1

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 yearlong 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 (*ḥijāb*), 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 *daʿwa* (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 daʿwa 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" (*ʿalmana* or *ʿalmāniyya*) or "westernization" (*tagharrub*), 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 (daʿwa) 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.

they use to enter these arenas are grounded in discourses that have historically secured their subordination to male authority. In other words, women's subordination to feminine virtues, such as shyness, modesty, and humility, appears to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life. While it would not have been unusual in the 1960s to account for women's participation in such movements in terms of false consciousness or the internalization of patriarchal norms through socialization, there has been an increasing discomfort with explanations of this kind. Drawing on work in the humanities and the social sciences since the 1970s that has focused on the operations of human agency within structures of subordination, feminists have sought to understand how women resist the dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their "own interests and agendas." A central question explored within this scholarship has been: how do women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it? Scholars working within this framework have thus tended to analyze religious traditions in terms of the conceptual and practical resources they offer to women, and the possibilities for redirecting and recoding these resources in accord with women's "own interests and agendas"—a recoding that stands as the site of women's agency.[9]

When the focus on locating women's agency first emerged, it played a crucial role in complicating and expanding debates about gender in non-Western societies beyond the simplistic registers of submission and patriarchy. In particular, the focus on women's agency provided a crucial corrective to scholarship on the Middle East that for decades had portrayed Arab and Muslim women as passive and submissive beings shackled by structures of male authority.[10] Feminist scholarship performed the worthy task of restoring the absent voice of women to analyses of Middle Eastern societies, portraying women as active agents whose lives are far richer and more complex than past narratives had suggested (Abu-Lughod 1986; Altorki 1986; Atiya 1982; S. Davis 1983; Dwyer 1978; Early 1993; Fernea 1985; Wikan 1991). This emphasis on women's agency within gender studies paralleled, to a certain extent, discussions of the peasantry in New Left scholarship, a body of work that also sought to restore a humanist agency (often expressed metonymically as a "voice") to the peasant in the historiography of agrarian societies—a project articulated against classical Marxist formulations that had assigned the peasantry a non-place in the making of modern history (Hobsbawm 1980; James

[9] Examples from the Muslim context include Boddy 1989; Hale 1987; Hegland 1998; MacLeod 1991; Torab 1996. For a similar argument made in the context of Christian evangelical movements, see Brusco 1995; Stacey 1991.

[10] For a review of this scholarship on the Middle East, see Abu-Lughod 1990a.

Scott 1985). The Subaltern Studies Project is the most recent example of this scholarship (see, for example, Guha and Spivak 1988).[11]

The ongoing importance of feminist scholarship on women's agency cannot be emphasized enough, especially when one remembers that Western popular media continues to portray Muslim women as incomparably bound by the unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression. This acknowledgment notwithstanding, it is critical to examine the assumptions and elisions that attend this focus on agency, especially the ways in which these assumptions constitute a barrier to the exploration of movements such as the one I am dealing with here. In what follows, I will explore how the notion of human agency most often invoked by feminist scholars—one that locates agency in the political and moral autonomy of the subject—has been brought to bear upon the study of women involved in patriarchal religious traditions such as Islam. Later, in the second half of this chapter, I will suggest alternative ways of thinking about agency, especially as it relates to embodied capacities and means of subject formation.

Janice Boddy's work is an eloquent and intelligent example of the anthropological turn to an analysis of subaltern gendered agency. Boddy conducted fieldwork in a village in an Arabic-speaking region of northern Sudan on a women's *zār* cult—a widely practiced healing cult that uses Islamic idioms and spirit mediums and whose membership is largely female (1989). Through a rich ethnography of women's cultic practices, Boddy proposes that in a society where the "official ideology" of Islam is dominated and controlled by men, the zār practice might be understood as a space of subordinate discourse—as "a medium for the cultivation of women's consciousness" (1989, 345). She argues that zār possession serves as "a kind of counter-hegemonic process . . . : *a feminine response to hegemonic praxis*, and the privileging of men that this ideologically entails, which ultimately escapes neither its categories nor its constraints" (1989, 7; emphasis added). She concludes by asserting that the women she studied "use perhaps unconsciously, perhaps strategically, what we in the West might prefer to consider *instruments of their oppression* as means to assert their value both collectively, through the ceremonies they organize and stage, and individually, in the context of their marriages, so insisting on their dynamic complementarity with men. *This in itself is a means of resisting and setting limits to domination. . . .*" (1989, 345; emphasis added).

The ethnographic richness of this study notwithstanding, what is most relevant for the purposes of my argument is the degree to which the female agent in Boddy's work seems to stand in for a sometimes repressed, sometimes active

[11] It is not surprising, therefore, that in addition to seeking to restore agency to the peasantry, Ranajit Guha, one of the founders of the Subaltern Studies Project, also called for historians to treat women as agents, rather than instruments, of various movements (Guha 1996, 12).

feminist consciousness, articulated against the hegemonic male cultural norms of Arab Muslim societies.[12] As Boddy's study reveals, even in instances when an explicit *feminist* agency is difficult to locate, there is a tendency among scholars to look for expressions and moments of resistance that may suggest a challenge to male domination. When women's actions seem to reinscribe what appear to be "instruments of their own oppression," the social analyst can point to moments of disruption of, and articulation of points of opposition to, male authority—moments that are located either in the interstices of a woman's consciousness (often read as a nascent feminist consciousness), or in the objective effects of women's actions, however unintended these may be. Agency, in this form of analysis, is understood as the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective). Thus the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression constitutes the substrate, the slumbering ember that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit.

Lila Abu-Lughod, one of the leading figures among those scholars who helped reshape the study of gender in the Middle East, has criticized some of the assumptions informing feminist scholarship, including those found in her own previous work (Abu-Lughod 1990b, 1993). In one of her earlier works, Abu-Lughod had analyzed women's poetry among the Bedouin tribe of Awlād ʿAli as a socially legitimate, semipublic practice that was an expression of women's resistance and protest against the strict norms of male domination in which Bedouin women live (Abu-Lughod 1986). Later, in a reflective essay on this work, Abu-Lughod asks the provocative question: how might we recognize instances of women's resistance without "misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience—something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics?" (Abu-Lughod 1990b, 47). In exploring this question, Abu-Lughod criticizes herself and others for being too preoccupied with "explaining resistance and finding resisters" at the expense of understanding the workings of power (1990b, 43). She argues:

> In some of my earlier work, as in that of others, there is perhaps a tendency to *romanticize resistance*, to read all forms of resistance as signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and of *the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated.* By reading resistance in this way, we collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the workings of power. (1990b, 42; emphasis added)

[12] For a somewhat different approach to women's zar practices in the Sudan, which, nonetheless, utilizes a similar notion of agency, see Hale 1986, 1987.

As a corrective, Abu-Lughod recommends that resistance be used as a "diagnostic of power" (1990b, 42), to locate the shifts in social relations of power that influence the resisters as well as those who dominate. To illustrate her point, Abu-Lughod gives the example of young Bedouin women who wear sexy lingerie to challenge parental authority and dominant social mores. She suggests that instead of simply reading such acts as moments of opposition to, and escape from, dominant relations of power, they should also be understood as reinscribing alternative forms of power that are rooted in practices of capitalist consumerism and urban bourgeois values and aesthetics (1990b, 50).

Abu-Lughod concludes her provocative essay with the following observation:

> My argument . . . has been that we should learn to read in various local and everyday resistances the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power. Attention to *the forms of resistance in particular societies* can help us become critical of partial or reductionist theories of power. The problem has been that those of us who have sensed that there is something admirable about resistance have tended to look to it for hopeful confirmations of the failure—or partial failure—of systems of oppression. Yet it seems to me that *we respect everyday resistance* not just by arguing for the dignity or heroism of the resisters but by letting their practices teach us about complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power. (1990b, 53; emphasis added)

While Abu-Lughod's attention to understanding resistance as a diagnostic of differential forms of power marks an important analytical step that allows us to move beyond the simple binary of resistance/subordination, she nevertheless implies that the task of identifying an act as one of "resistance" is a fairly unproblematic enterprise. She revises her earlier analysis by suggesting that in order to describe the specific forms that acts of resistance take, they need to be located within fields of power rather than outside of them. Thus, even though Abu-Lughod starts her essay by questioning the ascription of a "feminist consciousness" to those for whom this is not a meaningful category (1990b, 47), this does not lead her to challenge the use of the term "resistance" to describe a whole range of human actions, including those which may be socially, ethically, or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms. I believe it is critical that we ask whether it is even possible to identify a universal category of acts—such as those of resistance—outside of the ethical and political conditions within which such acts acquire their particular meaning. Equally important is the question that follows: does the category of resistance impose a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power—a teleology that makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms?

What perceptive studies such as these by Boddy and Abu-Lughod fail to problematize is the universality of the desire—central for liberal and progressive thought, and presupposed by the concept of resistance it authorizes—to be free from relations of subordination and, for women, from structures of male domination. This positing of women's agency as consubstantial with resistance to relations of domination, and the concomitant naturalization of freedom as a social ideal, are not simply analytical oversights on the part of feminist authors. Rather, I would argue that their assumptions reflect a deeper tension within feminism attributable to its dual character as both an *analytical* and a *politically prescriptive* project.[13] Despite the many strands and differences within feminism, what accords the feminist tradition an analytical and political coherence is the premise that where society is structured to serve male interests, the result will be either neglect, or direct suppression, of women's concerns.[14] Feminism, therefore, offers both a *diagnosis* of women's status across cultures and a *prescription* for changing the situation of women who are understood to be marginalized, subordinated, or oppressed (see Strathern 1988, 26–28). Thus the articulation of conditions of relative freedom that enable women both to formulate and to enact self-determined goals and interests remains the object of feminist politics and theorizing. Freedom is normative to feminism, as it is to liberalism, and critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women's freedom rather than those who want to extend it.[15]

feminism and freedom

In order to explore in greater depth the notion of freedom that informs feminist scholarship, I find it useful to think about a key distinction that liberal theorists often make between negative and positive freedom (Berlin 1969; Green 1986; Simhony 1993; Taylor 1985c). Negative freedom refers to the

[13] As a number of feminist scholars have noted, these two dimensions of the feminist project often stand in a productive tension against each other. See W. Brown 2001; Butler 1999; Mohanty 1991; Rosaldo 1983; Strathern 1987, 1988.

[14] Despite the differences within feminism, this is a premise that is shared across various feminist political positions—including radical, socialist, liberal, and psychoanalytic—and that marks the domain of feminist discourse. Even in the case of Marxist and socialist feminists who argue that women's subordination is determined by social relations of economic production, there is at least an acknowledgment of the inherent tension between women's interests and those of the larger society dominated and shaped by men (see Hartsock 1983; MacKinnon 1989). For an anthropological argument about the universal character of gender inequality, see Collier and Yanagisako 1989.

[15] John Stuart Mill, a figure central to liberal and feminist thought, argues: "the burden of proof is supposed to be with those who are against liberty; who contend for any restriction or prohibition. . . . The *a priori* presumption is in favour of freedom. . . ." (Mill 1991, 472).

absence of external obstacles to self-guided choice and action, whether imposed by the state, corporations, or private individuals.[16] Positive freedom, on the other hand, is understood as the capacity to realize an autonomous will, one generally fashioned in accord with the dictates of "universal reason" or "self-interest," and hence unencumbered by the weight of custom, transcendental will, and tradition. In short, positive freedom may be best described as the capacity for self-mastery and self-government, and negative freedom as the absence of restraints of various kinds on one's ability to act as one wants. It is important to note that the idea of self-realization itself is not an invention of the liberal tradition but has existed historically in a variety of forms, such as the Platonic notion of self-mastery over one's passions, or the more religious notion of realizing oneself through self-transformation, present in Buddhism and a variety of mystical traditions, including Islam and Christianity. Liberalism's unique contribution is to link the notion of self-realization with individual autonomy, wherein the process of realizing oneself is equated with the ability to realize the desires of one's "true will" (Gray 1991).[17]

Although there continues to be considerable debate about these entwined notions of negative and positive freedom,[18] I want to emphasize the concept of individual autonomy that is central to both, and the concomitant elements of coercion and consent that are critical to this topography of freedom. In order for an individual to be free, her actions *must* be the consequence of her "own will" rather than of custom, tradition, or social coercion. To the degree that autonomy in this tradition of liberal political theory is a *procedural* principle, and not an ontological or substantive feature of the subject, it delimits the necessary condition for the enactment of the ethics of freedom. Thus, even illiberal actions can arguably be tolerated if it is determined that they are undertaken by a freely consenting individual who is acting of her own accord. Political theorist John Christman, for example, considers the interesting situation wherein a slave *chooses* to continue being a slave even when external obstacles and constraints are removed (Christman 1991). In order for such a

[16] Within classical political philosophy, this notion (identified with the thought of Bentham and Hobbes) finds its most common application in debates about the proper role of state intervention within the private lives of individuals. This is also the ground on which feminists have debated proposals for antipornographic legislation (see, for example, Bartky 1990; MacKinnon 1993; Rubin 1984; Samois Collective 1987).

[17] The slippery character of the human will formed in accord with reason and self-interest is itself a point of much discussion among a range of liberal thinkers such as Hobbes, Spinoza, Hegel, and Rousseau (Heller, Sosna, and Wellberry 1986; Taylor 1989). In late-liberal Western societies, the disciplines of psychoanalysis and psychology have played a crucial role in determining what the "true inner self" really is, and what its concomitant needs and desires should be (see, for example, Hacking 1995; Rose 1998).

[18] See Hunt 1991; MacCallum 1967; Simhony 1993; West 1993.

person to be considered free, Christman argues, an account is required of the process by which the person acquired her desire for slavery. Christman asserts that as long as these desires and values are "generated in accordance with the *procedural* conditions of autonomous preference formation that are constitutive of freedom, then no matter what the 'content' of those desires, the actions which they stimulate will be (positively) free" (1991, 359).[19] In other words, it is not the substance of a desire but its "origin that matters in judgments about autonomy" (Christman 1991, 359). Freedom, in this formulation, consists in the ability to autonomously "choose" one's desires no matter how illiberal they may be.[20]

The concepts of positive and negative freedom, with the attendant requirement of procedural autonomy, provide the ground on which much of the feminist debate unfolds. For example, the positive conception of freedom seems to predominate in projects of feminist historiography (sometimes referred to as "her-story") that seek to capture historically and culturally specific instances of women's self-directed action, unencumbered by patriarchal norms or the will of others.[21] The negative conception of freedom seems to prevail in studies of gender that explore those spaces in women's lives that are independent of men's influence, and possibly coercive presence, treating such spaces as pregnant with possibilities for women's fulfillment or self-realization. Many feminist historians and anthropologists of the Arab Muslim world have thus sought to delimit those conditions and situations in which women seem to autonomously articulate "their own" discourse (such as that of poetry, weaving, cult possession, and the like), at times conferring a potentially liberatory meaning to practices of sex segregation that had traditionally been under-

[19] This "procedural" or "content-neutral" account of autonomy is most influentially advocated by contemporary theorists like Rawls, Habermas, and Dworkin (their differences notwithstanding). It contrasts with a "substantive" account of autonomy in which a person's actions are not only required to be the result of her own choice, but also must, in their *content*, abide by predetermined standards and values that define the ideal of autonomy. In the latter version, a person who willingly chooses to become a slave would not be considered free. It should be noted, however, that the substantive account is only a more robust and stronger version of the procedural account of autonomy. On this and related issues, see Friedman 2003, especially pages 19–29.

[20] This long-standing liberal principle has generated a number of paradoxes in history. For example, the British tolerated acts of *sati* (widow burning) in colonial India, despite their official opposition to the practice, in those cases where the officials could determine that the widow was not coerced but went "willingly to the pyre" (for an excellent discussion of this debate, see Mani 1998). Similarly, some critics of sadomasochism in the United States argue that the practice may be tolerated on the condition that it is undertaken by consenting adults who have a "choice" in the matter, and is not the result of "coercion."

[21] For an illuminating discussion of the historiographical project of "her-story," see Joan Scott 1988, 15–27.

stood as making women marginal to the public arena of conventional politics (Ahmed 1982; Boddy 1989; Wikan 1991).

My intention here is not to question the profound transformation that the liberal discourse of freedom and individual autonomy has enabled in women's lives around the world, but rather to draw attention to the ways in which these liberal presuppositions have become naturalized in the scholarship on gender. It is quite clear that both positive and negative notions of freedom have been used productively to expand the horizon of what constitutes the domain of legitimate feminist practice and debate. For example, in the 1970s, in response to the call by white middle-class feminists to dismantle the institution of the nuclear family, which they believed to be a key source of women's oppression, Native- and African American feminists argued that freedom, for them, consisted in being able to form families, since the long history of slavery, genocide, and racism had operated precisely by breaking up their communities and social networks (see, for example, Brant 1984; Collins 1991; A. Davis 1983; Lorde 1984).[22] Such arguments successfully expanded feminist understandings of "self-realization/self-fulfillment" by making considerations of class, race, and ethnicity central, thereby forcing feminists to rethink the concept of individual autonomy in light of other issues.

Since then a number of feminist theorists have launched trenchant critiques of the liberal notion of autonomy from a variety of perspectives.[23] While earlier critics had drawn attention to the masculinist assumptions underpinning the ideal of autonomy (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982), later scholars faulted this ideal for its emphasis on the atomistic, individualized, and bounded characteristics of the self at the expense of its relational qualities formed through social interactions within forms of human community (Benhabib 1992; Young 1990). Consequently, there have been various attempts to redefine autonomy so as to capture the emotional, embodied, and socially embedded character of people, particularly of women (Friedman 1997, 2003; Joseph 1999; Nedelsky 1989). A more radical strain of poststructuralist theory has situated its critique of autonomy within a larger challenge posed to the *illusory* character of the rationalist, self-authorizing, transcendental subject presupposed by Enlightenment thought in general, and the liberal tradition in particular. Rational thought, these critics argue, secures its universal scope and authority by performing a necessary exclusion of all that is bodily, femi-

[22] Similarly "A Black Feminist Statement" by the Combahee River Collective rejected the appeal for lesbian separatism made by white feminists on the grounds that the history of racial oppression required black women to make alliances with male members of their communities in order to continue fighting against institutionalized racism (Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982).

[23] For an interesting discussion of the contradictions generated by the privileged position accorded to the concept of autonomy in feminist theory, see Adams and Minson 1978.

nine, emotional, nonrational, and intersubjective (Butler 1999; Gatens 1996; Grosz 1994). This exclusion cannot be substantively or conceptually recuperated, however, through recourse to an unproblematic feminine experience, body, or imaginary (*pace* Beauvoir and Irigaray), but must be thought through the very terms of the discourse of metaphysical transcendence that enacts these exclusions.[24]

In what follows, I would like to push further in the direction opened by these poststructuralist debates. In particular, my argument for uncoupling the notion of self-realization from that of the autonomous will is indebted to poststructuralist critiques of the transcendental subject, voluntarism, and repressive models of power. Yet, as will become clear, my analysis also departs from these frameworks insomuch as I question the overwhelming tendency within poststructuralist feminist scholarship to conceptualize agency in terms of subversion or resignification of social norms, to locate agency within those operations that resist the dominating and subjectivating modes of power. In other words, I will argue that the normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and subversion. In doing so, this scholarship elides dimensions of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance. In order to grasp these modes of action indebted to other reasons and histories, I will suggest that it is crucial to detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics.

It is quite clear that the idea of freedom and liberty as *the* political ideal is relatively new in modern history. Many societies, including Western ones, have flourished with aspirations other than this. Nor, for that matter, does the narrative of individual and collective liberty exhaust the desires with which people live in liberal societies. If we recognize that the desire for freedom from, or subversion of, norms is not an innate desire that motivates all beings at all times, but is also profoundly mediated by cultural and historical conditions, then the question arises: how do we analyze operations of power that construct different kinds of bodies, knowledges, and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics?

Put simply, my point is this: if the ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific (both in terms of what constitutes "change" and the means by which it is effected), then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance, but must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, respon-

[24] For an excellent discussion of this point in the scholarship on feminist ethics, see Colebrook 1997.

sibility, and effectivity. Viewed in this way, what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms.

It may be argued in response that this kind of challenge to the natural status accorded to the desire for freedom in analyses of gender runs the risk of Orientalizing Arab and Muslim women all over again—repeating the errors of pre-1970s Orientalist scholarship that defined Middle Eastern women as passive submissive Others, bereft of the enlightened consciousness of their "Western sisters," and hence doomed to lives of servile submission to men. I would contend, however, that to examine the discursive and practical conditions within which women come to cultivate various forms of desire and capacities of ethical action is a radically different project than an Orientalizing one that locates the desire for submission in an innate ahistorical cultural essence. Indeed, if we accept the notion that all forms of desire are discursively organized (as much of recent feminist scholarship has argued), then it is important to interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under which different forms of desire emerge, including desire for submission to recognized authority. We cannot treat as natural and imitable only those desires that ensure the emergence of feminist politics.

Consider, for example, the women from the mosque movement with whom I worked. The task of realizing piety placed these women in conflict with several structures of authority. Some of these structures were grounded in instituted standards of Islamic orthodoxy, and others in norms of liberal discourse; some were grounded in the authority of parents and male kin, and others in state institutions. Yet the *rationale* behind these conflicts was not predicated upon, and therefore cannot be understood only by reference to, arguments for gender equality or resistance to male authority. Nor can these women's practices be read as a reinscription of traditional roles, since the women's mosque movement has significantly reconfigured the gendered practice of Islamic pedagogy and the social institution of mosques (see chapters 3 and 5). One could, of course, argue in response that, the intent of these women notwithstanding, the actual effects of their practices may be analyzed in terms of their role in reinforcing or undermining structures of male domination. While conceding that such an analysis is feasible and has been useful at times, I would nevertheless argue that it remains encumbered by the binary terms of resistance and subordination, and ignores projects, discourses, and desires that are not captured by these terms (such as those pursued by the women I worked with).

Studies on the resurgent popularity of the veil in urban Egypt since the

1970s provide excellent examples of these issues. The proliferation of such studies (El Guindi 1981; Hoffman-Ladd 1987; MacLeod 1991; Radwan 1982; Zuhur 1992) reflects scholars' surprise that, contrary to their expectations, so many "modern Egyptian women" have returned to wearing the veil. Some of these studies offer functionalist explanations, citing a variety of reasons why women take on the veil voluntarily (for example, the veil makes it easy for women to avoid sexual harassment on public transportation, lowers the cost of attire for working women, and so on). Other studies identify the veil as a symbol of resistance to the commodification of women's bodies in the media, and more generally to the hegemony of Western values. While these studies have made important contributions, it is surprising that their authors have paid so little attention to Islamic virtues of female modesty or piety, especially given that many of the women who have taken up the veil frame their decision precisely in these terms.[25] Instead, analysts often explain the motivations of veiled women in terms of standard models of sociological causality (such as social protest, economic necessity, anomie, or utilitarian strategy), while terms like morality, divinity, and virtue are accorded the status of the phantom imaginings of the hegemonized.[26] I do not, of course, mean to suggest that we should restrict our analyses to folk categories. Rather, I want to argue for a critical vigilance against the elisions any process of translation entails, especially when the language of social science claims for itself a transparent universalism while portraying the language used by "ordinary people" as a poor approximation of their reality.[27]

My argument should be familiar to anthropologists who have long acknowledged that the terms people use to organize their lives are not simply a gloss for universally shared assumptions about the world and one's place in it, but are actually constitutive of different forms of personhood, knowledge, and experience.[28] For this reason I have found it necessary, in the chapters that follow, to

[25] See, in contrast, Lila Abu-Lughod's interesting discussion of the veil as a critical aspect of the concept of modesty (*ḥasham*) among Egyptian Bedouins (1986, 159–67).

[26] For example, in a survey conducted among veiled university students in Cairo, a majority of the interviewees cited piety as their primary motivation for taking up the veil. In commenting on the results of this survey, the sociologist Sherifa Zuhur argues that "rather than the newfound piety" her informants claimed, the real motivations for veiling inhered in the socioeconomic incentives and benefits that accrue to veiled women in Egyptian society (Zuhur 1992, 83).

[27] For a thoughtful discussion of the problems entailed in the translation of supernatural and metaphysical concepts into the language of secular time and history, see Chakrabarty 2000; Rancière 1994.

[28] For an excellent exploration of the use of language in the cultural construction of personhood, see Caton 1990; Keane 1997; Rosaldo 1982. Also see Marilyn Strathern's critique of Western conceptions of "society and culture" that feminist deconstructivist approaches assume in analyzing gender relations in non-Western societies (1992b).

attend carefully to the specific logic of the discourse of piety: a logic that inheres not in the intentionality of the actors, but in the relationships that are articulated between words, concepts, and practices that constitute a particular discursive tradition.[29] I would insist, however, that an appeal to understanding the coherence of a discursive tradition is neither to justify that tradition, nor to argue for some irreducible essentialism or cultural relativism. It is, instead, to take a necessary step toward explaining the force that a discourse commands.

POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINIST THEORY AND AGENCY

In order to elaborate my theoretical approach, let me begin by examining the arguments of Judith Butler, who remains, for many, the preeminent theorist of poststructuralist feminist thought, and whose arguments have been central to my own work. Central to Butler's analysis are two insights drawn from Michel Foucault, both quite well known by now. Power, according to Foucault, cannot be understood solely on the model of domination as something possessed and deployed by individuals or sovereign agents over others, with a singular intentionality, structure, or location that presides over its rationality and execution. Rather, power is to be understood as a strategic relation of force that permeates life and is productive of new forms of desires, objects, relations, and discourses (Foucault 1978, 1980). Secondly, the subject, argues Foucault, does not precede power relations, in the form of an individuated consciousness, but is produced through these relations, which form the necessary conditions of its possibility. Central to his formulation is what Foucault calls the paradox of *subjectivation*: the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent (Butler 1993, 1997c; Foucault 1980, 1983). Stated otherwise, one may argue that the set of capacities inhering in a subject—that is, the abilities that define her modes of agency—are not the residue of an undominated self that existed prior to the operations of power but are themselves the products of those operations.[30] Such an understanding of power and subject formation

[29] The concept "discursive tradition" is from T. Asad 1986. See my discussion of the relevance of this concept to my overall argument in chapter 3.

[30] An important aspect of Foucault's analytics of power is his focus on what he called its "techniques," the various mechanisms and strategies through which power comes to be exercised at its point of application on subjects and objects. Butler differs from Foucault in this respect in that her work is not so much an exploration of techniques of power as of issues of performativity, interpellation, and psychic organization of power. Over time, Butler has articulated her differences with Foucault in various places; see, for example, Butler 1993, 248 n. 19; 1997c, 83–105; 1999, 119–41; and Butler and Connolly 2000.

2

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 (*dāʿiya*; plural: *dāʿiyāt*) 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 *ḥājja* in Modern Standard Arabic and as *ḥāgga* in Egyptian colloquial Arabic) literally means "a woman who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca (the *ḥajj*)," but it is also used in Egyptian colloquial Arabic to respectfully address an older woman. While not all the *dāʿiyāt* had performed the ḥajj, and some were quite young, they were all referred to as *ḥāgga* as a sign of respect. Throughout this book, Arabic honorific terms (such as *hajja*, *sayyid*, and *shaikh*), 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 (*balṭu*) with heavy thick scarves covering their hair and neck. Still others wear the *khimār* (plural: *akhmira*), 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-Jamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya, and provides extensive welfare services to the neighborhood's residents. Religious lessons are offered twice a week by two women dāʿiyāt, 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 dāʿiya and her audience. The dāʿiyāt 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 (*shaʿbi*) 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: *gallābiyya*) 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 dāʿiyāt'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 "Gulfi" 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 dāʿiyāt, 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 *daʿwa* (a key term in the Islamic Revival that I explore below). Unlike the women in the other two mosques, all three dāʿiyāt, 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 dāʿiyāt 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 dāʿiyāt 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" (*ʿalmana* or *ʿalmāniyya*) 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" (*ʿāda 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 dāʿiyāt 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 [*ʿalmāniyyin*], and the Christians: we smoke like they do, we eat like they do, our books and media are full of pictures that are obscene [*faḥḥāsh*]. 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 [*iḥna muslimīn wi lākin afʿālna mish ka muslimīn: il-ʿēn, wil-libs, wil-shurb, wil-akl lāzim yikun lillah wi fi ḥubb 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 *infitāḥ* (economic liberalization) by President Anwar Sadat in the 1970s, which they said marked a radical transformation in Egyptian social mores and lifestyles. The dāʿiya 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 mutaḥaḍḍir*]: 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 nonbelievers, since the way Muslims organize their daily affairs gives little indication of their religious commitments. The dāʿiyāt 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 mutaḥaḍḍir), 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 *muʿāmalāt* [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 [*biyiʿmil bil-ḥadīth wil-qurʾān izzāy*]. All of us [Muslims] know the basics of religion [*al-dīn*], such as praying, fasting, and other acts of worship [*ʿibādāt*]. 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 [*muḥarrikīn maʿa id-dinya*], especially given that the present period

> is one of great change and transformation. For me, proselytization [*daʿwa*] means doing it from within ordinary acts and practicalities [*ʿamaliyyāt*], and translating worship [*ʿibāda*] into everyday practices so that these are always directed toward God [*fahm il-ʿibāda 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 dāʿiyāt, 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 (ʿibādāt) and those actions pertaining to social transactions (muʿāmalāt)[10] has been part of the Islamic juridical tradition since at least the tenth century. In the modern period, although *sharīʿa* procedures (those moral discourses and legal procedures sometimes glossed as "Islamic law") were unevenly applied in Egypt, most acts in the category of muʿāmalāt 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 dāʿiyāt, 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 *muʿāmalāt* may best be translated as "sections of the sharīʿa 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 sharīʿa 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 (ʿibādāt) to bear upon worldly issues in new ways, thereby according the old Islamic adage "all of life is worship" (*al-ḥayāh kullaha ʿibāda*) 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 sharīʿa, 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 dāʿiyāt 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 *muʿāmalāt* (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 sharīʿa 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 sharīʿa and those opposed to it, the latter being a loose alliance of intellectuals and journalists who came to be called "the secularists" (*ʿalmāniyyin*). 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-waʿi 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 (ʿibādāt) 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).

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-ʿīd 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 [*qaul*]? 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 [*bititnāqiḍ*] 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 [*raḥmat allāh*], the second third is His forgiveness [*maghfiratihi*], and the last third is refuge from hell's fire [*ʿitq 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 [ʿalmāniyīn] 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 (Ḥizb al-ʿAmal) 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 dāʿiyāt, 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 Eddin[22] 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. Insomuch 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 ['āda] and worship ['ibāda] 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 *i'tikāf* [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 *daʿwa*, 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 daʿwa. *Daʿwa* is the umbrella term under which the mosque movement, and the Islamist movement more generally, have organized many of their disparate activities. Daʿwa 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] Daʿwa 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 *dāʿiya* literally means "one who practices daʿwa"—it is also the label used for the teachers in the women's mosque movement.[33]

While daʿwa 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 daʿwa 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, *daʿwa* was used interchangeably with other terms, such as *sharīʿa* (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 Shiʿi tradition of Islam, however, the term *daʿwa* 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 daʿwa.

[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 daʿwa does not make this distinction: someone undertaking daʿwa—whether a man or a woman—is referred to as *dāʿiya*, the feminine form. The distinction is made in the plural: male practitioners of daʿwa are called *duʿāt*, and women *dāʿiyāt*. Gender distinction in the nominative singular is gradually emerging, however, as more women dāʿiyāt become active, and the Islamic press increasingly uses the term *dāʿi* 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-nahi '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 Tablīghi 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-nahi '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'iyāt 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'rūf 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'rūf 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 Takfīr 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'rūf 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'rūf 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'rūf 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'rūf. 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 ḥadīth that says, "Whosoever 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 ḥadīth cited in support of the use of militant force against immoral rulers is: "The most excellent type of jihād [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 ḥadīth 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 ḥadīth according to which Muhammed reportedly said that as long as rulers are effective in establishing the practice of worship or *ṣalāt* (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 (*rifq*) and gentle admonition (*al-mau'iẓa 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).

EPILOGUE

No study of Islamist politics situated within the Western academy can avoid engaging with the contemporary critique of Islamic ethical and political behavior, and with the secular-liberal assumptions that animate this critique. This owes to the fact that the "problem" giving rise to current scholarly concern surrounding Islam centers on this tradition's (potentially dangerous) divergence from the perceived norms of a secular-liberal polity. The force this framing commands is apparent not only in the writings of those who are critical of Islamist politics but also in the posture of defense that many Islamist writers must adopt in order to make their case in the court of international public opinion. Even the concepts I have had to rely on in describing the mosque movement incorporate this evaluative purview. The neologism "Islamism," for example, frames its object as an eruption of religion outside the supposedly "normal" domain of private worship, and thus as a historical anomaly requiring explanation if not rectification. The events of September 11, 2001, have only served to strengthen the sense that it is a secular-liberal inquisition before which Islam must be made to confess.

A study that focuses on "Muslim women" carries the burden of this judgment even more because of all the assumptions this dubious signifier triggers in the Western imagination concerning Islam's patriarchal and misogynist qualities. Far more than issues of democracy and tolerance, the "Woman Question" has been key within the development of the Western critique of Islam, even for writers who express distinctly antifeminist views when it comes to women in the West. A long history of colonialism has of course helped secure this essential framing: colonialism rationalized itself on the basis of the "inferiority" of non-Western cultures, most manifest in their patriarchal customs and practices, from which indigenous women had to be rescued through

the agency of colonial rule (Abu-Lughod 2002; Ahmed 1992; Lazreg 1994; Mohanty 1991; Spivak 1987). Western Europeans were not the only ones to deploy this trope within a colonial context; the Soviet Union also foregrounded a similar set of arguments in executing its civilizing mission among Muslim populations in Central Asia.[1] Today the force of this evaluative framing remains glaringly apparent in the fact that women's active participation in contemporary Islamist movements, rather than constituting a challenge to such long-standing assumptions, is taken instead as further evidence of the profound subjugation of Muslim women (see Mahmood 2003). My point in mentioning the tenacity of such views is not to suggest that there is no violence against women in the Muslim world, but that it is the reductive character of this framing, one that orchestrates an entire chain of equivalences associated with Islam, that needs to be questioned.

Admittedly, this evaluative stance I have described is not limited to Islam but, to varying extents, has long been a structural feature of the anthropological enterprise itself, as many anthropologists have pointed out. Marilyn Strathern, for example, has written eloquently about the historical understanding of Melanesia (her area of study) in the Western imagination as a space of "cultural primitiveness" that helped secure the West's own self-understanding as "modern, civilized, and scientific" (1988). Strathern deals with the weight this prior framing exerts on her work by employing a textual strategy that begins by acknowledging the constructed quality of what stands in for Melanesia in Western discourse. She writes, "I am constrained by the fact that there is, of course, no 'Melanesian case' that is not a Western projection. I therefore deliberately 'reveal' it through a binarism firmly located in an us/them contrast that works by inversion and negation. These are my means. Not the infinite strategy of third (mediating) terms, but a strategy of displacements. I thus try to present Western discourse as a form through which Melanesian discourse can appear. If one thinks about it, 'Melanesian discourse' can, of course, have no other locus" (Strathern 1992b, 75). Note that Strathern's strategy is not an attempt at cultural translation (through the use of "third mediating terms"); instead it seeks to displace Western analytical categories by staging inversions of familiar ways of thinking and conceptualizing.

[1] As Rosalind Morris has perceptively shown in a recent article, Muslim women in the Central Asian republics came to be regarded by a number of early Marxist theorists (key among them Lenin and Trotsky) as a "surrogate proletariat" whose enslaved status made them supposedly more receptive to the emancipatory promises of communism (Morris 2002). Ironically, his opposition to Trotsky notwithstanding, it was Stalin who put these ruminations into practice; Gregory Massell (1974) documents the immense human disaster that the Soviet policy of recruiting Muslim women into the communist project unleashed in what were then called "the Eastern states."

My project in this book partakes in some aspects of Strathern's arguments. Like the Melanesian case, my discussion of Islamist politics perforce must also engage the terms through which Islamism has come to be understood in popular Euro-American discourse. My juxtapositions of the practices of the pietists against secular-liberal understandings of agency, body, and authority in this book therefore take on a necessary quality: it is not a task I choose so much as one that is thrust upon me. It is clear that, regardless of whether I stage such juxtapositions or not, the horizon of secular-liberal presuppositions about the proper role religiosity should play in the constitution of a modern subjectivity, community, and polity will inevitably structure my audience's reading of this book. Not wanting to promote the particular assumptions that such a framing entails, I have attempted to circumvent these predictable modes of reading by parochializing the terms my readership is likely to bring to this material, displacing them through a combination of narrative description and analytical preemption.

There is a further layer of complication to my exploration of the Islamist movement in Egypt that is perhaps different from the dilemmas that Strathern faced. It has to do with the fact that North Atlantic geopolitical interests in the Middle East have long made it a primary site for the exercise of Western power, and thus for the deployment of the secular-liberal discourses through which that power often operates. What is at stake in Western critiques of Islam, in other words, is not simply a question of ideological bias, but rather the way these critiques function within a vast number of institutional sites and practices aimed at transforming economic, political, and moral life in the Middle East—from international financial institutions to human rights associations to national and local administrative bureaucracies. The transformations brought about within the context of this vast modernizing project have enveloped the entire social fabric of the Middle East, impacting everything from pedagogical techniques to conceptions of moral and bodily health to patterns of familial and extra-familial relations.

In light of this, secular liberalism cannot be addressed simply as a doctrine of the state, or as a set of juridical conventions: in its vast implications, it defines, in effect, something like a form of life. It is precisely for this reason that the knowledges, ethics, and sensibilities of even nonstate movements like the women's mosque movement necessarily engage its broad and diffuse agency. As I have sought to demonstrate in this book, this engagement cannot be analyzed in terms of a conflict between two historically distinct opponents. While contemporary Islamist activities identify secular liberalism as a powerful corrosive force within Muslim societies, the discourses in which they do so also presuppose practical and conceptual conditions that are indebted to the

extension of the secular-liberal project itself.[2] As the preceding chapters have made clear, however, the inextricable intertwining between these two formations is not without its tensions and ruptures. One of the basic premises of this book is that in order to understand Islamism's enmeshment within, and challenges to, assumptions at the core of the secular-liberal imaginary, one must turn not to the usual spaces of political struggle (such as the state, the economy, and the law) but to arguments about what constitutes a proper way of living ethically in a world where such questions were thought to have become obsolete. In Egypt today, the primary topoi for this ethical labor are the body, ritual observances, and protocols of public conduct.

POLITICS IN UNUSUAL PLACES

It is customary to analyze debates about religious markers of public behavior through the lens of identity politics, a politics that presupposes that each individual and group seeks to express its authenticity through symbols of ethnic, religious, and other forms of particularistic belonging so as to achieve recognition and respect from other members of the social collectivity. To the extent that claims on the state for rights, goods, and services must be made on the basis of social identity, it comes to be politicized as a key site of contestation. In this view, contemporary movements of multiculturalism and queer identity in Western liberal democracies, and ethnic and religious movements in the non-Western world, all exemplify this form of politics in that they are seen to be making claims on the state in particular, and the social collectivity in general, on the basis of certain shared characteristics that the participants consider essential to their self-definition as a group.

The uniquely modern character of identity politics has been analyzed from a variety of perspectives. Charles Taylor, for example, argues that identity politics is a result of the intertwining of two different discourses that the culture of liberal modernity has made available: the universalist discourse of equal rights and dignity on the one hand, and the particularistic discourse of the ideal of authenticity on the other (Taylor 1992). Other theorists, following Jacques Lacan, regard identity politics as an expression of a fundamental psychological process through which an individual comes to define herself in opposition to the Other (see, for example, Laclau 1990). On this view, new social movements are an expression of the constitutive lack that haunts all

[2] As I describe in chapter 2, the emergence and proliferation of Islamist movements are deeply indebted to modern mass education, practices of media consumption, and forms of political and associational life characteristic of civil society—all of which are crucial elements within the historical trajectory of secular liberalism across the globe.

processes of identity formation, a lack that on the symbolic level (which is also the realm of culture and language) manifests itself as a condition of possibility for these movements. Despite theoretical differences between these two perspectives as to how identity is constituted, there is agreement that contemporary (or "new") social movements are best analyzed in terms of a politics of identity that manifests itself in claims of rights, recognition, distributive justice, and political representation.

If we examine the material I have presented in this book about the character of the piety movement, it is quite apparent that this particular strand of the Islamist movement is only marginally organized around questions of rights, recognition, and political representation. Indeed, as I have shown, the mosque participants are quite ambivalent about the question of identity and are, in fact, emphatically critical of those Muslims who understand their religious practices as an expression of their Muslim or Arab identity rather than as a means of realizing a certain kind of virtuous life (see chapters 2 and 4). In this sense, it is not toward *recognition* that the activities of the mosque or the piety movement are oriented but rather toward the *retraining* of ethical sensibilities so as to create a new social and moral order. In light of this, it would therefore be a mistake to assume that all contemporary social movements find their genesis in a politics of identity and should be analyzed as responses to the juridical language of rights, recognition, and distributive justice.

The fact that the piety movement does not directly engage the state and its juridical discourses, however, should not lead us to think that it has no direct political implications.[3] To the extent that all aspects of human life (whether they pertain to family, education, worship, welfare, commercial transactions, instances of birth and death, and so on) have been brought under the regulatory apparatuses of the nation-state, the piety movement's efforts to remake any of these activities will necessarily have political consequences. As Charles Hirschkind has argued persuasively, "Modern politics and the forms of power it deploys have become a [necessary] condition for the practice of many of our more personal activities. As for religion, to the extent that the institutions enabling the cultivation of religious virtue have become subsumed within (and transformed by) the legal and administrative structures linked to the state, then the (traditional) project of preserving those virtues will necessarily be political if it is to succeed" (1997, 13). In other words, it is not that the pietists have "politicized" the spiritual domain of Islam (as some scholars of Islamism claim) but that conditions of secular-

[3] This is a position, as I suggested earlier, that is upheld by a number of scholars of Islamic reform movements. See, for example, Beinin and Stork 1997; Göle 1996; Metcalf 1993, 1994, 1998; Roy 1994.

liberal modernity are such that for any world-making project (spiritual or otherwise) to succeed and be effective, it must engage with the all-encompassing institutions and structures of modern governance, whether it aspires to state power or not. It is not surprising, therefore, that the supposedly apolitical practices of the piety movement have been continually targeted by the disciplinary mechanisms of the Egyptian state.

While acknowledging the constitutive role practices of governance continue to play in the formation of the piety movement, it is nonetheless crucial to point out that the full sociopolitical force of this movement cannot be apprehended in terms of an analysis solely focused on conditions of postcolonial governance. The discursive logic that has sustained this movement, and the contingent effects it has produced in the social field, are in no way coterminous with the operations of state power. Yet it seems to me that we have few conceptual resources available for analyzing sociopolitical formations that do not take the nation-state and its juridical apparatuses as their main points of reference. Partha Chatterjee expresses a similar dissatisfaction with our conceptual vocabulary when he argues that even though affiliations of lineage, religion, caste, and language (all of which exceed national forms of belonging) continue to command a powerful force within contemporary postcolonial societies, they remain poorly theorized within contemporary discussions of postcolonial modernity. Chatterjee glosses these affiliations under the "fuzzy" notion of "community" and argues:

> I do not believe that the imaginative possibilities afforded by the fuzziness of the community have disappeared from the domain of popular political discourse. On the contrary, I suspect that with the greater reach of the institutions and processes of the state into the interiors of social life, the state itself is being made sense of in the terms of that other discourse, far removed from the conceptual terms of liberal political theory. (1993, 225)

What Chatterjee discusses under the rubric of "community" has a certain resonance with my thematization of ethics in this book insomuch as my analysis of the ethical practices of the piety movement makes explicit those modalities of action through which embodied attachments to historically specific forms of belonging are forged. These ethical practices, as I have suggested, are also practices of subjectivation whose logic, while clearly shaped by modes of secular-liberal governance, is not reducible to its operations. It seems to me that such an understanding of the ethical in terms of the political, and vice versa, is crucial if we are to understand the power that extra-national forms of belonging currently command in the postcolonial world.

FEMINIST POLITICS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Finally, in conclusion, I want to revisit some of the questions regarding feminism with which I opened this book: How does my analysis of this movement complicate the analytical and politically prescriptive projects of feminism? What does it mean for feminists like myself to take the mosque participants' concepts of human flourishing into account? What are the ethical demands that a consideration of nonliberal movements such as the mosque movement imposes on us? What are the analytical resources that feminist theory offers to help us think through these questions?

As I suggested above, for a scholar of Islam, none of these questions can be adequately answered without encountering the essential tropes through which knowledge about the Muslim world has been organized, key among them the trope of patriarchal violence and Islam's (mis)treatment of women. The veil, more than any other Islamic practice, has become the symbol and evidence of the violence Islam has inflicted upon women. I have seldom presented my arguments in an academic setting, particularly my argument about the veil as a disciplinary practice that constitutes pious subjectivities, without facing a barrage of questions from people demanding to know why I have failed to condemn the patriarchal assumptions behind this practice and the suffering it engenders. I am often struck by my audience's lack of curiosity about what else the veil might perform in the world beyond its violation of women. These exhortations are only one indication of how the veil and the commitments it embodies, not to mention other kinds of Islamic practices, have come to be understood through the prism of women's freedom and unfreedom such that to ask a different set of questions about this practice is to lay oneself open to the charge that one is indifferent to women's oppression. The force this coupling of the veil and women's (un)freedom commands is equally manifest in those arguments that endorse or defend the veil on the grounds that it is a product of women's "free choice" and evidence of their "liberation" from the hegemony of Western cultural codes.

What I find most troubling about this framing is the analytical foreclosure it effects and the silence it implicitly condones regarding a whole host of issues—issues that demand attention from scholars who want to productively think about the Islamic practices undergirding the contemporary Islamic Revival. I understand the political demand that feminism imposes to exercise vigilance against culturalist arguments that seem to authorize practices that underwrite women's oppression. I would submit, however, that our analytical explorations should not be reduced to the requirements of political judgment,

in part because the labor that belongs to the field of analysis is different from that required by the demands of political action, both in its temporality and its social impact. It is not that these two modalities of engagement—the political and the analytical—should remain deaf to each other, only that they should not be collapsed into each other.[4] By allowing theoretical inquiry some immunity from the requirements of strategic political action, we leave open the possibility that the task of thinking may proceed in directions not dictated by the logic and pace of immediate political events.

Wendy Brown has written eloquently about what is lost when analysis is subjected to the demands of political attestation, judgment, and action. She argues:

> It is the task of theory . . . to "make meanings slide," while the lifeblood of politics is made up of bids for hegemonic representation that by nature seek to arrest this movement, to fix meaning at the point of the particular political truth—the nonfluid and nonnegotiable representation—that one wishes to prevail. . . . [L]et us ask what happens when intellectual inquiry is sacrificed to an intensely politicized moment, whether inside or outside an academic institution. What happens when we, out of good and earnest intentions, seek to collapse the distinction between politics and theory, between political bids for hegemonic truth and intellectual inquiry? We do no favor, I think, to politics or to intellectual life by eliminating a productive tension—the way in which politics and theory effectively interrupt each other—in order to consolidate certain political claims as the premise of a program of intellectual inquiry. (W. Brown 2001, 41)

I read Wendy Brown here as insisting on the importance of practicing a certain amount of skepticism, a suspension of judgment, if you will, toward the normative limits of political discourse. "Intellectual inquiry" here entails pushing against our received assumptions and categories, through which a number of unwieldy problems have been domesticated to customary habits of thought and praxis.

This argument gains particular salience in the current political climate, defined by the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent war of terror that the United States government has unleashed on the Muslim world. The long-

[4] The distinction between these two forms of human labor, as Judith Butler points out, goes back to at least Aristotle, who argues that "theoretical wisdom" is not the same as "practical wisdom" since each are oriented toward different ends: the former pursues what Aristotle calls "happiness," and the latter "virtue" (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000, 264–66). For contemporary reformulations of this argument, see Wendy Brown's discussion of the work of Benedetto Croce, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Foucault (W. Brown 2001, 40–44).

standing demand that feminists stand witness to the patriarchal ills of Islam has now been enlisted in the service of one of the most unabashed imperial projects of our time. Consider, for example, how the Feminist Majority's international campaign against the Taliban regime was an essential element in the Bush administration's attempt to establish legitimacy for the bombing of Afghanistan—aptly called "Operation Enduring Freedom" (on this, see Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). It was the burka-clad body of the Afghan woman—and *not* the destruction wrought by twenty years of war funded by the United States through one of the largest covert operations in American history—that served as the primary referent in the Feminist Majority's vast mobilization against the Taliban regime (and later the Bush administration's war). While the denial of education to Afghan women and the restrictions imposed on their movements were often noted, it was this visual image of the burka more than anything else that condensed and organized knowledge about Afghanistan and its women, as if this alone could provide an adequate understanding of their suffering. The inadequacy of this knowledge has today become strikingly evident as reports from Afghanistan increasingly suggest that the lives of Afghan women have not improved since the ouster of the Taliban and that, if anything, life on the streets has become more unsafe than it was under the old regime due to conditions of increased sociopolitical instability (Amnesty International 2003; Badkhen 2002; Human Rights Watch 2002). Perhaps we need to entertain the possibility that had there been some analytical complexity added to the picture that organizations such as the Feminist Majority presented of Afghan women's situation under Taliban rule, had the need for historical reflection not been hijacked by the need for immediate political action, then feminism might have been less recruitable to this ill-conceived project.

The ethical questions that imperial projects of this proportion pose for feminist scholars and activists are also relevant to the more sedate context of the women's mosque movement that has been the focus of this book. To the degree that feminism is a politically prescriptive project, it requires the remaking of sensibilities and commitments of women whose lives contrast with feminism's emancipatory visions. Many feminists, who would oppose the use of military force, would have little difficulty supporting projects of social reform aimed at transforming the attachments, commitments, and sensibilities of the kind that undergird the practices of the women I worked with, so that these women may be allowed to live a more enlightened existence. Indeed, my own history of involvement in feminist politics attests to an unwavering belief in projects of reform aimed at rendering certain life forms provisional if not extinct. But the questions that I have come to ask of myself, and which I would like to pose to the reader as well, are: Do my political visions ever run up against the responsibility that I incur for the destruction of life forms so that

"unenlightened" women may be taught to live more freely? Do I even fully comprehend the forms of life that I want so passionately to remake? Would an intimate knowledge of lifeworlds distinct from mine ever lead me to question my own certainty about what I prescribe as a superior way of life for others?

In his provocative and disturbing book *Liberalism and Empire*, Uday Mehta argues that one of the reasons a number of liberal thinkers, committed to ideals of equality, liberty, fraternity, and tolerance, were able to actively endorse the project of the Empire—a project not simply of conquest and pillage but also of profound political and moral paternalism—had to do with a broad orientation inherent within liberal thought regarding how one responds to "the experiences of the unfamiliar" (Mehta 1999, 201). As Mehta argues, for those who share this orientation, any given present is to be understood in terms of its contribution to an unbounded future. Insomuch as unfamiliar ways of life are judged by reference to their projection into such a future, one defined by the unfolding of the liberal project itself, the particularities of these forms are rendered provisional, moments of difference subsumed within a teleological process of improvement (Mehta 1999, 201–210). A similar orientation is also operative, I believe, in our feminist certainty that women's sensibilities and attachments, particularly those that seem so paradoxically inimical to what we take to be their own interests, *must* be refashioned for their own well-being.

Personally, it was this certainty that came to dissolve before my eyes as I became enmeshed within the thick texture of the lives of the mosque participants, women whose practices I had found objectionable, to put it mildly, at the outset of my fieldwork. I had approached the study of this movement with a sense of foreknowledge of what I was going to encounter, of how I was going to explain these women's "intransigent behavior" in regard to the ideals of freedom, equality, and autonomy that I myself have held so dear. Over time, I found these ideals could no longer serve as arbiters of the lives I was studying because the sentiments, commitments, and sensibilities that ground these women's existence could not be contained within the stringent molds of these ideals. My prejudices against their forms of life (or, for that matter, theirs against mine) could not be reconciled and assimilated within "a cosmopolitan horizon" (Mehta 1999, 22); the unseemliness of differences could not be synthesized. Nor did I find myself capable of factoring this difference into my old calculus of what in their behavior had more "feminist potential" and what was hopelessly irrecuperable. This language of assessment, I realized, is not neutral but depends upon notions of progressive and backward, superior and inferior, higher and lower—a set of oppositions frequently connected with a compelling desire to erase the second modifier even if it means implicitly forming alliances with coercive modes of power.

In this absence of familiar milestones, I came to reckon that if the old fem-

inist practice of "solidarity" had any valence whatsoever, it could not be grounded in the ur-languages of feminism, progressivism, liberalism, or Islamism, but could only ensue within the uncertain, at times opaque, conditions of intimate and uncomfortable encounters in all their eventuality. I say this not to resurrect a redemptive narrative of anthropological reckoning or universal humanism that claims the power to break through the thicket of prejudices and find a common human essence. To do so would be to reduce yet again all that remains irreconcilable into the trope of a shared humanity and its assumed teleological futurity. Rather what I mean to gesture at is a mode of encountering the Other which does not assume that in the process of culturally translating other lifeworlds one's own certainty about how the world should proceed can remain stable. This attitude requires the virtue of humility: a sense that one does not always know *what* one opposes and that a political vision at times has to admit its own finitude in order to even comprehend what it has sought to oppose.

As must be apparent to the sensitive reader, I have avoided the strategy of rendering the Other through its traces and absences—a strategy pursued by postcolonial writers sensitive to the violence a hegemonic discourse commits when it tries to assimilate the Other to a language of translatability.[5] On this view, to render unfamiliar lifeworlds into conceptual or communicable form is to domesticate that which exceeds hegemonic protocols of intelligibility. I have avoided this strategy of narrativization because I fear that it engenders a certain recursivity that ends up privileging the hegemonic terms of discourse by failing to engage—and be engaged by—the systemacity and reason of the unfamiliar, the strange, or the intransigent. Furthermore, to the extent that the tilt of the current political climate is such that all forms of Islamism (from its more militant to its more quiescent) are seen as the products of a roving irrationality, I feel a certain responsibility to render to reason that which has been banished from its domain. Perhaps more importantly, it is through this process of dwelling in the modes of reasoning endemic to a tradition that I once judged abhorrent, by immersing myself within the thick texture of its sensibilities and attachments, that I have been able to dislocate the certitude of my own projections and even begin to comprehend why Islamism, at least in one of its renditions, exerts such a force in people's lives. This attempt at comprehension offers the slim hope in this embattled and imperious climate, one in which feminist politics runs the danger of being reduced to a rhetorical display of the placard of Islam's abuses, that analysis as a mode of conversation, rather than mastery, can yield a vision of coexistence that does not require making others lifeworlds extinct or provisional.

[5] See, for example, Bhabha 1996; Chakrabarty 2000; Spivak 1987.