of "Muslim folklore" undertaken as a form of entertainment or as a means to display a religio-cultural identity. According to them, this has led to the decline of an alternative understanding of worship, one in which rituals are performed as a means to the training and realization of piety in the entirety of one's life. Part of the aim of the mosque movement is to restore this understanding of worship by teaching women the requisite skills involved in its practice.

¹⁵ Beginning in the colonial period, public education came to focus increasingly on secular subjects (such as geography, mathematics, and biology), replacing classical religious topics and supplanting methods of traditional schooling with the disciplinary practices of modern education (see T. Mitchell 1991, 63–127; Starrett 1998, 23–153). The teaching of Islam, however, was not eradicated from the curriculum but continued as one subject among others in public and private schools in Egypt.

¹⁶ It was this transformative character of Islamic education that incited the Egyptian government to implement a number of measures aimed at the regulation of these schools (see Herrera 2003, 171–80). The Turkish state has reacted in a similar fashion, prohibiting students from entering Islamic schools before the age of fifteen (*New York Times* 1998).

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Consider for example how Fatma, an active member of the mosque movement, articulated this widely shared view. Fatma was in her late twenties when I met her and, after the death of her father, was one of three breadwinners in a family of ten. Despite the long hours she worked, Fatma found time to attend mosque lessons regularly. She strongly believed that her involvement in the mosque movement had taught her what piety really entailed. In an interview with me, Fatma voiced her concerns about the folklorization of Islam:

The state and society want to reduce Islam to folklore, as if Islam is just a collection of ceremonies and customs, such as hanging lanterns from doorways or baking cookies during Ramadan, or eating meat on *al-'īd al-kabīr* [feast that celebrates the end of Ramadan].¹⁷ Mere ceremonies [*mujarrad al-manāsik*] without any bearing on the rest of life.

Noting the look of puzzlement on my face, Fatma asked, "Have you spent the month of Ramadan in Cairo?" I nodded yes. Fatma continued:

So you know what happens during Ramadan in Cairo.¹⁸ You must have heard the popular saying in colloquial Arabic that the first third of Ramadan is cookies, the second third is expenses [on food and clothing], and the last third is [visitation of] relatives.¹⁹ Where is worship in this saying [*qawl*]? You find special programs that the state television puts on every evening, showing all kinds of things that are prohibited [*ḥarām*] in Islam. The entire society seems to be focused on preparing food all day long and festivities in the evenings, all of which are contrary [*bitimāqid*] to the real meaning and spirit of Ramadan. If it were not for the mosque lessons [*durūs*] I began to attend two years ago, I would also have continued to think, like others, that Ramadan was about abstaining from food during the day, and in the evenings eating a lot and going out to the market or al-

¹⁷ Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar during which Muslims are required to fast, abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset.

¹⁸ While Ramadan is observed in all parts of the Muslim world, Egypt's celebration of it is distinctive for the festivities that start at sundown and continue well into the early hours of the morning during the entire month. Working hours are limited, and most Egyptian families celebrate by cooking special foods and spending evenings outdoors. Television and the entertainment industry put on special shows, and markets are full of consumer items (prepared foods, household goods, etc.). It is to these aspects of Egyptian Ramadan that Fatma refers.

¹⁹ In contrast to this popular saying was one that I had come to hear in the mosques, but which few Egyptians outside the mosque circles seemed to know: "The first third of Ramadan is kindness of God [*rahmat allāh*], the second third is His forgiveness [*maghfiratihi*], and the last third is refuge from hell's fire [*'īq al-nār*]." This saying is indicative of the special status accorded to Ramadan in Islamic doctrine in that increased frequency of worship during the month is supposed to lead to greater rewards from God.

Hussein [the area around the tomb of Hussein where Egyptians gather in large numbers in the late evening during Ramadan].

When I questioned Fatma further about what she meant by “the real meaning and spirit of Ramadan,” she explained to me that this entailed a range of behaviors that a Muslim must undertake when fasting, behaviors that conveyed the fuller meaning of the fast, such as abstaining from anger and lying, avoiding looking at things that stir one’s appetite (sexual or culinary), and being extra diligent in one’s prayers. It was not that baking cookies or decorating one’s house during Ramadan was wrong, she said: in fact, celebrating Ramadan is considered a “good deed” (*al-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ*) because it follows the example of the Prophet and his Companions. What gets lost in these popular festivities, she argued, is the understanding that the act of fasting is a necessary means to a virtuous life (what she called “the realization of piety”—*taḥqīq al-taqwa*). “Fasting is not simply abstaining from food,” she explained to me, “but it is a condition through which a Muslim comes to train herself in the virtues [*faḍāʾil*] of patience [*ṣabr*], trust in God [*tawakkul*], asceticism from worldly pleasures [*zuhd*], etc.” In Fatma’s view, therefore, an act of fasting that does not enable one to acquire these virtues transforms fasting from a religious act to a folkloric custom.

Fatma’s concerns were echoed widely in mosque circles. Hajja Nur was a *dāʿiya* who had taught at the Nafisa mosque for several years but now gave lessons at another mosque to a small number of women. In her characteristically lucid style of argument, she reiterated Fatma’s critique of the way Islamic obligations are currently practiced in Egypt, using a different example:

It is the project of the government and the secularists [*almāniyīn*] to transform religion [*al-dīn*] into conventions or customs [*ʿāda*]. People may not even know that they are doing this, but in fact what they do in actual behavior [*taṣarrufātuhum al-ḥaqīqiyya*] is to turn religion into no more than a folkloric custom! An example of this is the use of the veil [*ḥijāb*]²⁰ as a custom [*ʿāda*] rather than as a religious duty [*farḍ*]. When you [here she addressed me directly] as a foreigner look at Egyptian society right now and see all these women wearing the *ḥijāb* you must remember that a lot of them wear it as a custom, rather than a religious duty that also entails other responsibilities. These people are in fact no different than those who argue *against* the *ḥijāb* and who say that the *ḥijāb* is [an expression of] culture [and therefore a matter of personal choice], rather than a religious command. So what we have to do is to educate Muslim women that it is not enough to wear the veil, but that the veil must also lead us to behave in a

²⁰ Note that even though the term *ḥijāb* refers to the headscarf (which is distinct from other forms of the veil such as the *khimār* or the *niqāb*), it is also used as a general term for the veil in Egyptian colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic.

truly modest manner in our daily lives, a challenge that far exceeds the simple act of donning the veil.

Undergirding Fatma's and Hajja Nur's critique is a conception of religiosity that discriminates between a religious practice that is part of the larger project of realizing Islamic virtues in the entirety of one's life, and a practice that is Islamic in form and style but does not necessarily serve as a means to the training and realization of a pious self. Fatma and Hajja Nur are critical of the process by which practices that are supposed to be part of a larger program for shaping ethical capacities lose this function and become little more than markers of identity: such as when people fast because they have learned that this is simply what Muslims do. In summary, Fatma and Hajja Nur's remarks imply a critique of those forms of Islamic practice whose *raison d'être* is to signal an identity or tradition and which are, therefore, shorn of their ability to contribute to the formation of an ethical disposition.

Notably, Hajja Nur's statement above suggests that the attitude of those women who wear the veil out of habit is not dissimilar from those who regard the veil as a local custom (similar to regional styles of clothing, eating habits, and so on). In making this observation, she is referring to a widely known argument put forward by Egyptian intellectuals that veiling is not so much a divine injunction as it is a continuation of regional customs, practiced by women in Arabia at the advent of Islam, that has mistakenly become enshrined as a religious edict.²¹ Hajja Nur faults both of these attitudes (the one that regards veiling to be a regional custom, and the other that unthinkingly reproduces the tradition of veiling) for ignoring how the practice of veiling is an integral part of an entire manner of existence through which one learns to cultivate the virtue of modesty in all aspects of one's life. In making her argument, she uses a key distinction, often invoked by the mosque participants, between customary and religious acts, a distinction that women like Hajja Nur think is elided when religion is understood as yet another kind of cultural practice.

Hajja Nur's remarks about the veil can be usefully compared to the views of a key Islamist public figure, Adil Hussein, who served as the general secretary of the Islamist Labor Party (*Hizb al-'Amal*) until his death a few years ago. The following is an excerpt from an interview with him in a documentary on the Islamic Revival (produced by the American Public Broadcasting System, PBS), where he explains why he thinks the veil is important:

In this period of [Islamic] Revival and renewed pride in ourselves and our past, why should we not take pride in the symbols that distinguish us from others [like

²¹ See, for example, Harb 1984, 172–98; Muhammed 1996. For a comparable point of view, also see Leila Ahmed's discussion of the origins of the veil (1992, 11–63).

the veil]? So we say that the first condition is that clothing should be modest. But why can't we add a second condition that we would like this dress to be a continuation of what we have created in this region, like the Indian sari? . . . Why can't we have our own dress which expresses decency, a requirement of Islam, as well as the special beauty that would be the mark of our society which has excelled in the arts and civilization? (York 1992)

While Adil Hussein, like the *dā'iyyāt*, recognizes that the veil is an expression of the principle of female modesty, there are clear differences between their two views. Hussein regards the veil as a symbol of, among other things, an Islamic identity, culture, and civilization—not unlike the sari worn by South Asian women. For people like Adil Hussein, the increased popularity of the veil is a sign of the vitality of the Islamic Revival (*al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*), which in turn is interpreted as the Muslim world's awakening to its true identity and cultural heritage. While women like Hajja Nur and Fatma do not entirely disagree with this view, they do, in contrast, regard the phenomenon of veiling as an *insufficient*, though necessary, part of making the society more religiously devout. As Hajja Nur's remarks reveal, the critical issue for her is whether the proliferation of what *appear* to be Islamic practices (in form and style) *actually* enable the cultivation of Islamic virtues in the entirety of a Muslim's life.

The remarks of Adil Hussein and Hajja Nur about the veil register a difference that indexes a key line of fracture between the piety movement (of which the mosque movement is an integral part) and Islamist political organizations. Islamist political figures and publications often criticize mosque participants for promoting a form of religiosity that is devoid of any sociopolitical consequences, especially for the task of restructuring the state. Heba Saad Eddin²² was a prominent member of the Labor Party, along with Adil Hussein, when I conducted my fieldwork. In the PBS documentary from which I quote above, Saad Eddin is asked how she, as a prominent Islamist activist who is veiled herself, views the popular resurgence of the veil in Egypt. She responds skeptically by saying:

In many cases religion is used as a kind of escape where the focus of the individual is to pray and read the Quran. But if we mean by [the Islamic] Revival more involvement in social change, I believe then that the [resurgence of the] veil should be understood as religiosity [*al-tadayyun*], but not Revival. It does not necessarily reflect a bigger participation in social life for the sake of social change toward Islam. (York 1992)

²² Heba Saad Eddin also goes by the name Heba Raouf Ezzat. She has published under both names.

Saad Eddin's position on the veil accords with her larger criticism of the activities that mosques have increasingly undertaken in recent years in Egypt. In one of her weekly columns, "Ṣaut al-Nisā'" ("Women's Voice"), which she used to write for the Labor Party newspaper *al-Sha'b*,²³ Saad Eddin criticizes Egyptian mosques for having become a space primarily for the performance of prayers and Islamic rituals, rather than a platform for the call to "truth, justice, and freedom," that is, a place where people come to learn "how to analyze their social situation and how to struggle to defend their freedom" (Saad Eddin 1997).²⁴ In other words, for Islamists like Saad Eddin and Hussein, religious rituals should be aimed toward the larger goal of creating a certain kind of polity, and the mosque movement fails precisely to make this linkage, keeping matters of worship and piety incarcerated within what for them is a privatized world of worship.

the "objectification" of religion?

A number of scholars of the modern Muslim world have noted that, as a result of widespread literacy and mass media, ordinary Muslims have become increasingly familiar with doctrinal concepts and forms of religious reasoning that had previously been the domain of religious scholars alone (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Skovgaard-Petersen 1997; Zeghal 1996). In making this observation, these scholars echo an argument made most forcefully by Wilfred Cantwell Smith when he proposed that "religion" in the modern period has come to be understood as a self-enclosed system whose proper practice often entails, even on the part of lay practitioners, some form of familiarity with the doctrinal assumptions and theological reasoning involved in religious rites and rituals (1962). This observation has prompted some scholars of the Middle East to conclude that the proliferation of religious knowledge among ordinary Muslims has resulted in an "objectification of the religious imagination," in that practices that were observed somewhat unreflectively in the premodern period are now the focus of conscious deliberation and debate (Eickelman 1992; Eickelman and Piscatori 1996; Salvatore 1998). Contemporary Muslims' reflections upon the religious character of ritual practices are, therefore, seen as evidence of a "modern objectified religiosity."²⁵

²³ Heba Saad Eddin was a regular contributor to *al-Sha'b* until she ended her affiliation with the Labor Party in 2000. She currently writes for the Islamist website www.islamonline.net.

²⁴ The Egyptian government banned *al-Sha'b* in May 2000 for jeopardizing state security interests by publicly criticizing state policies and officials.

²⁵ For Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), objectification involves three processes: first, "discourse and debate about Muslim tradition involves people on a mass scale" (39); second, there is a tendency to see religious belief and practice "as a system to be distinguished from nonreligious ones"

At first glance it would seem that the debate about the veil is an illustration of this objectifying attitude toward religion, especially in the profusion of discourse on a practice that many would have performed unreflectively in the past.²⁶ Indeed, Hajja Nur's remarks seem particularly relevant to the observations made by these scholars: she assigns conscious deliberation a privileged role within the performance of religious duties, especially when she criticizes those who adopt the veil unreflectively (out of habit or custom) for failing to apprehend its true *religious* significance. While I generally agree with these scholars that modern conditions of increased literacy, urban mobility, and mass media have undoubtedly made ordinary Muslims more familiar with doctrinal reasoning than was previously the case, I would like to question the claim that this set of changes is best analyzed in terms of a universal tendency toward the "objectification of the religious imagination." There are several reasons for my disagreement.

To begin with, one must note that any kind of skilled practice requires a certain amount of reflection and deliberation on the specific mental and bodily exercises necessary for its acquisition. Inasmuch as the capacity to perform a task well requires one to be able to stand back and judge the correctness and virtuosity of one's performance, a certain amount of self-reflection is internal to such labor. For example, in order for a child to learn to pray, the parent must make her conscious of her gestures, glances, and thoughts. When the child undertakes the act hurriedly, or forgets to perform it, her parents may present her with various kinds of explanations for why praying is important, what it signifies, and how it is different from the child's other activities. Such a pedagogical process depends upon inducing self-reflection in the child about her movements and thoughts—and their relationship to an object called God—all of which require some form of reflection about the nature of the practice. In other words, conscious deliberation is part and parcel of any pedagogical process, and contemporary discussions about it cannot be understood simply as a shift from the unconscious enactment of tradition to a critical reflection upon tradition, as the aforementioned authors suggest.

(42); and third, a reconfiguration of the "symbolic production of Muslim politics" occurs as a result of the first two processes (43). What is lacking in these authors' writings is an analysis of how the three processes are articulated to produce the effect of objectification.

²⁶ In regard to the veil, the issue seems to be even more complicated given its embattled history during the colonial period. As Leila Ahmed points out in her seminal study of the discourse on the veil in the colonial and early nationalist periods in Egypt, the practice of veiling acquired a new valence for Egyptians as the British made it a key signifier of "Muslim backwardness" and the Egyptian elite mobilized for its banishment (1992, 127–68). One might argue that the fact that the veil was assigned such a key place in the colonial discourse better explains its salience within contemporary Egyptian politics than does a general theory of the objectification of devotional practices.

At the same time, it should also be acknowledged that practices of self-reflection have varied historically, depending upon shifts in notions of the self and pedagogical conditions of mass publicity and literacy. What is needed to understand changes in notions of reflexivity is an inquiry into the creation of historically specific forms of subjectivity that require, and in some sense make possible, particular modes of self-reflection (see pp. 146–48). Furthermore, in order to grasp what is historically unique about modern forms of reflection in relation to Islamic practices, it is necessary to explore both the discursive conditions under which *specific* kinds of deliberations become possible, and the practical task that an act of reflection is meant to accomplish. For example, it is worth recalling that the distinction Hajja Nur draws between customs/habits and religious obligations has been made by theologians at least as far back as the thirteenth century, and is not just a modern invention.²⁷ What has changed between a classical invocation and a contemporary one are the *practical* conditions under which the distinction between customary and religious acts is made, the new modes of reflection under which this distinction is taught and learned, and the relations of social hierarchy and institutional power that attend each historical context. Theological and doctrinal issues that were once the provenance of male religious scholars are now debated by ordinary women in the context of mosque lessons modeled to some extent on protocols of public address and modern education (rather than on the traditional Islamic schools, *kuttāb*),²⁸ where they openly discuss how to render even the most intimate details of their lives in accord with standards of Islamic piety. Similarly, working women and students now bring questions of virtuous practice to bear upon new problems, such as how to conduct oneself modestly on public transportation, and in schools and offices where pious protocols of sex segregation are not observed (for an analysis of these issues, see chapters 3 and 5). We must pay attention to this level of micropractices in order to understand what is unique about the contemporary focus on Islamic arguments and practices, rather than assuming that they are

²⁷ For example, the preeminent theologian al-Nawawi (d. 1248) wrote, “It is intention [*al-niyya*] that distinguishes between custom [*ʿāda*] and worship [*ʿibāda*] or distinguishes between levels of [different acts of] worship. First example, sitting in a mosque for [the purpose of] relaxation constitutes a custom, and when undertaken for *iʿtikāf* [a period of residence in a mosque dedicated to worship marked by minimal interaction with people], it is considered an act of worship, and it is intention that makes it so. And so with bathing: bathing when undertaken for cleanliness is custom, and it is intention that makes it an act of worship” (1990, 18). All translations from Arabic are mine, unless otherwise noted.

²⁸ *Kuttāb* were traditional Islamic schools, usually associated with the mosque, which came to be slowly replaced by the modern system of schools, colleges, and universities from the late nineteenth century onward in Egypt. For a general discussion of the transformations in the disciplinary practices of education in modern Egypt, see T. Mitchell 1991; Starrett 1998.

instances of a universal modern process wherein previously habitual actions become objects of conscious reflection.²⁹

Moreover, one must also learn to distinguish how particular reflections upon a religious practice are geared toward different kinds of ends. In the cases of Adil Hussein, Heba Saad Eddin, and Hajja Nur, even though all three support the adoption of the veil, their remarks are situated within very different visions of a virtuous society. For Adil Hussein, the veil stands in a relation of significance to the expression of one's cultural and nationalist heritage, whereas for women like Fatma and Hajja Nur it is understood to be part of an entire process through which a pious individual is produced. In the eyes of someone like Hajja Nur, one may argue, the meaning of the veil is not exhausted by its significance as a sign (of a civilization, culture, or identity), but encompasses an entire way of being and acting that is learned through the practice of veiling. Similarly, the goals that Heba Saad Eddin wants the practice of veiling to achieve ("truth, justice, and freedom") stand in contrast to those sought by Hajja Nur and Fatma, and even to some extent those of Adil Hussein, with whom she shared a political project. Thus, each of these views needs to be analyzed in terms of the larger goals toward which it is teleologically oriented, the different *practical* contexts in which each type of reflection is located, and the consequences each particular form of understanding has for how one lives practically, both in relationship to oneself and to others.³⁰

The practices of the women's mosque movement have not emerged as a result of an abstract tendency toward objectification, but are provoked by a specific problem, namely, the concern for learning to organize one's daily life according to Islamic standards of virtuous conduct in a world increasingly ordered by a logic of secular rationality that is inimical to the sustenance of these virtues. As I observed earlier, the women I worked with argue that they have had to create new structures of learning—in the form of mosque lessons—to inculcate values that were previously part of a social and familial ethos in Egypt, but which are no longer available in those arenas. The devel-

²⁹ The modern history of Islamic sermons may be used to demonstrate the same point. As Charles Hirschkind notes, the practice of the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*), a key communal event in Muslim societies since the time of Muhammed, only started to receive elaborate doctrinal attention in the last century with the development of a national public sphere and the concomitant rise in the importance of the practice of public speech making (2004). This should not therefore lead us to conclude that *khuṭba* required little or no self-reflection on the part of the preachers and listeners prior to the modern period. Rather, what this draws our attention to is the particular mode of reflection entailed in the delivery and audition of *khuṭba* in the modern period, one uniquely tied to the formation of a mass-mediatized reading public that the advent of modernity heralded in Muslim societies.

³⁰ I will return to many of these points in chapter 4, under a discussion of the different economies of self-formation and bodily discipline.

opment of the women's mosque movement should, therefore, be understood as an organized attempt to address what has come to be conceived as a practical need, one grounded in recent historical and social circumstances. The key concept that has been most useful for the development of institutional practices conducive to virtuous conduct is *da'wa*, a concept around which the women's mosque movement is organized. It is to the analysis of this concept that I now turn.

THE MOSQUE MOVEMENT IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Few Islamic concepts capture the sensibility of modern socioreligious activism and the spirit of doctrinal innovation better than the concept of *da'wa*. *Da'wa* is the umbrella term under which the mosque movement, and the Islamist movement more generally, have organized many of their disparate activities. *Da'wa* literally means "call, invitation, appeal, or summons." It is a Quranic concept associated primarily with God's call to the prophets and to humanity to believe in the "true religion," Islam.³¹ *Da'wa* did not receive much doctrinal attention in classical Sunni Islamic scholarship, and it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that it was given extensive elaboration.³² The term *dā'iya* literally means "one who practices *da'wa*"—it is also the label used for the teachers in the women's mosque movement.³³

While *da'wa* may also be directed toward non-Muslims, the contemporary piety movement in Egypt primarily understands it to be a religious duty that requires all adult members of the Islamic community to urge fellow Muslims to greater piety, and to teach one another correct Islamic conduct. While the practice of *da'wa* commonly takes the form of verbal admonishment, in Egypt

³¹ See Canard 1999.

³² Mendel has shown that during the early years of the Caliphate, *da'wa* was used interchangeably with other terms, such as *shari'a* (Islamic Law), *dīn* (religion), *Sunna* (the tradition of the Prophet and his Companions), and sometimes even *jihād* (which means both "holy war" and "effort directed at a specified goal") (Mendel 1995, 289). In the Shi'i tradition of Islam, however, the term *da'wa* has a different history: it refers to a widespread Ismaili movement in the tenth century that later resulted in the establishment of the Fatimid dynasty in North Africa. See Kaabi 1972; Walker 1993. Since Egypt is primarily a Sunni country, my references are limited to the Sunni interpretation of *da'wa*.

³³ Even though Arabic makes a distinction between male and female forms of the active participle, the word used in Egyptian colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic for someone who conducts *da'wa* does not make this distinction: someone undertaking *da'wa*—whether a man or a woman—is referred to as *dā'iya*, the feminine form. The distinction is made in the plural: male practitioners of *da'wa* are called *du'āt*, and women *dā'iyyāt*. Gender distinction in the nominative singular is gradually emerging, however, as more women *dā'iyyāt* become active, and the Islamic press increasingly uses the term *dā'i* to refer to men.

today it encompasses a range of practical activities that were once considered outside the proper domain of the classical meaning of the term. These activities include establishing neighborhood mosques, social welfare organizations, Islamic educational institutions, and printing presses, as well as urging fellow Muslims toward greater religious responsibility, either through preaching or personal conversation. While many of these institutionalized practices have historical precedents, they have, in the last fifty years, increasingly come to be organized under the rubric of *da'wa*.³⁴ In many ways the figure of the *dā'iya* exemplifies the ethos of the contemporary Islamic Revival, and people now often ascribe to this figure the same degree of authority previously reserved for religious scholars (Gaffney 1991; Haddad, Voll, and Esposito, 1991; Zeghal 1996).

Despite the fact that *da'wa* has become a reigning organizational term for a range of activities, few historical works explore its semantic and institutional development.³⁵ This lacuna is all the more striking given the attention paid to other terms used by the Islamist movement, such as *al-jihād* or *al-daula*.³⁶ Where we do find some discussion of the notion of *da'wa* is in relation to a sister concept, one whose semantic determination is tightly intertwined with that of *da'wa*. This is the principle of *amr bil ma'rūf wal-nahī 'an al-munkar* ("to enjoin others in the doing of good or right, and the forbidding of evil or wrong"), around which many of the *da'wa* activities, especially those of religious exhortation and preaching, have been elaborated.³⁷ In fact, one could

³⁴ The Islamic Revival has been characterized by a proliferation of these activities. For example, there has been at least a 330 percent increase in the number of mosques built overall in Egypt between 1975 and 1995 (al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies 1996; Zeghal 1996). Similarly, the number of Islamic nongovernmental organizations grew by 17 percent in the 1960s, 31 percent in the 1970s, and 33 percent in the 1980s (al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies 1996, 236).

³⁵ For an exception to this rule, see the articles by Roest Crollius 1978; Hirschkind 2001a; Mendel 1995. While Roest Crollius and Mendel provide a historical background for the development of the Sunni concept of *da'wa* in the Middle East, Hirschkind analyzes the effects of the contemporary practice of *da'wa* on popular modes of sociability and public debate in Egypt. Also see the important work of Barbara Metcalf (1993, 1994, 1998) on the South Asian Tablighi Jamā'at, which is also organized around the concept of *da'wa*, but more focused on the question of spiritual renewal than social welfare, which seems to be the hallmark of the Egyptian *da'wa* movement.

³⁶ On the concept of *al-jihād*, see Kepel 2002; Peters 1996. For discussions of the concept of *al-daula*, see T. Asad 1980; Ayalon 1987; Zubaida 1993.

³⁷ The key words involved in this principle are *ma'rūf* and *munkar*: the former means "what is known and accepted according to acknowledged norms," whereas the latter means "what is disavowed or rejected" and therefore unacceptable. Notably, the former is considered to be consubstantial with what is mandated by God and the latter with iniquity. For the historical roots of the terms *ma'rūf* and *munkar*, both in pre-Islamic Jahili poetry and the Quran, see Izutsu 1966, 213–17.

argue that the modern doctrinal justification for *da'wa* has been established primarily through the considerable moral scholarship conducted on the principle of *amr bil ma'rūf*. Since the principle of *amr bil ma'rūf* occurs in a number of places in the Quran that are concerned with the maintenance of public morality, Muslim reformers have paid close attention to its treatment within classical exegetical writings, especially in their attempts to rectify what they regard to be erroneous accretions to Islamic practices.³⁸

Michael Cook, in his exhaustive survey of the Islamic scholarship on *amr bil ma'rūf*, notes that the interpretation of this principle has historically varied from school to school and scholar to scholar (Cook 2000). Cook's book is a remarkable synthesis of the diversity of opinions that have existed on the subject since early Islam. While I will draw upon his work, my concern here is more limited. I want to highlight those features of *amr bil ma'rūf* that undergird the *da'wa* practices of the mosque movement, with particular attention to the shifts in the meaning of both these concepts that the modern Islamist movement has secured over the last century. My goal is to provide a brief genealogy of the figure of the *dā'iya*, as she/he has come to lead the Islamic Revival, by drawing upon some of the contemporary popular uses of the term *da'wa*—primarily within the mosque movement but also generally within the piety movement—and the particular interpretation this term has been given in the Egyptian Islamist literature.³⁹

In contemporary Egypt, the activities denoted by the principle of *amr bil ma'rūf* can vary substantially, ranging from delivering a sermon or a mosque lesson to expressing a concern for the maintenance of pious comportment (for example, when a woman in a mosque, or on a bus, tells another woman that she should veil or pray) to addressing more general issues of moral and social conduct (as when someone tells a mother not to neglect her child while absorbed in a conversation with a friend). While many of these practices also fall under the rubric of *da'wa*, there are activities—such as helping to build a mosque, or establishing an Islamic printing press—that are, strictly speaking, referred to through the concept of *da'wa* more often than through the principle of *amr bil ma'rūf*. Given the overlapping contexts in which the two notions are used, I would summarize their interrelationship as manifesting itself

³⁸ The principle of *amr bil ma'rūf wal-nahī 'an al-munkar* occurs in a number of places in the Quran. The most cited verses include verses 104 and 110 in *Sūrat al-Imran*, and verse 71 in *Sūrat al-Tauba*. The verse in *Sūrat al-Tauba* addresses women and men equally, and women *dā'iyyāt* frequently quote it to justify their involvement in the field of *da'wa*. This verse reads: "And [as-for] the believers, both men and women—they are close unto one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer. . . ." All translations of Quranic verses are from M. Asad 1980.

³⁹ See, for example, Amin n.d.; al-Qaradawi 1991, 1993; Sultan 1996. On women's *da'wa*, see al-Wa'i 1993.

in three different ways. Sometimes the terms are used synonymously, as in the case of someone offering verbal advice or admonishment. At other times, *da'wa* is commonly understood as a kind of vocation (like that of a preacher, or a mosque teacher), while *amr bil ma'ruf* is regarded as a duty that a Muslim undertakes in the context of normal life. Finally, while both can be understood as involving enjoinders to piety, the notion of enjoining as it is used in *amr bil ma'ruf* extends beyond acts of encouragement to the use of force in prohibiting undesirable conduct (as suggested by the second part of the injunction, "the forbidding of evil and wrong").⁴⁰ Some have understood this to mean that the use of violence is justified in order to bring about moral good, as was the case when members of the militant group *Takfir wa Hijra* killed President Anwar Sadat in 1981 for his alleged immoral conduct as a Muslim ruler.⁴¹ Thus, we find that *amr bil ma'ruf* is more likely to be used to legitimate the use of physical force than is *da'wa*; the latter remains primarily an instrument of moral exhortation and reform.

A contentious issue involved in the interpretation of *amr bil ma'ruf* turns on who is qualified to act as an agent of moral reform on the basis of this moral principle, especially in light of the tutelary role the state assigns to itself in relation to society and its exclusive claim on the use of violent force. Increasingly, as Islamic militants have used the principle of *amr bil ma'ruf* to justify their actions, the Egyptian state has mobilized its own network of religious scholars to argue, first, that it is the state that is primarily responsible for its correct implementation, and second, that it is best to forego this religious duty if it results in social discord or *chaos*.⁴² The state has, in other words, sought to establish itself as the sole and legitimate undertaker of *amr bil ma'ruf*. The state's claim is widely rejected not only by the militants, but also by a number of those Muslim reformers who are strongly opposed to the use of violence as

⁴⁰ The particular logic of this interpretation draws upon a famous *hadith* that says, "Whoever among you sees a *munkar* must correct it by the hand, and if not able to, then by the tongue, and if unable to do [even] that, then by the heart, and this is the weakest [manifestation] of faith."

⁴¹ A popular *hadith* cited in support of the use of militant force against immoral rulers is: "The most excellent type of *jihad* [striving in the way of Allah] is speaking a true word in the presence of a tyrant ruler" (al-Nawawi n.d., 200). For an example of the use of this *hadith* to urge militant action, see the pamphlet written by the famous Egyptian preacher Shaikh Umar Abd al-Rahman (now jailed in the United States for his alleged role in the 1991 bombing of the World Trade Center) (al-Rahman 1989). Those who oppose this interpretation use an alternative *hadith* according to which Muhammed reportedly said that as long as rulers are effective in establishing the practice of worship or *salat* (one of the minimal conditions by which one qualifies as a Muslim) in the Muslim community (*umma*), people should not rebel against those rulers (al-Nawawi n.d., 196).

⁴² See, for example, the widely circulated booklet put out by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Daif 1995) in response to commentaries written by militant Islamists, such as Shaikh Umar Abd al-Rahman.

a means of bringing about moral transformation (Cook 2000, 526–28). These reformers include key intellectual figures of the contemporary Islamic Revival, such as Muhammed Umara (1989), Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1981), and Fahmi Huweidi (1993).⁴³

historical imbrications

According to Roest Crollius, the first notable argument in the modern period that links da'wa to amr bil ma'rūf probably occurs in the work of Rahid Rida (1865–1930), in his commentary on the Quranic verses pertaining to amr bil ma'rūf (Roest Crollius 1978).⁴⁴ This commentary is considered to be the combined work of Rida and his mentor Muhammed Abduh (1849–1905), both of whom participated in founding the Salafi movement widely regarded as the intellectual forebear of the contemporary Islamist movement.⁴⁵ Two elements of Rida's discussion are noteworthy for introducing a new perspective on classical discussions of da'wa and amr bil ma'rūf wal-nahi 'an al-munkar. The first is the emphasis he places on modern forms of knowledge and organizational practice—an emphasis that was absent in the work of earlier commentators (also see Cook 2000, 510).⁴⁶ Rida insists that, in addition to traditional knowledges, a familiarity with subjects such as history, sociology, psychology, and political science is necessary for the modern undertaking of da'wa—even though these subjects did not exist in early Islamic history (Rida 1970, 39–45). The second noteworthy aspect of Rida's interpretation is his unequivocal

⁴³ The use of violence as a legitimate means to amr bil ma'rūf was also rejected by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), two key intellectual figures of the Islamist movement who are revered by the militants as well as the reformers. Both Ibn Taymiyya and al-Banna advocated that the practice of amr bil ma'rūf required civility (*riḥq*) and gentle admonition (*al-mau'izah al-ḥasana*) rather than militant force (Cook 2000, 153, 523).

⁴⁴ Rashid Rida compiled the lectures delivered by the then rector of al-Azhar, Muhammed Abduh, between 1899 and 1905, added his own commentary to the lectures, and published them in the journal *al-Manār*, which he edited from 1889 until his death (Rida 1970).

⁴⁵ The Salafi movement emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in the context of European intellectual and political dominance in the Muslim world. The Salafis articulated a strong critique both of the secularizing trend among Muslim elites, and what they perceived to be the stagnation of thought among Muslim jurists and the 'ulamā' (religious scholars). The Salafi leadership argued for an interpretation of the founding sources of the tradition, the Quran and the Sunna, in accordance with principles of scientific rationality, liberal governance, and natural law (see Hourani 1983; Kerr 1966). The term *Salafi* derives from the term *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*, which refers to the virtuous forefathers who lived at the time of the Prophet and the early Caliphs.

⁴⁶ Rida was successful in establishing a short-lived school for da'wa (1912–1914) for the training of Muslim missionaries, which attracted a considerable number of students from all over the Muslim world (Roest Crollius 1978, 278).

assertion that *da'wa* activity is the obligation of every individual, and as such constitutes what is called *farḍ al-'ain* in Islam (Rida 1970, 35).⁴⁷ Muslim jurists have made a distinction between individual obligations (*farḍ al-'ain*) and those duties that are incumbent upon the community as a whole, but which, when fulfilled by some members of the community, then no longer oblige others (*farḍ al-kifāya*). While scholars have differed historically on whether *amr bil ma'rūf* falls under the former or the latter category, the common view has been that *amr bil ma'rūf* is a collective duty best undertaken by qualified religious scholars or Muslim leaders (Cook 2000, 17–18).⁴⁸ By departing from this older, more established position, Rida makes the conditions under which *da'wa* and *amr bil ma'rūf* can be enacted fairly open: such an interpretation, as we shall see, has opened the space for women to speak in the name of *da'wa*, as in the women's mosque movement I studied.

The two innovations that mark Rida's interpretation of *da'wa*—its dependence on modern knowledge and organizational frameworks, and its status as an individual obligation—were crystallized further by the work of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) under the leadership of its founder Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949).⁴⁹ Al-Banna established the Brotherhood in 1928. This organization has since grown into one of the key reform-oriented Islamist political groups of the twentieth century, and its activities have been at the forefront of *da'wa*.⁵⁰ Al-Banna's elaboration of *da'wa* was a key part of his larger program aimed at creating institutional structures and sensibilities capable of contesting Western cultural and political hegemony. Unlike Rida,

⁴⁷ At one point, for example, Rida argues, "Calling to excellence and the doing of good and the forbidding of evil [*al-da'wa 'ila al-khair wa amr bil ma'rūf wal-nahī 'an al-munkar*] is a definitive duty [*farḍ ḥamī*] incumbent upon every Muslim" (Rida 1970, 35).

⁴⁸ For a number of medieval theologians who are important to Salafī thought—such as Zamaḥrashi, A. H. al-Ghazali, al-Razi, and Ibn Taymiyya—*amr bil ma'rūf* was a societal obligation (*farḍ al-kifāya*). Well aware of the threat such a calling entailed to social order, they went to great lengths to spell out a number of conditions that had to be met in order to perform this obligation correctly (see Cook 2000, 131–32, 153–55, 364–65; Roest Crolius 1978, 267–71). Even though Rida refers to A. H. al-Ghazali's work extensively in his commentary, he departs from A. H. al-Ghazali in treating the obligation as incumbent on every Muslim (*farḍ al-'ain*).

⁴⁹ Hasan al-Banna was a product of the Salafī school of thought: he inherited the editorship of Rashid Rida's journal *al-Manār* upon Rida's death and edited it until 1940 (Skovgaard-Petersen 1997, 156).

⁵⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood was a part of the anticolonial struggle against the British, and had a relationship of mutual support with the Free Officers responsible for the 1952 coup. But soon after the 1952 revolution, sharp differences developed between the Brothers and President Gamal Abdul Nasser, who led the coup. Nasser banned the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954 and jailed the majority of its members. Not until Anwar Sadat came into power in 1971 was the Brotherhood allowed to function again, although officially it remains outlawed. For the early history of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928–1954), see R. Mitchell 1993.

whose primary focus was on missionary activity among non-Muslims, al-Banna directed his organizational efforts at the education and reform of fellow Muslims who, in his opinion, were becoming increasingly secularized and westernized under an indigenous leadership that had abandoned Islam in favor of Western values and lifestyles.⁵¹ Various aspects of al-Banna's critique continue to be echoed by participants in the mosque movement, and their pedagogical activities have given a new life to his reconstructive project.

In extending the classical meaning of *da'wa*, al-Banna incorporated many of the concepts and organizational strategies integral to the practice of modern politics and governance. For example, in his writings and public speeches he addressed fellow Muslims as citizens whose collective project was to sustain the Egyptian nation as an integral part of the *umma* (the Muslim community).⁵² Similarly, the Muslim Brothers made the public spaces of urban life (cafés, clubs, and public squares) a key site of their *da'wa* activity, and used aural and print media extensively to propagate their message.⁵³ They engaged in trade union activities and established professional syndicates, which to this day form the backbone of the Muslim Brotherhood's popular activism. The Brothers successfully transformed mosques from spaces reserved for worship to, what al-Banna described as "schools [for] the commoners, the popular universities and the colleges that lend educational services to the young and old alike" (al-Banna, quoted in Abu Rabi' 1996, 78)—a legacy that continues to thrive in the role mosques are playing in the current Islamic Revival.

The figure of the *dā'iya* emerged from the confluence of two trends put into motion by reformers like al-Banna and the activities of the Muslim Brother-

⁵¹ Hasan al-Banna held the Western-style education system (which had been gradually adopted since the late nineteenth century in Egypt) largely responsible for having turned indigenous elites into efficient vehicles for the propagation of Western and secular values. In pointing to the effects of this system of education, al-Banna wrote: "They [Western powers] founded schools and scientific institutes in the very heart of the Islamic domain, which cast doubt and heresy into the souls of its sons and taught them to demean themselves, disparage their religion and their fatherland, divest themselves of their traditions and beliefs, and to regard as sacred anything Western, in the belief that only that which had a European source could serve as a model to be emulated in this life" (al-Banna 1978, 28).

⁵² For example, see al-Banna's open letter to King Faruq I of Egypt and a number of leaders of the Muslim world (al-Banna 1978, 103–132).

⁵³ Al-Banna wrote, "The methods of *da'wa* today are not those of yesterday. The *da'wa* of yesterday consisted of a verbal message given out in a speech or at a meeting, or one written in a tract or a letter. Today, it consists of publications, magazines, newspapers, articles, ordinary films, and radio broadcasting. All these have made it easy to influence the minds of all mankind, women as well as men, in their homes, places of business, factories and fields" (al-Banna 1978, 46). Note that even though the translator of al-Banna's work, Charles Wendell, translates *da'wa* as "propaganda," here I have retained the original word, which captures the wider sense in which the term is used.

hood. On the one hand, the interpretation of *da'wa/amr bil ma'rūf* as a religious duty that is incumbent upon every virtuous Muslim woman and man (*farḍ al-'ain*) further strengthened the general propensity toward the individualization of moral responsibility so characteristic of modern Islam (al-Banna 1978, 80). The other trend that gained further ascendancy through al-Banna and his organizational activities was a trenchant critique launched against traditional religious education, in particular against religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) and their institutions for making religion into a specialized field of knowledge that served only the interests of the ruling elite.⁵⁴ This critique of the *'ulamā'* as a professional class only intensified after independence from colonial rule when the state took over many institutions of religious learning and training, harnessing their energies for its own nationalist project (see Gaffney 1991; Skovgaard-Petersen 1997; Zeghal 1999).⁵⁵ It was in the context of a growing perception that scholars and preachers trained within the government-administered religious institutions were no more than state functionaries and bureaucrats that there arose the figure of the self-trained preacher/*dā'iya*, who took on *da'wa* as a vocation rather than as a form of employment. Unencumbered by the patronage of the state, the *dā'iya* could claim to act and speak in the name of pious commitment and not as a condition of his bureaucratic responsibility to the modernizing state. Significantly, it is not an accident that it is secular universities—not the state-run Islamic University of al-Azhar where the *'ulamā'* are usually trained—that have produced the most prominent *dā'iya't* (both male and female) of the last century.⁵⁶

WOMEN AND DA'WA

It should come as no surprise that women have entered the field of religious pedagogy under the rubric of *da'wa*, especially in light of how the practice has

⁵⁴ This critique had already been initiated by the Salafi thinkers, but gained a new valence through the work of the Muslim Brotherhood (Skovgaard-Petersen 1997, 155).

⁵⁵ In 1961 Nasser literally made traditional religious institutions, such as the division of Religious Endowments and the Islamic University of al-Azhar, parts of the state bureaucracy. Since then, the Egyptian government has also established a variety of governing bodies to oversee mosque activities, bringing them under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Similarly, the terminology of *da'wa* became an integral part of the official enterprise of the state with the establishment in 1961 of the Department of *Da'wa* and Islamic Culture (*Qism al-Da'wa wal-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya*), which continues to train preachers for appointment to state-administered mosques.

⁵⁶ For example, both al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb (the ideologue of the militant wing of the Islamist movement) were graduates of the Department of *Dār al-'Ulūm* (Faculty of Religious Sciences) at Cairo University—a department that has produced a number of key activists of the Islamist movement.

crystallized in the modern period. There are both theological and sociological bases for women's entrance into this field. Despite scant historical attention paid in the robust literature on *amr bil ma'rūf* to the role of women (Cook 2000, 286), modern interpretations of *da'wa* often draw upon those verses of the Quran that enjoin women and men equally to undertake this duty.⁵⁷ Many religious scholars (male and female) associated with the Islamic Revival maintain that the requirements for women's performance of *da'wa* are similar to those incumbent upon men: the *dā'iya* must practice what she preaches, and her exhortations must be in accord with the Quran and the Sunna, undertaken with wisdom and sincerity of the heart (*hikma wa ḥasana*), and performed for the purpose of pleasing God rather than for personal gain or popularity (Z. al-Ghazali 1994a, 1996a; *al-Liwā' al-Islāmi* 1995; al-Qaradawi 1992; al-Wa'i 1993).⁵⁸ Since the prevalent interpretation of *da'wa* holds that all those who are familiar with, and observant of, Islamic rules of conduct are qualified to engage in this activity, the ability to practice *da'wa* has come to depend not so much on doctrinal expertise as on one's moral uprightness and practical knowledge of the tradition—this is particularly significant for women who have had little formal training in doctrinal issues.

Even though women's participation in the field of *da'wa* has grown in recent years, it is important to realize that this participation is structured by certain limits. Foremost among these is the condition that women, while encouraged to carry out *da'wa* among other women, are not allowed to do so among men. This is consistent with prohibitions forbidding women to deliver the Friday sermon or to guide men in the performance of collective prayer. Hence the terms *khaṭīb* (one who delivers a sermon) and *imam* (one who leads the prayers) are reserved for men. Women preachers are markedly called *dā'iyyāt* or *wā'iḏāt* (nominative for *wā'iz*, meaning "to preach, admonish, or give good advice"). The reasoning behind these restrictions is twofold. First is the general belief that since the Quran makes men the guardians of women, the latter should not serve in significant positions of leadership over men.⁵⁹ Second is the prevailing notion that a woman's voice can nullify an act of worship because it is capable of provoking sexual feelings in men—though it must be

⁵⁷ The most widely cited Quranic verses on this topic are verses 71 and 35 from *Sūrat al-Tauba* and *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, respectively. Many male leaders of the Islamic Revival support the participation of women in *da'wa*. See, for example, M. al-Ghazali 1996; al-Qaradawi 1981; Abu Shuqqah 1995, vol. 1.

⁵⁸ In contrast, Cook reports that only two well-known medieval Sunni jurists—Ibn Hazam (d. 1064) and A. H. al-Ghazali (d. 1111)—specifically permitted women to undertake *amr bil ma'rūf* (Cook 2000, 485).

⁵⁹ The pertinent Quranic verse here is from *Sūrat al-Nisā'*: "Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter" (verse 35).

noted that this view is not shared across all Muslim societies, and in places like Indonesia some of the most popular and respected Quranic reciters are women (see Hirschkind 2003).⁶⁰ Women *dā'iyāt* in Egypt today do not challenge these conditions of participation. Yet despite their adherence to these limits, as we shall see later, the *dā'iyāt* continue to evoke skepticism, if not outright condemnation, from the religious establishment.

Women's entry into the field of *da'wa* is not solely the result of modern doctrinal innovations; it has also been facilitated by conditions of higher literacy and increased social mobility afforded to women in postcolonial Egypt. Since the 1950s, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women being educated at the secondary and higher levels, and women have entered the paid work force in large numbers. The years between 1952 and 1970 witnessed a fifteenfold increase in women's enrollment in universities, and this trend has continued into the 1990s (Nelson 1984).⁶¹ Since 1961, when the University of al-Azhar began admitting female students, women have been able to specialize in religious subjects (such as Islamic jurisprudence, exegesis of the Quran and the Sunna, and so on), although there is still no College of *Da'wa* for women at the University of al-Azhar as there is for men. All of these developments have gradually opened doors for urban women to pursue religious study, and have endowed them with a sense of entitlement that they should be able to claim the Islamic tradition in a manner parallel (though not necessarily equal) to men. In light of this, it is not surprising that a large percentage of the participants in the mosque movement are either students or working women employed in a range of fields, including education, medicine, government bureaucracy, manufacturing, private enterprise, and so on.

The development of women's *da'wa*, therefore, is part of a shared history of transformations that have occurred in secular and religious institutions in the modern period. As we have seen, it is almost impossible to track changes in the concepts of *da'wa* and *amr bil ma'rūf* that are purely "religious" in scope. There is perhaps no better way to illustrate the intertwined role that secular and religious institutions have played in the articulation of women's *da'wa*

⁶⁰ Despite the doctrinally contested nature of this position, many male religious figures who support women's *da'wa* also, paradoxically, espouse this position. These figures include not only prominent intellectual Islamist figures (such as Abu Shuqqah, Muhammed al-Ghazali, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi), but also the leaders of the various nonprofit religious organizations that have played a pioneering role in the establishment of *da'wa* training institutes for women in Egypt. See, for example, the statement made by the president of the nonprofit organization al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya, which currently oversees the largest number of women's *da'wa* institutes in Cairo (*al-Nūr* 1996).

⁶¹ The UNESCO Statistical Yearbook reports that Egyptian women made up 36 percent of the total number of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in 1996, including vocational and technical schools. This figure does not include enrollment at the University of al-Azhar and at private institutions of higher learning.

than through a brief examination of the life of Zaynab al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali is believed to have been the first prominent female *dā'iya* in Egypt, and her trajectory as a *dā'iya* exemplifies key developments in the history of women's *da'wa* since the 1940s. Ironically, her story is one that remains largely undocumented and, it would be fair to say, even unknown among the participants of the women's mosque movement.⁶²

the secular/religious trajectory of the female dā'iya

Zaynab al-Ghazali (b. 1917) is credited with establishing a women's organization called the Society of Muslim Ladies (*Jamā'at al-Sayyidāt al-Muslimāt*) in the late 1930s, which was initially dedicated to providing charitable services to poor women and children. The Society later expanded its role to training women in the art of preaching so that they could instruct women in religious issues either in their homes or at mosques. During the first few years of the Society's operation, the institute (known as the "Center for Preaching and Advice") was affiliated with the University of al-Azhar, and many well-known *'ulamā'* reportedly came to lecture on subjects such as exegesis of the Quran and the *ḥadīth*, the basic rules of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and religious exhortation (al-Hashimi 1989, 205).⁶³ Women received six months of training and were then appointed to state-run mosques to provide religious lessons to other women. They were, at this point, referred to as *wā'iẓāt* rather than *dā'iyyāt*.⁶⁴ Even after the institute's affiliation with al-Azhar ended (around 1938–39), al-Ghazali's organization continued to train women in the art of religious exhortation well into the late 1950s.

According to her biographers, al-Ghazali had no formal training in religious issues and never received an education beyond secondary school (al-

⁶² While there are a few biographies of Zaynab al-Ghazali in Arabic (al-Arabi 1996; al-Hashimi 1989, 1990), and a couple of short entries on her life in English (Badran 1995; Hoffman 1985), to my knowledge there is no extensive history in English, Arabic, or French of the work conducted by al-Ghazali's organization, the Society of Muslim Ladies. I have been able to piece together a rough account of the work conducted under the auspices of this organization from a variety of sources, including al-Ghazali's own writings, Arabic and English commentaries on her published work, and personal interviews with Zaynab al-Ghazali and her secretary conducted over a period of several months in 1996. I have also drawn upon a series of tape-recorded interviews with al-Ghazali conducted in 1992 by a member of the Brotherhood that were part of her private collection, but which to my knowledge have not been disseminated or published to date.

⁶³ Significantly, al-Ghazali's institute had almost the same name as the state-run institute of preaching at al-Azhar University that was reserved for men. The former was called *Ma'had al-Wa'ẓ wal-Irshād*, and the latter *Qism al-Wa'ẓ wal-Irshād*.

⁶⁴ Notably, al-Ghazali did not use the term *da'wa* to describe her work at the time, and it was only when she became active in the Muslim Brotherhood that she assumed the title *dā'iya*.

Arabi 1996, 17–62; al-Hashimi 1990, 29–30). She, like the male *du'āt*⁶⁵ of her time, was self trained in issues of religious doctrine and exhortation. Al-Ghazali had already become a powerful orator and public figure when Hasan al-Banna asked her to combine her efforts with those of the Muslim Brothers. Her participation would have been a boon to the Brothers since they did not have a significant history of public involvement with women's issues. Even though al-Ghazali never formally merged her organization with the Brotherhood, the Society of Muslim Ladies came to be perceived as part of the Islamic opposition to the government because of al-Ghazali's close ties with the Brotherhood. In the later years of the Society's association with the Brotherhood, al-Ghazali's organization published a journal entitled *al-Sayyidāt al-Muslimāt* (1954–56); a quick survey of this publication reveals that though the Society continued to train women in preaching, its public profile had become enmeshed in the political struggles Egypt was undergoing at the time.⁶⁶ The fate of the Society and the Muslim Brothers became further intertwined when al-Ghazali became one of the main coordinators of the Brotherhood after most of its leadership was jailed under President Gamal Abdul Nasser (Kepele 1986; Z. al-Ghazali 1995). In 1965 Nasser dissolved the Society of Muslim Ladies, and Zaynab al-Ghazali was imprisoned for six years.⁶⁷ After her release from prison, al-Ghazali was prohibited from speaking publicly, but she continued to hold religious lessons in private homes. She also wrote on the topic of women's *da'wa* and maintained a regular correspondence with young Muslim women and men from all over the Arab world who asked her for advice.⁶⁸

Al-Ghazali's genealogy as a *dā'iya*⁶⁹ was a product of the sociopolitical ethos of her times and the new possibilities that were opening up for women at the turn of the twentieth century. Al-Ghazali reached adulthood when there had already been almost three decades of women's activism in Egypt, much, but not all, of which was linked to the emergent nationalist movement of that time.⁶⁹ According to historian Beth Baron, a vigorous women's press had

⁶⁵ The term *du'āt* refers to men who undertake *da'wa*; see note 33 above.

⁶⁶ It remains unclear what the level of political involvement was for the women enlisted in the preaching institute of the Society. In speaking to al-Ghazali and her secretary, I got the impression that there was a small core of women, along with al-Ghazali, who were politically active, but that most of the women at the institute remained uninvolved.

⁶⁷ For an account of her years in prison, see Z. al-Ghazali 1995.

⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali remains one of the few contemporary women to have published commentaries on the Quran and the *ḥadīth*; see Z. al-Ghazali 1994a, 1994b, 1996a. For a compilation of her correspondence with young men and women, see Z. al-Ghazali 1996b, 1996c.

⁶⁹ Given the manner in which the "woman question" had become intertwined with the very definition and character of anticolonial politics, it is not surprising that this renaissance in women's activities coincided with the burgeoning of the nationalist movement in Egypt (Ahmed 1992; Haddad 1984). Yet, as historians of Egypt have been careful to point out, women's groups,

emerged during the period from 1892 to 1920, with nearly thirty journals "by, for, and about women" (*al-majallāt al-nisā'iyya*) representing a range of political positions (Baron 1994, 1). This was accompanied by an efflorescence of women's charitable associations, which served as the springboard for women's entry into public and political life, and which continued well into the 1940s.⁷⁰ At the same time, a broad urban culture emerged of women delivering speeches to other women, speeches that were published in the organizations' journals and by the emergent nationalist press (Baron 1994, 181–82).⁷¹ Al-Ghazali's activism, therefore, occurred at the height of the early nationalist period in Egypt wherein the status of women and their visibility in public life was made a key signifier of the new nation, an emphasis that later declined once independence from colonial rule had been achieved.

Zaynab al-Ghazali's first exposure to women's activism came at the age of sixteen when she joined the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), an affiliation that she reportedly later terminated because of the EFU's "secular orientation" (al-Arabi 1996; al-Hashimi 1990, 33–34).⁷² While a few women's organizations oriented around an Islamic framework had been established earlier in the century—a group called *Tarqiyyat al-Mar'a* (Society for Women's Progress) had been created as early as 1908 to promote the enforcement of the *sharī'a* (Baron 1994, 176–77)—most of the early associations formed by women tended to privilege a secular-nationalist discourse. That said, it should be noted that even secular organizations, such as the EFU, never renounced religion or understood secularism to imply atheism. As Margot Badran has pointed out, the EFU and other feminists "shied away from a secularism which severed all links with religion" (Badran 1991, 210–11).

Despite the shared propensity of the Society of Muslim Ladies and organizations like the EFU to embrace some form of religiosity, there were important differences between them. To begin with, in contrast to the EFU, the Society was open only to Muslim women (and not, therefore, to Egypt's Christian and Jewish population). Secondly, the EFU's basic platform and the platforms of

from the late nineteenth century onward, were not simply mouthpieces for nationalist political parties but they in fact continued to adopt positions that opposed those of the male leadership of many of the groups with which they worked (Badran 1995; Baron 1994).

⁷⁰ See Salim 1984, 52–65; Badran 1995, 113–23; Baron 1994, 168–75.

⁷¹ While many of the women engaged in these activities belonged to the elite strata of Egyptian society, some, like al-Ghazali, were from the middle or upper-middle class. See Baron's interesting discussion of the class composition of the Egyptian women's movement from 1892 to 1920 (1994, 116–21).

⁷² Even though al-Ghazali discontinued her participation in the EFU, she claims she never opposed the EFU's activities and that there continued to be sporadic cooperation between the Society of Muslim Ladies and the EFU (Badran 1991).

other comparatively smaller organizations in the 1940s (such as the National Feminist Party and the Daughter of the Nile Union) highlighted liberal values and principles, such as equality between men and women, individual rights, and so on—issues that al-Ghazali treats with considerable ambivalence in her speeches and writing. Al-Ghazali has often portrayed the “woman question” (*qaḍīyyat al-mar’a*) as a “Western invention,” and has continued to regard Muslim concern with this question as a reflection of their “colonized mentality” (al-Hashimi 1990, 231).⁷³ The principle of gender equality, while implicit in some of al-Ghazali’s writings, never finds the prominent place it is accorded within the literature of other women’s organizations and feminist figures of her time.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to disregard the extent to which al-Ghazali’s Islamic activism was shaped by the liberal discourse of early nationalism, with its emphasis on women’s public visibility. This influence is evident in al-Ghazali’s position that Muslim women should play an active role in public, intellectual, and political life (such as running for public office or holding the position of a judge), with the important caveat that these responsibilities should not interfere with what she considers to be women’s divinely ordained obligations to their immediate kin (al-Hashimi 1990).⁷⁴ In espousing this position, al-Ghazali departs from the views of the male religious establishment of her time. Similarly, the language of “women’s rights” finds an important, if attenuated, place in al-Ghazali’s speeches and writings and is often invoked to emphasize that Muslim women and men are equally called upon to serve God. Al-Ghazali’s modernist religious activism illustrates how the histories of Islamism and secular liberalism are intimately connected, a connection that is, nonetheless, saturated with tensions and ambivalences.

al-ghazali and her legacy

Significant aspects of al-Ghazali’s genealogy as a *dā’iya* continue to characterize contemporary women’s *da’wa* activity in the mosque movement.⁷⁵ Doctrinal similarities exist between al-Ghazali and the *dā’iyāt* of today, particularly

⁷³ Relatedly, al-Ghazali has long insisted that Islam does grant Muslim women all the rights that feminists are concerned with, and that what is missing is their proper implementation (al-Hashimi 1990). Note al-Ghazali’s use of the term “women’s rights” even as she condemns its invocation by feminists.

⁷⁴ Al-Ghazali is, however, against the idea that a woman should be allowed to hold the position of president or prime minister of a Muslim nation (al-Hashimi 1990, 242–56).

⁷⁵ Despite the significant continuity between the work of the Society of Muslim Ladies and the women’s *da’wa* movement, I was surprised that none of the women I worked with ever invoked either al-Ghazali or her organization in the context of mosque lessons or private conversations. When I mentioned al-Ghazali’s work, many of the *dā’iyāt* acknowledged her legacy but remained

in their adherence to those positions that represent the majority consensus among Muslim jurists. For example, like al-Ghazali, most of the *dā'iyyāt* I worked with do not dispute the prohibition on women's delivery of the Friday sermon, nor do they advocate for women to serve as imams for women (let alone men) in mosques. Similarly, like al-Ghazali, the *dā'iyyāt* seldom employ the rhetoric of women's equality: while they do invoke the language of rights to justify their access to sacred knowledge, the female bearer of these rights is not regarded as being on equal footing with her male counterpart. (See my discussion of these issues in chapter 3.)

Important continuities also exist in the organizational history of women's *da'wa* between al-Ghazali's time and the present. Just as the University of al-Azhar and the Muslim Brotherhood were avenues for al-Ghazali's activism but never directly supported the establishment of the Society of Muslim Ladies, neither have these organizations been instrumental in organizing or promoting the contemporary women's mosque movement.⁷⁶ Despite the fact that the University of al-Azhar opened its doors to women in the study of religious sciences in the 1960s, none of the contemporary *dā'iyyāt* have come to the practice via this institutional trajectory, and only a very few of the mosque groups are affiliated with the Muslim Brothers. Moreover, the contemporary *dā'iyyāt* encounter the same neglect and skepticism from their male counterparts in regard to their considerable achievements as al-Ghazali did two generations prior. Just as the story of al-Ghazali's organization remains relatively obscure, the contemporary Islamic press bemoans the lack of women's participation "in the field of *da'wa*" despite the proliferation of women's mosque groups (see, for example, *al-Liwā' al-Islāmi* 1995, 1996a, 1996b).⁷⁷ Similarly,

circumspect. Some of the *dā'iyyāt*, when pressed, explicitly said that they did not consider themselves to be working within a model of *da'wa* similar to al-Ghazali's since they were not part of a political movement aimed at reforming the state. Such responses may reflect the nervousness many Egyptians feel about potential state reprisals against those who sympathize with the Muslim Brotherhood. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the earlier history of the Society of Muslim Ladies is not well known, and that neither the Brotherhood nor other religious associations have done much to publicize it.

⁷⁶ Recall that al-Ghazali had already attained considerable notoriety when the Muslim Brothers asked her to join them, and that, earlier, she had been able to continue her preaching activities successfully even after al-Azhar terminated its affiliation with her organization.

⁷⁷ During the period of my fieldwork (1995–97), it is significant that other than one small article in an Egyptian French newspaper (*El-Imam* 1996), I did not encounter any press on the ubiquitous women's *da'wa* movement. Women writers have not addressed this omission either. For example, when I reviewed the list of Masters and Ph.D. theses produced by women at the College of Islamic Sciences (*Kulliyat al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya lil Banāt*) at the University of al-Azhar between 1981 and 1996, I found none that addressed the role of women in *da'wa* from either a theoretical or a sociological perspective.

despite the copious literature that currently addresses the techniques and skills of male *du'at*, hardly any publications focus on women's practice of *da'wa*.⁷⁸

The one institutional structure that continues to play a significant role in facilitating women's *da'wa* activities is that of Islamic nonprofit organizations (*al-jam'iyyāt*), whose focus has typically been on providing welfare and charitable services to the poor.⁷⁹ Just as it was al-Ghazali's nonprofit institute that initiated *da'wa* lessons for women, the largest number of women's *da'wa* training centers are run by Islamic nonprofit organizations in Egypt today. Chief among these is al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya, established in 1912, which currently owns approximately seven thousand mosques in Egypt and is well known for providing an extensive array of services to the poor (including medical services, literacy classes, financial assistance, and remedial tutoring for children).⁸⁰ In 1997 al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya ran six training centers (*Ma'āhid al-Da'wa*) for women in Cairo alone, in which eight hundred women were reportedly enrolled in two- to four-year *da'wa* programs.⁸¹ More modest in scope but providing a similar range of services are Anṣār al-Sunna, established in 1926, and Da'wat al-Ḥaq, created in 1975, both of which also have institutes for training women and men in *da'wa*.⁸² Large numbers of women continue to enroll in these *da'wa* centers: for example, in 1996 when I was conducting my fieldwork, the number of women enrolled at the training centers run by al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya and Anṣār al-Sunna exceeded the number of men.⁸³

⁷⁸ For an exception to this general rule, see Zaynab al-Ghazali's two books written on the topic of women's etiquette in the performance of *da'wa* (1994a, 1996a), and one other publication to which I was repeatedly referred when I expressed puzzlement at this lacuna: *Nisā' al-dā'iyyāt* by Taufiq al-Wa'i (1993).

⁷⁹ The first Islamic charitable organization, al-Jam'iyya al-Khairiyya, was established in 1892. It provided religious education, vocational training, and medical services to the poor, and was taken over by the Ministry of Health in 1965 (al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies 1996, 233).

⁸⁰ Al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya's activities are almost entirely funded by voluntary donations collected from neighborhoods in which the organization is active; it receives only a nominal amount from the Egyptian government and accepts no donations from foreign countries. Yet the scope of its services is vast. For example, in 1996 alone the organization spent 1,914,460 Egyptian pounds on the provision of welfare services to poor children (*al-Nūr* 1996). For a brief history of al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya, see al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies 1996, 238–42.

⁸¹ Personal communication with the Secretary of al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya, Cairo, 7 January 1997.

⁸² Both these organizations publish popular monthly journals on *da'wa*-related issues: Anṣār al-Sunna publishes *al-Tauḥīd* and Da'wat al-Ḥaq publishes *al-Huda al-Nabawi*.

⁸³ Based on personal interviews with the program coordinators of these two organizations, 20 February 1997.

MODES OF SOCIABILITY

Nonprofit religious organizations of the kind I describe above have historically been concerned not only with the provision of religious instruction, but also with cultivating an Islamic ethos that makes them distinct from secular nonprofit organizations. If we take the example of the Society of Muslim Ladies, it is clear that even though it shared with the EFU some of the liberal-bourgeois and nationalist assumptions that permeated the Egyptian middle classes in the 1940s, there was a marked difference in the sources of authority and models of sociability each tried to emulate. While it was Europe that informed the sociocultural imagination of organizations like the EFU, the Society stressed a mode of living that was grounded in what they saw as Islamic values and ethics. If anything, this disparity between styles of conduct has grown even wider in Egypt today, and is manifest in the sharp lines drawn between those who conduct themselves in an "Islamic manner" and those who ground their sociability in what may be glossed as "Western-liberal" lifestyles. Women's mosque groups and Islamic nonprofit organizations (such as al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya) believe that the formation of a virtuous society is critically dependent upon the regulation of everyday conduct in keeping with Islamic principles and values. As we saw earlier in this chapter, this not only includes performing religious obligations in a prescribed manner, but also includes regulating how one conducts oneself in public, how one maintains one's family and kinship relations, the kind of entertainment one consumes, and the terms on which public debate proceeds.

It would be a mistake to dismiss these concerns of the da'wa movement as a preoccupation with superficial distinctions of style and form that have little impact on issues of "real import" (such as economics and electoral politics), or to assume that since piety movements do not confront the state directly, they are apolitical in character—as some scholars of the Middle East have recently argued (Göle 1996; Roy 1994).⁸⁴ As theorists of the public sphere have come to recognize, regulation of such quotidian practices is of eminent political concern because they play a crucial role in shaping the civic and public sensi-

⁸⁴ Roy, for example, makes a distinction between what he calls "political Islamism" and "nonpolitical" or "neofundamentalist" Islamism wherein he sees the former as a product of modernity and the latter as a rejection of modernity (1994). In my opinion, Roy subscribes to far too narrow an understanding of politics, and does not give adequate attention to the ways in which piety movements (which would fall under Roy's category of "nonpolitical" and "neofundamentalist" movements) are as much a product of modernity as are the state-oriented Islamist groups he regards as "political."

bilities essential to the consolidation of a secular-liberal polity.⁸⁵ The elaboration of the secular-liberal project in the Middle East has entailed a profound alteration in, and reorganization of, people's ethical and aesthetic sensibilities, life choices, and manner of public and personal conduct—not to mention a complete transformation of legal, educational, and political institutions. For example, Kemal Atatürk's project of secularizing Turkey critically rested on transforming modes of public sociability by making religious attire illegal, mandating European dress for women and men, abolishing the use of Arabic script (in light of its association with Islam), prohibiting the display of other public markers of religious practice, and banning religious education from schools (Göle 1996; Navaro-Yashin 2002).

Comparable changes, even if more limited in scope and ambition, can also be tracked in Egypt, since the Egyptian state has, at least since the nineteenth century, instituted a range of reforms targeted at the transformation of religious institutions and sensibilities (see T. Asad 2003; T. Mitchell 1991; Salvatore 1998; Skovgaard-Petersen 1997; Starrett 1998). These reforms have been aimed not so much at abolishing religion from Egyptian political and public institutions as at regulating Islamic practices in order to ensure that they take a particular form. In instances when Islamic practices depart from state-endorsed forms, they are met with the disciplinary force of the state apparatus. One recent example was the Ministry of Education's ban on the donning of the veil in primary schools (grades 1–5), which was ruled constitutional in 1994 when challenged in the Supreme Constitutional Court and subsequently enforced (Herrera 2003, 176–80). This regulation echoes similar decisions in Turkey and France, which also prohibit girls and women from wearing headscarves in public schools.⁸⁶ Even though there are important differences between the political cultures of these three countries, it is striking that a mundane article of clothing has provoked similar reactions among otherwise dissimilar liberal and would-be-liberal states. I would argue that the reason the veil elicits such strong responses is that

⁸⁵ Among the institutions that characterize modern society, social theorists have defined the public sphere as a critical space in which citizens come together to articulate and debate a variety of moral and political concerns (Calhoun 1992; Habermas 1991; Warner 2002). While the secular character of the public sphere is often taken for granted, an increasing number of scholars argue that long-standing religious sensibilities and institutions have played a crucial role both in the creation of the public sphere in various historical contexts and in the conceptualization of many of its ideals (see T. Asad 1999; Connolly 1999; Hirschkind 2001a; van der Veer 2001).

⁸⁶ For example, in March 1998, Istanbul University banned veiled students from attending classes, and later, in May 1999, an elected member of the Turkish parliament was denied permission to take office because she refused to remove her headscarf (Kinzer 1998, 1999). Similarly, the French government banned the wearing of headscarves by Muslim girls in public schools in 2004 as part of a broader ban on the display of religious symbols in schools (Sciolino 2004). For the 1994 debate about the veil in France, see Ibrahim 1994; Moruzzi 1994.

it continues to assert a kind of religiosity that is incommensurable with, and inimical to, those forms of public sociability that a secular-liberal polity seeks to make normative. Differently put, one can say that the forms of attire toward which secular-liberal morality claims indifference are indexical precisely of the kind of religiosity that makes such a secular-liberal morality possible in the first place. The indifference is put into question when nonliberal forms of religiosity claim the public space, and wittingly or unwittingly challenge the premise of this indifference. The fact that men's religious attire in the context of public schools—such as Jewish men's yarmulkes or Sikh men's turbans—does not elicit the same response further suggests that women's adoption of religious clothing is taken to be a sign of social coercion in a way that men's wearing of religiously symbolic clothing is not.⁸⁷

Insofar as the secular-liberal project is aimed at the moral reconstruction of public and private life, it is not surprising that the Egyptian state has found a contentious rival in the piety movement, whose authority is grounded in sources that often elude and confound the state.⁸⁸ As part of the Egyptian government's ongoing efforts to regulate religious associational life (Gaffney 1991), in 1996 two laws were approved for implementation aimed at controlling the activities of the *da'wa* movement. One aims to nationalize thirty thousand nongovernment mosques within five years—a process that was initiated in 1996 but continues (*al-Hayāt* 1997; *al-Nūr* 1997).⁸⁹ The second is directed at preaching activities: the state now requires that all male *du'āt* and female *dā'iyāt*, regardless of their prior religious training or experience, undergo a two-year training program in *da'wa* administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*al-Hayāt* 1996b). Upon completion of this training, the *du'āt* and *dā'iyāt* are conferred a state license to preach, and all those found preaching without this license may be punished by up to three months of imprisonment and a fine of one hundred Egyptian pounds (approximately thirty dollars). In addition, the government has stepped up its surveillance of women's mosque lessons, and it is now customary to see a government employee with a tape recorder sitting at the back of the mosque recording the lessons, which

⁸⁷ I am thankful to Jane Collier for urging me to take into account this aspect of the reaction to the veil.

⁸⁸ For example, even though the institution of al-Azhar is under the control of the Egyptian government, and legitimizes many of its policies, it has also continued to produce strong currents of resistance to state policies from time to time (Moustafa 2000; Zeghal 1999). In fact, the most vociferous opposition to the government legislation aimed at controlling preaching activities has come from the Azhar Scholars' Front (Jabhat 'Ulamā' al-Azhar). The government has responded by reorganizing the Front and dismissing many of its critical members (Moustafa 2000).

⁸⁹ This law was initially proposed in 1964 and has been on the books since (Gaffney 1991). Various governments, from Nasser's to Sadat's to Mubarak's, have made use of this law as they have sought to modulate their conflicts with the Islamist opposition.

are then examined for phrases and ideas considered objectionable from the state's point of view. Since I finished my fieldwork, all of the mosques where I worked have had lessons terminated for variable periods of time, and in the case of the Nafisa mosque, the government restricted the number of *dā'iyāt* who could teach there, transferring some to lesser-known mosques.

The government has responded to increasing criticism of this legislation by arguing that it is the most effective means of weeding out "extremist elements" and preventing them from using mosques to spread their message (*al-Ḥayāt* 1997; *al-Muslimūn* 1996; *al-Wasaṭ* 1997).⁹⁰ Since the activities of the mosques have multiplied over the last two decades, the government worries that many men and women have used the authority conferred to them as preachers to propagate views critical of the state. This new legislation is an extension of state efforts to combat the Islamist movement on its cultural and pietistic fronts, having successfully put an end to the militant Islamist threat.⁹¹ The Egyptian government hopes that by regulating the training that preachers receive and making them go through the licensing process, it will be able to control the kind of people who speak from the authoritative space of the mosque. The women *dā'iyāt* have responded to this legislation by enrolling in the governmental training centers in order to procure the requisite license so that they can continue to preach. They are quite conscious, however, that the state lacks the resources to create the kind of institutional structure that could bring the vast resources of *da'wa* networks under its control. They, therefore, intend to continue doing their work despite state surveillance.

egypt: a secular state?

Some readers may argue that I am wrong to describe the Egyptian state in secular-liberal terms because the Egyptian government violates the principal divide between religion and state that is so germane to normative models of secularism. According to such an argument, the Egyptian government's willingness to allow Islam an ongoing role in the administrative structure and

⁹⁰ There has been vociferous opposition to this legislation not only from popular male *duāt*, but also, surprisingly, from the 'ulamā' of al-Azhar, all of whom regard the law about preaching as the state's attempt to nationalize the field of *da'wa* and turn preachers into government employees (*al-Ḥayāt* 1996b; *al-Sha'b* 1997). The government has been criticized for muzzling those *duāt* who have had considerable experience in the field of preaching but who are trained at institutes other than those run by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

⁹¹ The Egyptian government was particularly successful in curtailing Islamist violence after the passage of an anti-terror law in July 1992, which expanded the power of the police to arrest and detain Egyptians suspected of terrorist activities. Since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the Egyptian government has capitalized on the U.S.-sponsored "war on terrorism" to further quell Islamist opposition and to generally ban any form of political dissent.

policies of the state, and the state's financial support for and management of religious institutions (such as mosques and the University of al-Azhar), are all examples of the Egyptian state's departure from the model of secular governance best embodied in late-liberal Western societies.

By way of a response, let me first say that it is important not to conceptualize secularism on a single model whose skeletal structure has been fleshed out by Euro-American societies, a model by which the modernizing attempts of non-Western nations are to be assessed. Even if we understand secularism in its most narrow sense—as the doctrinal separation of religion and state—it is worth noting that this separation has been negotiated in a variety of ways even in Europe and the United States. Moreover, even in self-avowedly secular-liberal societies this doctrinal principle has not entailed the banishment of religion from the realm of politics, law, and public life. Various and contrasting imbrications of religion and politics within secular-liberal polities can be seen historically in the role Puritanism played in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the centrality of the Anglican Church in Britain, and in the place of the Catholic church in Spanish and Italian modernity. Within these contexts, secularism has entailed the legal and administrative intervention into religious life so as to construct “religion”—in its spatial entailments, in its worldly aspirations, and the scope of its reasoning—along certain lines (T. Asad 2003; Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Connolly 1999; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2003; van der Veer 2001).

From the late-nineteenth century to the present, the Egyptian state has been deeply involved in just such an intervention into the religious practices of the population it has governed.⁹² Through the nationalization and direct management of religious institutions the state has attempted to redefine the locations and modalities of proper religious practice as part of the project of creating a modern polity. While the constitution heralds the *shari'a* as the basis of Egyptian law, in actual practice the *shari'a* has been restricted to the domain of personal status law in accord with the modernist logic of keeping religion domesticated within the private realm. Furthermore, Egyptian statecraft operates on the basis of an entire range of epistemological assumptions that

⁹² One of the central challenge for scholars of postcoloniality lies, I believe, in the ability to conceptualize modes of secular-liberal governance in non-Western societies, societies that on the one hand follow the structural logic of what Foucault calls *governmentality* in the context of late-liberal Western societies, and that, on the other hand, have modified this logic in historically specific ways (Foucault 1991a). *Governmentality* in this sense refers not so much to the ruling capacities of the state apparatus as to the management of a social field whose operations ensure that citizens produce and monitor their own conduct as individual subjects. For discussions of *governmentality* in non-Western contexts, see Chatterjee 1995; Hansen 1999; T. Mitchell 1991; D. Moore 1999; D. Scott 1999.

are constitutive of the very idea of “the secular”—notions of causality, temporality, space, and the limits of verifiable knowledge (on these notions, see T. Asad 2003; Chakrabarty 2000; Chatterjee 1995). In these ways the Egyptian state cannot be analyzed outside the discursive logic of secular-liberal governance, just as it is impossible to describe the practices of the piety movement in religious terms alone.

The modernist project of the regulation of religious sensibilities, undertaken by a range of postcolonial states (and not simply Muslim states), has elicited in its wake a variety of resistances, responses, and challenges. One of the points that I will insist upon in the chapters that follow is that these challenges, while deeply indebted to the logic of secular-liberal governance, cannot be understood solely in relation to the practices of the modern state. This is in part due to the fact that many of the resistances posed to liberal secularity are the unintended consequences of a range of ethical practices that do not necessarily engage the state directly. Furthermore, inasmuch as secular-liberal governance posits a putative separation between morality and politics, an analysis that remains focused on the agency of the state runs the risk of reinscribing this ideological separation without putting it to critical scrutiny. The analytical labor of the forthcoming chapters is directed precisely at exploring why and how movements of ethical reform—such as the piety movement—unsettle key assumptions of the secular-liberal imaginary even when they do not aim to transform the state.