

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Piety and activism in Egypt : reflections on framing, motivation, contradiction and desire

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9tc7x0v5>

Author

Lewis, Leslie R.

Publication Date

2010

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Piety and Activism in Egypt:
Reflections on Framing, Motivation, Contradiction and Desire

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Leslie Robin Lewis

Committee in charge:

Professor Suzanne Brenner, Co-Chair
Professor Roy D'Andrade, Co-Chair
Professor Hasan Kayali
Professor Martha Lampland
Professor Esra Ozyurek

2010

Copyright

Leslie Robin Lewis, 2010

All rights reserved.

The Dissertation of Leslie Robin Lewis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and
form for
Publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2010

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to family and friends in Egypt who opened their hearts and homes to me, and to family and friends here, who have buoyed and bolstered me, and provided unerring, unconditional love and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	ix
Acknowledgements.....	x
Vita.....	xi
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Common Portrayals, Complexity and Contradictory Effects.....	6
1.2 Individual Motivations.....	14
1.3 Commonalities Across Groups.....	15
1.4 Preview of Chapters.....	18
Chapter 2: Context.....	25
2.1 No Single Cairo.....	29
2.2 Political and Economic Climate.....	32
2.3 Physical and Social Environment.....	36
2.4 Conservatization and Islamicization of Society.....	41
2.5 Contrasts.....	44
2.6 Women’s Lives.....	49
Chapter 3: Fieldwork Methods.....	55

3.1 Grand Plans.....	57
3.2 Methodology.....	60
3.3 More Humility, and an Expanding Perspective.....	67
3.4 Concerns about research.....	68
3.5 Complications and Benefits in the Field.....	71
3.6 Analysis of Data.....	73
Chapter 4: Convergences and Divergences: Egyptian Women’s Activisms over the Last Century.....	75
4.1 Early Activisms: Turn of the Century.....	81
4.2 1920s-1940s.....	85
4.3 1950-1970: Nassarism, Arab Socialism and State Feminism.....	87
4.4 1970-1990s: Sadat and Infitah, Mubarak, Developmentalism.....	89
4.5 New Century: Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Social and Religious Conservatism.....	93
4.6 Convergences.....	97
4.7 Accretions.....	98
4.8 Tensions.....	99
Chapter 5: Character of the Piety Movement.....	102
5.1 Growth of the Movement.....	106
5.2 Social Composition.....	109
5.3 Practices.....	111
5.4 Distinguishing Pietists from Secular	

and Islamic Feminists.....	115
5.5 Guiding Principles.....	120
5.6 Inner Conviction of Pietists.....	121
5.7 Logic of Participation.....	123
5.8 Connection and Belonging.....	123
5.9 Accomplishment and Self-Control.....	126
5.10 Activities on Behalf of Others.....	127
5.11 A View of the Movement through a Different Lens.....	128
5.12 Effects in the Social Field.....	133
5.13 Multiple Economies.....	139
5.14 Conclusion.....	142
Chapter 6: The Experience of Individual Actors, and their Broader Social Effects.....	144
6.1 A (Post?)Modern Enterprise.....	147
6.2 New Roles for Women.....	149
6.3 Complexities.....	153
6.4 How Women Benefit.....	155
6.5 Social/relational Gains.....	160
6.6 Social effects.....	163
6.7 New Constraints.....	165
6.8 Conclusion.....	169
Chapter 7: A Framework for Examining Human Action.....	173
7.1 Internal Drives.....	176

7.1.1 Meaning.....	177
7.1.2 Relational Connection.....	179
7.1.3 Sense of Mastery, Control and Self-Efficacy.....	180
7.2 External Variables.....	183
7.3 Individual Variables: the particular circumstances of each individual.....	185
7.4 Reinforcers: Social Approbation and Cultural Legitimacy.....	186
7.5 Constructing Desire.....	188
7.6 Limits of Understanding: the Problem of the Frame.....	190
7.7 Two Tales of Segregation.....	195
Chapter 8: Case Studies.....	200
8.1 Love, Meaning and Identity (Aisha).....	200
8.2 Legacy (Salima).....	211
8.3 Practicality, Belonging and the “Will to Believe” (Fareeza).....	213
8.4 Order/Control (Zahra).....	219
8.5 Connection (Na’ima).....	226
8.6 Control/Cultural Symbols (Sumaiya).....	233
8.7 Conclusion.....	241
Chapter 9: Conclusion: Diverse Frames, Simultaneous Truths.....	242
References.....	253

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1: World Economic Forum comparison between scores of highest-ranking (Sweden) and lowest-raking (Egypt) countries with respect to economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, health and well-being of women.....	53
--	----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the National Science Foundation, the Bailey Scholarship Fund, Friends of the International Center, and Fletcher Jones Dissertation Write-Up Fellowship for their generous financial support of this research and writing. I would also like to express my gratitude to my academic mentors for their guidance and support, and to my husband, children and family for their emotional and physical support.

Chapter four of this dissertation has been accepted as a chapter in Arenfeldt, Pernelle and Golley, Nawar, Eds., *Mapping Arab Women's Movements*. University Press, currently in press. Ms. Lewis is the principal author on this paper.

VITA

Education

<i>University of California, San Diego</i> Ph.D. in Anthropology	2010
<i>University of California, San Diego</i> M.A. in Anthropology	2002
<i>University of Massachusetts, Amherst</i> M.PH. in Community Health Education and Epidemiology	1994
<i>University of California, Los Angeles</i> B.A. in Anthropology Departmental Honors	1990

AWARDS AND HONORS

• Dean's Social Science Research Travel Grant, UCSD	2008 – 2009
• Fletcher Jones Dissertation Year Write-up Fellowship	2007 – 2008
• Research Fellow, Institute for Gender and Women's Studies, AUC	2005 – 2006
• National Science Foundation Dissertation Grant	2004 – 2005
• Fulbright Scholarship (selected for award but research blocked by Egyptian Ministry due to "sensitive nature" of research topic)	2004 – 2005
• F. G. Bailey Fellowship, UCSD Department of Anthropology	2003 – 2005
• Diane Lin Memorial Scholarship, Friends of the International Center, UCSD	2003 – 2004
• TA Excellence in Teaching Award, Department of Urban Studies, UCSD	2002 – 2003
• Tinker Research Grant, CILAS, UCSD	2001 – 2002
• Member, SAMHSA Nat'l Steering Committee on Women, Trauma & Dual Dx	
• Public Health Traineeship	1998 – 2000
• Dean's Honor List, UCLA	1991-- 1992
• Rigger Brown Outstanding Senior Award, UCLA Rowing Team	1989 – 1990
• University of California Presidential Undergraduate Fellowship	1989 – 1990
	1987 – 1988

Teaching Experience

Lecturer – Urban Studies and Planning Program, UCSD **2009-2011**
USP 144: Environmental & Preventive Health Issues, USP 143: The U.S. Health Care System, USP 147: Case Studies in Health Care Programs: Poor and Underserved Populations, USP 145 Aging: Social and Health Policy Issues

Associate Faculty – MiraCosta College, Oceanside, CA **2008-2011**
Design and teach courses in cultural anthropology.

Graduate Teaching Assistant – Urban Studies and Planning, UC San Diego **2002-2009**

Graduate Teaching Assistant – Anthropology, UC San Diego **2000-2002**

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, created, proctored, and graded exams and papers for a six anthropology courses: Introduction to Culture, Law & Religion in Israel, and The Anthropology of Medicine, Social Anthropology, Anthropology of Education, Gender, Sexuality & Society

Adjunct Instructor – Psychology Department, Springfield College, MA **1998-1999**

Developed, taught and graded graduate course on group dynamics

Teaching Assistant – Public Health, U of Massachusetts, Amherst **1991-1993**

Taught discussion sections, held office hours, created, proctored, and graded exams and papers for two public health courses: *PH129 Health Care Myths & Realities* and *PH233 Sex, Drugs and AIDS*

Related PROFESSIONAL Experience

Western Massachusetts Training Consortium, Holyoke, MA

Director of Training and Research **1995 – 2000**

Principal grant-writer and coordinator of SAMHSA-funded research and intervention site in Franklin County, MA; program development and evaluation; additional state and local grant-writing and management; qualitative & quantitative research; community development activities; conducted focus groups & needs assessments; developed & facilitated workshops and trainings; planned several conferences, including logistical, administrative, evaluation and budget oversight; **oversaw direction of self-advocacy programs for people with developmental disabilities.**

Stavros Independent Living Center, Amherst, MA **1993 – 1995**
Health Education Coordinator

Developed and coordinated health education programs for people with developmental disabilities and their personal assistants.

1994 – 1995

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

Educator/Advocate

Facilitated workshops for college and community audiences on topics related to violence against women, (rape, domestic abuse), women's health, relationships, etc.

Publications and papers

Forthcoming from University Press: "Divergences and Convergences: A Perspective on Women's Activisms in Egypt over the Past Century," in Arenfeldt, Pernelle and Golley, Nawar, Eds., *Mapping Arab Women's Movements*.

2009. Book Review: *A Republic of Spirit and Mind: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* by Catherine L. Albanese in *The Golden Spiral*, a publication of the Metanexus Institute, Volume 10:4
<http://www.metanexus.net/Magazine/ArticleDetail/tabid/68/id/10909/Default.aspx>

2009. "Growing up righteous: childrearing models and pious practice in Cairo." Paper given at the biannual conference of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, March 27-29, Asilomar, CA

2008. *The Cairo Chronicles*. Booksurge

2007. "Piety as subterfuge: moral suspicion and anxiety in Cairo." Paper given at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, November 27-31, Washington, D.C.

2007. "Scandalous behavior: what transgressive acts tell us about social norms, values and gender ideology." Given at biannual conference of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, March 8-11, Manhattan Beach Marriott Hotel, Manhattan Beach, CA

2006. "Four Lives", in Adam Jones, ed., *Men of the Global South: A Reader*. London: Zed Books. <http://www.zedbooks.co.uk/book.asp?bookdetail=3784>

2005. "Activisms in Egypt". *Al-Raida Magazine*. Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Lebanese American University, Volume XXII, No 109-110: 15-22.
<http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida109-110/main.html>

2005. "Women's Mosque Movement in Cairo". *Al-Raida Magazine*. Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Lebanese American University, Vol XXII, No 109-110: 51-57.

2005. *The Academic Game: Psychological Strategies for Successfully Completing the Doctorate*. With Elaine Parent (lead author). Philadelphia: Infinity Publishing.

2005. "Integration of Alcohol and Other Drug, Trauma and Mental Health Services: An Experiment in Rural Services Integration in Franklin County, MA" (with Veysey, B; Andersen, R; Mueller, M; Stenius, V.) in Bonita Veysey, Colleen Clark, editors, *Responding to Physical and Sexual Abuse in Women with Alcohol and Other Drug and Mental Disorders: Program Building*. Binghamton, New York: Haworth Press, Inc.

ADVISING

- Faculty Advisor, Global Health Brigades, UCSD Chapter
- Faculty Advisor for multiple students through the Academic Internship Program
- Health Care-Social Issues Faculty Advisory Committee

Languages

- Spanish – speak fluently and read/write with high proficiency
- Egyptian Arabic – speak with medium proficiency; read and write with basic competence.

Memberships

- American Anthropological Association
- Society for Medical Anthropology
- Society for Psychological Anthropology
- Society for the Anthropology of the Middle East
- Society for the Anthropology of Religion
- Association of Feminist Anthropologists
- National Women’s Studies Association
- Middle Eastern Studies Association

References:

Roy D’Andrade Department of Anthropology University of Connecticut 354 Mansfield Road Storrs, Connecticut 06269-2176 Phone: 860-450-1643 Fax Number: (860) 486-1719 rdandrade@ucsd.edu	Barbara Brody, Director Center for Community Ophthalmology UCSD Shiley Eye Center 9415 Campus Point Drive La Jolla, CA 92093 Phone: 858-534-9671 Fax: 858-534-1691 Brody@eyecenter.ucsd.edu
Suzanne Brenner Department of Anthropology-0532 University of California-San Diego 9500 Gilman Drive La Jolla, CA 92093-0532 Phone: 858-822-1606 Fax: 858-534-5946 Sbrenner@ucsd.edu	Karen A. Stevens, Ed.D. Academic Program Manager University Without Walls University of Massachusetts Amherst 100 Venture Way, Suite 200 Hadley, MA 01035 413-577-0172 (voice) kstevens@uww.umass.edu

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

**Piety and Activism in Egypt:
Reflections on Framing, Motivation, Contradiction and Desire**

by

Leslie Robin Lewis

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Suzanne Brenner, Co-Chair

Professor Roy D'Andrade, Co-Chair

This dissertation contributes to the growing scholarship attempting to analyze and understand devout religious engagement, and to cull from its study insights about human motivation, complexity and desire. It considers the lives, goals and activities of pious Muslim women in Cairo, Egypt. Far from being a simplistic and easily-defined phenomenon, marked by homogeneous membership, strict and uncomplicated conservatism and the marginalization of women, the grassroots Islamic piety movement in Egypt encompasses diverse membership, multiple practices and complex and contradictory individual and social effects. Its internal diversity is revealed when the lives of individuals within it are examined. While the women have shared understandings of the importance and correct execution of pious acts, and while they are united in their worldview, as centered on the glory, beneficence and dictates of God, each

woman's engagement with the practices of the movement is spurred by a distinct set of needs and circumstances, and achieves different ends. At the same time, at the root of these differences lay common human drives for meaning, connection and control.

The specific aims of the dissertation are four-fold. The first is to provide an intimate view of the piety movement: its internal complexity and contradictions, and its effects, both for individuals, and for Egyptian society. A second goal is to capture and convey some of the internal diversity of the movement, and the multiple ways that individual women use the symbolism and idioms of Islamic piety to meet their social, practical and psychological needs: for expiation, for an ordered, purposeful life, for connection and belonging, for a sense of mastery and meaning, and as a way to adapt to sources of fear and anxiety in their lives. The third aim is to examine the ideals and practices of the piety movement through its own value lens in order to show why it "makes sense" within its historical and social context. The fourth goal is to propose a set of common human desires that transcend ideological and practical differences, and represent a point of commonality across diverse human projects and pursuits.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Deplaning in the chill of early January, 2005, with my children and husband in tow, I gazed out upon a sea of women in dark *abeyas* and head scarves. Eager men jostled for service opportunities and the tips they would bring. Around us were the tear-filled faces of families and friends, reuniting after long separations. Already in those early moments, signs of a deep faith in God and Islam were apparent in the comparatively culturally-sanitized space of the Cairo International Airport. During subsequent days I would find evidence of this religiosity all around me: in language, dress, and in the proliferation, normalization and celebration of prayer in public and semi-public (as well as private) space. Throughout the bustling neighborhoods of Cairo, the very passage of time was punctuated by the five daily calls to prayer. Fruit sellers organized their wares in such a way as to spell the name of Allah with a strategic mixture of mangos and tangerines. The sounds of live and recorded sermons flowed onto the streets from mosques, shops, taxis and apartment windows.

I was walking into the bosom of in-laws and extended family, an exceptionally pious group of people who would define a large part of my personal and ethnographic reality over the coming eighteen months. Living in close quarters with my Egyptian

mother- and sister-in-law, I found myself privy to intimate conversations, witness to immediate and extended family dynamics, and both participant and observer of established gender, generational and class hierarchies.

Within a week of our arrival we were drawn into the preparations for one of the two most important Islamic celebrations across the Muslim world, *Eid Al-Adha*, which coincides with the final day of the yearly *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. We participated in the division of meat from the morning ritual slaughter: one third to charity, one third to extended family, and one third to be cooked and enjoyed as part of the *Eid* celebration. The focus of these efforts: God, piety and charity towards others “for the sake of God” were themes I would see repeated day after day for the length of my stay in those dusty lands. The increased social and religious conservatism evident on the streets, in the malls and in the new construction of mosques across Cairo, was a trend that seemed to cut across all socioeconomic classes.

The extent to which Islam infuses the lives of members of my extended affinal family has grown steadily over the past twenty years. Objects and activities (newly) considered *haram* or forbidden have been gradually put aside: most songs and musical instruments, dance, attendance at the cinema, the viewing of non-Islamic television, and socializing between unrelated men and women. All had previously been a part of the family’s traditions. Now such things are considered secular distractions from proper Islamic pursuits and behavior.

The broad Islamic revival across Egypt and other parts of the globe has been the source of significant academic and popular interest (Esposito 1995; Hirshkind

2006; Ibrahim 1988; Keddie 1999; Macleod 1991; Mahmood 2005; Marty & Appleby 1991; Marsot 1984; Zuhur 1992). The indices of this *SaHwa* or reawakening include increased attention to religious observances, such as mosque attendance, prayer, fasting. In addition, religious programming and publications have proliferated (Abu-Lughod 2005; Bunt 2009; Eickelman 1997, 2002; Hirschkind 2006), and greater emphasis has been placed on Islamic dress and values. Public markers have included an increase in Islamically-oriented governments, organizations, laws, banks, social welfare agencies and educational institutions (Esposito & Burgat 2003).

Although a sea of change can be seen across the family of which I am a part (just as it can be seen across the country), it is not uniform. There are swells and eddies, flashes and shifting levels of commitment to this new piety. Some exceptionally devout individuals act as models to others. One member of the family partakes of extended prayers every night, prostrating herself for hours, sometimes even drifting off to sleep in a supplicatory pose. Her piety and conviction are legendary, evident in her dress (dark, wide, head-to-toe garments, including the *niqab* or full face veil), knowledge of the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* (sayings and doings of the Prophet Mohammed), and Islamic jurisprudence and practice. It is written on her body as well, in the form of a dark purple bruise on her forehead from long hours at prayer. She spends large portions of each day memorizing the sonorous lilts and caverns of *Qur'anic arias* (verses). She, and now other members of the family fast on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as during the middle of each Islamic month, following the practice of the Prophet.

Over the initial weeks of my stay I came to learn, by observation and by receipt of direct admonition, the precisely (Islamically) correct way to pray, yawn, sneeze, drink water, sleep, eat, attend to personal hygiene, dress and greet others. I adjusted my schedule to that of the household. Socializing and other activities were a part of our day, but they were secondary to prayer, Islamic *durus* (lessons), and efforts to aid people in need.

In the evenings, the family regularly received guests. Since our nightly visitors were almost exclusively individuals who shared the family's religious orientation, my early impressions of Cairo were that the new forms of public piety I had seen on previous visits, and read about in ethnographic (Abu-Lughod 1998, 2004; El-Guindi 1999; Fernea 1995; Hirschkind 2001; Hoodfar 1997; Mahmood 2001, 2003) and other observers' (Abdo 2002; Murphy 2002) accounts, were growing and spreading. It appeared to me that (a particular interpretation of) modest dress and behavior had become normative, and that evidence of public and private faith had become the new standard of basic respectability, morality, and for women, marriagability. Lack in any of these areas (not wearing a headscarf at a minimum, wearing too-tight jeans, interacting with men, working in a field of employment deemed corrupt, like television) was cause for familial concern and social sanction.

I spent most of those first four months immersed in a subculture of women who centered their lives around (their understandings of) God, and on the development of piety and other Islamic virtues. Saba Mahmood (2001, 2003, 2005), working with a similar group of women, highlighted this cultivation of a virtuous self as the primary

focus of pious women, and argued that it bespoke a model of agency, subjectivity and desire distinct from that of western-secular conceptions. The dress, action, interaction, charity, fasting, prayer and behavior I saw around me did seem to be almost single-mindedly guided by a commitment to God and moral self-discipline. The frequent response among pious women when I lauded a particular effort or sacrifice, was to “pray that God (should) accept” the fast, act of charity, or other sacrifice. It struck me initially as either wild insecurity or false modesty, but I came to understand that humility, modesty and self-abnegation were important parts of these women’s self-cultivation and moral project.

Over time, I was able to gain some perspective on the piety movement, and place it within the broader context of Egyptian society. As my range of contacts and experience expanded, I came to see that the level of piety to which I had become accustomed represented only a segment of the population, and one end of a continuum of religiosity within Egypt. At the same time, my familiarity with women’s lives within the movement, and thus, its internal diversity, grew. Differences in their attachments and motivations became apparent, and my understanding of the aims, longings, experiences and constraints of individual women deepened.

One of the aims of this dissertation will be to provide an intimate view of the piety movement: its internal complexity and contradictions, and its effects, both for individuals, and for Egyptian society. Taking a closer view problematizes neat social, political and religious categories. Contradictions and inconsistencies, inevitable in any human project, rise to the surface. A second aim will be to capture and convey

some of the internal diversity of the movement, and the multiple ways that individual women use the symbolism and idioms of Islamic piety to meet their social, practical and psychological needs: for expiation, for an ordered, purposeful life, for connection and belonging, for a sense of mastery and meaning, and as a way to adapt to a potentially debilitating fear. A third goal deals with the issue of framing, and it is meant to get at the cultural logic of participation. Thus, it is to examine the ideals and practices of the piety movement through its own value lens in order to show why it “makes sense” within its historical and social context. Finally, a fourth aim is to make a case that a common set of deeper human needs lay at the root of pious women’s (and all of our) major transformative projects and pursuits.

1.1 Common Portrayals, Complexity and Contradictory Effects

Recent scholarship (Abu-Lughod 1998; Asad 1993; Brenner 1996, 1998, 2005; Hatem 1994; Kandiyoti 1991; Keddie 1999) has dispelled myths of a homogenous (fundamentalist) “Islamism” pervading the Middle East, Africa and South/Southeast Asia. Works such as those of Deeb (2006) of Shi’i Muslims in Lebanon, Mahmood (2005) on pious Sunni Muslim women in Egypt, Foley (2004) in Malaysia and Brenner (1996, 1998, 2005) and Rinaldo (2006, 2008) in Indonesia, have shown some of the variety and complexity of Islamic interpretation and practice existing today. A multitude of distinct projects and strategies abound. Group agendas range broadly from the political to the social to the moral and, as many people will hasten to argue, in the inextricable combination of all three.

And yet, portrayals frequently fail to capture this complexity, not only due to oversimplistic and frequently inaccurate representations in the mainstream media, but because of the ways pious religiosity is framed and perceived even within academia. An excerpt from a talk given in 1995 by Marty Martin of the Fundamentalism Project, entitled, “Too Bad We’re Too Relevant,” gives a sense of the extent to which strongly pious movements have been perceived:

Much of what goes on within such fundamentalisms is threatening-or even devastating-to other kinds of fundamentalists, to more moderate coreligionists in the complexes out of which particular fundamentalisms grow, to their neighbors and rivals, to governments, and to the idea of civil society. (Martin 1996: 24)

The problem with such a characterization is that it lumps together multiple expressions of several different religious traditions as sharing a particular (and particularly threatening) orientation to the world. There is a failure to see the variety of individual religious interpretations and movements, and the complexity within each. In the case of the Egyptian piety movement, because there are markers of similarity with other groups identified as “fundamentalist,” including strict dictates over male and female dress, interaction and roles, for example, a presumption is made about the quality and tenor of being a part of it, particularly for women. Women’s lives, and in particular their freedoms, are understood to be constrained and diminished by their membership and participation in this group.

As Rinaldo (2006) has argued, pious forms of religion do not necessarily coincide with or contribute to conservative politics and the marginalization of women.

In her sample of pious Indonesian women, modesty and piety were central values, but activism in the community, and even at the national level, was also integral to both their lives, and their religious practice. In other words, for them, “piety means not only an ethical sensibility, but is an identity and a politics. (3)” For these pious Indonesian women, Islam is the very basis for reform projects. The pietists in Egypt did not agitate for political reform in the way that the Indonesian activists did. They may be propelled by a deeper, and/or different set of concerns, such as moral self-discipline, aid to others, and insights into the laws and desires of God. As Mahmood (2005) pointed out, living within a set of norms and ideals that constrain certain forms of action and expression is not necessarily problematic from the perspective of the women who adopt such a framework.

Women’s daily actions and interactions defy simple categorization. Contrary to assumptions that women in the piety movement are passive victims of oppression at the hands of both patriarchal institutions and individual men, many women benefit materially, socially and psychologically from their involvement. In addition, women’s adoption of the principles and practices of the movement has frequently served to increase their power relative to their previous circumstances. This is not to paint an overly rosy picture. Abu-Lughod (1996) has cautioned against a tendency in anthropological literature of the Middle East of presenting women as leading rich, rewarding lives with considerable influence and power. Many women do lead rich and rewarding lives, but the extent to which they possess or wield power and influence is far more complex. Women in Egypt confront patriarchy in every sphere of their

lives (Abu-Lughod 2001). Further, as Sharabi (1988) has argued, they must contend with “neopatriarchy.” Contemporary patriarchies, he says, are products of the intersection between the colonial and indigenous domains of state and political processes. Consequently, avenues devised by women in pre-colonial contexts for procuring and wielding power and influence, or even simply securing basic needs, may no longer be viable or effective. Further, they are subject to the particular patriarchies of colonial powers, and now, national laws and internationally-driven structural adjustment policies (SAPs) that constrain their lives in new ways. These circumstances are important for understanding the contexts within which women are making decisions and acting. These broader constraints tend to be mitigated or exacerbated by aspects of women’s lives, such as class position, family culture, and a woman’s relative position in intersecting economies of power and influence. Thus, while there can be real gains for women, their experiences vary significantly by class and other individual markers and divisions (Tucker 1993). Effects on individual lives depend on each woman’s unique set of relationships, perceptions, resources, and experiences.

The participation of growing numbers of women, regardless of their individual reasons for joining the movement, has had a cumulative effect on social and religious norms in broader society. One of these effects has been the Islamicization and increased conservatism of Egyptian society. New norms of dress, language and comportment have expanded, as have efforts at the desexualization and sacralization of public space. Practical effects “on the streets” have included greater gender

segregation, including all-women cars on the Metro, all-women taxis, and all-women days at local hotel pools. Standards of modesty have increased and religious programming has proliferated. All of this has entailed a conscious rejection of “modern” (liberal, western, secular, feminist) notions of “equal” relations between men and women, and shared-gender space, in favor of what is perceived to be the “natural order” of separate spheres, and complementarity between the sexes.

At the same time, even as dominant gender ideologies within the movement affirm the segregation and separation of spheres between men and women, and the rightful the dominance of men over women in everyday life, the relative power, influence and standing of some women in the community has increased. Owing to their level of piety and self-discipline, and to their mastery of different markers of model faith, they are highly esteemed and sought out for advice and guidance.

One paradox of the movement is that while “freedom” from the constraints of a dominant gender ideology is in no way the pietists’ intent, many of the practices and activities in which pious women engage do press against gender norms and dynamics. Prior to the current revival, religious knowledge and local mosques were the near-exclusive domain of men. Now, women have asserted their presence and insisted on the sharing of mosque and community space, both for prayer, and for lessons and charity work. Women, working individually and together in groups, labor to uncover the meaning and quotidian implications of the teachings of the *Qur’an* and *Sunna* (sayings and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed). Many women have thus gained access to religious knowledge, and through this, to new sources of power arising out

of a growing moral and religious economy. Piety and power have long been connected, not only for men but for women (Warren 2005).

Through means of formal organizations and informal groups, pious women constitute large sources of support, succor and resources for poor women and their families. They collect *zakat* (charity) and distribute the proceeds to those deemed most needy (and worthy, according to a particular set of religious and moral standards). Thus, they act as providers, traditionally another province of men.

Many of the actions of pious women on behalf of poorer families have had positive, practical effects. Further, women who distinguish themselves with respect to piety, charity and Islamic knowledge, command respect and deference from men and women alike. Because these women operate under a figurative veil of Islamic legitimacy, they have far more leeway in effecting changes in the gender status quo.

Any movement of large social change carries with it the potential for expanding possibilities, even while it may limit others. Most major historical changes have contradictory effects (Keddie 2006). As this work will try to show, the piety movement in Egypt offers its participants a source of deep meaning, connection, control and competency in multiple spheres, even while it also has the effect of curtailing some (though not all) types of involvement in broader social and political decisions and actions. Such complicated effects can be very clearly seen in the portion of the grassroots Islamic piety movement examined here.

The scope and range of activities of some women have expanded significantly. At the same time, there has been a forfeiture of previously accepted modes of being

and action. As women have embraced orthodox interpretations of Islam, and achieved levels of knowledge and memorization of the Qur'an previously enjoyed solely or primarily by men, they have gained some of the respect and legitimacy attached to it. At the same time, they eschew previously accepted forms of religious expression, those frequently engaged in by women, in the home (Ahmed 2000), as well as limited informal means of power traditionally wielded by women, like gossip and other forms of social maneuvering. There are further constraints, both self-imposed and externally-dictated, on women's participation in (non-religious) civic, political and business affairs, and deeply held conviction over the need for gender segregation in all areas of life. These have limiting effects for women and men both (since opportunities for collaboration are lost), but for women in particular.

The contradictory effects of the piety movement complicate simple divisions between "pious religious subjects" on the one hand, and "feminist subjects" on the other. The day-to-day practices of different groups contribute to this complexity of categories. Actors may espouse a particular set of beliefs, but this fact does not preclude them from utilizing other discourses, strategies and systems of thought if such systems promote or augment their own projects, needs or desires. Women in Egypt manipulate norms and institutions in order to promote their own interests (Hoodfar 1997). Actors often draw on available discourses, if they serve their immediate purposes or needs. Thus, for example, Islamic discourse is used by secular feminists in Egypt as one form of justification for gender equality. Islam is the predominant oppositional discourse (Rostam-Kayali 1999) and represents the only

source of moral and political legitimacy for most of the citizens (Kandiyoti 1995). As such, feminists are more effective if they work within the religious framework to achieve their goal of women's rights (Abu-Lughod 1998). Pietists, who genuinely and vocally embrace a gender ideology of male dominance and separate spheres, nonetheless "push" against gender constraints and expand the roles, responsibilities and availability of public spaces open to women. Pietists and secular feminists alike engage in a sort of "direct" (hands-on) activism with poor, marginalized women in Cairo. Pietists cite scientific findings when they perceive it as supporting their own claims to truth. This cross-utilization of strategies is not limited to Egypt. Pious Islamic activist women in Indonesia draw on a human rights discourse to bolster their arguments (Rinaldo 2006). Thus, actors utilize discourses and strategies at their disposal as a matter of practicality, but they tend to muddy ideological categories in the process.

1.2 Individual motivations

Particular individuals' motivations to join the modern Islamic revival have been explored in a number of different cultural settings (Afshah 1994; Brenner 1996; El Guindi 1999; Kandiyoti 1996; Keddie 1999; Mahmood 2001, 2003, 2005; Rinaldo 2006; Zuhur 1992). Authors have highlighted themes of cultural and religious identity, subjectivity, alternative modernity, piety, protest, practicality and rejection of Western economic and cultural hegemony as explanations for this growing personal and public movement. Some women understand their choice as an awakening, not only to societal

straying and corruption, but also to their own personal failures and need to live a truly devout Muslim life (Brenner 1996; Mahmood 2003; Zuhur 1992). This idiom has an interesting parallel in early twentieth century proto-feminist proclamations of a “women’s awakening” (Baron 1994) in this case to a desire for education, equality and participation in public life.

Women’s motivations for joining present-day feminist groups has not been explored, likely because participation in secular movements do not challenge notions of secular modernity and progress the way religious movements do. The increase in religious practice and sentiment, seen not only in New Religious movements (Barker 1995; Burrows 1987; Danforth 1989; Lewis 2004) and revivals of established faiths, but in the appropriation of religious symbols and rhetoric for legitimacy among politicians and activists alike, works against secularization theory (Comaroff 1985; Ong 1987; Smith 1987). Thus, there is ample research addressing the reasons for this (Berger, et. al. 1999; Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2009; Smith 1987). The feminist movement in Egypt, despite its local history, variegated cast and diverse agendas, is still seen (both internationally and in Egypt) as essentially Western and secular. It aligns with, rather than challenges, the current international (western) paradigm of social theory. Given the present socially conservative climate in Egypt, feminism’s longstanding association with the West, and a “backlash” against self-declared feminism (Zuhur 1999), openly adopting feminist ideas comes with significant costs. Women’s decisions to join, then, are of interest and significance.

Individual women and men respond in different (i.e., non-fixed) ways to the dominant cultural models and themes in public discourse. As D'Andrade and Strauss (1992) pointed out, culture does not affect human experience and knowing in any deterministic or monolithic way. Many men and women in Egypt align with some variation of an Islamic message and prescription for living, but the choice of message and orientation, and the extent to which it is internalized and practiced, varies tremendously.

Mahmood (2005) called into question assumptions of a universal desire for freedom among all people. Her research effectively showed, and this data confirms, that human agency is not defined or exhausted by a desire for liberation. A question remains, however, about whether there still might not be some kind of universal common denominator connecting all people, perhaps rooted in our basic desires for belongingness, meaning and control or mastery in our lives. Thus, a universal desire or drive for meaning, connection and control is theorized here. The way people seek to satisfy these drives varies significantly, based on both external influences, and individuals' interaction with their broader social environment. Beyond this, there are external reinforcers, as described in subsequent chapters. Some strategies which meet these needs are more socially and psychologically rewarding and rewarded than others.

1.3 Commonalities across groups

Mahmood (2005) took pains to distinguish the desires and subjectivity of pious women in Egypt as an important and worthy corrective to assumptions of a universal

desire for emancipation/freedom/autonomy. The aim here is to do the opposite: to suggest that when examined closely, through the stories of women's lives and their hopes and struggles, that commonalities of desire *do* become apparent, not only desires that connect diverse women in the piety movement, but that connect individuals across diverse movements in Egypt, and, as will be argued, across the world. All three movements examined in this study: pious women and secular and Islamic feminists, have a basis in ideas about justice and morality. After the trappings and ideological overlay are removed, what remains in each case is a passionate effort to "do good" in the world, with the caveat that there are obvious differences in conceptions of "good." Strategies may vary, although, as indicated and will be seen, the strategies of ideologically diverse groups sometimes overlap. Cosmologies, core beliefs and conscious or articulated goals do differ. Yet each project is substantially, and similarly, "pro-social," entailing selfless efforts on the part of committed individuals towards beneficial ends in their own lives, and the lives of others.

Drawing attention to the commonality of these movements is not to ignore or brush over the significant differences between the groups, or to minimize the deep religious conviction of the women (and men) involved in the Islamic piety movement in Egypt (and elsewhere). Rather, it is to broaden the way we might think about the activities, intentions and desires of the women involved. Seeing their actions as more *like* than unlike those of the archetypal models of agency and activism, we stand a better chance of understanding, and normalizing, them. It may also expand the way we think about deeply pious religious sentiment and practice.

On balance, as this dissertation aims to show, strong religious commitment, even that which is connected to and predicated on a strict and conservative conception of gender roles, spheres and hierarchy, does not necessarily entail a simplistically “raw deal” for women. Viewed through one lens, there is a narrowing of options for women. Viewed through another, there is an expansion. In neither case do women “check” their agency, creativity and passion at the door of piety. Rather, their expression finds new outlets within a different set of guidelines, beliefs and ideals. For the women in the piety movement, self-transformation, is a primary focus of attention. However, many pietists extend their “self” transformative energies in the direction of the needs of others. In fact, their very efforts on behalf of others are constitutive of their own moral self-improvement. Because of this, they share with other activists, an ethic and practice of care and compassion directed outward to the broader community.

1.4 Preview of chapters

The primary fieldwork on which this dissertation is based was with a group of about thirty women involved in a grassroots Islamic piety movement, primarily centered in and around the Nasr City section of Cairo. These were women who centered their lives around God and their understanding of His dictates. The original research design included a formal comparison with secular and Islamic feminists, and a further “control” group of ordinary Egyptian women who did not align themselves with a particular movement or ideology, at least not at the level of passion and

commitment as women in the other three groups. Research plans invariably mutate; this one was no exception. Although data is drawn from conversations and formal interviews with a number of women in these comparison groups, the bulk of time was spent, and consequently, the richest data is culled, from the women in the piety movement. Broad conclusions reflect an examination of all of the groups, but most reliably the pietists.

As will be outlined in the chapter on context, current conditions in Egypt, as across the global south and arguably across the world, are such that individuals have very little control over their economic lives, the actions of their putatively representative politicians, or even what goes on in the public sphere. Civic and political involvement is precluded by restrictive laws, social norms, and a heavy police presence. The physical environment within the teeming city is oppressive: the population has multiplied to eighteen million, the air is heavily polluted, trash builds up in open lots next to apartment buildings, and water service abruptly stops periodically and without warning. Swaths of drab, concrete high-rises radiate outward in all directions from new and old sections of the city, interrupted only rarely by patches of green.

Evident in the conversations and attitudes of every day citizens is a lack of faith in government and international bodies, a loss of a sense of control, and a perception of subtle changes in values “on the street.” People complain that there is less respect or concern for others, and less honesty. Old forms of kinship and locality have given way, for many Egyptians, to “modern” models of nuclear families and neolocality (Baron

2007). It may be that the diminishment of old bonds and sources of support and sociality has led to this perception (whether real or imagined) of lost values. It has been shown that religious revitalization movements tend to arise in contexts of social and religious pluralism, cultural change and moral uncertainty (Wallace 1966; Marsden 1980; Nagata 2001). A widespread desire for cogent rules, stronger families, and more defined roles has made popular religious movements attractive to many women (Keddie 1999). The piety movement offers the promise of a return to the values that Egyptians have traditionally esteemed and been known for: hospitality, humility, care for others, respect for women, modesty, propriety.

Chapter three will delineate the methods for both data collection and analysis. The focus will be on individual women's lives, and their motivations and experiences within the piety movement. Many studies of broad-based, conservative religious movements have focused primarily on geopolitical and economic phenomena as the source of the growth of religious movements (Beeman 2001; Lubeck 2000). Others have examined their common features and perceived effects (Martin & Applebee 1991). Others have attempted to define the desires and subjectivities of the participants, and to articulate the implications for liberal theory (Mahmood 2001, 2003, 2005; Rinaldo 2006, 2008). This dissertation focuses primarily on the daily lives of pious women in Egypt, drawing heavily on the intimate exchanges that arise out of everyday contact. The rationale is that individual perspectives can provide rich, nuanced insights into the character, diversity and effects of the movement from the "bottom up."

The latter portion of chapter three will discuss the use of different psychological, sociological and anthropological theories as heuristic tools for analyzing and interpreting the words and behavior of individual participants. Theoretical flexibility and bricolage, are offered up as a useful way to deal with, and make sense of, the internal diversity of the movement. Different women's involvement, and their commitment to pious principles and lifeways, varies significantly, depending on a multiplicity of factors, including the extent to which they internalize cultural models, values and discourses, their socioeconomic position, social networks, family, education and personality. Accordingly, members vary in their motivations for joining, and in their forms of expression. Examining the stories of a segment of this population, it is hoped, will provide a better sense of not only the intricacies of this movement, but of human motivation and action more generally.

Chapter four will provide a historical perspective on women's activism in Egypt over the past century. It reviews the contemporaneous origins and confluence of nationalisms, Islamisms and feminisms, and their eventual divisions. A survey of women's involvement in diverse movements over the past hundred years reveals that the "cross-over" we see today between religious and feminist/activist categories has historical precedent.

Chapter five will attempt to capture the diversity among the pietists by looking at distinct projects within the larger movement: self-transformation on the one hand, similar to the activities of the women described by Mahmood (2005), and outward-oriented piety activism for a strong subgroup within the movement. As will be shown,

both groups are propelled by a desire to act in ways that will be accepted and rewarded by God. This chapter will also attempt to capture some of the contradictions and inadequacy of methodological categories, by comparing and contrasting the activities and ideals of the piety movement with those of secular and Islamic feminists. As will be explored, some of the complexity and complication has to do with the simultaneous presence of different and intersecting economies, for example moral, social and religious as well as financial, which complicate “expected” hierarchies and power dynamics even at the individual level.

Chapter six seeks to explain the general appeal of the piety movement to women who, due to their relative class position, income level and education, would be considered unlikely to embrace its ideals and practices. Further, it will examine the success with which many women have enacted the values and goals of the movement, and how their activities push against traditional gender norms and space, even while there is no accompanying intent to consciously challenge such norms. Finally, there is an examination of some of the social effects of this growing movement in Egypt, including an expansion of roles and opportunities for some women, even as trends toward gender segregation limit women’s participation in other spheres of public life, and traditional forms of “feminine” maneuvering and influence, are reduced and devalued.

Chapter seven lays out a framework for understanding the different influences (some variable, some constant) on human decision and action, and proposes a “common denominator” of core human needs that can be seen to be at the root of the

pietists', and all human, endeavors. This is an attempt to connect even the most ostensibly ideologically distinct moral, social, political and religious projects on the basis of shared "deeper" longings and desires. It argues that certain core human needs, namely, those for meaning, connection and control, underlie even practically and ideologically distinct "surface" desires and activities.

In Chapter Eight, the lives of six pietists are examined in order to show the diversity of individual needs, personalities and circumstances within the movement, and the resulting variety of motivations for participation. At the same time that there are very real individual differences in experience and appeal of the movement, the cases will show that all of the women are ultimately driven by some or all of the three theorized needs in chapter seven.

Chapter 2:

Context

Haala enters the throng of humanity along the downtown streets of Cairo. She passes fruit sellers, small corner shops selling snacks, entrepreneurs hawking a variety of wares: women's clothing, roasted peanuts, Islamic literature and adornments, sunglasses. Customers jostle for space, as Haala propels herself forward. Lacking sufficient money for a taxi, she resigns herself to the discomfort and ignominy, but relatively low expense, of a shared van for her ride to work. Bracing herself for the inevitably close quarters, she looks determinedly away from the men and is grateful to see another woman seated in the middle with a space next to her where an older man has mercifully moved aside. Normally she has to contend with the unwelcome overtures, sometimes even the physical groping, by men on the crowded public transportation. This time, *Il-hamdulileh* (thank God), she will be spared.

After a half hour of starts and stops, loud yells and the choking fumes of traffic, Haala arrives at her office at the Ministry of Information, one of the many bureaucratic arms of the vast Egyptian government. Haala realizes that she is very fortunate to have a job, even if the pay is low. She earns two hundred pounds (\$40)/month, just enough to contribute to, but not cover, her family's expenses. Many of her friends are without jobs, some because of new social pressures to stay at home,

some because they cannot find work. Many of the husbands of her friends are unemployed as well, a fact which creates significant strain in their marriages and lives.

Unemployment is high; estimates range from 12-30%. Recent analysis of the psychological effects of extended unemployment, using the historical case of Austria (Muller 2008), provides insight into the potential social fall-out of the difficult, extended employment conditions in Egypt. Prolonged unemployment leads to idleness, hopelessness, and a contraction of an individual's sphere of influence. Unemployed men tend to decline into resignation and apathy. Women are affected as well, although their ill-effects tend to be mitigated by the more pressing needs and responsibilities of children.

Egypt's minimum wage has remained at a dismal 35 Egyptian Pounds (E£35 or \$6.50) a month since 1984. When bonuses, incentives and annual increases are factored in, the minimum monthly salary of government employees and public sector workers increases to about E£289 (\$53). This is a significant increase, but still a very low wage. Private sector employees often earn even less. In both cases, the income is far too low to meet even the most basic living expenses. As prices have risen and pay has remained unchanged, at least 44 percent of Egypt's population of 82 million now live below the poverty line of \$2 per day (Shaoul 2010).

Inflation reached 23 percent in July 2008 and remained high throughout 2009. Food prices have risen astronomically. Two years ago there were riots when the price of bread rose by just a few cents. A dozen people were killed across Egypt in clashes

with security forces. Such incidents are isolated, but the economic conditions that precipitate them create real everyday challenges for most Egyptians. Women are disproportionately affected since they and their children are far more likely than men to live in poverty.

Because salaries are so low, Egyptians are forced to work multiple jobs, if they can be found. In 2008, a survey of 73 cities worldwide by the Swiss investment bank, USB, showed that residents of Cairo worked the most hours—2,373 per year compared to an average of 1,902 in the other cities (Swiss Bank UBS 2009). Egyptians work very hard, but find themselves unable to get ahead. Many families can no longer survive on a single earner's income. Inflation has increased, price supports for staples like bread and cheese have been withdrawn, and real wages have dropped. This economic “crunch” has been gradually worsening for most Egyptians over the past three decades, in spite of official markers of national strength and prosperity.

In the years leading up to the 2008 global financial meltdown, Egypt's GDP grew yearly by 7%. However, although this looked good on paper, it benefited only a thin stratum, the business and military elite that form the government's social base. Policies have tended to respond to international pressure, and to create a climate friendly to business owners and multinational corporations, leaving the bulk of the citizenry to cope with their practical effects.

Partly as a response to this, and coupled with former President Nasser's reforms, which opened up educational and employment opportunities to broad swaths

of the population, women's participation in the formal labor force has been increasing since the 1950s. According to government estimates, the number of working women doubled from 500,000 to 1 million between 1978 and 1980. By 1982 women accounted for 14 percent of all wage-earning and salaried employees throughout the country. In 2004, women made up about 34% of the (non-agricultural) workforce in the formal sector in Egypt (Egyptian Human Development Report 2008). This seems moderate, but it does not account for women's high participation in the large informal work sector, which includes maids, caretakers and prostitutes.

As women's roles and responsibilities outside the home have increased, there has been no accompanying reduction in the workload *inside* the home (Hatem 1994). Although there are certainly individual exceptions, particularly among the more educated classes, the norm, and an important marker of masculinity, is that men do not attend to domestic responsibilities. Women cook, clean, tend, caretake, wash, mend and serve. Men do not. Consequently, as more and more women have joined the formal workforce, they have experienced a doubling (or more) of their workload (Macleod 1991).

Social and economic changes that challenge gender norms, and upset traditional dynamics between men and women, have been observed to precipitate a "backlash" in negative response to these changes (Faludi 1991). When individuals and groups perceive their sources of power and identity to be at risk, they lash out by asserting power or dominance in different contexts. If this is the case, it may not be pure coincidence that the behavior of men toward women in public has shifted

significantly, and for the worse. There has been a sharp increase in sexual harassment (Hassan, et. al. 2008). Public space in Cairo is both gendered and “classed” (de Koning 2009); men and women occupy it very differently. Women tend to move from place to place purposefully; they run errands, attend to business, shop for the night’s meal. Men, in contrast, are as comfortable being still as being engaged in some activity. Men seem to colonize public and semi-public space, gathering at *aHwas* (small cafés), food stands and stoops. Groups of unemployed younger men often line neighborhood streets, lounging, cat-like, on the tops of cars, calling out desultorily to girls and women as they pass by. Occasionally they draw themselves out of their lethargy for a pick-up game of soccer. When finished, they return to their stairwells and perches to smoke and chat.

This gendering of public space and current of sexual harassment and tension hit its apex at a public celebration in downtown Cairo in 2006. It was the second night of *Eid*, and thousands of Cairenes converged on the city center to celebrate a release from the restrictions of the previous fasting month of Ramadan. To many people’s shock and horror, the mostly-male crowd transformed into a pack of itinerant molesters. Touched off, some witnesses say, by frustration at the selling-out of a popular film before they could purchase tickets, hundreds to thousands (depending on the report) of boys, adolescents and young men went berserk, breaking the windows of the cinema before moving on to assault unsuspecting women nearby. The mob chased and surrounded every woman in sight, groping them lasciviously and attempting to tear off their clothes. Modest Islamic dress was no protection as the men attacked

veiled and unveiled women indiscriminately. Local police had been given the night off, and those off-duty officers who were appealed to for help waved off the assaults saying, “This is Eid!” Perhaps more disturbing, these same officers, initially so disinclined to assert their authority to protect the women, immediately flew into action to block the attempts of camera-wielding bystanders to document the mass assaults.

Initial reports of the event surfaced in the blogosphere and when the news trickled down to ordinary Egyptians, it was met with disbelief. Given Egypt’s conservative social and cultural traditions, and a decades-long trend towards greater public religiosity, such behavior was so outrageous as to strain credulity. Official sources were silent on the topic, fearing publicity which might negatively affect tourism. Eventually some newspapers and talk shows addressed the issue. Combining eyewitness accounts with soul-searching analyses, they tried to make sense of the deeply troubling event and devise strategies to avoid such situations in the future.

Although the occurrence was shocking, it was not without precedent. On the 26th of May of the previous year, in the heat of a contentious election reform debate, a group of women protesting downtown were assaulted in broad daylight by purported bystanders (later believed to be plain-clothes policemen or thugs hired by them). Security forces stationed around the protesters either looked on or actively encouraged the men. Women were thrown roughly to the ground and physically assaulted. Their clothes were torn and some of the men mimicked sexual thrusting movements on top of the women. The attack elicited tremendous shock, although some people rationalized that it was a consequence of the female protestors engaging in atypical

and unseemly public behavior. Still, even those whose political views ran contrary to those of the victims believed that the lewd, sexually humiliating and violent attack on women was unconscionable.

2.1 No Single Cairo

Cairo is comprised of many worlds. The content and subjective experience of each world depends a great deal on the gender, cultural identity, religion, and relative social and economic position of each individual actor. Opportunities are available to some and not others. The social and physical environment differs markedly from one part of the city to another, and these differences-class norms, barriers and values-are reproduced from one generation to the next.

The word, *zahma* literally means “blockage,” but it is used colloquially to refer to gridlock traffic. It is a useful metaphor for thinking about the political machinery in Egypt. Cairo traffic is legendary. Being in the midst of its punctuated flow is akin to a ride down a whitewater rapid. Lanes form and dissipate, cars slide into impossibly small apertures, vehicles aggregate...condense... and then (WOOOSH!) release every few minutes or so. Stoppages are arbitrary and unpredictable, but total.

In much the same way, individuals caught in the system of public administration and bureaucracy (a thing nearly impossible to avoid in one’s lifetime), face blockages of gargantuan proportions. Graft and delays are a part of everyday life. During one of my own many encounters with Egyptian administrative bureaucracy, I saw a woman perched on a hard, dusty bench in the hallway holding children younger

than my own. She sat impassive amidst the sea of bustling (mostly male) traffic and din. Even her children were calm, perhaps having already learned to be patient. When I asked the people helping me how long she would have to wait I was told casually, “Oh three or four days, . . . maybe two if she’s lucky.”

And yet, as on the Cairo streets, there are always small openings, ways around and through the “stuck points,” as long as one possesses resources or the right connections. When my husband or I entered the drab, non-descript administrative buildings toting backpacks and small children, we were immediately identified as westerners. Enterprising young semi-professionals sliced through the wall-to-wall smoke and people, and offered to do most of the work for us. If we need a formal statement of Power of Attorney to enable our agent to go to Alexandria to grease the wheels and get our furniture out of its lonely three-month-long container prison, “*Mefish mishkela*” (no problem). For a mere 1000% mark up, these men would push the form through, get the signatures, and enable us to depart in only three hours. As was the case with the woman sitting on the bench, however, most of the people there could *not* afford the special treatment that a hundred and twenty Egyptian pounds (about \$20) buys.

Disparities in access, resources and rewards are stark and unapologetic. This inequality of opportunity fosters surprisingly little overt anger or foment. Most people, preoccupied with survival (the underclasses), or with maintaining or advancing in class status (working and middle classes), do not tend to rail against the institutionalized injustice so much as they wish they had some of the perks that wealth

and position afford. The average Egyptian has very little control over his or her world. National and international policies create social and economic realities over which the citizenry has no say, but with which each must contend. Perhaps not surprisingly, many respond with apathy and detachment to politics, which they perceive as pointless and predetermined (Abdelhadi 2005).

Cairo houses a burgeoning population of natives, migrants and foreigners, and both reflects, and responds to, the norms, values, desire and goals, as well as the internal diversity of these groups. What one is struck by, driving through the streets of Cairo, are the contrasts. Cairo is a mixture of old and new, of western-style imports, copies and hybrids, alongside traditional Egyptian foods, music, and norms. On any road coming in or out of the city there are antediluvian donkey-drawn carts laden with fresh, cheap produce. These rickety get-ups jog alongside late model luxury cars with tinted windows, seemingly oblivious to any danger or annoyance they might be causing.

In the newer “suburbs” of Cairo, there is far less blending of worlds. One can see here, instead, the expansion of a private building sector that responds to the very wealthy Egyptians and ex-patriots. Here there are two-hundred dollar-a-night hotels with wave pools and all the amenities of five-star equivalents in the U.S. The new neighborhood streets are laid out like tract home suburbs in the U.S. The desert air is clean; the surfaces of all of the new units are sanitized. Reminiscent of wealthy areas in southern California, maids and other workers commute from poorer parts of the city

on a daily basis, to clean houses. Apart from this daily influx, the community remains very homogenous with respect to class.

In the slums of Imbaba, the opposite can be seen: desperation and poverty. Families live hand-to-mouth in small hovels, relying totally or in part on the charity of the local mosque or informal groups of pious women who dole out food, clothing and medicine. There is no formal infrastructure: no electricity or running water, except what people have rigged up. Children are unkempt, owning typically only a single set of clothes. Flies and rats are rampant. Mothers, exhausted and drawn, age prematurely.

2.2 Political and Economic Climate

There are significant restrictions on political or civic participation that is critical of the government. The combined restrictions of a thirty-year Emergency Law, social norms of civic non-participation, and a well-grounded fear of the police have tended to discourage active protest or dissent among the populace. Police presence is ubiquitous and police violence is entrenched. The majority of Egyptians seem almost trained to fatalism and apathy. Among this group, I suspect that impetus for change and an improved life has not been squelched entirely. Rather, the discontentment and desire for change has been channeled into spiritual and religious arenas, areas which are more within individual control. At the same time, there remains a minority who do not shrink from dissent and activism.

In recent years, Egypt garnered a good deal of international attention when President Hosni Mubarak permitted, for the first time in history, the inclusion of opposition candidates in the presidential election. Under some international pressure he also relaxed enforcement of rules against public gatherings and some forms of public protest. This instilled hope in some and led to the growth of opposition parties, the most vocal/prominent of which was a coalition of groups and individuals calling itself *Kifaya* or “enough.” This group was (and still is) committed to reform of corrupt governmental practices: nepotism, injustice and failure to govern in the true interests of the people. Criticism of the government was tolerated to an extent¹, but when it came down to actual elections, there was never any doubt that Mubarak would emerge the winner. Only 25% of Egyptians voted and among those, many were pressured to vote for Mubarak by use of such tactics as bribery, threat and thuggery (Blaydes 2006). I recall the stories circulating in neighborhoods of monetary offers for votes, and of the presence of video cameras and party officials at polling stations to intimidate voters. Thus, while international reports of Egyptian democratic reforms paint a picture of a budding democracy, the reality on the streets (and in the voting

¹ This was, and still is, a risky proposition since individuals can still be arrested and held merely for speaking ill of the Egyptian government. Ayman Nour, a prominent critic and leader of the Al Ghad (“Tomorrow”) liberal opposition party, was jailed in 2005 and not released until 2009 (Boukhdar 2009). Twenty thousand political detainees languish in Egyptian prisons (Soueif 2006).

locations) is of an unabating grip on the part of the ruling regime on politics and Egyptian citizens² (Soueif 2006).

In parliamentary elections, similar tactics were used to maintain the power base of the ruling party, *Al Hezb al watani al democrati* (the National Democratic Party). In spite of this, and in spite of the official prohibition against religiously-based political parties, candidates from the Muslim Brotherhood (running as independents) emerged with 20% (Abdel-Latif 2005) of the seats—a record high. This is particularly striking given the formal and informal barriers to such change. The numbers are not enough to effect any real change, but, given the risk individuals took to cast votes in opposition to the ruling party, it did make a significant statement about the strength and direction of many voters' sympathies.

Although some observers have been heartened by these developments, most Egyptians continue to operate with a deep reluctance to engage in any kind of political activity, nor even public outspokenness. The current regime aligns unapologetically with a very narrow business elite and uses the security apparatus to stifle dissent. Although there is a small group of creative and courageous writers and film directors who push against strict government standards, the majority of TV programming remains self-censored, pro-government and leery of controversial content. The eyes and ears of the government are on the street. The police and armed forces act as tools

² In 2005, the Freedom House rated political rights in Egypt as "6" (1 representing the most free and 7 the least free rating), civil liberties as "5" and gave it the freedom rating of "Not Free." (BBC 2007)

of surveillance and enforcement, generating fear by both their physical presence and by their notoriously vicious tactics. The might and influence of the military is evident from the preponderance of machine gun-clad soldiers at street corners, universities, houses of worship, and other strategic locations throughout the city.

Police harassment and torture of prisoners is institutionalized, frequently sadistic and almost completely without accountability. The Emergency Law, in place now for nearly 30 years, gives the police and armed forces de facto immunity and impunity in dealing with citizens³. As Abu-Lughod (2005) observed of Egyptians, “for many classes the experiences of the (modern) nation-state have tended to be more through police violence, official corruption, security surveillance and the maltreatment of conscription than through the privileges of office, income and social standing (14).” One secular activist I know works tirelessly to end this abuse of power. She co-founded a rehabilitation center for victims of torture⁴. It was a bold move, since its work both draws attention to, and attempts to create accountability for, the abuses of the police. The program is only tenuously kept in place through the support of international human rights organizations, and it faces frequent threats of closure from the government.

³ Egypt periodically indicates that it will abolish the Emergency Law (EL). In March 2007, despite significant mobilization by *Kifaya* and other opposition groups, the EL was renewed. Further, President Mubarak approved several constitutional amendments to include "an anti-terrorism clause that appears to enshrine sweeping police powers of arrest and surveillance." In 2009, the vote came up again. Despite protests, the EL was renewed yet again for an additional two years.

⁴ *El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence*
<http://www.alnadeem.org/en/node/23>

In the face of threat and actual violence, and apropos the rumblings of dissent described earlier, groups of Egyptians have and do attempt to challenge the status quo. Protests in central Cairo are sometimes political in nature, but usually have to do with a call for higher wages, or resistance to privatization and loss of benefits. They have become, according to reports, almost a daily occurrence. According to a report by the Solidarity Centre, a trade union sponsored group in Washington, 1.7 million workers engaged in 1,900 “strikes and other forms of protest” from 2004 through 2008 (Shaoul 2010). Estimates for 2009 suggest that there were 1,000 strikes and other forms of industrial action (Shaoul 2010).

And yet, they have very little effect. The government has embraced market reforms, low wages and anti-trade union legislation in an attempt to make itself attractive for direct foreign investment, and the vocal discontent of such a small minority does little to alter this. The threatened and actual abuses of the police force assures that opposition to official policies does not grow too large. This is particularly so because the police force is ready and available to It Both the government and the police have shown themselves to be without compunction in committing systematic human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch 2010).

2.3 Physical and Social Environment

The physical and social environment exerts a tremendous influence on individuals’ perceptions, options and activities. People are surrounded by the deleterious effects of inadequate social policy and infrastructure. Rows of drab,

grime-spewn, high-rise apartment buildings sprawl outward from points throughout the city, many unfinished with thick bars and wires rising above the top floor. There is a dearth of grass and foliage, and few public retreats for moments of peace or repose. Frequent gridlock traffic belies the glut of overutilized, undermaintained, black exhaust-coughing cars, along with the lack of traffic planning or enforcement.

For the past thirty years, even as record numbers of immigrants have entered Cairo from both the beleaguered countryside and neighboring countries, the government has failed to fund improvements to infrastructure in order to support the increased numbers of people. Environmental controls are either non-existent or unenforced, so that residents are exposed to everyday toxins like lead and carbon monoxide (World Bank 2004). The public education system is deeply underfunded: teachers' salaries are abysmally low, and most have to supplement theirs with tutoring or a second job (Hargreaves 2001; Shoeb 2004). Healthcare is similarly underfunded: Egypt spends 3.8% of its GDP on healthcare, less than what is seen in lower-middle income (LMI) countries, and less than most countries in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region. Its life expectancy lies below the regional and LMI average. (Gericke 2004).

Trash is carelessly strewn across city streets and tossed into open lots from the roofs of surrounding apartment buildings. It accumulates there, fetid in the heat, attracting rats, stray cats, and dogs. City water is heavily polluted (Myllylä 1995), and then chlorinated to such an extent that the levels of chemicals may be as harmful to human health as the original microbes they are meant to eradicate. The middle and

upper classes now regularly drink bottled water at a cost far beyond the means of the rest of the population. Cairo now has the dubious honor of having the most polluted air in the world (World Bank 2004).

The physical environment, which affects all citizens to varying degrees, is yet another area of life over which citizens have little to no control. There is widespread suspicion, and it seems reasonable to assume, that increased levels of toxins and pollutants in the air, water and food have contributed to the rapid growth in cancer rates and other chronic diseases. General nutrition has suffered as more healthy traditional foods have been pushed out by fast food imports and imitations (Galal 2002). Such food, because it is only affordable for some, and comes with the lingering glamorous association of the west, has come to be the new prestige food.

Obesity rates have risen at epidemic rates in Egypt (Galal 2002), mirroring the phenomenon across the world, as more and more of people's calories are filled by refined sugars, carbohydrates and fats. Mortality rates remain high for infectious diseases in the countryside, even as they climb for chronic diseases such as cancer and coronary heart disease (FAO 2006). Assaults on health are growing, and are devastating in their distribution. Their apparent randomness contributes to a sense of powerlessness and despair for many citizens.

Egyptian society is highly class-conscious. Both class and regional identity are marked off by dress, speech, hygiene, bearing and gait. Occasional resistance to norms notwithstanding, most people conform to, and perform according to, a clear class hierarchy. The woman coming to her benefactor's door for charity is not invited

in, but rather sits on the grimy steps outside the door and waits. As a general rule, the less money you possess, the longer you wait anywhere you go. The poor woman kisses her benefactor's hand and uses elaborate, flowery language to praise her goodness and hope that God will reward her.

Among the pious women of the upper class, charity is always dispensed with good will, but also a healthy dose of moralizing and proselytizing. Class tends, also, to trump gender hierarchies: lower class men are solicitous of, and deferential towards, women of higher classes, particularly when they are providing a service and being paid by them. Ill-treatment and exploitation of poorer, less-educated classes is rampant partly because there is a surplus of workers, and partly because such treatment has a long history. *Bowaabs* (caretakers of apartment buildings), *shighellas* (maids) and apprentices are typically paid low wages and are vulnerable to various forms of physical and sexual abuse. Young men are kicked around, cuffed, and berated as a matter of course. Young women working in the homes of the upper classes are at particular risk (Ahmed 2007), a circumstance which has been captured both in literature (El Sadawi 2007), and in the everyday boasting of men.

Over the course of my fieldwork, my husband, an Egyptian-Eritrean by birth, spent many casual evenings with old school friends. Through him, I gained insight into the lives of upper and middle class men, and particularly into the form and content of their interactions without women present. It was immediately clear that their behavior, speech, posturing and topics of conversation were very different from what I could observe at the few mixed-sex gatherings of which we were a part. Sexual

relations with maids was a topic of conversation on at least three occasions. Some of the talk was mere bravado; someone in the group was “performing” masculinity by means of a sexual boast. However, at least one serious conversation proclaimed the near inevitability of a liaison between the “master” of a house, and the maid. The men viewed this as entirely consensual and mutually-desired. When my stand-in, self-righteous, Foucauldian feminist husband questioned the “freedom” of a maid’s choices under such conditions, his friends told him he was ridiculous.

Self-expression has its limited, culturally-sanctioned outlets. Non-normative sexual, artistic, political, religious, social, or gendered behavior are ventured and accepted only in limited spheres. There is very little social flexibility and acceptance for people who step outside legitimate cultural categories and practices. The threat of social stigma alone is a powerful deterrent, so people tend to self-police. For those who do not, there are various levels of community and administrative surveillance and control. The comings and goings, the company and the dress of neighbors is closely monitored, as I discovered on a number of occasions. When our Christian neighbors observed that we had many visitors wearing the *niqab* (face veil) and other markers of “extreme” piety, my husband was called into the local equivalent of the Office of Homeland Security for a (fortunately nonviolent) interrogation. When I took my early AM walk through my neighborhood streets completely covered in modest Islamic dress, I was followed for a half-hour, and then approached, by tense police officers with guns. The Egyptian government embraces, at least publicly, a faithful Muslim

populace. However, it is wary of levels of faith that challenge order or the political status quo.

2.4 Conservatization and Islamicization of Society

Egypt is a Muslim country by sheer numbers, but also by the extent to which Islam is weaved into the tapestry of society. Although Egypt's Islamic roots go back over twelve hundred years, its conceptualization, and public expression of faith has changed, and changed again, in response to local, national and international factors.

Islam infuses all aspects of life in Egypt, influencing food choices, punctuating the language, and sculpting the landscape. The call to prayer regulates time and space, acting as a fixed and vocally-prominent point in time around which activities and meetings are scheduled. There are mosques in most large public settings, like the airport and the newer malls that cater to the moneyed, mainly-Muslim masses. But even if there is no official place to pray, people carve out private, sacred space in almost any setting with nary a glance from passers-by. I witnessed people kneeling down to pray in nooks at the end of university hallways, in the narrow aisles of double-decker busses, even outdoors on a small patch of green traffic median with cars whizzing past on both sides. All these markers of faith act as constant reminders of faith and morality.

Public and private expressions of individual piety have increased over the past several years, a phenomenon witnessed by local and foreign observers both (Murphy 2002; Mahmood 2003, 2005). The importance of religion in people's lives can be

seen in the vast (and growing) number of mosques and churches across the city. The deeply pious believe that it is incumbent on them to not only exemplify high moral and religious standards themselves, but also to help others to be good Muslims as well. They appear to abide by a religious imperative to liberally and unselfconsciously dole out advice to others. This happens regularly, in private and public, with intimates and strangers alike. At street shops and in taxi cabs, devout citizens blare radio sermons or tapes of Qur'anic recitations so that they can fill their work hours with the words of God. Hirshkind (2001) wrote of a taxi ride he took with a matronly older woman and a teenage boy in which the group debated the assertion that music is *haram* (forbidden) in Islam (and thus should have no place in public transportation). Such conversations are unremarkable and commonplace in Cairo, permeating everyday life.

Even people who are only moderately religious argue passionately over religious points and interpretations. Islam is the lingua franca in Egypt, both the medium of communication and its primary content. References to God are ubiquitous. Few utterances tumble from tongues without a ceremonial reference to Allah, either to acknowledge or thank, beg aid or favor, give credit or express a wish that good things will come.

An atmosphere of religious and moral awareness and discipline has thus been created, through shifts in language, public discourse and comportment. Private and public space alike have become increasingly Islamicized by the ways people dress, speak, interact and behave. The religious practices of the newly pious have transformed ordinary and profane space into, if not the sacred, then at least into

decidedly and self-consciously moral space. Pious women and men reject liberal (often western) styles of dress and modes of interaction between women and men that had become more common through the middle of the twentieth century. They have adopted a new form of Islamic dress (protesting its historical legitimacy as authentic wear at the time of the Prophet). They eschew casual interaction with unrelated members of the opposite sex, arguing that such behavior invited temptation and sin.

Today, three decades of increasing Islamic religiosity (and identity politics) have left their mark: the *hijab*, or modern head and neck scarf, is the feminine norm. There are variations within the larger pool, ranging from the more conservative *khimar* and *abaya*, both more modest, shape-concealing garments, to the basic head covering that young women combine with snug fitting, western-style clothes. Still, the baseline standard for modesty and proper dress has been raised. Now it is women who do not cover who stand out and whose morality and religiosity, and thus, their marriagability, are called into question. Despite the frequently invoked *hadith* (saying of the Prophet) that one cannot judge what is in another's heart, a woman's character is indeed judged by the way she presents herself to the world. Women are scrutinized for their choice of garments. The strength of their faith and morality is presumed based on this superficial evidence. In this context, the bar is raised for those interested in demarcating a particular brand and (elevated) level of piety. In order to distinguish oneself as pious beyond reproach, one must not only cover with a headscarf and clothes that cover most of the body. One should wear a garment that conceals all suggestion of bodily form, accompanied by the *niqab* (face scarf). Growing numbers

of women walk the streets in just such a fashion, murmuring recitations from the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* as they move through the streets.

Morality and proper behavior, always matters of public policing and discourse, have now become even more pronounced, with talk shows devoted to the topic, voluminous literature aimed at transforming the self, and morality tales to warn those who might stray from the “right path.” Neighbors, family members and acquaintances regularly monitor and comment upon one another’s activities, levels of modesty, prospects and successes in marriage and employment. Those not internally motivated to practice self-restraint in their behavior, dress and interactions with others because of adherence to strict interpretations of Islam will do so out of fear or wariness of public judgment and harangue.

2.5 Contrasts

Against and in contrast to this backdrop of conservatism and religiosity, there is a visual onslaught of sexualized and commercialized images. In some ways, this is the public face of economic policies which have opened the Egyptian marketplace to multinational interests and created a flood of western goods into the country. On city streets, modestly dressed women and men pass huge window displays where leggy mannequins draped in slinky, diminutive lingerie jut their hips out suggestively. Large billboards regale passers-by with images of female models poised, mouths parted in apparent pre-orgasmic bliss as they anticipate their phallic ice cream confections. Music videos, home-grown and American imports alike, explode with

sexual imagery. These are the icons of moral decay against which many *imams* (preachers) rail, the evidence of Western cultural hegemony and corruption. The current generation of youth is believed to have been corrupted by the unbridled, libidinous immorality of the West.

There seems to be a current of moral anxiety preoccupying the social body. On many occasions, I heard people lamenting that “people are different these days: they are less honest, more self-serving.” I was advised that one must be on one’s guard because people are now inclined to take advantage of others for their own benefit. Such sentiments are very much in contrast to traditional Egyptian values of kindness, honesty, hospitality, and aid. Alongside this feeling of a loss of traditional values and sociality, there is a real preoccupation with the immorality of modern life. As urban living has become increasingly complex and anonymous, as supports and real opportunities for people have dwindled, and as any sense of accountability by the government has disappeared, individuals’ sense of security and self-efficacy have plummeted. At the same time, all forms of criticism and dissent are suppressed. It may be that, in reaction to these circumstances, frustration and discord are channeled into a culturally legitimate and politically safe preoccupation with moral misrepresentation, inauthenticity and duplicity in everyday affairs. This has created the curious circumstance of a sort of war for the moral high ground.

Among the large and growing groundswell of people (re)oriented to faith in very public and self-conscious ways, good morals are considered to be both arising from, and impossible without, *deen* (religion). Concern is focused on the corrupting

influence of the imported advertising images, music videos, and movies on impressionable young minds, rather than on the social and economic problems that plague society, and their underlying causes. Thus, loss of *deen* and morality is a primary focus and concern of the faithful. It is the stuff of sermons and daytime talk shows alike.

There are tales of women going out alone and being kidnapped by groups of men in vans, taken elsewhere and raped. Popular Islamic cassettes and literature describe in gruesome detail the agonies of hell for the masses who stray from the straight path. One oft-recounted story told of a young man who went to nightclubs, mingled with women, drank and did not heed repeated admonitions by his parents to “pray and be a good Muslim.” He died suddenly, without apparent cause (though listeners silently concurred that it was God’s punishment). The night the young man was buried, his father came to the cemetery to dig up the grave (a ghastly thing to do, but no other listeners ever seemed concerned). When he opened the coffin he was horrified to find his son’s body contorted in an obvious response to excruciating pain. He wore an expression of torture. His hair had turned white.

Such tales were told repeatedly, wide-eyed, and with a frisson of fear. They left people absolutely spellbound, and the intended audience, teenagers and young adults, typically came away from the experience recommitted to prayer and living an upstanding, moral life. Most people, believing Islam to be the only legitimate discourse in the country, are swept up by religio-moral trends. A minority of individuals do have a more social-structural (as opposed to individual-moral) analysis

of the current problems in society. Secular-oriented intellectuals and activists tend to see human misery as resulting from systems, norms and events in particular sociopolitical and historical circumstances. They also see women, the poor and other marginalized groups as disproportionately ill-affected by these circumstances.

Many in this group would locate the roots of social ills like crime, prostitution and drug use in governmental and international policies that have created a broad economic crisis, and eviscerated public social and financial supports. In spite of their perspicacity on this score, they fail, in the popular media, at least, to effectively deliver a critique or counter solution that goes beyond advocating/practicing greater conservatism and individual constraint.

Rather than offer a counter analysis identifying systems and institutions as the root of social problems, they instead attempt to challenge and ridicule visual displays of piety as mere subterfuge blanketing immoral and unethical goals and practices. They “turn the tables on the faithful,” accusing them of moral hypocrisy. They decry the ostensibly pious as false, hypocritical and scheming. Thus, in secular circles I heard tales of “*niqabis*” (fully-covered women wearing a *niqab* or face veil) riding in taxis, naked beneath their outer garments, to paid or unpaid assignations, ...tales of young women in conservative Islamic dress leaving their homes with heads bowed piously but then arriving at nightclubs and throwing off their *hijab* and dancing the night away.

Groups of business owners spoke disdainfully of “men with beards” (a marker of piety in men, along with short *galabayette* (full-length gowns) and full-time

possession of prayer beads and copies of the Qur'an), and refuse to hire them saying, "They are totally unreliable. They have no work ethic. They are lazy and dishonest."

One interviewee complained bitterly of the hypocrisy of supposedly religious men: shop owners, taxi drivers, even sheikhs portraying themselves in a pious light, who nonetheless lie and cheat to make a little extra money from customers, or (even greater hypocrisy, in the case of the sheikh) fondling the thighs of teenage girls they were supposed to be tutoring.

A cartoon in one of the most widely-distributed newspapers epitomizes the cynicism that characterizes the counter discourse. A picture of three women's heads from behind, one without headscarf, one wearing a basic *tarha* or headscarf, and one in a *khimar*, which is a larger, longer, more conservative version. They are placed next to a picture of some woman's rear-end in tight-fitting pants, her curves prominent. The caption beneath the cartoon reads, "*A hundred pounds for every reader able to identify the owner of the bottom half!*" The cartoon makes fun on two levels: one is seemingly conservative, holding up for ridicule women who signal religiosity through one aspect of their dress but who betray their true character by their choice of tight-fitting, western-style clothes. The second jab is deeper, suggesting that pious appearances do not represent the truth of the inner motives and depravity of many of their numbers.

The counter discourse, which intends critique of this widespread preoccupation with religiosity and conservatism in society, as well as its assertion of the association between morality and Islamic piety, has the opposite effect of raising the religiosity

bar even more. In other words, it tends to perpetuate and increase the very phenomenon it is meant to criticize. The message received by the religiously-minded seems to be that even moderate visual evidence of piety is now open to skepticism, and thus, greater and greater efforts must be undertaken to prove an individual's piety (and good girl-ness, and marriagability). Public/social, familial and self-scrutiny all rise.

Thus, two ideologically-opposed forces (branches of the Islamic political and piety movements on the one hand, and secular intellectuals and activists on the other), tend to foster the same moral preoccupation, both ratcheting up the baseline level of what "counts" as modest and pious, and increasing the reliance of the population on visual markers of religiosity as evidence of moral credentials.

2.6 Women's lives

Egyptians today are exposed to an onslaught of opposing and contradictory cultural messages about what forms of behavior, interaction, dress and action are worthy of pursuit, and which are morally and socially acceptable. Traditional Egyptian conceptions of family, work, gender relations, and public behavior mingle with, overlap, and sometimes clash with the conflicting beliefs and norms of alternative (Western-modern, neo-Islamic) ideologies (Beeman 2002). Women in particular face contradictory role expectations and social sanctions when they try to meet the conflicting demands of competing ideological systems (Macleod 1991). Women's work lives have simply doubled (or tripled). Economic changes have had

the further effect of complicating gender role expectations and relations between women and men.

The current double burden women face certainly has precedent. Historically, cultural, religious, and nationalist discourses have charged women with maintaining continuity with the past ("tradition") and upholding cherished moral values and cultural institutions (most notably those connected with the family) (Ahmed 1993; Baron 1994; Chatterjee 1993). Thus women have long shared responsibility for the project of modernization with men on the one hand, (and been roundly criticized when they are seen as holding society back from making progress), and been charged with the task of maintaining tradition and core moral values on the other (Mankekar 1999; Katrak 1992). Negotiating multiple pressures and responsibilities takes its toll. MacLeod (1991) addresses some of the social and psychological strain she witnessed in her work with lower middle class women in Cairo. The women with whom she worked typically held jobs outside the home in order to keep the family financially afloat, but faced censure (directly) from neighbors, and (indirectly) from local sheikhs and media discourse for not devoting themselves entirely to the (home-based) care of their family.

I observed the same pressures on women, particularly those from the middle classes for whom work is perceived as unnecessary and thus, frivolous. One conversation I had with an interlocuter brought this point home. Nur was a literature professor at a local university who self-identified as both a feminist, and a practicing Muslim. She had no outward markers of her faith, arguing that for her, "faith is a

private matter.” Nur spoke eloquently of the particular strains endured by middle class women, and it became clear that she spoke from personal experience. Middle class women, she said, are equally, if not more, plagued by conflicting and impossible expectations. Their work outside the home is often viewed as superfluous, in contrast to that of poorer women which people accept as necessary for survival. As a result, middle class women are criticized for not staying at home and embracing their primary role. Families suffer, it is believed, and morality declines when mothers are absent. These women’s incomes, rather than go for subsistence needs, went for expenses of “advancement” (or simply maintenance of middle class status) such as tutoring for children, private schools, washing machines and other appliances. “These things are necessary these days!” she insisted, her frustration evident. “Because the educational system is so bad, you can’t NOT get a tutor for your child! Even the teachers rely on the income of their tutoring, which is often greater than what they can bring for their regular salary!” Middle class women, then, find themselves in a bind: for any chance of getting ahead, they must work to provide the necessary added income for their families. And yet, criticism is aimed at them for their purported materialism. Women who stay at home are celebrated, and seen as “sacrificing” for their families, an important value of Egyptian motherhood. They scrimp, save, and stretch their husband’s salary and, thus, are held up as models of good womanhood. Those women who cannot, or choose not, to stay at home, suffer social disapprobation and guilt.

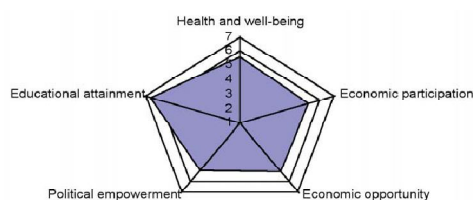
Current religious and social discourse celebrate women as the core of the family, the omnipresent caretakers of husband and children, the rock of all things good

and traditional and natural against the crucible of western modernity, immorality and crass materialism. Many women bask in this representation, feeling it finally acknowledges their important role and contribution in the family. But it also puts them in a difficult position when they must leave the sanctuary of home to work and bring home a salary. They are censured for not taking good enough care of their families (in the traditional sense, by which is meant being at home, cleaning, and preparing home-cooked meals for them). A good wife and mother stays at home and oversees the moral and religious development of her offspring. For at least portions of the day, this is impossible for many women.

Thus, they face a quandary in how to meet the basic economic needs of their family while assuring the proper moral, religious and intellectually-rigorous upbringing of their children. In response to these dual demands, a wealth of daycare centers has cropped up across the neighborhoods of Cairo. They are tucked along side streets, each adorned with (Western) children's cartoon images: Teletubbies, Tweety Bird, and various Disney characters. Recognizing the competitive economic climate, the more expensive schools offer instruction in English so that the children have an early advantage. At the same time, savvy daycare directors, sensing the role conflict, and ambivalence of mothers over leaving their children in the care of others, offer expiation in the form of an explicitly religious atmosphere. The mothers are comforted by the assurance that in their absence, their child(ren) will at least be bathed in positive Islamic values and learning.

Other measures provide an incomplete but nonetheless useful reference point for understanding the constraints of women's lives in Egypt. The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked 58 nations (30 industrialized; 28 "emerging") based on five criteria: economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and well-being (1985). Egypt ranked last. Diagram 1, below, contrasts Egypt with first-ranked Sweden in the five areas of comparison. Egypt never ranks higher than a "4" (in "economic opportunity" for women), and women's options are particularly low in political empowerment and educational attainment (both <1).

Sweden (1/58):



Egypt (58/58):

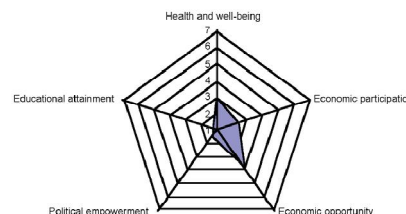


Diagram 1: World Economic Forum comparison between scores of highest-ranking (Sweden) and lowest-ranking (Egypt) countries with respect to economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, health and well-being of women (Lopez & Zahidi 2005)

My own impression of women in Egypt is that they are exceptionally resilient, patient, adaptive and good-humored. The differences in women's lives was stark: upper class women lived in luxury, surrounded by fine objects, maids and other servants. Women of the middle class worked far harder, but still had several times the resources, advantages and aid of women in the lower classes.

I was constantly and ceaselessly struck by the harsh living conditions, unabating work, and day-to-day struggle of poor women. Still, even the least advantaged of women laughed, carved out a life as best they could, commiserated with, and helped neighbors. I met many women who were engaged in very important work on behalf of others, but it remained the case that most women operated within traditional gender roles and norms, and were not involved in political or business affairs in significant numbers.

Most women, whether they worked outside the home or not, expected and aimed to get married and raise families, expected that their husbands would be at least occasionally watchful and jealous, and that he would go out with his friends some evenings every week. Most women look to female family members and neighbors, along with their children, for companionship and intimacy. In this sense, the explosion of piety and its public expression has expanded the worlds, goals and activities of many Egyptian women.

Chapter 3:

Fieldwork Methods

Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.

-Polonius (from Hamlet, William Shakespeare, 1603)

I came to the field interested in looking at three groups: women in a grassroots Islamic piety movement, secular feminists, and Islamic feminists. The members of each of these groups, to a greater or lesser extent, make a substantial investment of time and energy to a particular cause or ideal. However, it is this first group, the pietists, that engages in a kind of self-transformation, significantly altering the way in which they present themselves in both public and private arenas. It was with this group that I spent the greatest amount of time.

Among the pious women I knew and observed, “awakening” to what they perceived to be the true path of Islam required a fundamental reorganization and reorientation of day-to-day practices and pursuits. While some women seemed, at least to outward appearances, to have sudden religious epiphanies in their adoption of a new religiosity, others grappled with the decision for weeks, sometimes months. They did not, they said, want to enter lightly into so significant a commitment. Committing to a pious road demanded a change not just in outer garments, but in thoughts, attitude, daily pursuits and interactions, even life trajectory.

The level of religious commitment these pious women embrace involves self-abnegation through fasting and denial of comforts, the rejection of nearly all forms of music and mixed gender interaction, and the willing adoption of clothing that conceals the whole body. A concept in evolutionary biology is useful for examining why individuals might engage in a set of behaviors that, by most standards, would be considered “extreme.” The costly signaling theory of religion posits that religious rituals and taboos can promote intragroup cooperation, a function which is argued to be the primary adaptive benefit of religion to individuals (Sosis and Bressler 2003). By “standing out” so noticeably from ordinary Egyptians, pietists signal their faith, morals and beliefs. Physical markers act as a shorthand to other group members of trustworthiness and reliability. There are costs, but there are rewards as well. Thus, there is logic to such engagement.

Human beings act in ways they perceive to be in their interest. The problem, then, is in understanding the appeal of something that seems to us to preclude comfort, self-actualization, individual freedom and control, personal gratification-the very pursuits and “interests” we tend to valorize. The questions which propel this dissertation center around two topics. The first, having to do with motivation, seeks to examine the social and psychological factors precipitating the adoption of a particular ideology and set of practices. This involves an exploration of individual lives, both from an etic perspective, and an emic one, drawing on women’s subjective experience.

It aims to render comprehensible the appeal of the modern grassroots Islamic piety movement in Egypt, but also to theorize about human motivation more broadly.

The second topic looks to the effects of the piety movement, a movement gaining momentum not just in Egypt, but around the globe. In what ways are individual lives altered, improved or constrained? In what ways have the words and actions of this active, pious minority influenced broader social norms, public attitudes and discourse? In this chapter, I describe some of the data collection methods used to address these questions, along with some roadblocks and epiphanies I encountered along the way. I conclude with a brief explanation of how I organized and analyzed my data.

3.1 Grand plans

I had great plans going to the field. I suppose all fresh-faced anthropology students engaging in their first real ethnographic research do. I laid out my schedule for identifying informants, conducting interviews, and surveying the media. I created and borrowed instruments: psychological and personality assessments, health and socioeconomic surveys. I planned my comparative approach, targeting eighty women across four groups for the collection of survey and observational data. I drew up a contact schedule in order to assure that a minimum number of structured discussions would be undertaken with each participant. I planned to augment these with more informal and impromptu conversations with individuals and groups at social gatherings, weekly discussions and study meetings. I must have been off my rocker.

At my proposal defense, some of my committee members smiled indulgently at my enthusiasm. One openly expressed his incredulity at my optimistic plans. Not surprisingly, humility and the need for scaling were two of my first lessons in the field. I came to realize that if I could accomplish even a third of my original plans, I would have achieved a great deal.

During my first three months in Cairo, I felt trapped. In thinking about where we would live, my husband and I had agreed that we should rent our own apartment, since it would afford peace and privacy during the long months ahead. We shipped all of our goods and furniture, believing that this would be less expensive and more comfortable (and comforting) for the kids than buying new things upon our arrival. Alas, the gods of shipping are capricious; our container was delayed: one month, two months, three months. Finally, in the fourth month of our stay, we gained access. With our belongings first in extended transit, and then stalled at the coast, we had no other choice but to remain living with my husband's mother and his grown siblings in their small, two-bedroom apartment. It was deeply generous of them to share their space with us. Still, in spite of love and good will all around, this arrangement was challenging. I had a three-year-old child, and a one-year-old baby. Both awakened early, without fail, every morning. All other inhabitants of the apartment slept in, usually exhausted from engaging in extended prayers late into the night, or recovering from visits from friends and relatives that lasted until the wee hours of the morning.

With seven permanent bodies, and revolving door of indefatigable visitors numbering five to fifteen at a time, space was at a premium. At the same time, I was

negotiating a still relatively new relationship with my in-laws, and stumbling through a crash course in social customs and protocol. Although I earned high marks for eagerness, I repeatedly jumbled the intricate and unspoken rules of social calls, offering refreshments too abruptly, before verbal niceties could be exchanged, or tea before cold drinks. Guests would smile awkwardly at my gaffs, and look to my mother-in-law to smooth the situation over.

It was not until many months later, well past the wild-eyed, internal craziness of the period, that I realized what a gift this period of time was. Although there was wrangling over small details of childrearing and domestic chores, for the most part, the close quarters fostered a kind of intimacy and connection that transcended cultural, religious and generational differences. This was something that I could not have anticipated, and could not have been realized in any other way, no matter how well-laid my methodological plans. The conversations and interactions I had, born of close daily contact, enabled me to develop gratifying, authentic relationships with a number of individuals within the extended family, and to win a place in their hearts. I learned a great deal from and through these relationships, and gained insight into my friends' personal, public and religious lives. When we finally moved to our own place, the tenor of my days changed significantly, and contact was necessarily reduced. However, by this time, a foundational and lasting connection had already been established, one that facilitated continued learning and access to a large network of pious women.

3.2 Methodology

My ethnographic fieldwork consisted of data collection on two levels: sociocultural and individual. To get at the former, I collected and analyzed newspaper bylines and cartoons, magazines and television talk shows. I listened to “talk on the street:” urban morality tales, jokes, comments, asides, and casual conversations. I sampled selections from the copious supply of religious materials. Cassettes, pamphlets and decorations line the walls of supermarkets, bookshops, gift shops, office supply stores, sidewalks outside mosques, and sections of outdoor markets. In reviewing these materials, I was looking to discern themes and topics of concern to people. One theme, that of preoccupation with individual morality and piety, and the dangers of their absence, became immediately apparent. People talked, wrote, and clearly thought about what it means to be a good Muslim and person.

I found preponderance of stories of “awakening” to God’s work, both in everyday conversations, and stories in the media. Periodically, stories would surface of famous Egyptian actresses rejecting their former (corrupt) lives, and ‘taking the veil,” or committing themselves to God, husband and family (Kamel & Mashhour 2004). There were stories of moral failure, and the agonizing punishment that was the necessary consequence of such a fall from grace. There was a concern with appearances: propriety, dress, and outward modesty. However, it was widely agreed

that appearance alone, even the presence of ostensible markers of piety, could not definitively reveal a person's true character.

There was a powerful push, from some quarters, for a re-assertion of “traditional” and Islamic gender roles. According to this line of thinking, women should move out of the formal labor force, leaving more jobs and higher salaries for men. Women should come back into the home where they might fulfill roles as good wives, devoted mothers and models of Muslim piety. Men should live up to their own responsibility by working diligently and being good providers to their wives and children. While these new roles were valorized, little mention was made of economic constraints that families face that limit the ability of men and women to achieve such ideals.

To learn about individuals, I observed and participated in gatherings and meetings, and joined women on outings to orphanages, schools, and cafés. I engaged in conversations in homes, workplaces, and occasionally, at restaurants. My access to women in the piety movement was far smoother than for Islamic or secular feminists. While not a majority, the number of pietists in the population is far higher than the tiny minority of women who identify as feminists.

I was able to gain entrée into pious groups and informal organizations through family and their connections. I did not have a similar network among intellectuals or activists, at least not initially. Over time, I began to forge relationships through the American University in Cairo, where I was a Research Fellow, affiliated with the Institute for Women and Gender Studies. I was able to procure meetings and

interviews through both my connections there, and through simple cold calling. I knew of different feminist and human rights organizations, and eventually learned of a group of Islamic feminists who met together periodically.

The bulk of my data on both groups of feminists comes from scheduled interviews, whereas this data among the pietists is complemented by rich information gleaned from sharing meals, conversations, concerns, and laughter. With this latter group, I was able to observe, and later discuss, relationships, social and familial hierarchies, and personal transformations.

To deepen my understanding of the goals and perceptions of individuals, I undertook fifteen interviews with women in the piety movement, four with secular feminists, and three with Islamic feminists, for a total of twenty-two. In addition, I wanted to get a sense of how these women, moved as they were by a particular world view and life course, compared to the general population. Toward that end, I spent time with, and interviewed, a fourth group of “ordinary” Egyptian women.

This group consisted of “non-joiners,” i.e., women who did not participate in any particular social or religious group. They did not subscribe to (or at least did not organize their time and effort around) a particular group's ideology. Most identified as Muslims, but they did not adhere as rigidly to prescriptions like regular prayer. They might not pray quite on time, or they might not pray all five prayers every day. Even if they did pray regularly, it was done privately, or occasionally at the workplace with fellow employees. They tended not to attend extracurricular mosque activities like study groups or classes, although a few had tried these out at some point. None of

them wore full Islamic dress. Most wore a simple head scarf, and clothing that covered all but their face and hands. A few wore no head covering at all. Many were teachers or child care workers; one was a junior architect. I spent many hours in casual conversation with these women, and subsequently conducted formal interviews with four of them, bringing the total number of interviews to twenty-six.

The primary orientation of this research is “person-centered ethnography,” which is to say that while the social (political, religious, economic) and cultural (ideological and normative) world in which these women live has been thoroughly examined and documented, the focus is not on how precisely the system is run, but on how these individuals relate to, and function within, that system. Between the interview and informally-gleaned data, I have compiled detailed information about women’s lives, what draws them to a particular movement, and the content and effects of their experiences. I consider it equally important to document the ways that individual perceptions of, and responses to, their social, political and economic worlds have effects beyond the individual to the level of group and society. The latter portion of this dissertation addresses some of these social-level phenomena.

To begin each interview, I asked a series of standard questions (see appendix for list) about beliefs, thoughts on the origins of suffering and social ills, gender roles and ideals and personal goals and activities. From there I sought to allow the interview to follow the interests and concerns of the informant. The formal interview format was based on a model developed by Levy (1973). The goal of these interviews was to learn how individual women relate, respond to, and reconcile conditions,

challenges and contradictions in their social worlds. I was also interested in their goals, and the meaning that each woman attached to her daily activities and pursuits. The interviews included collections of life histories with a special emphasis on identifying women's religious, political, social and familial roles, as well as ascertaining whether these women perceive conflicts or practical difficulties in enacting these roles. The information gleaned was also meant to help to understand some of the reasons why women would be drawn to one movement or another.

In general, my intent with these interviews was to allow informants' answers to lead, rather than insist that informants stick rigidly to a planned series of questions. In this way, I thought I would be able to follow the concerns of the informants. This was wonderful in theory, but I found that during the formal interviews, my informants, instead of taking an idea raised in the interview and "running" with it, answered most of my questions succinctly, and then looked to me to continue the conversation. The idea of a sit-down interview, recorded on paper or cassette, seemed to evoke anxiety. No matter how hard I tried to put them at ease, some continued to be nervous. The interviewees did answer my questions, but my hopes for long tangents into unexplored conversational realms were mostly unrealized.

The richest information I was able to gather arose organically, from informal conversations with select individuals lasting late into the night. I thought that my greatest insights would come from carefully planned interviews. I would, I thought, come upon pearls of knowledge, the discovery of which was only possible as a result of my careful probing. Instead, as indicated previously, it was casual interchanges

with family, friends and others in the extended network from which I learned the most. These conversations arose spontaneously, driven by mutual curiosity and the desire, on both sides, to know and be known. The formality of interviews felt almost artificial by comparison. They still yielded information, but they were always, on some level, a performance, a defense of a way of life, or an attempt to persuade me of the correctness of a particular life path.

The late night conversations and casual daily exchanges I enjoyed bore far more cultural and psychological fruit probably owing to the informality and comfort of the situation. Rather than the measured responses which seemed to be inherent to the interview method, and no matter how open-ended or casually-posed the question, I was privy to spontaneous reactions, admonitions, gossip, complaints and jokes. I heard side comments rife with meaning, and personal stories which betrayed deeper feelings of passion, frustration, anger, jealousy, hope and wistfulness.

It was through these daily conversations that I came to form many of my ideas about the deeper motivations of the women with whom I spoke, and the ways they reconciled personal (psychological) drives with cultural prerogatives. These, in turn, helped me to construct a broader theory about the factors influencing human action generally, one which, I hope, can account for the ways in which the social (economic, political and social institutions), cultural (norms, ideals and practices) and psychological (drives, needs and past experiences) combine and interact to affect decision-making and behavior.

In order to get a sense of socioeconomic status and the relative standing of the women in my study both within and among the different groups, I gathered information on three factors (based loosely on the Three-factor Index developed by Hollingshead and Redlich, 1958). These included the woman's or her family's neighborhood, her occupation or that of the household head, and the years of school completed by her, or the household head. These, combined, serve as an index of socioeconomic status (SES). I correlated this information with women's participation in religious, social, work and familial activities; perception and internalization of cultural models and ideologies; extent and satisfaction with interpersonal relationships; reported health status and complaints (information collected during informal interviews); and my assessment of participants' general psychological, relational and emotional well-being and coping strategies.

I sought to get a sense of the different women's psychological well-being and adaptation to what I (and most of my informants) considered to be challenging social, political and economic circumstances. For this, I spent time observing women at their everyday work, at gatherings, and interacting with others. I talked with them about their lives, experiences, impressions and relationships.

One concern I had, upon entering the field, was that expressions of strain and tension in this population would manifest in ways unfamiliar to me and particular to Egyptian cultural norms and accepted outlets for emotional expression. Unni Wikan (1996) discusses the exaggerated expression of hardship among the poor in Cairo (through lamentations and complaints) which she argues often obfuscate true

accomplishments, strengths and resiliency. Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) in her work with the Awlad 'Ali, a Bedouin tribe in northern Egypt, found the opposite expressive style: one of “stoicism,” even in the face of hardship. Aware of the potential for both (generic) cultural difference, and for variation within broader Egyptian culture, I anticipated that learning to “read” people would take some months. I allowed my impressions of people to accrete over time. After several months in the country (and building on experience with, and observations of, my extended Egyptian family), I was able to pick up on cues. Some of the modes of speech, expression, affect and behavior, I was able to discern, suggested stress, depression, anger, and various defense mechanisms either on or beneath the surface.

3.3 More humility, and an expanding perspective

When I began my fieldwork in Egypt I organized my thinking and activities around three groups of women with distinct sets of beliefs, values, goals and practices. These were to include women, as previously indicated, who were part of three groups: a grassroots Islamic piety movement; secular feminists; and Islamic feminists. The divisions seemed clear and justifiable at the time. However, the clarity of those categories and my confidence in them soon waned.

Early on, in a series of interviews with a “pietist” named Ameena, she asked me, “Leslie, what is an Islamic feminist?” I explained that an Islamic feminist was someone who generally argued and worked for women’s rights and for the improvement of women’s lives based on the core principles of the *Qur’an*. She

thought about this for a moment and then said, “But I do that too. What is the difference between these Islamic feminists and me?”

It was an excellent question. The differences between groups had become fuzzy in my own mind by this point. I stumbled in my attempt to distinguish the activities of the two groups. The problem was that the divisions I had blithely constructed obscured the fact that the groups had numerous similarities, even while they were defined and propelled by distinct motivations, beliefs and values. I had constructed three artificial categories in order to try to understand and describe the different aims, philosophical orientations and practices of the women in my study. Now, instead of being tools that helped illuminate and clarify people’s beliefs and actions, mine had begun to box people in. Aameena was rightly resisting my narrow and delimiting categorization. Her life, her work, and her passions extended far beyond the confines of a static label.

3.4 Concerns about research

Raising questions about participation in any movement or activity creates a risk of setting that participation apart as a source of scholarly and public curiosity. The lives (and dress, and perceived oppression) of women in the Middle East is a particularly politicized discourse, especially given the polarizing rhetoric of the U.S. (and other western) governments about the “Muslim world.” Media imagery already demonizes Muslims, vastly (and dangerously) oversimplifying the goals and actions of a diverse population and a complex world. It is my hope to convey some of this

diversity and complexity in my writing. Contextualizing and humanizing people's behavior and action (particularly the actions of people who have been either vilified or exoticized) is perhaps anthropology's most effective strategy and best chance at altering (mis)conceptions and assumptions about people we perceive to be very different from ourselves.

A further concern, unfortunately a potential pitfall of ethnographic methods, is the extrapolation of the insights of a few informants to the level of group, culture or society. Complex societies are defined by the broad socioeconomic, generational, gender, sexual, religious, and affiliative diversity of groups within their bounds. The danger of drawing conclusions about any large group (e.g., women in Egypt) based on the experience or report of a small sample of that group has been well-documented within feminist studies (Anzaldúa 1990; Baca Zinn & Dill 1996; Brown 1994; Espín 1994, 1995; hooks, 1994; Lutrell 1997, 2003). Although the criticism arose primarily as a response to the unquestioned assumption that the lives of white, middle-class, heterosexual women from the global north were representative of women everywhere, the admonition in the context of my own research remains relevant. I recognize that there are limits to the use of the experiences and perceptions of a limited number of individuals to build knowledge about a (diverse) social group.

Still, the close study of individual lives, perceptions and beliefs remains a rich source of information about how cultural norms, economic realities and sociopolitical currents affect everyday lives. Psychological insights, gleaned through participant-observation, interviews and informal conversation with informants, adds a new

dimension to the discussion. It is this marriage, a comprehensive knowledge of sociocultural forces on the one hand, and an analysis of a variety of individual experiences and responses to those forces on the other, that yields the most complete picture of the phenomenon under study. I believe that this problem can at least be partially remedied by broadening the scope of data collection to include women from different segments and levels of society.

This is one of the reasons that, while my focus lay with the pietists, I include three groups of women for contrast and comparison. Delving into the perceptions, goals and practices of women from four different groups (women of diverse beliefs, values, practices and goals) has enriched my understanding of their lives and motivations. Insight into the practices, conflicts and desires of individuals is critical for understanding larger social issues and movements.

It is only through the observation of, and participation in individuals' everyday lives, their quotidian conversations, grumblings and effusions of joy (at feeling, for example, that they are being "held" by God), that one can begin to see the dynamic interplay, the mutual and reciprocal influence, between individuals and their sociocultural environment. Recognizing the broad political and economic constraints on the one hand, and the cultural models and social discourse and pressures on the other, helps explain why some individuals are drawn to one particular (religious, political or social) model of belief and action, and some to another (or to none in particular).

3.5 Complications and benefits in the field

Bringing children to the field added labor (both figurative and literal), of that, there is no doubt. My daughters were young and thus, required a significant output of time and energy. Their needs always had to take precedence over my desire to conduct an interview, write or organize my notes, reflect or analyze a situation. At the same time, the opportunities that their presence afforded me were of equal or greater value than the time and energy their care demanded. With my children in my arms, doors were opened. I was able to mine the interstices of life within an Egyptian family. I have gained access to their extended network of friends and relations. I was a mother, and for a significant portion of my stay, I was also pregnant with my third child. Because of this, I “made sense” to people in a way that I might not have as a single, childless Western researcher living in Egypt. I had a socially-comprehensible role and, it should be said, exceptionally cute children. More than one face lit up when I came to talk with women, charming Quinlan at my side, or ebullient-faced Sophia in my arms. Small children are excellent ambassadors.

Having a baby even helped me gain access to the home of one of the extremely busy feminist interviewees I was pursuing. Zakaya had been resisting my overtures for weeks, occupied, as she was, with health problems and multiple projects. Upon my return from the states, with my newest daughter, Shems, in tow, I resumed my attempts to set up a meeting. When I mentioned that I would need to bring my three

month old with me to the interview, the shift in her attitude was palpable and positive. She was openly delighted and invited me to her home.

Having children also offered my interlocuters a different view of me. Seeing me with my children, and witnessing the affection we shared, was a very positive point in my favor. Even the fact that I continued to nurse my second daughter through her second year earned me accolades as a good mother. This practice, they said, was in line with the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, who advised women to nurse their babies until two years for the best development of the child.

To my pleasure, once we all came to know one another well, my in-laws and the extended network of friends and relations frequently said, “Leslie behaves like a good Muslim. She has the heart of a Muslim.” This was a high compliment indeed, even if it carried the implicit suggestion that since I already behaved like a good, modest, pious woman, all I would need to do would be to recite the *shahada* (the first pillar of Islam: a confession that there is only one god, Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet). There were, not surprisingly, efforts to convert me, both because friends and family members were concerned for the state and destination of my soul, but also because they wanted to ensure that my husband, Hani, would return to the fold. It is commonly believed that if a wife is pious, there is a far greater likelihood that her straying husband will return to God. They had also, and still have, very real worries about our failure to raise our children as Muslims. It is hard to convey the depth of their concern on this point. They love us very much, and genuinely fear what we will

face after death. It is a delicate business honoring and appreciating such a sentiment, without giving false hope of any impending conversion.

A final benefit of having children in the field was that my need for support to care for them while my husband and I both attended to our work opened up a world of contacts with “ordinary” Egyptians. Concerned that our children spend time in a day care that they would both enjoy, and that would supply sizeable amounts of love and care, my husband and I toured quite a number of childcare centers. As we went, we formed a fuller understanding of Egyptian values and beliefs about children and their development. I came to know teachers, assistants, childcare directors, cooks and maids who I would not have otherwise had the occasion to meet. I spent a significant amount of time with some of them, and, in a few cases, developed close relationships. All of this enriched both my personal experience, and my research data.

3.6 Analysis of data

I have not been guided by any single theory in my analysis of the piety movement, and the women who make up (some of) its numbers. No theory is broad or general enough to be able to explain everything, everywhere. I find theories useful insofar as they help us understand a phenomenon. To seek to *understand* something is fundamentally, texturally different from seeking to *explain* it. In seeking an explanation, one pursues an answer, an objective, scientific cause. In the case of understanding, one seeks to grasp details, to imagine the thoughts and feelings of another individual, and to see both the logic and passion underlying her actions.

Considering my goal of understanding, then, it will follow that I have looked to different theories as tools with which to analyze the words and behavior of individuals in my study, as well as the social-level phenomena, the material conditions, norms and discourses swirling around them. I have done this in my presentation and analysis of six “case studies” of women in the piety movement. I have drawn on the insights and perspectives of such theorists as Erik Erikson, William James, Sigmund Freud and Stark & Bainbridge, among others. In the formulation of ideas about deeper motives, I draw on the writings of numerous (ostensibly incongruous) scholars, including Emile Durkheim, Victor Frankl, Max Weber, Carol Gilligan, Suad Joseph, and Michael Foucault.

No social, political or religious movement is monolithic, and the piety movement is no exception. It is peopled by men and women who share much, but who nonetheless vary in their motivations for joining, as well as in their forms of expression. By examining the stories of a portion of these women, utilizing tools as different heuristics, we may gain a better sense of the movement as a whole, and of the diverse and multiple factors that influence the women’s adoption of its principles and practices.

Chapter 4:

Convergences and Divergences: Egyptian women's activism over the last century

A true understanding of women's position and activism in Muslim societies cannot be gained by looking solely at Islamic ideology or socioeconomic processes, and similarly not by employing universalistic feminist theories. The political status and historical development of particular states must be taken into account.

Deniz Kandiyoti 1991

Early on in my fieldwork, I had a conversation with a small group of women in which I raised the topic of feminism. Upon hearing the word, all four women stiffened. For them, I learned, feminism did not symbolize women's liberation, neither did it portend the inevitable enhancement of their rights. On the contrary, it signified women's debasement, and the blind parroting of the norms of a corrupt, sexually-objectifying West. Feminists, according to this group, were women who had lost all connection and allegiance to religion, nation, and womanhood. When I shifted to the more palatable topic of women's rights, my interlocutors visibly relaxed. Over this the group was in agreement: women should be "given their rights," as dictated in Islam. All women should be valued, supported and cared for in marriage and in the unfortunate event of divorce. Women should be properly provided for, and they and their children supported both materially and emotionally. Women, they insisted, should have a voice in the major decisions of their lives. Most importantly, women's spiritual equality to men, so clearly stated in the Qur'an, should be recognized and honored by all.

Two things struck me as I reflected on our exchange. First, these women, though painted by the West as ultra-conservative, based, superficially, on their adoption of modest Islamic clothing, were very much both descendents, and recipients of the fruits of a long legacy of activism by women. It was clear that they had internalized many of the aims and expectations of their feminist foremothers. Second, expectations about the rights of women had become so integrated into the discursive fabric of society over the years, that it had become normalized. That women deserved their rights was a commonly-held dictum. This group simply argued the righteousness of the point by drawing on Qur'anic justification.

I suggested that many activists today calling themselves feminists seemed to be working towards many of the very goals the group identified. They were aiding individual women in everyday, practical ways, as well as trying to tackle some of what they believe are the deeper causes of women's ill-treatment. I noted that many even draw on the Qur'an, *Ahadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed) and the *Sunna* (the life and deeds of the Prophet) to justify their efforts and to argue on behalf of women. With some skepticism, they allowed that this was a good thing to do, given the right motivations and methods. With inflammatory labels left aside, then, there appeared to be far less of a divide between these ordinary, religious women, and so-called feminists.

To complicate conceptions of women's activism yet further, many of the very women with whom I was speaking engaged in activities not unlike those of the frequently-maligned feminists. These were women who were deeply committed to

living the “straight path” of Islam and to perfecting their thoughts and actions toward a pious ideal. They also embraced explicitly male-centered models of decision-making and leadership, and an ideology of female deference to men. And yet, many also spent nearly all of their waking hours in efforts towards improving the health and well-being of poorer women and their families. They pushed against traditional gender boundaries in complex, even if not self-conscious or intentional ways. It became apparent over the course of my fieldwork and reading that women’s activism are overdetermined and as complex as the variegated contexts out of which they arise.

It is a goal of this chapter to dispel several interrelated myths about Egyptian women’s actions and activism today and throughout history. One common assumption in the West is that Muslim women, and in particular, those who embrace strict interpretations and practices of Islam, are by definition passive observers of their own lives, oppressed in turn by fathers, husbands, social norms and legal institutions. As I will show, very frequently, the opposite is true. Many prominent Egyptian activists, remarkable change agents in their own lives and in society at large, have been religious: most often Muslims, by dint of sheer numbers, but also Coptic Christians. Beyond simply bringing a religious sensibility to their projects, a significant proportion of women’s group activism have had religion generally, and Islam specifically, as their guiding moral force. Today, pious women’s efforts on behalf of other women and their families have real, positive effects in the lives of the women they aid.

A similarly misperceived and inaccurately represented movement in Egypt is that of feminism. The stereotype of feminism prevailing in Egypt is that it is aggressively anti-male and in conflict with the cultural and religious moral code (Badran 1994). Feminists at this point in history seem to be unavoidably associated with the West. In contrast, those whose primary identity is rooted in Islam are considered to be *ipso facto* indigenous and authentic. This sharp division has not always been the case.

Egyptian feminism is neither inherently anti-religious, nor a negative and corrupting import from the West. Egyptian feminism, like all local feminisms, has been influenced by the emancipatory efforts of people across the globe. As groups in diverse settings have pushed to reexamine gender, class and colonial relations, their fundamental ideas and organizational strategies have been drawn on for inspiration in other settings. In spite of this exposure and exchange of ideas, the Egyptian feminist movement developed uniquely in a way that both reflected and responded to local and national culture, norms, constraints and exigencies. Feminist expressions among many women in Egypt throughout the early part of the twentieth century were very much grounded in interpretations of Islam at the time. Early feminism, in other words, was neither opposed, nor *perceived* as opposed, to Islam. Not until the 1970s, when a more conservative form of Islam was permeating popular culture, and other social and economic changes were afoot, did feminism come to be branded as anti-Islamic.

The activities of Islamically pious women today have been constructed as inherently opposed to those of feminists, who tend to be painted as secular dupes of

the West. The portrayal is an expression of broader tensions over cultural identity among the populace, complicated by the economic, political and cultural encroachments by the West which negatively affect people's lives and options. Egyptians are drawn in multiple directions, responding alternately, and at times contradictorily, to visions of advancement and of material wealth on the one hand, and models of moral, authentic and pious Egyptianness on the other. The putative polarity between (secular) feminisms and Islamic activism has gained discursive power not so much because it reflects reality, but because iterations of its message serve particular political interests. It is an effective technique of cultural politics, practiced with equal effect in the U.S. political scene, to appeal to people's emotions and frustrations, as a way to draw them into religious and other ideological projects. At the turn of the twentieth century, Egyptians were drawn into modernizing projects that focused on women as both objects of potential advancement, and potential stagnation in old traditions (Baron 2005). Because the discourse *is* so powerful and persuasive, over time, this narrative of a timeless opposition between feminists, as symbols of inauthenticity and immorality, and religious women, as champions of tradition, honor and morality, has colored perceptions and relations to the extent that *has* influenced reality.

In truth, no movement, religion or political program is ideologically pure nor entirely internally consistent. There is, and has been, both variety and dissent within and across the ideologies of different movements in Egypt. Projecting a strict division and presumed relationship of conflict and opposition onto women's movements from

the beginning of the twentieth century, “obscures the overlappings, contradictions and complexities of discourses and activism that took place against a background of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle (Al-Ali 1997: 175).” Although some scholars have attempted to blur dichotomies between westernizing and traditional strands of the feminist movement (Badran 1995; Baron 1994), the popularity of this binary persists.

As has been well-documented in the historical, sociological and anthropological literature, Egyptian women have been active in efforts towards political, social and religious change for over a century (Abu-Lughod 1998; Ahmed 1992; Al-Ali 1997; Badran 1994, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002; Baron 1997, 2005; Botman 1999; Hafez 2003; Hatem 1992; Kandiyoti 1991, 1996; Karam 1998; Khater and Nelson 1988; Moghadam 1994). Women’s activism in Egypt have spanned numerous religious, political and social movements over the past century. These have included anti-colonial, nationalist, feminist, socialist, pan-Arab, developmentalist, Islamist and piety movements. The character, goals and make-up of both formal and informal efforts by women have varied over the past century according to shifting historical, economic, social and political circumstances at the local, national and international levels. State ideologies have existed in tension with both secular and Islamic political alternatives. Subsequent sections will document some of the changes in women’s lives, and their diverse responses.

4.1 Early activism: Turn of the Century

Women's efforts toward social and political change in the early decades of the century were focused on advancing the well-being, civic involvement and opportunities of women. A number of scholars argue that feminist activism at the beginning of the 20th century was entirely an activity of elite women, frequently beginning with, or expressed through, philanthropic work (Abdel-Kader 1987; Ahmed 1992; Khater and Nelson 1988). Badran (1996) challenged this assumption, noting that a wide variety of voices and perspectives made up the first wave of Egyptian feminism. An early source of women's public activism was women's literary journals (Baron 1997). Baron documents the development of almost thirty Arabic women's periodicals edited in the period before the 1919 revolution and shows how they were central to the awakening of (particularly middle class) women in Egypt.

This "awakening" was inextricably linked to modernizing projects at the turn of the century. Women, ever the symbols of (alternately) tradition or modernity, depending on the particular political project of the moment, were the focus of change. The family and the feminine were idealized in the nationalist rhetoric, even though women, as potential political actors, were excluded from participation in the state (Baron 2005). There is a parallel idealization today of women as "good" women are encouraged to return to the home where they can be models of thrift, modesty and piety. It is now religion, rather than modernity or nationalism, that is the moral driving force behind the discourse. However, the message remains fundamentally the same. In both cases, it is aimed primarily at the middle and upwardly-aspirant classes. For most poor women, no "return" to the home is called for since their responsibilities

have always encompassed work both inside and outside of the home as a matter of survival (El-Laithy 2000; Nassar 1997). Many middle class women today face the same dilemma: their income is critical to their family's welfare and maintenance of middle class status. In spite of this, they are admonished to give up their materialism and triviality and concentrate on home, husband and children (Macleod 1991).

The bulk of the modernizing efforts at the turn of the century, and the questions of women's "place" and role(s) they should occupy, fell into one of two categories: one emulating the West, and one using liberal Islamic reform as the basis for change. Each offered an alternative for how society should be redefined. The goals of the former were to build a nation on the model of European nations, and at the same time, to "emancipate" women as a marker of progress. In truth, the goal was not actually women's emancipation, at least not in the sense of women being free to choose how they wanted to live their lives, or of gaining equal rights for inclusion in civic life. The goal was to become "modern" in a Western way (Baron 2005). Women were to be educated in the "domestic sciences," according to which both childcare and housekeeping were to be newly rationalized and hygienic. Women, went the wisdom, should be educated in order that they learn to be proper partner-wives to their husbands. They should also be trained and prepared to raise the next generation of good citizens.

For women of certain classes, the changes being advocated offered both new opportunities and new constraints (Abu-Lughod 1998). Under the new "modern" model of social relations, women came to be under far more surveillance and control

by men than they had been previously. Also, in the celebrated shift away from extended family networks towards the new ideals of conjugal love, nuclear family and neolocality, women lost the immediate presence and support of female kin. Finally, as new attention was drawn to the “science” of childrearing, women came under scrutiny for how well they executed their maternal role. Many upper class women were drawn to this vision, seeing the benefits, without immediately recognizing the potential losses and heightened surveillance. Others saw this brand of modernity as a rejection of Egyptian’s own cultural and religious history and identity, and worked instead for change that retained that identity. The Islamic reform modernizers offered an alternative well in line with such sentiments.

The atmosphere at the turn of the 20th century was one of liberalism. Innovation in all areas of life tended to be celebrated and encouraged, and change was not considered to be in conflict with Islamic principles. The Islamic Modernist Movement was part of this *zeitgeist*. The brand of Islam popular at the time emphasized renewal and reform, including *ijtihad* (individual inquiry into religion and its interpretation in light of the socioeconomic needs and realities of the time). Both this widespread sense of possibility, and the Islamic and nationalist movements that arose at the time, contributed to the rise of Egyptian feminism (Badran 1995; Hourani 1983). Not surprisingly, then, at the turn of the twentieth century, women with a feminist consciousness and activist agenda articulated their programs within the framework and language of Islam and nationalism.

Nabawiyya Musa (1890-1951) was a pioneer of girls' schooling, women's rights, women's journalism, and nationalist education. An avid writer and public intellectual, she believed that spreading women's education was an essential nationalist act with the greatest potential impact. Malak Hefni Nasif (1886-1918) was an Egyptian feminist, Islamic modernist reformer, and writer. She demanded that women be allowed to participate in congregational worship in mosques, study in all fields, and enter all occupations and professions. Nasif argued that women should be permitted to develop themselves and contribute to the welfare of the *ummah* (religious community). One can see the reverberations of Nasif's message today in the public presence, and sense of entitlement, of women in mosques and other religious spaces. Nasif also protested male abuses of divorce and polygyny, and called for reform of the Muslim personal status code. Both Musa and Nasif pushed for education and public places of worship for women.

At the same time that women were advancing the causes of educational and civic participation opportunities for women, they were also aware of and caught up in anti-colonialist and nationalist projects of the day. In 1919, women of all classes joined both organized and spontaneous public protests decrying the continued British colonial occupation and demanding national independence. Many women joined the Wafd party in their quest for liberty from colonial rule. The Wafd party made promises to women, assuring them of the right to vote. The promises proved empty; in the 1923 constitution, only men were granted suffrage. As Botman (1999) notes, because the Egyptian constitution was modeled after European liberalism, with its

own tradition of patriarchy, separate, unequal spheres were constructed for women and men. It was clear that women would have to fight, slowly and methodically, to expand their rights and opportunities.

4.2 1920s-1940s

During the first decades post-revolution, women's activist efforts were largely focused on winning women's suffrage and larger civic involvement. Not surprisingly, this was a concern primarily of the upper and upper-middle classes; poor women had long been "in the public" working to keep their families afloat, and had little time to spare over concern for these issues. The concern of most poorer and working class women was not to gain the vote, but to be able to feed and clothe their children.

Undeterred by the betrayal and political exclusion they experienced at the hands of the Wafd Party, groups of women continued to organize. Under the leadership of Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) and Saiza Nabarawi (1897-1985), women formed their own organization, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), in 1923. The EFU focused its attention on education and employment opportunities for women, and reform of the personal status law. At the same time, Egyptian society was churning with other movements for change. In 1928, Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) formed the Muslim Brotherhood. This organization appealed to the marginalized strata of society who felt excluded from social and economic transformations (Hafez 2003). At the time, there was great suspicion about, and disapproval of, the purportedly corrupt and debauched activities of the upper classes. This is a sentiment and discourse that can

be traced through numerous decades of the previous century, and that continues today. The Brotherhood offered a response to this: a vision of society in which corruption could be stamped out, by fostering the re-adoption of positive Islamic morality and values in the public as well as private spheres.

Zainab al-Ghazali (1917-2005) and Doria Shafik (1908-1975) were contemporaries who embarked on different paths towards women's empowerment. Al-Ghazali felt a kinship with al-Banna's message and sought to establish a women's counterpart to the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1936 she founded the Muslim Women's Association. Early in her activism, she focused her attention on women's roles as mothers, tutors and guides to future generations. She believed that *da'wa* (proselytizing) was the duty of all Muslims, including women. Al-Ghazali did not believe that there was or should be a "woman question." She considered it a ploy of the West to manipulate change where none was warranted (Lewis 2007). She was interested in, and committed to women fulfilling, active roles in society. However, she was skeptical and critical of what she perceived as many feminists attempts to "establish the civilization of the Western woman in Egypt, the Arab world and the Islamic world (209)." (Interview with Zeinab Al-Ghazali as cited in Badran 1994). According to al-Ghazali, Islam views women and men in a unified sense with clearly-defined roles for each.

In many ways, al-Ghazali's life illustrates of the complexity and contradictions within various political, religious and social movements. In spite of her celebration of women as wives and mothers foremost, she divorced her own husband because he

tried to impede her pursuit of her self-described Islamic mission. Later in life, al-Ghazali spoke more of the importance of women being individuals, free to choose their own path, not necessarily only as wives and mothers (Lewis 2007).

Doria Shafik was far more radical in her demands, calling for women's right to vote and to run for parliament. A feminist, poet, publisher, and political activist, she openly challenged every social, cultural, and legal barrier that she viewed as oppressive to the full equality of women. Shafik founded the Daughters of the Nile Union in 1948. Through this, she catalyzed a movement that championed women's suffrage, raised the consciousness of middle-class university students, and worked to increase economic and educational opportunities for lower-class urban women (Nelson 1996).

After World War II, in spite of exclusion from formal political participation, women activists were participating more actively in public life than ever before. Their focus was the nation, and their own possibilities for agency and advancement within it. As the decade turned, and talk was again of revolution, activist women cultured renewed hope for change.

4.3 1950-1970: Nassarism, Arab Socialism and State Feminism

The 1950s were a period of tremendous change. As the longstanding nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiments found expression in nascent Arab Socialism, independent feminist projects lost steam. On the positive side, Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), Egypt's post-revolutionary leader, enacted a new socialist

regime which applied the same reform to everyone: education, health and social welfare for all, women and men both. As a result, women were promoted to positions of leadership. In 1957, Rawya Attiya became Egypt's first female parliamentarian. The state went on to establish a policy of "state feminism" by which many women were mobilized (Hatem 1992). The result was remarkable improvement in women's access to, and participation in, public roles. However, women's independent organizations were outlawed. Many political and religious groups found themselves limited in their capacity to organize and take action. If an organization was not state-initiated and approved, it was not allowed. While women's opportunities for civic and political involvement increased as a result of these state initiatives, they were not accompanied by an equivalent improvement in women's status, safety and well-being within the family (Hatem 1994). Personal status laws, which had a far greater effect on most women's lives, remained unchanged (Hatem 1986).

Pan-Arabism, and Nasser's program of Arab Socialism, benefited women in some important ways. With new policies in place, women began to make inroads in virtually every sector of the economy. At the same time, feminist efforts and organizations were co-opted by the state and molded in ways that would make them acceptable (Al-Ali 2002).

Most, though not all, Egyptians experienced great pride and hope during the Nasser era. Nasser enjoyed popularity across the Arab world, and Egypt basked in the success of a number of internationally key events, such as the seizure and nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the 1956 war against Israel, which was a

military loss, but a political victory for Egypt. All this changed following Egypt's shattering loss to Israel in the Six Days War of 1967. This devastating event resulted in the loss of not only valuable territory, but widespread confusion and loss of confidence as well. Having been borne along for well over a decade by high emotion and promises of pan-Arab solidarity and victory against Israel and other perceived enemies, such a devastating reversal occasioned shock, confusion, and soul-searching (Murphy 2002).

In the aftermath of Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, as Egyptians struggled to make sense of their devastating loss, Islam ascended anew as a political, social and moral force in Egyptian society. For a population seeking both explanations and direction, Islam became a source of solace and moral guidance (Al-Ahram Foundation 1995).

4.4 1970-1990s: Sadat and InfitaH; Mubarak, Developmentalism

When Anwar al-Sadat (1918-1981) came to power following the death of Nasser, he wanted to deflect power away from the previous regime, which, though weakened, still retained political and ideological capital. Toward that end, he shifted the state away from Arab socialism and cultured Islam as a counter ideology, allowing Islamic groups to rally public sentiment, and releasing Islamists who had been imprisoned by Nasser. Having been marginalized during Nasser's regime, groups advocating a more public Islam now flourished.

In 1973, Sadat initialized a new *Infitah*, or “Open Door” policy under which the country shifted from domination by the public sector to private investment, both foreign and domestic. Foreign and multinational corporations were offered tax and labor incentives to encourage investment. Many promises were made to Egyptians about the benefits these economic changes would bring to them. Economic changes did herald important demographic shifts. The 1970s saw the movement of people in and out of the country, with far-reaching social effects (Abdel-Kader 1987). Foreigners moved in looking for new investments. Egyptian men of the lower and middle classes migrated out, frequently to religiously conservative Gulf countries, looking for the abundant, well-paying labor opportunities available there (Russell 1992).

The income from this foreign labor led to rapid economic gain for certain classes. This, in turn led to greater materialism as more and more products became available through foreign imports from the U.S., Europe and China. With so many young men gone, young mothers frequently became de facto heads of household (Al Shalchi 2010). Westernization swept across the upper classes (a mirroring of a similar process at the turn of the 20th century). The middle classes aspired to do the same, urged on by the rampant advertising and availability of goods for those with money. In 1977, Sadat announced that he was ending the long-standing government subsidies on flour, rice and cooking oil, and that he also would be cancelling state employee bonuses and pay increases. This sparked violent “bread” riots in which thousands of (primarily poor) women took to the streets demanding a return of the subsidies on

food staples so critical to their families' survival (Gertel & Kuppinger 1994). Eight hundred people were killed. Although Sadat ultimately cancelled the policy, encroachments on people's social and economic supports and security continued. After Sadat's assassination in 1981 at the hands of a radical Islamic group, leadership transferred to Hosni Mubarak, who continued policies in the same direction that Sadat had set.

Throughout the 1980s, state supports for vulnerable populations continued to retreat. In partial response, an Islamic support network began to grow and spread: Islamic cultural centers associated with mosques, Islamic health units, schools, and both formal and informal systems of social welfare. This shift had important implications for people's sense of allegiance and identity. Most believed that the state could no longer be relied upon. Islam (and Islamic institutions) were the answer.

During this time, many prominent activists emerged onto the scene. Some extolled Islamic principles and, at the same time, championed the cause for women's involvement in the public, even political and work spheres. This involvement took many forms. Some activists called for more women's writings, while others advocated women's involvement in politics and work outside the home. Safinaz Kazem (b. 1937), a prominent writer and activist for many years, , argues that both sexes constitute society and thus, both sexes must build it together (Khan 1998). Kazem continues to be highly vocal about gender issues. At the same time, she devotes herself to the worship of God and the study of Islam. Kazem believes that

concentrating on women's rights in Islam will ensure women's liberation in society (Kandiyoti 1991).

Nawal El-Saadawi (b. 1931), more outspoken and controversial, has concerned herself with the sexual oppression of women, and its many manifestations. A physician and, earlier in her career, the Director of Public Health at the Ministry of Health, El-Saadawi drew on her own upbringing in rural Egypt, combined with her observations and interactions as a doctor among rural villagers, to draw conclusions about the link between physical and psychological problems of women with the harm they endure at the hands of individual men and larger patriarchal systems. She wrote a book on women's sexuality in Egypt entitled, *Women and Sex* in 1972, and it cost her a plum position at the Ministry of Health. Because she challenged traditional practices and beliefs, El-Saadawi drew intense public criticism. She was seen as encouraging the immorality of women, and violating religious principles (Mazrui & Abala 1997). Conservative Islamic leaders have tended to make this accusation, lending weight to the association in the public imagination between feminism, secularism and sexual promiscuity.

Ironically, the combination of El-Saadawi's focus on women's sexual and gender oppression on the one hand, and the push by conservative religious forces to encourage women to return to the veil, contributed to the construction of women in the popular imagination as vulnerable sexual beings. This perception persists today. Male sexuality, by contrast, is painted as animal and predator-like (Lewis 2007), a view reinforced by religious and secular individuals alike.

4.5 New Century: Neoliberalism, Globalization, and Social and Religious Conservatism

At the end of the twentieth century, as conservative forms of popular Islamic culture reverberate through society, religious rhetoric tends to locate the sources of problems in society in secularization and westernization, and the mindless parroting by some Egyptians (Najjar 1996). Western cultural hegemony, combined with a weakened and vulnerable *nafs*, or “self,” is held up as the root of social problems among *al-shaabab* (the youth). Greater commitment to Islam, particularly as a matter of individual, everyday practice, is seen as the proper course for positive individual and social change (Mahmood 2005).

Politically, the pendulum has swung toward the conservative, a sharp contrast from the liberalism of the early part of the twentieth century, and the socialism of mid-century. Conservative Islamist social ideology permeates Egyptian society. “At the moment, the broad conservative atmosphere in Egypt permeated by populist Islamist influences tempers public and explicit expressions of feminism.” (Badran 1994: 205). Economically, Egyptians have been reeling from neoliberal policies that have benefitted only the elite (Mitchell 1999). It is to this strata of inordinately wealthy Egyptians that many makers of consumer goods aim their products and advertising. In obvious locations around the cities are the trappings of the rich: newly-built, high-priced malls, hotels with waterslides, wave machines and other amusements. Billboards offer a feast for the eyes of expensive consumer products affordable to only 5-10% of the population. Many formerly state-owned factories have been privatized

(Beinin 2005). Workers have lost their rights and job security, and watched wages and hours drop. The unemployment rate has ranged between 9-12% over the past five years (CIA World Factbook 2009), and those individuals lucky enough to have jobs are forced to accept extremely low wages. Most households need two incomes in order to survive. The gap between the rich and poor grows steadily wider (Chen et. al. 2006).

In the midst of these political, economic and religious forces, and in the face of machinations of both the state and international bodies, many women remain active in their attempts to improve their own lives and the lives of other women. Intellectuals and activists with a secular orientation are not numerous, but they are tenacious in their efforts and unfailing in their commitment to social and structural change. They speak of a just world for all, regardless of religion, gender and other markers of difference. One such activist, Aida Seif al-Dawla, is a psychologist and co-founder of the El Nadim Center for the Psychological Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (<http://www.alnadeem.org/en/node/23>). She has worked for years, reaching out to women and men both, and seeking to create a society in which all members can thrive.

Many secular feminists, recognizing the importance of religion as a reference point for so many individuals, and of Islam as a powerful social and political force (presently the only legitimate source of authority in the eyes of many citizens), draw on *surat* (chapters) from the Qur'an and examples from the *Sunna* to fight for women's right to divorce, child custody, and financial support from their husbands. Some of these feminists self-identify as Muslims; others do not espouse any particular

religiosity but recognize the strategy and expediency of drawing on such culturally salient idioms and forms of authority⁵.

Islamic feminists, a small but growing group in Egypt, in some ways represent this hybrid of activism well. They recognize the social structural roots of gender inequality, and seek to recognize and foster women's contributions, but they do so based on reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of the Qur'an. Heba Raouf Ezzat, a political scientist, writer and activist, and Omaima Abou-Bakr, a professor of English literature and the founder of the Women and Memory Forum⁶ in Cairo, both draw on Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic history to make a case for women's expanded rights, roles and opportunities (Abu Bakr 1999; Heba Raouf Ezzat 2008).

Women with explicitly religious motivations work to carve out women-centered religious space (Hafez 2003). However, such women do not concentrate their efforts solely on *da'wa*; they also work to overcome conditions that limit and undermine women, such as illiteracy, inefficient healthcare and ignorance of rights in Islam. The piety activists with whom I worked were frequently the lone source of succor and hope, bringing to the crowded, dark halls of clinics and hospitals food, medicine, toys for children, and reassurance that God would keep them. Most powerfully, they brought care, concern, and acknowledgement of people's pain and

⁵ This information is drawn from interviews with self-identified (secular) feminists in Cairo in 2006-7.

⁶ Founded in 1995, the Women and Memory Forum (WMF) is composed of a group of women academics, researchers and activists concerned about the negative representations and perceptions of Arab women in the cultural sphere. http://www.wmf.org.eg/en/about_ngo

suffering. *Da'iyat* (informal women preachers) among them encouraged other women to use Islam as a frame of reference and anchor in the face of problems and the concerns of an increasingly complex and challenging world.

The positive material, social and psychological effects on women being aided ought not imply that the goal of the (pious) women's activism is to challenge gender inequality, either at an interpersonal, or a structural level. In fact, this is frequently not the aim at all. Their primary goal is to please God by their actions, to love and care for others "for the sake of God." The effects of their actions remain, and the members of this group are strong, directed women indeed. It is clear that actions with explicitly feminist goals do not exhaust the possibilities for agency and activism open to women in Egypt or anywhere else. As Mahmood (2001, 2003) has argued, Western liberal thought often erroneously equates women's agency with efforts toward emancipation, assuming that only actions undertaken in opposition to a gender order that devalues women relative to men, and limits their speech, movement and civic contributions, "count" as agency. We should be wary of the often implied assumption that the primary or *only* sources of limitation and constraint in women's lives are individual men, and larger patriarchal structures. They are not. Women, depending on their own social and economic position in society, as well as familial history and practical circumstances, are also constrained (and sometimes privileged) by levels of education and income, access to resources, local development, state policies and laws, family structures and religious community. By privileging one area of oppression, the combined and cumulative effect of other factors (both positive and negative) becomes

muted. This detracts from a genuine and nuanced understanding of individuals' lives, motivations and actions.

4.6 Convergences

Feminism and Islam have been, and continue to be, in relationship with one another as forces for change that are sometimes competing, and sometimes in concert. It has been argued that women's activist positions have been converging (Badran 1996). It is certainly true that there is significant overlap in activities, and even to some extent, the goals of diverse, activist groups. At the same time, there is tremendous diversity of opinion not only across, but also within each activist movement.

Feminists are not always secular, nor do they only rely upon "secular" strategies to achieve their ends. Islamists and pious activists are interested in many of the same outcomes as feminist activists: improved lives for women and all disenfranchised people, and women being valued for their contributions (whether these contributions come about through the role of mothers/wives, *da'iyat*, and/or as political and business leaders).

Women across all groups are interested in facilitating women's public roles in society, though these roles will vary (Badran 1996). At the same time, all would recognize and value women's role in the family. All would agree that women should have viable choices in their lives, should be able to live without fear of harm (to themselves or their children), and should be able to earn enough money to support

themselves and their families if necessary. In all cases, the act of stepping into public settings, and taking on the responsibility of care for marginalized families, is a bold, and in many ways, selfless act. It is an act that ends up expanding the presence and voice of women in the broader public sphere, regardless of whether this was the original intent.

4.7 Accretions

Throughout the past century, the effects of each “wave” or movement of women’s activism has remained in some form to be built upon by subsequent women’s efforts. The ideal of individual choice, for example, and of a companionate marriage, are “modern” ideas, new at the turn of the century but commonplace today. Similarly, women’s inclusion in congregational prayer in mosques was an early demand of feminists at the turn of the century. Today women feel a deep sense of entitlement to utilize mosque space, resources and activities. The very notion of women’s rights, inchoate before the turn of the twentieth century, is now so normalized as to trip from the tongues of women of all stripes, conservative, liberal, religious and secular alike. Even the adoption of conservative Islamic dress only has meaning because it is women’s own act of volition. The choice is what makes the act significant.

4.8 Tensions

Currently there are tensions between forces for, and against, women's "return to the home." One side advocates public roles for women in politics, business and civic life. Women's presence in the public sphere, in both employment and civic activities, has become fairly normalized over the past century, even if the streets remain "gendered" male, and are increasingly the location of sexual harassment. There are economic imperatives that press for women's public presence as well.

At the same time, there is a passionate discourse that encourages women to focus on their domestic (wifely, motherly, housekeeperly) roles, and to limit their involvement with unrelated men in any setting (Booth 2001; Kandiyoti 1991; Singerman 2006). This powerful and persuasive discourse on women's "return to the home" reverberates from grand and local mosques alike. It is marketed to younger generations by popular television preachers, and glamorized by the highly publicized decision of select Egyptian actresses to "take the veil" and return to the home (Abu-Lughod 2005). Some of these pressures and influences have been effective; clusters of women have left their jobs or made decisions to avoid places where women and men mingle, in effect cutting themselves off from large segments of public life. But even while women are (often ostentatiously) relinquishing some old roles, they are also adopting new ones: *da'iyat*, teachers, leaders, advisors, students of new Islamic institutes, providers of sustenance and hope to poor families. Thus, for many women, including those within the grassroots Islamic piety activism, the ideologies they

embrace, and the activities in which they engage, often expand, rather than contract, their roles.

Another effect of gender segregation has been to re-establish some of the opportunities for women's support and solidarity lost in the modernizing of the 20th century. At that time, as norms shifted from traditional arranged marriage to "modern" companionate marriage, and as neolocality became the new standard, women lost networks of support from extended family from whom they now lived apart (Hoodfar 1997). As pious women and men gravitate to separate spheres, some aspects of "female society" has been reclaimed as women insist on separate space, in homes, in public, and even in commercial settings. Enterprising young women and men, responding to this growing trend have begun to envision, and in some cases initiate, women-only taxis, and days at local hotel pools, clubs and cafés (Cowell 1990; Valenti 2007).

Because of the similarities across different women's activisms, there is great potential for collaboration and coalition-building. Such efforts are unfortunately blocked by the enmity and mutual misperception cultured between groups by a conservative rhetoric that relies on symbols of Western encroachment and corruption in order distinguish itself as the authentic, moral alternative. Women are, and have always been, powerful focal points for arguments about culture, modernity, tradition and nation, and this oppositional discourse is no exception.

The activities and activisms of many women, pious and feminist alike, defy simple categorization. What remains clear is that even in the face of increasing

economic, social, and political burdens, in spite of increasing poverty which disproportionately affects women and their families, and in spite of forces that would limit the power and reach of women, women continue to be active agents of change in their own lives, and the lives of others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter four of this dissertation has been accepted as a chapter in Arenfeldt, Pernelle and Golley, Nawar, Eds., *Mapping Arab Women's Movements*. University Press, currently in press. Ms. Lewis is the principal author on this paper.

Chapter 5:

Character of the Piety Movement

When my family and I flew to Cairo to begin my fieldwork, my husband's family met us at the airport. Beautiful, ebullient, tearful faces smiled their welcome. Every one of our numerous female relatives was present except my famously devout sister-in-law, Ameena⁷. It was explained that, *mash' Allah* (credit to God), Ameena had taken the *niqab*, a small sartorial addition (a rectangle of fine mesh material covering the face and eyes) that nonetheless signaled a radical change in her religious commitments and identity. Ameena had sent word that she would meet us at home, preferring to avoid mixing with unrelated men at the airport.

Back at my mother-in-law's apartment, we relaxed and visited with the extended family for hours, catching up on people's lives and activities. When the extended family finally left, and only our immediate family remained, my husband queried his sister about the apparent escalation of her level of piety. To him, a man who had lived abroad for many years, it seemed extreme.

"Ley, ya Ameena? Ley kidda?" he asked, "Why do you do this?!"

Ameena calmly explained, "It is my choice. I do it to please God, because it is preferred."

⁷ All names in this chapter have been changed.

We spent months living in close quarters with Ameena and the rest of the family. During that time, I came to understand that everything Ameena does is for God. She gives thanks to *Allah* for everything she possesses or receives, ranging from food to gifts, to her own natural talents. She offers up words of gratitude even for hardships, illness and want, because she believes God's greater wisdom is at work. Ameena believes there is a plan to which she is not privy. She trusts it because she trusts in *Allah*. "*Il-hamdulileh*" is her constant refrain. "I thank God for all."

The extent to which Islam infuses Ameena's life has grown steadily over the years. Beginning in her twenties, and extending into her thirties, she has gradually put away what she considers *haram* or forbidden: her music collection, guitar, occasional attendance at the cinema, and viewing of non-Islamic television. She eschews any casual interactions with men, birthday celebrations, and singing, an activity she used to love. She says, when I ask her if these things were difficult to give up, that they are mere secular distractions which took her focus away from more appropriate pursuits and behavior. She is happier now, she insists, and she does seem to be at peace.

Ameena undertakes extended prayers through the night, sometimes drifting off to sleep in a supplicatory pose. She memorizes the sonorous lilts and caverns of the *Qur'anic arias*. Her collection of cassette sermons and Islamic literature is extensive. She surrounds herself with the ethical soundscape described by Hirschkind (2006), nearly always plugging into sermons or Qur'anic recitations as she travels through public space. Ameena fasts on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as the middle of each Islamic month, following the practice of the Prophet. She breaks her fast with dates

and milk, according to his advice, drinks only while sitting, yawns with her palms facing outward, sleeps only on her right side, all following Mohammed's words or model.

Ameena is representative of a growing number of women and men who believe that the relegation of faith to the private sphere, apart from civil society and everyday living, is misguided, and a major cause of problems in modern society. Islam, they insist, should infuse every aspect of one's life and society at large. Movements pushing for the (re)sacralization of both public and private space have been documented in countries around the world (Bramadat & Biles 2005; Westerlund 1995). Participants in the piety movement in Egypt agitate for more, rather than less, integration of religion into everyday life. As one of my informants emphatically stated, "Islam is not something that can be put aside in the corner, no! It is a part of everything." Islam, they say, provides a clear prescription for living a life that is ordained by God. It is the very basis of a just and moral society.

This sentiment is shared across the broad Islamic revival that has blossomed in Egypt, and in many countries across the world. The commonality of conviction, however, obfuscates the heterogeneity of the larger movement. The current Islamic revival, as documented in Egypt (Abdo 2002; Dekmejian 1980; El Guindi 1981; Haddad, et. al. 1991; Kramer 1996; Mahmood 2001, 2003, 2005; Murphy 2002; Wickham 2002), as well as in Lebanon (Deeb 2006), Saudi Arabia (Ochsenwald 1981), Indonesia (Brenner 2005, 1998, 1996; Hefner 2000; Renaldo 2008, Rudnycky 2010), and elsewhere, encompasses numerous groups with diverse objectives,

strategies and daily activities. These significant differences exist even as the groups share an overriding concern with creating a more publicly Islamic society.

Islamism, or political Islam, has been the focus of much popular, political and academic attention as a globalizing world wrestles with different forms of political goals and mobilizations, and their implications for international commerce and relations (Fuller 2003; Milton-Edwards 2004). Islamism is generally understood to be a political philosophy which seeks to transform the secular nation-state to an Islamic version of the same, by political (working within the current system), or more radical means (Enayat 2005; Göle 2000; Husain 2002). In contrast to this, participants in the grassroots piety movement growing in size and influence across the neighborhoods of Cairo, concentrate their attention on their own (and others') development as Muslims. They concern themselves primarily with increasing their knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunna, the primary texts of Islam, translating their message to everyday life, and cultivating a pious disposition through habits of prayer and self-discipline (Mahmood 2004, 2005).

While women in the piety movement would welcome the transformation of many aspects of social life in Egypt towards greater piety and new (Islamic) moral standards, their starting point is the individual rather than institutions, laws or political structures. Their focus is on cultivating attitudes and habits of piety. As Mahmood (2001, 2003, 2005) clarified in her own ethnography of the women's mosque (piety) movement in Egypt, participants operate using an Aristotelian model of (embodied) morality, as a set of virtues that must be inculcated. They believe that this inculcation

occurs through self-discipline: as one engages in prayer and other bodily practices, such virtues become automatic and ingrained in the self. The result is that one pleases, and feels closer to, *Allah*.

Participants expect that an Islamically-grounded society will evolve gradually, by virtue of a transformation of ordinary Egyptians' religious sensibilities and public behavior. In the end, however, this outcome of social change is less an explicit goal, and more an effect of their efforts at self-transformation, individual-level *da'wa* and charity, and a desire for closeness to God.

5.1 Growth of the Movement

Islamic revivalism has surfaced and resurfaced throughout the history of Egypt and the rest of the Islamic world (Black 2002; Esposito 1998). This latest wave, termed *al-SaHwa al-Islamiyya* (or the Islamic awakening) by participants, emerged in the late 1970s, gaining momentum through the eighties and nineties (Al-Ali 2000). The Egyptian context within which it has grown has been one of authoritarian political rule, limits on civil liberties and human rights, high unemployment, increased cost of living and infiltration of western commercial interests with many negative results for the majority of Egyptians. Popular discourse holds that western influence has led to rampant materialism and corruption of traditional morality (Abu-Lughod 1998; Bloss 2009). Linked to this, and fueled by the rhetoric of growing Islamic groups, many people blame political, social and economic woes on the diminution and separation of religion in everyday life, and seek to remedy this by re-integrating Islamic principles

and practices into civil society. They propose an Islamic social model as the way to improve society and people's lives as an alternative to what is widely perceived to be the unredemptive failure of nationalism, pan-Arab socialism and western capitalist models. Morality has come to be perceived as the central social problem in society and Islam as its only solution (Abu-Lughod 1995).

Over the past twenty years the number of Islamic books, schools, religious programs, mosques and NGOs has multiplied (Abu-Lughod 2010; Mahmood 2005; Murphy 2005). Local mosques hold religious lessons for women with 25-500 attendees from across the socioeconomic spectrum (Mahmood 2003). The combined efforts of numerous devout and committed individuals, spreading *da'wa*, combining it with charitable works, teaching, learning and preaching, has served to build an ideological infrastructure and foster Islamic modes of behavior, interpersonal practice and discipline.

Islamic influence can be seen and heard throughout the public sphere. Shop windows, lampposts, trashcans, kiosks and fences carry religious admonitions and, some even believe, messages from God, as when the name of *Allah* is perceived in a fallen leaf or in the ornate design of a fence (Starrett 1995). Popular cassette recordings of sermons are widespread and serve to connect listeners to the ethics, duties and challenges of a broader, even global, Islamic public (Hirschkind 2006). Fruit stands and taxi cabs broadcast public sermons at decibels so high that transactions are hampered. This amalgam of visual and aural imagery creates an atmosphere in which discussion and practice of Islam is not merely tolerated but

commonplace and widely accepted. People frequently debate points of Islamic jurisprudence and advise others on proper forms of prayer and comportment.

Early trailblazers in the movement openly rejected liberal (often western) styles of dress and modes of interaction between women and men that had become more common through the middle of the twentieth century, mirroring the reverse phenomenon at the turn of the century at the height of modernization projects (Baron 2005). The newly pious women adopted a new form of Islamic dress, asserting its historical legitimacy as authentic clothing for women at the time of the Prophet, worn most exemplarily by the Prophet's wives. They eschewed casual interaction with unrelated men, arguing that such behavior invited temptation and sin. Today, three decades of increasing Islamic religiosity have left their mark. Nowadays, the *hijab*, the modern covering of head and neck, is the norm. There are wide-ranging variations within this larger category of clothing, from the more conservative *khimar* and *abaya* to the basic head covering that young women combine with snug fitting, western-style clothes. But the baseline standard for modesty and proper dress has been raised.

Women who do not cover stand out, and their lack of Islamic covering raises questions about their level of morality and religiosity, a circumstance that negatively affects their perceived respectability and thus, their marriagability. Despite the Islamic dictum that one cannot judge what is in another's heart, women are scrutinized for their choice of garments, and the strength of their faith (a primary marker of morality) is presumed based on this sartorial evidence. Such a context similarly “ups the anty” for those interested in demarcating a particularly elevated level of piety. In

order to distinguish oneself as pious beyond reproach, one must not only cover with a headscarf and clothes that cover most of the body. One should wear a garment that conceals all suggestion of bodily form, accompanied by the *niqab*. Growing numbers of women walk the streets in just such a fashion, murmuring recitations from the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* as they move through the morass of cars and bodies on the avenue.

5.2 Social composition

One of the remarkable features of this movement is that it cuts across class boundaries, traversing levels of income and educational attainment. Most striking is the extent to which the piety movement draws from the middle and upper-middle classes. Contrary to modernist assumptions about the reliance and connection of the poor to religion, the poor do not comprise the majority group in this case (Wikan 1996). It is the middle classes, many of them high school and university educated, that make up its bulk (Lubec 2003; Macleod 1991; Mahmood 2005; van Nieuwkerk 2008). Still, women from all social classes are counted among its ranks. This is a point of pride for many participants since part of the discourse of the movement is that all are equal in the eyes of God. Lila Abu-Lughod (1997) argues that the discourse of morality associated with the 'new veil' works to produce a false sense of egalitarianism that distracts from the significant and ongoing problems of class inequality in Egypt (503). Class, though muted as a discourse, does seem to affect the experiences and motivations of individual participants in the movement, as well as society at large.

The rightness of the “straight path” (*is-surrat il-mustaqil*) is undisputed among the participants in the piety movement. However, the ability of each individual to engage in the activities believed to be integral to that path varies considerably across social classes. Women’s lives, their access to power and economic resources, as well as their social and legal standing, vary from one community or class to another (Tucker 1993). Women of the middle and upper classes have the time and financial support to engage in extensive prayer and study, to engage in *da’wa*, and to be a part of organized and casual charity work. Some also have cars and homes with air conditioning, resources which ease the discomforts of heavy clothing and movement through crowded, hot, frequently harassing public space.

The commitment and passion of some women in the movement is profound. However, this high level of passion and fervor is not shared equally across all participants in the piety movement. Among my informants in the poorer classes, I found religious expression to be generally less exuberant. These women, who worked as maids, vegetable vendors and occasionally factory workers, did have many of the external markers of piety: very modest dress (although not typically the *niqab*), and attendance at *durus*, or religious lessons. Still, they did not exhibit the same zeal as their middle class counterparts. They had neither the free time, nor the available resources of women in better socioeconomic circumstances. Poor women in Egypt bear the greater burden of legal and bureaucratic institutions, lacking the money for bribes or legitimate services that speed supplicants through the morass of red tape. They press into hot, crowded public transportation to travel to work across the city.

They are often the recipients of aid from Islamic NGOs or informal mosque charities. However, in order to collect aid, they are scrutinized for worthiness by their benefactors and subtly pressured to adopt the pious, modest practices of the movement.

The circumstances and constraints with which poorer women have to contend likely drain their energy and enthusiasm. It is difficult to know the internal psychological landscape of these women, or to gauge their motives or level of pious commitment. According to Clark (2004), in her study of Islamic Social Institutions (ISAs) in Egypt, “the poor reach out for any help they can receive” (39). This pragmatism does not preclude that they will be affected or influenced, either negatively or positively, by the acts of groups or individuals. Surely, some women were moved by the aid and message they received. Still, based on observation and conversations alone, it does appear that those individuals with the greatest passion and commitment to the ideals of the movement hail from the middle classes.

5.3 Practices

Many of the practices of women in the Islamic piety movement have been documented by Mahmood (2001, 2003, 2005), and for the general public by Murphy (2005). My own research yielded many of the same observations. Women organize and participate in lessons and discussions about how to live better, more Islamically correct lives. They try to culture an “ideal virtuous self” through specific forms of prayer, dress and bodily comportment (Mahmood 2003:2). Beyond developing new

habits of the body and mind, women engage in *da'wa*, (“inviting” others to a particular interpretation and practice of Islam). They advise others on proper forms of behavior, dress, worship and interaction. They also undertake “good works,” an activity I will examine more closely later in the chapter. The pietists I know did not march on the streets or lobby the government. On the contrary, and in direct opposition to the objectives and strategies of Islamists, they believe that one should not try to force change in either governing structures or specific leaders. The women contend that the unknown consequences could be far worse than present circumstances. In the 2005 elections, almost none of my informants voted. They expected a Mubarak victory, and believed that this was the proper course of things. In one conversation I had with a pietist on this topic, I asked if she thought that Mubarak should be forcibly removed from office.

“Of course not!” she answered, surprised by my question. “It is not for us to decide about these things. We should not force change; we can only pray that the President will become a better Muslim and thus, a better leader.” Later she explained that a leader comes from the larger *umma*, or religious community, and will reflect the values and practices of that community.

“If the people are more pious and Islamically adherent, a good leader will eventually emerge from that base, and this will be better for all.”

“And in the meantime?” I ask.

“We must wait,” she said, “and pray. *Insha'Allah*, we will all improve with God's help; society will improve.”

I had a similar conversation with another informant. Hind was a middle class woman in her early sixties who was very pious, knowledgeable and active in bringing aid and Islamic practice to families in the poorest sections of the city. I asked her whether she hopes to change society by her actions.

“The focus should be on ourselves, and we hope that our actions and words will encourage others to do the same. Little by little people will begin to see the truth; they will be convinced, *insha’Allah*.”

Most activism operates on the assumption that norms and public attitudes will follow policy or structural change. The pietists’ approach makes the reverse assumption: that it is necessary to first alter public thinking and behavior, and that new thinkers, leaders and policies will follow from this positively altered social milieu. This conception, shared by many pietists, can be likened to a Gramscian “passive revolution.” Such an endeavor focuses on the gradual capture and possession of the society by exerting moral and intellectual leadership over civil institutions and processes. According to Gramsci (1994), true revolution wins not just state power but society itself by institutional, intellectual and moral hegemony. The strategy has been having slow but steady effect. Through *da’wa*, charity and “good works”, and the spread of increasingly conservative dress styles and modes of interaction between women and men, women who are part of formal Islamic service organizations (ISAs) and the more informal mosque or piety groups, have exerted a steady and gradual Islamicizing influence on society.

Women in the piety movement do not regard authorized models of behavior necessarily as an external social imposition that constrain the individual (the way we imagine them here in the West). Rather, they view socially prescribed forms of conduct as the ‘scaffolding’ through which the self is realized (Mahmood 2003: 9). Consequently, far from being adversarial towards (specific) social and even legal impositions, as long as the particular injunctions are intended to be, and are enacted for the pleasure and glory of God, and as long as they are aimed at the creation of a just, pious Muslim society, there is no need or tendency to resist these. They do not limit personal development or individual freedom. Instead they help to create and support an easier road to living rightly and loving God. The piety movement operates within the existing structures and policies of state in its aim to make Egyptian society more religiously devout. This is not to say that members of the piety movement necessarily approve of the actions of the state. The women I knew did not typically involve themselves in public politics. However, many did have strong opinions about local and international affairs. Rather, they focused on the moral and religious state of their society, beginning with their own failings, and moral and religious development as a starting point. While trying to improve their own adherence to the Qur’an and *Sunna*, the women offered guidance and support to their families, friends, and others in their social networks. This, they believed, would create a ripple effect outward from individuals and small groups, that would slowly create change.

5.4 Distinguishing Pietists from Secular and Islamic Feminists

It might be helpful to articulate some of the differences among the three groups of this study as a way of clarifying the character of the piety movement. What most strongly distinguish the groups are their core goals and the broader framework of understanding within which their goals are embedded. Secular feminists in Egypt, like their counterparts in many parts of the world, believe that much of the reason for women's state of severe disadvantage vis-à-vis men, and their comparative social, political and economic marginalization around the world, is because women are systematically denied access to arenas where decisions, policies and laws are made. This circumstance both creates and perpetuates conditions of inequality. Society will improve, they argue, not just for women but ultimately for men too, when women become equal partners and participants in civic, business, political and educational affairs. They believe that change has to occur at many levels. As such, activists work across many levels of the broader struggle, addressing socioeconomic barriers such as illiteracy, limited schooling and job skills, all of which affect individual success and survival. They work to alter systems level circumstances, such as marriage and family laws, and limited political participation and judicial representation by women.

This is a very different conception of what makes society good and just from that envisioned by women in the Islamic piety movement. The latter's understanding of problems plaguing society are related to moral corruption, of ill-influence from the West, and of vast numbers of individuals losing their way from the right path, that of being devout, God-fearing (and God-loving) Muslims. The *nafs*, or the self, is

believed to be weak and thus, vulnerable to distraction and temptation. The answer is to eradicate corrupting influences. However, since that is not entirely possible (and it is a difficult task indeed to counter the influx of Western-influenced music, videos, movies, clothing styles, and sexual norms), the answer must be to fortify individuals against the constant temptations of the self: temptations to be lazy and not pray, to be sinful and look or touch what one should not; to fall prey to the temptations of others, to stray from the correct path of good morality, modesty, piety, fidelity, respect and aid of others. This bolstering of the self is accomplished through study and practice of pious living (according to the *Qur'an* and *Ahadith*), through commitment to prayer, and to following the model of the Prophet and his wives. It is further achieved through good works, fasting, reciting the *Qur'an*, eschewing distractions such as music, movies, and inappropriate interactions with people of the opposite sex. All of this fosters piety and strong morality.

The pietists also engage in a kind of charity and welfare work that can be described as direct action activism. It is a hands-on approach to addressing the practical, socioeconomic, legal and political problems that some groups disproportionately experience. Rather than demanding change at the level of systems and institutions, direct action activists work directly with the people victimized by these systems. Asef Bayat (2000) has noted that there has been a move away from demand-making movements towards a direct action model, whether individual, informal or institutional.

The pious women I know are not motivated by a deep sense of social and economic injustice over women's plight. They certainly feel sadness and sympathy at the suffering they witness, and they feel compelled to help, but they are motivated by their love for God and by their desire to please Him. Unlike all of the secular feminists I interviewed, and to an extent, the Islamic feminists also, the pietists do not seek to change society (neither its laws nor its institutions) on behalf of women as a group or category. They focus on individuals and their desperate circumstances. They do not perceive the social and economic structures and institutions of society as problematic in and of themselves. They are simply as they are. Since God in his omniscience sees (and oversees) all, it is clear to them that things are as they are meant to be. What they find troubling is that people with greater fortune do not help those with limited means, or at least do not do so nearly enough.

One woman in the piety movement, Hebba articulated this viewpoint in one of our conversations. We were sitting upstairs in her room next to a large window, sorting through some articles of clothing for charity when talk turned to social inequalities. I was, in my usual fashion, lamenting the stark class divisions in most societies and expressing my wish that it not be so. She smiled as she continued to fold clothes.

"Do you see that man outside sweeping the street?" she asked me, pointing to a man in a soiled orange uniform slowly working his way up the street. He was desultorily swishing dust and picking up large pieces of trash. I nodded.

“If there were no divisions between people, who would clean the streets? Would a doctor clean the streets? Certainly not! Would you?”

“Well why shouldn’t I? I answered in all my pro-egalitarian glory. “Why should some people have to take the most tedious or boring jobs in society, while others have the easier jobs and higher paying positions? Why shouldn’t everybody have to do some sweeping up?”

“This would never work,” she said dismissively. She often found my comments outrageous, even if heart-warmingly well-intentioned. They just did not seem possible to her.

“There has to be some order. This is the way God made the world. The problem isn’t that there are rich and poor. The problem is that the rich aren’t doing their duty by helping the poor, as God said they should. The Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) gave us excellent examples of how to do this, and yet so many people are poor...*too* poor. It is very sad.”

For Hebba as for other women in the group, socioeconomic stratification is necessary for social order. However, there must also be empathy and aid, there must be adjustment within the strata so that the poorest people can also survive and live decently within their means. This, they saw, was not happening and many of them devoted themselves full-time to remedying the wrong. They did this in part by their work with individual families in need, and in part by aiming to be models of piety and morality, to be “good Muslims” who might inspire reflection and positive change in others.

Islamic feminists, even though they share a (variation of an) Islamic orientation with pietists, are more akin to secular feminists in worldview and goals. They are worldly in the sense of being motivated by a sense of social and gender injustice rather than by a desire to please God. (They certainly wish to please God generally, but their engagement with *ijtihad* is not propelled solely or specifically by this desire.)

Like the secular feminists, Islamic feminists also have a more social-structural analysis of what ails society. They believe that while individuals can (and do) behave poorly (i.e., they lie, cheat, covet, lust, transgress) and should mend their ways, the weak-will of mortals is the least of the problem. Religious institutions, and the social laws and norms emanating from misinterpretations of religious text have created tremendous problems and difficulties, particularly for women. Islamic feminists are ultimately interested in altering these, after thorough examination and correct interpretation of the text (Ahmed 1992; Badran 1996, 2002; Barlas 2002, Fernea 1998; Moghoda 2002). This is a point of distinction from pietists (and secular feminists with whom I spoke): in their day-to-day work which was not at all “grassroots” or “with the people.” Rather, it involved wrestling with Islamic texts. They read and reread the *Qur’an* with an eye to both context and meaning in order to extract core principles. Their work is generally geared towards intellectual circles. Thus, the products of their labors are articles, books and perhaps conferences. These efforts might ultimately translate to everyday women’s lives, but for the time being their work remains an intellectual project.

5.5 Guiding Principles

With respect to guiding principles, Islamic feminists and pietists both look to the *Qur'an* and Islam as the reference and framework from which to work. However, they differ in one important point: pietists *accept* prevailing interpretations of the *Qur'an* and *Ahadith*, while Islamic feminists believe that uncovering the meaning of the text is an ongoing process and is achieved through the process of *ijtihad*, a kind of struggle to extract the correct meaning from the text. Pietists' concern is with the proper *expression* and practice of the accepted interpretations. They consider the textual interpretations to be correct, true, immutable. It is people who are imperfect; people who do not fully understand, who do not correctly perform their religious responsibilities. The task, then, is to work to constantly improve oneself through learning and practice to cultivate Islamic habits and virtues, and a pious disposition. The intent is to apply the lessons of the Prophet Mohammed, and his wives, to everyday life: to transform the self, through prayer, Qur'anic recitation and other pious practices, in order to make oneself worthy of God and heaven.

Islamic feminists, in contrast, see those purportedly "timeless" interpretations of the *Qur'an* and *Ahadith* as fundamentally incorrect and modeled on outdated, historically- and contextually-bound, patriarchal (mis)readings of the text. They see this as problematic on many levels, not the least of which is the fact that many individual, social and legal injustices are justified based on these (mis) interpretations. Islamic feminists argue that the raw materials for improving women's lives, and for valuing them (their intelligence, their capacity and their spirituality) at the same level

as men, are present in God's pronouncements. What needs to happen, and what has thus far mostly failed to happen, is for the core Islamic principles to be extracted from historically-specific stories in the Qur'an and *Sunna*. These principles (which, they argue, are of justice, fairness, equality, etc.) can then be applied to present social problems and circumstances, altering norms, laws, attitudes and women's lives for the better. Secular feminists, as indicated previously, are guided by non-religious philosophies and frameworks.

5.6 Inner conviction of pietists

The pietists I knew spoke glowingly of their experiences in the movement. As their religious knowledge increased, and they perfected their pious practice, they enjoyed a tremendous sense of purpose and accomplishment. For many of the women I spoke with, making such a life change has been rewarding psychologically, even empowering. This is not "empowerment" in the sense typically understood within a western liberal and feminist framework (Mahmood 2005). In academic and advocacy circles, the term empowerment typically evokes images of new-found strength and confidence based on autonomy, self-reliance and liberation from social and institutional constraints. In contrast, piety activists champion such qualities as perseverance and submission toward achieving higher levels of religious attainment.

In Hafez' (2003) study, Islamist activist women defined empowerment as an improved state of being based on perfecting the self to gain closeness to God. In my own conversations with pietists, women reported feeling that they are doing something

deeply right. They spoke of experiencing a sense of righteousness and inner strength as a result of their new commitment. As adherents of many religions can attest, devotion and commitment to God can evoke powerful feelings. As Durkheim (1954) noted,

The believer who has communicated with his god is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is stronger. He feels within him more force, wither to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them (416).

Participants in my study describe a sense of sureness in their hearts, a “love for all things for the sake of God.” They exude this passion and conviction in their words of advice and guidance to others. A number of women describe feeling almost “held” physically within the protective hands of God during times of difficulties. “He eases the way for me,” (“*Rabina sehel*”), one woman reported. The devout believe that their sacrifice and submission to God’s dictates will ultimately be rewarded. They may struggle day to day with trying to be better: with rising in the early morning for the *Fegr* prayer, with fasting, with remaining calm in the face of anger, and with wearing layers of dark garments in the pressing heat of Cairo summers. However, they believe they are on the right path, the “straight path,” and they believe that if they are sincere and they live by their understanding of God’s will, they may escape the fires of hell and be accepted into paradise.

5.7 Logic of participation

Pietists live within a web of social relations, cultural institutions and normative expectations. Like all of us, they are compelled by psychological and social needs. Although the women may experience themselves as actors making momentous decisions about their social and spiritual lives, the interests and beliefs of those around them play a significant role in shaping their sensibilities, habits and desires. This is not to say that they are without agency; the pietists act, often decisively, and at times against the counsel of husbands, parents, and friends. Their actions also have effect: they influence people in their immediate social sphere, as well as contribute to a social shift toward increasing social and religious conservatism across Egypt. Still, decisions and actions are shaped by many factors in people's lives, and the pietists are no exception. In this section, I will examine some of the features of participation in the movement that help explain the cultural and psychological logic of women's actions.

5.8 Connection and belonging

A range of sociopsychological factors simultaneously draw women towards a particular discourse and form of practice. The women's mosque movement offers a deep sense of connection, purpose and belonging. Durkheim (1954) spoke of the importance of social cohesion and solidarity, and believed that these phenomena, when present in people's lives, buffered the blow of personal crises. Researchers Soroya Duval (1998) and Sherine Hafez (2003), in two separate studies of Islamic women's groups, noted that a strong emphasis on sisterhood, community and shared

values contributed to women's sense of well-being. "The sense of solidarity, satisfaction and bonding that comes from helping others was emphasized by many of the women. They found it was the main reason they kept coming back to the group (Hafez, 60)."

For most of the history of the discipline of psychology, human development has been defined and measured by such processes as individuation and increasing autonomy (Kagitcibasi 2005). Beginning in the 1970s, a number of feminist psychologists (Belenky 1986; Gilligan 1982; Miller 1976; Surry 1985) challenged such views as based entirely on male subjects, and consequently, incapable of capturing the whole of human experience. Centering their attention on the lives, voices and practices of women and girls, they found that in their studies, it was not separation and individuation, but rather relationship that was at the core of identity, social and moral development. Gilligan (1982) argued that women's experiences of connectedness to others leads to enlarged conceptions of self, morality, and visions of relationship.

The above models and realizations came out of a western context, in which the values of individualism and autonomy are paramount. In the Egyptian, and larger MENA (Middle East and North Africa) context where familial idioms and structures resonate deeply with cultural models and early experiences, the importance of relational connection is likely even greater. Suad Joseph (1996), based on her work in this region, describes a particular mode of relating, both within families and in the larger social field, which she terms patriarchal connectivity. It is characterized by

gender and age domination, but also by love, protection and distinct roles and expectations which offer comfort and clarity in an often ambiguous, ambivalent world. Women are subordinate to male authority but they also, at least theoretically, and in the imagined ideal, have sacralized, unambiguous spheres of female authority. For example, education and moral formation of children is the most important task of the family and the mother is the central figure in these activities. Kandiyoti (1988) also wrote of a “patriarchal contract” that, while extracting a high cost from women, also offered protection and other benefits. As increasing urbanism and out-migration have weakened the cohesion, and diminished the presence and strength of families, a social-relational vacuum is created. The piety movement offers relationality and connectivity in a growing context of urban anonymity and economic inequality in a modern, neoliberal market economy.

In many ways, the piety movement mirrors the cultural-familial form described by Joseph. Female members refer to one another as “sisters,” and occasionally to male members as “brothers.” There are hierarchical relationships (with *Haajas* and women who are models of piety in the upper echelons), along with a patriarchal authority figure (*sheik*). Such idioms and relations offer a familiar touchstone in a world perceived to be hostile and fraught with enemies, both political and spiritual. According to Kandiyoti (2001), one of the reasons that the piety movement has enjoyed such appeal is because women are able to remain embedded in families. Further, their forays into the larger spheres of Islamic literature and institutions, into neighborhoods other than their own, hospitals, clinics, orphanages and other state-run

institutions, are legitimated by their connection to the broader kinship of God, sisterhood in Islam and the *Umma* (religious community). Women's social networks are significantly increased (in ways that would not otherwise be possible), creating opportunities for women to interact, grow, learn, acquire new skills, generate power, authority and social (and religious) capital.

5.9 Accomplishment and self-control

Many of the women in my study had, and shared, a wealth of knowledge about *ahadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed), and observed practices of the Prophet and his wives. It was clear that this both provided internal guidance for behavior, and was a source of pleasure and pride for the women. Foucault's concept of self-refinement through technologies of the self (1988) is useful for understanding the sense of power and accomplishment that women reported experiencing. Disciplinary technologies work not through repressive mechanisms but rather through comparatively subtle and persuasive forms of control. Disciplinary forms of power are located within institutions (hospitals, schools, religious institutions) but also at the micro level of society in the everyday activities and habits of individuals. They secure their hold not through threat of violence or force, but rather by creating desires, attaching individuals to specific identities and establishing norms against which individuals and their behaviors and bodies are judged and against which they police themselves. The *SaHla Islamaya* (Islamic Awakening) has offered up a new norm of womanhood that appeals to women and acts as an ideal to which they aspire.

Among the pietists I know, the challenge to improve the self is explicit and frequently discussed. Women often vocalized their desire and efforts to be better, to be more modest, to carry out God's commandments and desires with greater reliability and sincerity. They fasted for long hours and engaged in acts of charity and kindness, suffered the stifling heat in heavy clothes, and held all this up to God asking that it be accepted. As they learned larger and larger sections of the *Qur'an*, came to know the stronger *Hadiths* by heart, and perfected their posture during prayer and repose, they felt a gratifying sense of accomplishment. Family members both propelled *themselves* to greater piety and virtue, and advised one another on every detail of proper comportment and behavior. Improvement and excellence net internal satisfaction, as well as external kudos and recognition from within the circle of family and friends. Through this experience, the individual is spurred on to greater self-refinement.

5.10 Activities on behalf of others

While It is the rigorous bodily discipline of women in the piety movement, both in Egypt and elsewhere, that has captured the popular imagination and garnered academic interest (Abu-Lughod 2002; Mahmood 2005; Ong 1990; Rinaldo 2008), another aspect of women's daily concerns and occupations is equally important. Acts of charity and self-sacrifice on behalf of others is also a powerful theme and driving passion for many women. Rinaldo (2008) has observed a similar phenomenon among pious Muslim women in Indonesia. About a quarter of the women I worked with in

Egypt devoted the bulk of their time and energy to the needs of women and their families who were in the most desperate of straits.

These activities ranged from collecting and distributing financial support to widows and their children, to teaching literacy through the *Qur'an* and *Sunna*, to offering medicine, support and succor to cancer victims and their families. This subgroup of women, whom I call piety activists give significantly of their time and resources in support of charity, teaching skills and providing opportunities to disadvantaged women and their families. In some cases, they formed groups and even organizations in order to engage in this work more efficiently. These women engage in acts of charity and service to others, not for the sake of women as a class of people, per se, although they care about individuals and their plight. Rather, they engage in their activities “for the sake of God.” For the beneficiaries of such aid, the motive hardly matters. Given the gradual retreat of the government from social responsibilities over the preceding decades, the poor in Egypt rely considerably on the actions, both organized and informal, of these pious women.

5.11 A view of the movement through a different lens

Rather than focus on the bodily practices and other forms of self-discipline that signify religious identity, I propose that we train our attention on the activities of piety activists through a lens of social action. In doing so, I do not wish to try to redefine the goals or desires of pietists to make them more palatable to, or congruous with, secular liberal expectations about agency. As Mahmood (2005) has effectively shown,

and I can confirm based on my own conversations with the women in the movement, it does not appear to be either the conscious intent, or latent desire, of women in the piety movement to challenge gender norms or understandings. The point is not to discover the heretofore unrealized feminist spirit in the activities of the pietists. It is, rather, to show the permeability and limitations of the categories we use to distinguish and identify groupings of people. Just as the modest, conservative, pious Muslim women I examine here do not always speak or act according to our expectations, it is equally true of women categorized as feminist. Some of the women who identified as secular feminists shared with me that, contrary to assumptions made about them in their own country and abroad, they were still practicing Muslims. They simply kept their faith separate and private. In addition, recognizing the extent to which Islam is embedded in people's everyday understandings, many secular feminists used religious idioms and justifications to push for social and political change. It was a simple, culturally savvy and effective strategy for getting things done.

Secular political movements are like religious movements in many ways. They garner a devoted, passionate following of individuals who share a set of beliefs and values, a moral and ethical position, and a devotion to leaders who show themselves to be particularly knowledgeable and committed. Different beliefs across cultures and subcultures notwithstanding, we share common forms of sociality, as well as political, social and religious expression.

The piety activists are an interesting group because they defy (some) expectations, and complicate categories. Neither their desires, nor their actions (nor

the effect of those actions) fits neatly within accepted divisions about modern liberal-secular subjects on the one hand, and fundamentalist or conservative Muslim subjects on the other. While their activities are not intended to challenge gender roles and hierarchies, in some ways they do so. As Mahmood (2005) has pointed out, women in the piety movement espouse *illiberal* desires: they inhabit, rather than challenge what many consider to be restrictive norms. They accept the responsibilities and rewards of a position in a hierarchy in which they defer and submit to the authority of God, but also to a significant extent, to men. And yet, their efforts expand the possibilities, perceptions and capacities of women in some very real ways. There is a “feminist effect” to pietists’ actions. Women’s presence in, and sense of entitlement to, space within local mosques has increased. Women who are unofficial religious leaders and teachers in the community are accorded respect and honor. The actions of the piety activists have opened up new educational, occupational and housing opportunities for marginalized women.

Further complicating the picture, not all of the things the pietists desire are illiberal. They are also influenced by, and desirous of, some very liberal things. Commodities and “modern” sources of comfort are foremost among these. So on the one hand, there is great discursive and practical emphasis on living according to the model of the Prophet and his wives: of eating, drinking, resting, and purifying the body precisely as he did. Thus, it is believed that one should consume the things Mohammed spoke of: *talbina*, a barley drink good for settling the stomach, camel’s milk, for its health properties, and *sewak*, a twig from a tree, for cleaning the teeth.

On the other hand, specialty coffees are desired and enjoyed, as are other luxury goods: chocolates, imported cereals and vitamins. Some of the women, who are accustomed to *tekeef* (air conditioning), avoid going to the homes of people who do not possess this comfort. Women who are ostensibly (and indisputably) modest and pious nonetheless sit in the back rooms at gatherings, selling or buying Avon products: make up, fragrance and body lotions.

Younger women amass collections of lingerie in very seductive styles, and intergenerational groups of women occasionally appraise these in casual backroom gatherings. These diminutive garments suggest a particular kind of marriage: not just companionate, but sexually-satisfying, even romantic, filled with love and desire. It is in stark contrast to the practical, contractual notion of marriage I heard discussed in front rooms: one based on shared piety, and good will. When I asked women about marriage, their responses were, in my estimation, breathtakingly casual. The standard reply to my query about what kind of man would be a desirable husband, was that he should be a good Muslim. One woman quoted a *hadith* which said, essentially, that “if a man seeks your hand in marriage, and he is a good, pious man, you should accept him.” Much, of course, was packed into this description. A “good Muslim man” is understood to be one who is able to support a woman in the manner in which she was raised. Women spoke of another *hadith* which praised men who were kind to their wives and mother. These, it was said, were the “best of men.” Clearly, kindness and respect for women was a desirable quality since such a characteristic had tremendous implications for a woman’s married life. Even with these elaborations, however,

marriage was presented as a straightforward, contractual, practical matter. It was the hope chests full of lingerie and other niceties that belied a second, unspoken, but quite liberal desire.

Holding conservative gender ideologies, or embracing of orthodox religiosity, does not preclude engagement in activism. Conservative activism is alive and well, not only in Egypt, but across the world and here in the U.S. as well. Further, not all activism is political in its goals or philosophy. Women's activism in present-day Egypt encompasses a range of political and ideological frameworks, including numerous Islamic and secular-oriented⁸ approaches.

In Azza Karam's (1998) study of Islamism, she found that the Islamist women in her sample considered public activism to be *de rigueur*. Although the activists confirmed the sanctity and importance of women's primary duties as wives and mothers, they contended that once women's primary obligations are fulfilled (i.e. the children are old enough to take care of themselves, and housewifely duties are manageable), women have a religious duty to become publicly active in promoting and spreading their faith. Many believed that it was incumbent on women to be active participants in building a true and strong Islamic society. This is similar to the political activism of politically conservative and evangelical Christian women in the U.S.

⁸ Secular-oriented here refers to a framework that advocates a separation between religion and politics. Secular activists typically refer to civil law and human rights conventions as frames of reference for their struggle, though they are not necessarily anti-religious or anti-Islamic, either personally in their own lives, or strategically in their activism.

5.12 Effects in the social field

Women in the piety movement do not challenge gender norms or hierarchies that concentrate power and resources in the hands of men. They do not see their efforts as aimed at resisting men or male authority per se, nor are they interested in liberating themselves from “patriarchal constraints.” On the contrary, they confirm the need for a gender hierarchy (in the mortal world). I was told on a number of occasions, “A ship cannot have two captains.” The expression referred to the need for a husband to take leadership and responsibility in a couple’s home, and the impossibility of shared authority between a wife and husband.

The piety activists did not consider themselves constrained by gender roles; they felt comforted by them. In the course of their day, they simply wanted to collect money, do their work, and achieve the goals related to their personal mission. Men and male dictates are simply factors that have to be considered and negotiated in the course of this. Mahmood (2003, 2005) criticized the tendency in western liberal thought to presume that agency is synonymous with efforts and desires towards liberation. The examples of these women make clear that individuals can be very effective actors (both in terms of achieving their own goals and in having effect on society) without necessarily moving toward some emancipatory goal.

Notwithstanding Mahmood’s (2005) criticism, individual women do act and negotiate, press against, and even alter the very norms and hierarchies they embrace. It is both an irony of the movement, and a testament to its complexity, that even

though there is no intent to alter the system, and no resistance at all to male dominance as an ideal and guiding principle for social life, individual women *do* act in ways that contradict that ideology. In their everyday negotiations with individual (or groups of) men, pietists work to advance their own goals. In their relations with one another, the women form large, supportive networks, and culture friendships that provide them a source of solidarity and connectedness apart from the usual supports of family and neighborhood. The effect of this is to open up new possibilities and conceptions about women, their capacities and their appropriate and legitimate occupation of public space.

The solidarity, camaraderie and networks of support evident among pious women resemble the solidarity and “sisterhood” celebrated in feminist movements throughout the U.S. and elsewhere. Pious women are frequent and tireless supports to one another, taking phone calls late at night from distressed “sisters,” and generally being a solidary force against the struggles of faith in everyday life. Pious activists work to secure housing, food, medicine, and clothing, and to provide educational support and physical and emotional succor to those in need. They labor to improve the lives and prospects of the sick, marginalized and despairing, the majority of whom are women and their children.

Two women I knew, Salima and Iman, devoted themselves completely to activities in support of (primarily, although not exclusively) women and their families. Salima was a widow of about sixty years with six grown children. Iman was a doctor in her late forties with two daughters in young adulthood. They had been good friends

for about three years at the time I met them. They met at an Islamic lecture and became fast friends. Both were deeply pious, and desired to do God's work, caring for people who were more disadvantaged than they. Both women hailed from the relatively comfortable middle class. When Salima and Iman were not exhausted by the labor and emotional toll of their aid work, they had a very playful, almost girlish relationship which involved a good deal of gaiety and teasing. Together they worked nearly every day, from eight to ten hours straight, at their informal charity and aid work. Sometimes they organized a larger group of similarly committed friends and acquaintances to help them.

Outside the mosque after Friday prayer and other public sermons, they urged their fellow Muslims to give alms. Other time was spent arranging appointments and accompanying the poor and ailing to local clinics and hospitals. Inseparable from their caretaking and charity was their *da'wa* or proselytizing. They gave formal lessons and informal advice to all of the women they helped on how to integrate Islam into their everyday lives: through prayer, dress, speech, interactions and other daily practices. The pair visited the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city. They brought toys and sweets to children at orphanages. They spent hours advocating for and comforting families burdened by cancer, injuries, and other ailments. Salima and Iman maintained this schedule even while adhering to their own strict regimen of prayer and fasting. The rigors of it took a toll on Salima especially, since she was diabetic. Still, neither woman slowed down. They were deeply committed to their cause.

The people Salima and Iman aided were at the lowest rungs of society: women who had been left by husbands, whose children were chronically ill, who were disabled themselves and unable to work, and who were desperate, surviving on impossibly low monthly incomes from mosque donations of 30-70 pounds (\$5-11) a month⁹. It was clear that Salima and Iman's efforts had an effect, based not only on the gratitude they were shown (which bordered on reverential), but also by the improvement in the material circumstances of the families receiving aid. They found people jobs, apartments and support for children with significant emotional or physical needs.

I distinguish them as piety activists because their activities on behalf of others were driven by their commitment to the service and pleasure of God, rather than a desire for fundamental, structural social change. This is an important point of distinction; based on actions, and even some effects, the piety activists might easily be confused with secular feminist activists. Although as I have indicated, the women very clearly embraced a male-centered model of decision-making and leadership both within and outside the house, their activities both upset gender hierarchies and expanded normative expectations about women's public roles and activities.

To begin, there is an exception to the broad ideology of male dominance and superiority within this group: as spiritual beings before God, women and men are equal. Their roles and duties on earth might be different, a fact which is necessary for

⁹ The per capita income in Egypt is \$1400/year, already quite low by international standards. These people survive on less than a tenth of this.

the smooth functioning of society. However, with regard to requirements within Islam: for *shahada* (profession of faith) prayer, *zakat* (giving of alms), pilgrimage and fasting, and for living by God's dictates, women's and men's expectations are essentially the same. Most important, as was relayed to me numerous times, "Men and women are equal before God."

Owing to their belief in the spiritual equality of all, the pietists felt a sense of entitlement, to utilize mosque space and resources. They engaged with Islamic texts, translated it to their everyday lives, and taught other women to do the same. They acted as primary "providers" to other (poor, desperate, ill) women. All of these activities were formerly the sole province of men. At one point, the women even presented subtle challenges to the authority and agenda of the (male) leadership of the mosque.

Salima, Iman and their informal group of piety activists were connected to a large and important mosque in Nasr City, a newer and developing section of Cairo. The neighborhoods surrounding this particular mosque were predominantly middle class. People seeking aid frequently traveled from as much as an hour away to ply the consciences and wallets of these mosque-goers because they had a good reputation for giving. Salima and Iman also regularly approached the faithful as they entered or exited the mosque. Because their pleas were persuasive and the "cases" (of individual strife and suffering) that they described were compelling, many people gave them money to distribute. Eventually I learned that their solicitation caused friction with the organized male leadership of the mosque.

“Why?” I asked, “Why would they object to charity work?” I felt defensive on their behalf, knowing that they spent more time per week going from hospital to clinic to poor neighborhood than most people spent at their jobs. They seemed always to be aiding others.

“Well,” she said, the corners of her mouth turning up into a slight smile, “there are things they want the money for too. They want to build new rooms, offer new classes.”

“Can’t they just collect their own money? Is there such a limited supply?” I asked.

“Of course the supply is limited!” Salima tsk-tsked me. “People only give so much.” She openly lamented the challenge of funding so many worthy projects. At the same time, a glimmer in her eye belied the hint of pleasure she experienced at competing (and often prevailing) against the imams (religious leaders) of the mosque over coveted charity dollars. She and Iman were good at getting people to dig into their consciences and pocketbooks. There appeared to be a conscious (though neither overtly intentional nor aggressive) undermining of male religious leaders at the local mosque. They had no interest in challenging the status quo. This fact notwithstanding, Salima and Iman were determined to push their own agenda (of religious charity to specific groups they had identified), even at the cost of tension with male leaders’ who had their own agenda of infrastructure improvement at the mosque.

Hafez (2003) identified a similar situation among a more formal women's aid organization that disbursed monthly monetary and food aid to widows at the local mosque. Many of the men of the mosque rankled over the women's use of the space several days a week and complained that the space the men had to use for their activities was neither as large nor as comfortable. The women, propelled by their belief in the worthiness of their cause, carried on with their work in spite of the obvious resentment of the men.

5.13 Multiple Economies

We are left with the contradictions and complexities of intersecting axes of power and influence, by categories of gender, class, age and religiosity. Amidst, and operating within these influences, we have diverse individuals whose behavior is driven by very different belief systems, opportunities, resources and sets of constraints. Like members of any group, the women of the piety movement defy pigeonholing: they comprise a heterogeneous mixture of personalities, personal histories, educations, influences and aspirations, drawing on and utilizing diverse forms of power and legitimacy, and responding to various economic, emotional, and moral prerogatives.

Thus, diverse influences, negotiations and contradictory actions are constantly at play in the social field. How else do we reconcile, on the one hand, the intense commitment of a woman to a conception of piety that emphasizes *haya'* (shyness),

modesty and devotion to God, with the fact that she sells Avon to her equally pious family and neighbors?

How else do we understand the attempt of a foreign male suitor to “out-Islam” the mother of his intended by pointing out what he perceived to be a blunder in the protocol of marriage proposal proceedings, and his subsequent stonewalling? In this instance, the suitor, a very devout young man from Bosnia, had come to Egypt to study at Al-Azhar, a world renowned institution of Islamic learning. He came, also, in search of a pious Muslim wife. Having heard of the reputation of one of our relatives at the local mosque, he sent an inquiry about her. Initial negotiations between the suitor and her brothers were positive, and this gathering was to be the initial meeting. Signs were favorable for a match, pending basic compatibility and amenability between the parties, and contractual negotiations. At the meeting, the potential bride’s mother, brothers, brothers’ wives, cousins and younger nieces were present, as a show of goodwill and support. The suitor’s objection, blurted out rather indecorously once everyone had gathered the salon, was that he should not be in the same room with non-*Mahram* women. In other words, there were theoretically marriageable women present (the brothers’ wives) and there should not have been.

Although he may have had a debatable point regarding protocol, this ill-fated young man tread on both his future mother-in-law’s hospitality in her home, and her own formidable reputation and honor as a *da’iyyat* (teacher) and *hagga* (woman who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca). This was a critical oversight on his part as he, full of righteous confidence over Islamic correctness, and self-importance over his own

gender dominance, misjudged the other streams from which power and legitimacy are (and were being) drawn: cultural tradition, respect for age and accomplishment, the expectation of hospitality, politeness and deference within familial settings. The marriage did not go through. It was ostensibly for other reasons, but this gaff cast an uneasiness over the negotiations that never lifted, and ultimately, the process was derailed.

In any cultural context, multiple economies are simultaneously at play. Money and material resources have obvious utility and importance, and they are linked to social capital which requires and generates social prestige, contacts and exchange relations. Of particular relevance here, there is a moral and religious economy operating as well, with growing power and importance, as Egyptian society becomes increasingly Islamicized. That the Islamic Brotherhood, an officially illegal political party, should have won twenty percent of the parliament seats in the 2005 election despite formidable practical, political and economic barriers, is an indication of the strength of their message and its currency in society. Moral-religious capital is marked by physical signs (modest dress, “*zibeeb*,” which is an informal term referring to the semi-permanent bruise that forms on the foreheads of people who prostrate themselves frequently and at length in prayer), and social signs (having a following of pupils or advice-seekers; perceptions and speech *about* an individual).

The broader Islamic revival challenges not only the values and practices of civil society, but attaches increased importance to Islamic knowledge and practice. As the rules of the game change, different players benefit in new ways. Pious women

devote tremendous amounts of time and energy to cultivating a virtuous self, perfecting knowledge and practice of Islam. As such, many have become models of morality, modesty and religiosity, and experts in knowledge of the Qur'an, *Sunna*, and sometimes Islamic jurisprudence. Genuinely pious women command respect and esteem, and are deferred to, in a moral-religious economy. This and other streams of power, capital and legitimacy influence social relations and interactions, sometimes complicating expectations and hierarchies of gender, age, and, even occasionally, class.

5.14 Conclusion

Women in the Egyptian Islamic piety movement comprise a diverse group of individuals operating within, and responding to, multiple demands and desires. Neither are they only about challenging norms in a bid for freedom and autonomy, nor solely and seamlessly about inhabiting norms, e.g., of a conservative movement. It is not an either-or proposition. It would be more useful to understand the women (and all individuals, women and men both) as acting in ways they perceive to be in their own interest and in the interest of other people as well, both those in their immediate sphere, and in broader society. There is also the likelihood that, at least occasionally, there are motives operating beneath the women's conscious awareness. Significantly, the women's immediate interests do not always coincide with the expectations or stated values/beliefs of the movement. The women are generally not even aware of this contradiction between their actions and stated ideals.

The pietists with the deepest religious convictions are propelled by their beliefs, and when social and familial constraints related to gender create a barrier to their efforts, they work around, and sometimes through these. Pietists are not feminists, “closet,” inchoate or otherwise. There are enough differences in worldview, orientation and beliefs between these two movements to clearly distinguish them. However, it is also true that, for reasons of practicality, strategy or self-interest, participants in each group do, say, and desire things that defy expectations, and disturb the boundaries between set categories of religious vs. secular, feminist vs. non-feminist, and modern vs. traditional. The blurriness of these boundaries is a good reminder of the complexity of human motives, and the unreliability of predictive models of human behavior. In the next chapter, I will explore more deeply the motivations and effects of women’s participation in the piety movement. In chapter seven, I will present a framework for understanding human motivation and behavior more generally.

Chapter 6:

The Experience of Individual Actors, and their Broader Social Effects

Over the past three decades, there has been steady growth of so-called “fundamentalist” religions. This umbrella term tends to stand for any conservative variation of well-recognized world faiths, generally (Protestant and Catholic) Christianity and Islam, but also Hinduism, Judaism and Sikhism, among others. Marty and Appleby of the Fundamentalism Project (1988-1993) identified a number of characteristics that appear to be present in conservative sects of many religions, regardless of their ideological divisions. These commonalities include male leadership and authority over women and children; rigidly-defined gender roles; adherence to a single, inerrant truth; a strong division between group “insiders” and “outsiders;” and orientation to a(n imagined) Halcyon past for guidance in present-day behavior and pursuits. The Islamic piety movement in Egypt certainly shares these characteristics.

Those groups that are labeled fundamentalist are widely seen by the intellectual community and much of the broader public as limiting the freedom and stultifying the self-expression, particularly of female devotees. The common perception is that ultra-conservative expressions of faith reject modernity and “turn back the clock” with respect to women’s gains in the civic, business and political spheres, and in their relations with men. An examination of the lives and motivations of Muslim women themselves offers a far more nuanced view.

Women in the grassroots piety movement in Egypt, who emphasize modesty and piety in their daily lives, avoid speaking to unrelated men, and leave their jobs to return to the home, are neither terrorist-harboring radicals, nor meek victims of coercive, overbearing patriarchs. Their reasons for adopting these conservative forms of behavior and dress are complex and variegated, and they “make sense” when examined within the sociocultural, economic and political context of individuals’ lives. A deeper understanding of these women’s motives and experiences is critical background for a meaningful and informed public conversation about cultural and religious difference, international engagement and conflict resolution.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the new Islamic piety movement burgeoning across the Muslim world has drawn largely from women in the middle and upper middle classes (Wikan, 1996; Lubeck 2003). This is the very group that would be expected, based on secular- liberal understandings of agency and desire (as focused on emancipation and self-actualization), to eschew such affiliation. According to Mahmood (2005), “normative liberal assumptions about human nature...(include) the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, ... assert(ions of) autonomy..., (and) acts that challenge social norms...(5).” The women who tend to be the driving force behind the movement are educated, and have resources and opportunities for seeing and availing themselves of alternative ideologies and life courses. In spite of this, a small but significant (and growing) proportion of educated, (comparatively) financially secure women are drawn to an interpretation of Islam that appears, because of the strict gender ideology at its core, to limit the freedoms and

range of expression available to them. It begs the question, if conservative forms of religion are so bad for women, if indeed they are fundamentally and unabashedly unequal and oppressive from a gender perspective, why are large and growing numbers of women drawn to them?

In this chapter, I will explore the foregoing question by examining the popularity and growth of the Islamic piety movement in Egypt, primarily through its appeal to, and effect on, individual women. Many studies of broad-based, conservative religious movements have focused primarily on geopolitical and economic phenomena as the source of the growth of religious movements (Beeman 2001; Lubeck 2003). While these offer important contextual analyses, understanding the constraints and actions of individuals *within* that context is critical to comprehending larger social phenomena. Significant social and political change does not come about but for the presence and momentum of the individuals who drive it. The question is, then, what fuels their commitment?

As I will argue, pious Muslim women's choices are neither irrational, nor the sole product of familial and societal pressures. Putting aside for a moment questions about whether *any* individual's choice is truly free and unconstrained (Butler 1999; Foucault 1978, 1999), pious Egyptian women, as much as their secular and religious counterparts in and outside of the country, are rational actors adopting an ideology and set of practices that they perceive to be in their interest, and which meet many of their needs for meaning, connection and control in their lives.

To say that the decisions and actions of pious women are rational is not to say that their motivations are always carefully weighed out and considered. They may not even be entirely conscious. Human action cannot be reduced to rational goals alone, no more than it can be entirely explained by unconscious drives. The quantity and diversity of factors precipitating action and those reinforcing decisions and behavior are numerous and interrelated. Their diverse interactions are rarely laid cleanly out in our minds. More often, they underlie our decisions in diffuse ways, beyond our immediate awareness. We tend to make decisions because they “feel right,” rather than as a result of an elaborate cost-benefit analysis. We gravitate towards modes of being and thinking that resonate, that align with our cognitive models of the world, and that have been tried out and approved of by those in our social network. Once decisions are made and actions taken, their “rightness” is frequently affirmed by positive social and emotional experiences arising from them. As I will demonstrate, many women in the piety movement benefit socially, psychologically, spiritually and even economically from their involvement. These benefits may or may not be foreseen, and only occasionally seem to be the conscious impetus for change. However, because the effects tend to be positive, they serve to reinforce the decisions that pious women have made. Their example offers subtle encouragement to other women to make similar commitments and changes in their own lives.

Human action arises out of interplay among internal motivators, external forces and tendencies and perceptions arising out of past experience, a proposition about which I will elaborate in the next chapter. To understand a woman’s decision to adopt

a newly self-consciously Muslim identity and engage in pious practices, one has to examine both the minutiae and the macroforces of her life, and take into account basic human psychological and practical needs. Some of the factors that influence decisions and behavior are common to all people. Humans share a set of psychological and emotional needs that include a desire for meaning and understanding (Frankl 1946; Geertz 1973) and connection to others (Ainsworth and Bowlby 1991). Relational connections tend to be particularly important to women (Belenky 1986; Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982; Miller 1976). Beyond these, humans exhibit a need for a sense of mastery and control in their world (Kastenbaum 1993; Schieman, et. al. 2003).

Structural factors are an equally critical influence. We must understand how these lives are connected to, shaped by and actively responsive to sociocultural, economic and political forces at the local, regional, national and international levels. Individuals within a given society live and work within a set of broadly similar social, political and economic conditions, although each person's location within the socioeconomic matrix conditions their experience in significant ways. Finally, beyond common structural and psychological factors, each individual's temperament, immediate social web, and set of life experiences contribute to her perceptions, decisions and behavior. When this array of forces and influences is considered, the decisions and behavior of individual actors, and their broader social effects, can be more deeply understood.

6.1 A (Post?)Modern Enterprise

Modern religious fundamentalisms turned out to be anything but fossilizations, leftover traces from happenings in earlier strata of human experience. They were and are adaptive, inventive, innovative, and improvisatory.

-Marty Martin (1998)

For all its alleged fundamentalism, its “harkening back” to earlier, purer times, the current Islamic *saHwa* (awakening) is very much a product of modernity. The materials, the sensibilities, even the fashions that define it bear the mark of “modern” thinking and the modern world. There has been a proliferation of Islamic educational materials in diverse, technological formats (Eikelman & Anderson 2003; Hirshkind 2001, 2009). Large sets of sermons on cassettes and CDs, and recordings of Qur’anic recitations are sold outside mosques, as well as in the “impulse buy” section of the local supermarket. The devout listen to these recordings on headsets as they traverse the city, or in their cars as they commute to work (in the case of some taxi and delivery drivers, *while* at work). The number of Islamic internet sites, magazines and television programs has exploded (Abu-Lughod 2005; Bunt 2009). Such sources offer conduits for the distribution of the ideas and ideals of the movement, as well as a forum for discussion, expression and social connection. Even those products that purport to aid adherents in modeling their lives after the Prophet Mohammed and his wives and companions¹⁰ rely on modern packaging methods and distribution routes.

¹⁰ Sticks of *sewak* for cleansing the teeth are marketed as “used by the Prophet” and heralded as better than modern dentrifices. Food products like *talbina* (a thick barley drink), *tamr* (dates) and camel’s milk are declared “good for the body,” even curative, according to Prophet Mohammed.

In part because of new technologies, there has been a shift in the structure and sources of religious authority. Religious elites no longer have a monopoly on the tools of literate or religious culture. Eickelman (2002) argues that the availability of mass education along with mass communication has created an Islamic “reformation” in which vast numbers of people from across the Muslim world are examining and debating the fundamentals of Muslim belief and practice. In the past, learned sheikhs who could read and recite the Qur’an were the sole sources of Islamic knowledge and interpretation. Few others were literate enough to read and understand the arcane grammar of the Qur’an. Improved literacy rates and access to education have made it possible for many people to engage directly and personally with the *Sunna* (collectively, the Qur’an and *ahadith*, or the compiled sayings and doings of the Prophet Mohammed), rather than have to rely entirely on religious authorities for interpretation and guidance. Further, the availability of religious discussion, commentary and advice on television, in magazines and online has increased popular interest in directly engaging with religious texts. Religious discussions and debates are common fare in public and private settings alike, not only between intimates, but among strangers as well. Debates center around individual behavior and standards of modest dress, as in whether the *niqab* (face veil) and gloves are required to be worn by women, or are merely “preferred” by God.

6.2 New Roles for Women

Women have been at the forefront of the grassroots piety movement, a sort of “new guard” on the streets, fostering religious education and life transformation among growing cadres of the newly devout. While adherents of both sexes continue to listen and defer to the authority of learned (male) sheikhs, they also address themselves, in larger and larger numbers, directly to the text. Working both independently and in groups, they apply the ideas and messages of that text to their everyday lives. Their goal is to perfect their practice of Islam and to model themselves in all ways after the Prophet and, in the case of women, after his wives as well. Taking the principle of “equality before the eyes of God” to heart, and combining it with the admonition that the word of God should be shared and spread, women leaders in the community both proselytize informally (*da’wa*), and organize classes and learning groups for the purpose of elucidating, and then translating to practice, the appropriate expressions of piety and moral behavior in their day-to-day lives.

Thus, although traditional interpretations of the *Sunna* are not challenged (as they are by Islamic feminists, for example¹¹), there is a shift away from a total reliance on traditional religious authorities to guide understanding and practice. Guidance now comes from a variety of sources. Personalities in the media (frequently, though not

¹¹ Islamic feminists (IFs) challenge the longstanding, traditionalist interpretations that the pietists accept as unerring. IFs argue that such interpretations, steeped as they are in the customs and gender dynamics of the era during which they were written, must be re-examined and re-evaluated (through a process called *ijtihad*, for their deeper lessons and meanings). They believe that once the cultural, historical and linguistic context is understood, and the complexities and resulting misunderstandings are addressed, the core principles of Islam (of justice, compassion, equality, etc.) will be what remain. For more information about Islamic feminism, see Badran 2009; Barlas 2002; Cooke 2000; Wadud 1999, and others).

exclusively male) offer a more accessible rendition of Islamic principles and dictates. Lay “popular preachers” such as Amr Khaled, Khaled al-Gendy and Moez Masoud command huge followings, particularly among young people (Zaied 2008). Many of the pious women with whom I spoke did not consider these popular religious personalities to be informed or correct on all Islamic points. Nevertheless, they saw them as a potentially useful starting point for young people just beginning their journey toward a fuller and more correct expression of faith. A number of well-known sheikhs not associated with *Al-Azhar* (and thus, not a part of “establishment” or state Islam) are also popular. Their appeal seems to cut across both moderate and very religious adherents. Weeknight and Friday sermons draw large crowds and have the feel (the energy, excitement and heights of devotion) of a music concert in the U.S.

At the community level, a proliferation of small neighborhood mosques (*mesegeed*) offer local alternatives to the larger, grander and more populous mosques (*gama'a*). The smaller mosques, often simply small rooms tucked into local buildings rather than in structures set apart, tend to be run and attended by neighborhood men. The larger mosques, drawing supplicants from a much broader area, have a far larger base of financial support. As such, they tend to fund civic arms which encompass community centers, schools, classes for adults, and social services. Women are sometimes hired as directors that oversee activities related to women and children.

Additionally, women (*da'iyyat*, or female proselytizers/teachers/guides) play a significant role in setting the tone and form of pious expression in the neighborhood. Through their classes and advice, and through their appearance, comportment and acts

of benevolence and charity, they serve as models of righteous living, embodying Islamic principles and teachings in their actions, behavior and dress. Women newer to the movement learn to shape and discipline their own religious and moral expression based on the example and instruction of more established women. In this way, a bar is set for piety, good moral behavior, and appropriately modest dress.

6.3 Complexities

The fact that women act in many ways as the engine behind the movement is significant and challenges preconceived notions about the passivity of conservative religious (especially Muslim) women. Still, in spite of the importance of women's energy and informal leadership to the movement, their presence does not make the movement pro-woman in a clear or (Western) feminist sense. This is in part because the expression of Islamic thought and practice that this group of pious women is so effectively spreading throughout Egyptian society is a very orthodox and "male" form of the faith, that is, narrowly-defined, literal and text-based. Leila Ahmed (1993, 2000) made a useful distinction between two forms of religious (Islamic) expression: an "official" (orthodox) Islam, which is characterized by rigid adherence to accepted doctrine, and an "ethical" Islam, which emphasizes the moral and spiritual equality of all human beings and embodies greater flexibility of belief and practice. The former (official) expression was dictated and practiced by learned men. The latter (ethical) form described and encompassed the religiosity of Ahmed's mother and the women's world of her youth. This was a world where basic Islamic principles and values were

lived. Rather than focusing on the text, or on the precise enactment and observances of daily rituals like *wudu*' (ritual purification), prayer, and proper dress, women (and the bulk of men) manifested Islamic ethics in their daily lives (Ahmed 2000). They did this through fair treatment of others, hospitality, generosity, honesty and kindness.

Women in the current piety movement certainly do attempt to integrate positive principles such as these into their everyday lives. However, they are also quite preoccupied with orthodoxy and orthopraxy: the "correct" way to think, act, interact and present oneself to others, all according to a strict adherence to traditional (male) interpretation of Islam. The form and content of prayer is precisely appointed, as is the correct way to dress, eat, sleep, speak, drink, and yawn. Although they draw from sermons, cassette lectures, pamphlets and the advice of religious experts, the situation is not as simple as one party (men) telling another party (women) what to do. The women in the piety movement elect on their own, sometimes contrary to the desires of fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, to change their lives in significant ways. The forms of practice and belief they adopt: dominant, orthodox, textual, "masculine" brand of Islamic practice, lend them a new legitimacy, and levels the spiritual and social playing field. Many of the women in this movement "do" piety better than their male counterparts. They become models of pious practice, spending hours every day in prayer, study and acts of *da'wa* and charity. The legitimacy of the form, and the women's self-discipline and accomplishment, place them above scrutiny. And yet, the effects for individual women (and as we shall see, for larger society), are complicated. The creed the pious women have embraced, and the

practices they have perfected, have opened up new avenues for spiritual, social and psychological expression and gratification. At the same time, they have circumscribed their former range of actions and forms of expression in a variety of ways. In the next section, I will examine the changes in individual women's lives, and the effect of these new competencies, values and pursuits on women and society more broadly.

6.4 How Women Benefit

From the outside looking in, the circumstances of deeply pious women may seem dubious. Clothed in layers of dark garments, sweating and uncomfortable during the long, hot Cairo summers, limited to same-sex gatherings and exchanges, and made anonymous by face veils in some cases, they appear to be every bit the oppressed women of the western imagination. But this conclusion takes into account neither the objective social, political and economic benefits women gain by embracing the principles and practices of the movement, nor the experience (on the whole, the positively transformative nature) of participation.

The pietists with whom I worked do not delude themselves about some of their discomforts and sacrifices¹². Most grumble about the intense heat and complain bitterly when air-conditioning is absent. Some, sighing, lament the loss of old family traditions like mixed-gender meals with the extended family, and celebrating

¹² With the exception that some women, acutely aware of the ways they are misperceived by outsiders, were at pains to insist that their clothes were cool and comfortable, i.e., that they did *not* suffer. On the contrary, they said, "God, through His dictates, makes the way easier for us, not harder."

birthdays¹³. However, these sacrifices, along with the equally demanding sacrifices of women's time, energy and money, are the very things that define the women *as* good, pious Muslims.

Religious directives coincide neatly with dominant gender ideals. Women in Egyptian society (as in many societies) are distinguished by their capacity and their presumed inclination to give of themselves: to feed, clothe, clean, love, guide and otherwise care for children as well as adults. Self-sacrifice is both a virtue and an expectation of mothers, and by extension, all women, as potential mothers (Abugideiri 1976; Badran 1996). All women are perceived as equipped with the capacities and characteristics of mothers¹⁴. The prerogatives of the "straight path" these women embrace: charity, *da'wa*, piety, *haya'*, modesty in bearing, generosity and care towards others, parallel the ideals of Egyptian womanhood. Thus, the extent to which women excel in cultivating these characteristics and activities is the extent to which they see themselves and are recognized by others as "good women" and model Muslims. Those women who are able to overcome desires, to acknowledge and address their own (perceived) failings, and to think, act, dress and relate in a way that they believe is pleasing to God, enjoy both social approbation and a sense of self-mastery.

¹³ Birthday celebrations have been abandoned by some pious families on the grounds that the Prophet Mohammed celebrated only two holidays: *Eid al Fitr*, following the fasting month of Ramadan, and *Eid al-Adha*, coinciding with the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is felt by these families that all followers should do the same.

¹⁴ In Arabic, the root of the word for womb (*raHm*) is the same as that for the word compassion (*raHim*). Women are believed to be especially compassionate, and to be, more than men, both affected by, and responsive to, the suffering of others.

Piety and self-discipline, are a source of gratification and pride. Disciplinary technologies secure their hold by creating desires and attaching individuals to specific identities Foucault (1988). They establish norms against which individual behaviors and bodies are judged, and against which individuals police themselves. The Islamic Awakening has offered up a new (and according to participants, elevated) norm of womanhood that appeals to women and acts as an ideal to which they aspire.

One might reasonably ask why an ideal of womanhood centering on self-abnegation, sacrifice and self-conscious attention to modes of presentation and behavior would appeal to any woman. In fact, current norms of middle class womanhood in Egypt place women in a bind. Not unlike the experience of working women in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s and continuing through today, women in Egypt working in jobs outside the home enjoy no reduction in their domestic workload in spite of long hours away from the home (Hatem 1994). As women have contributed their paychecks to the financial well-being of their families, Egyptian husbands on the whole have not taken on the responsibility of sharing the household labor of cleaning, cooking, shopping and childcare. Indeed, it remains an important mark of masculinity that men *not* lift a finger at home. Thus, many modern women face a situation in which they work both inside and outside of the home, often starting their days at 5am and not finishing work until after 10 or 11pm at night.

To make things worse, as popular discourse and opinion have shifted toward “traditional” religious ideals of “women staying home,” many women who continue to work outside the home face open disapproval from neighbors and from media

discourse as well. Given the double workload that women currently face, and the social pressures on women to live more frugally so they *can* stay at home and be good wives and mothers, it is not surprising that many women are drawn to an ideal of womanhood that values “traditional” femininity, and puts pressure on men to provide for their wives and families as they should, according to Islamic law.

Robbins (2004) observed a similar phenomenon of women in Papua New Guinea joining a charismatic sect of Christianity in large numbers. By becoming a part of this community, the women openly embraced an ideology that placed them in a subservient position vis-à-vis men. He noted that by aligning themselves with this new social and spiritual movement, women gained a new source of power and legitimacy that could be used to compel errant husbands to give up the habit of drinking (or other costly and/or harmful indulgences), and return home to contribute to their families’ financial, emotional and moral well-being. In the event that husbands still could not be controlled, the women were morally justified in separating from them. Whatever the outcome of their marital troubles, the women gained a community of like-minded believers who provided emotional and material support through difficult times.

A comparison with ideals of femininity in the U.S. is useful for further understanding how individuals can attach themselves to models and norms that appear to be contrary to their interests. In the U.S., the dominant model of femininity has to do with thinness, beauty and youth as ideals of appearance, and romance, relationships and consumerism, as “natural” feminine desires. Few, if any, of these attributes or

pursuits would be held up by men *or* women as *human* ideals. Most (save for relationships) neither define nor expand human experience, longing, wisdom or happiness. And yet, millions of women attach themselves to these ideals and employ various disciplinary technologies (such as dietary and fitness regimens, expert advice on how to walk, talk, dress, style one's hair, wear one's makeup) in order to produce and perfect (American) idealized forms of feminine embodiment (Bartky 1988).

Among many pious women in Egypt, the challenge to improve the self is explicit and frequently discussed. Family members often vocalize their desire and efforts to be better, to be more modest, to carry out God's commandments and desires with greater reliability and sincerity. They fast for long hours (twice weekly, at minimum), and engage in acts of charity and kindness, suffer the stifling heat in heavy clothes, and hold all this up to God asking that it be accepted. As they learn larger and larger sections of the *Qur'an*, come to know the stronger *ahadith* by heart, and perfect their posture during prayer and repose, they feel a gratifying sense of accomplishment. Family members both self-monitor, propelling themselves to greater piety and virtue, and advise one another on every detail of proper comportment and behavior. Excellence nets internal satisfaction, as well as external kudos and recognition from within the family and mosque circle. The individual is thus spurred on to greater heights of learning and practice.

Beyond an internal sense of mastery and control, successful self-discipline brings social accolades. Women who excelled in memorization of the *Qur'an*, who were exemplary in prayer, comportment and dress, who had and shared knowledge

and insights about the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed, were lauded by peers and sought out by younger members for guidance and support. They enjoyed respect, and deference from both family members and strangers on the street. Piety and power have long been connected, not only for men but for women (Warren 2005). Those women with the time and resources to devote themselves entirely-in dress, speech, action and interaction-to a pious life, have gained significantly in social and religious capital.

6.5 Social/relational gains

The self-in-relation abhors and dreads isolation, disconnection, and loss of the other, for this absence produces a fundamental loss of the self.

Marcia Weskott (1989)

Power is certainly linked to social networks since it is through the acknowledgement, deference and loyalty of other individuals that we gain and maintain it. But connection with like-minded others, and the emotional pleasure and sense of belonging they bring, are their own rewards. The piety movement offers a deep sense of connection and purpose, welcome in an environment that, because of its population growth (18 million and counting), increasing unemployment and poverty, civic restrictions, and political and police threats, often engenders a sense of hopelessness and isolation. Social cohesion and solidarity have long been recognized as important for social and psychological well-being (Durkheim 1954). In their own (separate) studies of Islamic women's groups in Egypt, Duval (1998) and Hafez

(2003) each affirmed the importance of community and shared values to women's lives and faith.

A woman who I came to know very well over the course of my time in Egypt provides a good illustration of the importance and positive effect of social support and approbation, particularly for women. Na'ima¹⁵ had been a fairly lively woman prior to and early in her marriage. There were rumors that the couple's first child had been conceived before the marriage, a supposition that tainted her reputation, although the talk faded when the new baby came and she settled into motherhood. Years passed without incident. Another baby came, at the end of a long interval, seven years later. About fifteen years into the marriage rumors began that Na'ima, whose movements were typically monitored, like every other woman's, by her neighbors, was going out during the days while her husband was at work. By implication, she was accused of having an extramarital affair. The veracity of the claim was never established, but the damage to her reputation and marriage was done. Following this incident, she experienced profound disconnection from her husband's extended family, previously a major source of social and psychological support and intimacy. She became depressed and introspective for many months, enduring the wrath of her husband (whose physical violence escalated in the wake of the rumors), and the cool distance of her in-laws.

¹⁵ This and all other names are pseudonymous

After about a year of loneliness and comparative solitude, Na'ima began to adopt more modest dress and pious practices. She prayed with regularity and took solace in the *Qur'an*. After many months and repeated requests, her husband finally allowed her to leave the house to attend public sermons and religious lessons with his devout female cousin. Since this was for a valid and desirable purpose, the strengthening of faith, and his extended family was encouraging such behavior in all family members, he found it hard to say no, in spite of his continued bitterness and skepticism. After much time, the acrimony in the marriage began to diminish. Whether because of new and deepening religiosity, or its social and relational effects, Na'ima became more serene. With every new Islamic step (the adoption of gloves, the addition of extra fasting and prayer) she basked in the peace of submission to God, but she also, importantly, felt the warmth of the family opening to her again. It was clear that while she may have sought spiritual redemption or the ultimate reward of heaven, she enjoyed a critical transformation in her corporeal sphere: renewed friendships and support, solidarity and respect, laughter and love.

In many ways, the piety movement mirrors the cultural-familial form of patriarchal connectivity described by Joseph (1996). There are hierarchies of gender and age/experience, with a clear social order, and well-defined expectations for exchange of respect, honor and aid. There are also expectations of sociality and reciprocity. Access to kin-like relationships may be particularly appealing given the current marriage trends in Egypt. Whereas historically, women married in their late teens to early twenties (and men in their early to mid-twenties), the average age for

marriage has climbed significantly for both genders owing to the combination of rather demanding cultural expectations about what should be brought to a marriage, and economic barriers to that ideal (Singerman and Ibrahim 2002; Singerman and Hoodfar 1996). Most of the younger women in the movement that I encountered were unmarried. It may be that the fictive kinship of the group, coupled with the opportunities and shared purpose it offered, both heightened the appeal, and strengthened the bond among participants.

6.6 Social Effects

Through their actions and often very public religious activities, women have contributed to an alteration in gender norms and relations in society in many important ways. Although their numbers are comparatively small, the social effect of their words and practice is broad and significant. Public dress and norms of behavior have shifted to a far more conservative standard as a result of the pietists' example. This normative shift has been helped along by a sympathetic media which has increased the number of explicitly Islamic themes and programming¹⁶. There has also been a proliferation of new Islamic clothing lines generated by savvy entrepreneurs looking to capitalize on a new trend. Outer garments come in a wide variety of styles and materials, and scarves in an explosion of colors grace market stalls and mall nooks.

¹⁶ The highly-publicized decision of a couple of Egyptian actresses to don *hijab* contributed to the popularity of this trend (Abu-Lughod 1997).

Even *hijab* bathing suits are available in the summer months, although these are not considered sufficiently modest by all women in the movement.

Because of the alignment of gender and religious ideals (self-sacrifice, modesty, piety, charity, compassion), and because the movement and activities of the women outside the home are in the service of God, they are above scrutiny. Any inchoate objections to women's public presence, movement and expanding roles can find little purchase. This is important because although the stated ideals and practices of the piety movement circumscribe women's freedoms in some significant ways (with regard to their activities, dress, choice of companions and deference to male authority), in daily practice women's activities push against the very conservative gender norms that the movement champions and embraces.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the intent of the women in the piety movement has never been to challenge male authority or to upset the gender hierarchy. Their overriding goal has always been to live the most pious and upstanding life possible in hopes of pleasing God and ultimately being judged worthy of heaven. And yet, many women have stepped boldly into the formerly male-only space of the mosque, not only for Friday prayer, but for use during the week as well. Without challenging conventions about women's place, role and participation (i.e., that women occupy separate space for prayer either upstairs or behind men; that it is the exclusive domain of men to lead mixed group prayers), they nonetheless claim rights to that space, not only for prayer but for the practice of charitable works, and the organization of religious lessons for themselves and other women. This "incursion" of women into

the public religious domain is a significant shift, and it is not without tension. It extends to other forums and spaces as well. Women now attend Islamic institutes which give them formal training in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and its application. Further, as women have assumed both formal and informal roles of collecting and distributing charity to families in need, they have become the defacto “providers” to these families. This is a role that is, according to both religious and cultural precedent, a male prerogative and obligation.

6.7 New Constraints

Most major historical changes have contradictory effects.
Nikki Keddie (2006)

While individual women benefit, and while new roles and spaces have opened up for religious women, circumstances are now such that pietists themselves, and women in broader society, all face new forms of surveillance, constraint and control. Foucault (1977) argued that with all extant social systems, ordinary women and men both gain from, and become subject to, new forms of surveillance, discipline and control at the hands of systems, institutions, groups and individuals. In examining the shifting lives of Egyptian women at the turn of the (twentieth) century, Baron (2007) demonstrated a similar phenomenon in which middle and upper class women were pushed to modernize: to become educated in the “domestic sciences,” to rationalize childcare and housekeeping and to orient their focus and energy on their husbands and their (nuclear) family rather than on extended family groups and concerns. This

transformation opened up new opportunities for women but also removed traditional, and often very effective and satisfying, sources of informal power and social support.

Women in the piety movement, along with their male counterparts, fervently embrace an orthodox (presumed inerrant) interpretation of Islam, to the exclusion of all other forms. As such, they reject culturalized versions of Islam as corruptions of the purported original. Variants within the broader faith of Islam (Shia, Sufi), and traditions (like saint worship, spirit possession and more flexible interpretation and practice of Islamic dictates) which tend to personalize and humanize individuals' encounters with the sacred, and give ordinary people religious leeway and a sense of efficacy (Boddy 1989; Hoffman 1995; Nutveg 1988), are treated with the same dismissal and disdain as belief systems outside of Islam.

Those practices that are primarily associated with women, such as gossiping, are proclaimed to be particularly loathsome to God. Such criticism results in the marginalization of women's traditional forms of power, influence and personal religious expression. Ways that women have traditionally maneuvered and negotiated within families and communities have been vilified and their activities monitored and scrutinized, largely by other women. Early work in feminist anthropology identified ways that women wielded power and influence through sons and husbands. Margery Wolfe (1972), in her well-known work with women in rural Taiwan and China, traced forms of power on the part of women in the face of constraints of patriarchal kinship, including women's informal talk (a form of social exchange that is frequently dismissed as the spiteful yammering of women), and their strategic whisperings to

husbands and sons as “pillow ghosts.” Gossip, Wolfe noted, was powerful enough to make or break public reputations. Pious women have come to police themselves vigorously on this point, invoking damnation for what would appear to be a comparatively minor offense. I was warned on a number of occasions that all women need to curb their desires to talk about other people. It is because women gossip so much, I was told, that hell is mostly peopled by women. In this way, then, women are themselves shifting the playing field and removing the more traditional “resources” for women’s social and political maneuvering.

I recall one encounter with a woman who bore social disapprobation and social sanction for her transgression of the new norms for modest female behavior. I was accompanying a woman named Haala to her cousins’ home for dinner one night in late spring. The evening was balmy, and as we approached the building where Haala’s cousins lived, I could see a small group of people sitting outside on overturned boxes, talking and laughing. It was clear that the group was having a good time. It was a pleasant enough picture to me, but Haala visibly stiffened as she became aware that one of her female cousins (a woman in her early thirties who lived downstairs from the cousins she was visiting) was among the conversants. This was a neighborhood of the “popular” classes (working to lower-middle class), where casual interactions among neighbors outside had previously been perfectly acceptable. Times had changed, however, and new gender role expectations were increasingly at play. More religiously conservative norms of behavior had come to the fore, having to do with modesty, morality, propriety, and along those lines, the unacceptability of interaction

between unrelated men and women. This small crowd included both male and female neighbors. As new norms diffused across sections of Cairo, such intermingling had taken on the taint of impropriety and immodesty.

Haala did not acknowledge her cousin at all as we passed her, and the snub was clear to all. Upstairs, she complained vociferously about her cousin's shamelessness to the mutual cousins. In Haala's opinion, sitting outside on the ground in a mixed gender gathering, even one of familiar neighbors, raised serious questions about her morality and judgement. Although it went unspoken, there were class elements to Haala's objection.

When I left the field three months later, Haala had still not spoken to her cousin, and much of the family had followed suit. The cousin, already one of the poorer and least admired relations, faded more and more into the background. She is less a part of family gatherings or shared confidences now, and it is clear that if she hopes to return to the family fold, and to regain some respectability, she will have to cease to engage in old forms of sociality, and adopt the newer habits of piety.

Owing to their new skills and competencies, a proportion of pious women in Egypt (many of whom are without husbands or sons) maneuver successfully within society and assert both power and influence on family, community and broader society. The appeal and rewards of the movement are clear. However, this power and social capital does not extend to all. As the traditional ways in which women effect change and influence others are proscribed by their negative associations (as unIslamic, the work of *Shayton*, or demons, etc.), women without access to the new

forms of agency, influence, power and control (because they lack the time, support, resources and literacy enjoyed by their middle and upper-middle class counterparts) are left with the older forms, which are increasingly subject to criticism and social sanction.

6.8 Conclusion

Popular conjecture and academic theorizing about Middle Eastern women's agency has a long history. Early feminist and Marxist writings reinforced essentializing, orientalizing stereotypes by portraying women as passive victims both of patriarchal systems and individual (stereotypically brutal) men (Mohanty 1988). Subsequent contributions to the research and literature sought to uncover instances of women's agency in the face of constraints on their freedom (Abu-Lughod 1986; Atiya 1982; Davis 1983; Early 1993; Fernea 1985; Wikan 1991). They focused on identifying the conceptual and practical resources available to women and the ways that women appropriate and redirect them in support of their own interests. Women were seen as resisting male-centered cultural hegemony either by carving out space apart from men (e.g., in language and poetry, weaving, or cult possession) or by perpetrating small sabotages and rebellions within gender-unequal structures, actions which were often shown to have the unintentional and paradoxical effect of reproducing the very inequality the actions were meant to upset (for examples see Boddy 1989; Brusco 1995; Hale 1987; Hegland 1998; Macleod 1991; Torab 1996). The pious women have improved their life circumstances and in many cases improved

those of other women, not by resisting dominant norms, but by adopting and perfecting new ideals and practices that on the surface appear to limit them.

Even as they embrace fairly rigid ideas about the “place” and “roles” of men and women in the order of things, individual women gain socially, practically and psychologically through their commitment to “correct” Islamic practice, thought and dress. Many women have expanded their social networks and their range of physical movement. They have increased their moral and religious authority, and enjoy a sense of mastery, because of their unwavering commitment to piety and moral self-discipline. Without seeking gender equality, or overtly challenging male authority, pious activists have nonetheless altered gender norms and relations by moving into previously male space (making use of local mosques for prayer, female-led religious instruction, and organized activities), and assuming traditionally male responsibilities, such as providing financial support to women and families in need.

Along with these changes and gains have come new limits on personal freedom and self-expression. The pressure on men and women to inhabit distinct spheres serves to limit the participation of one gender (in this case, women) in civic, business and political affairs. When women absent themselves from politics and business because of a desire (or a pressure) to sex segregate, society loses the direct contributions of women in these realms. However, there is no strict dichotomy between a feminine private and a masculine public. Religion represents a portion of the public sphere that pious women have entered and engaged with in significant ways.

Molyneux (1985), in her seminal article based on work with women in Nicaragua, showed how engagement with one type of activism (“practical”), which focuses on demands for basic needs), sometimes leads to engagement with more “strategic” activism, a form which seeks to counter the system(s) that created the inequities in the first place. The pious activists of whom I have written fall squarely in the “practical” category of activism, with their focus on the fundamental needs of poor women and their families. However, as the scope of their work expands, as it has been, from the immediate needs of poverty (food, clothing, medicine), to more long term supports (support with skill-building, literacy, employment, and childcare strategies) so too will their involvement in other spheres of civic life. When the women provide food and medicine, or arrange for jobs or housing for needy families, it is always driven by their desire to fulfill a religious duty of guiding individuals down the “straight path” of Islam. But their efforts affect public attitudes, and create new pathways for change. These are not strategic efforts aimed at systemic change, but their work within the system may have long-lasting effects, not only for individuals, but for society as well.

In a self-consciously Muslim society, where religious identity is the primary social locator and stands in as short-hand for morality, trustworthiness and marriagability, pious activism is an important role and source of social capital. While not challenging orthodox Islamic prescriptions or understandings, these leaders have nonetheless opened up a whole new field of legitimate engagement for women in arguably the most relevant area of public life. While feelings of disenfranchisement

and apathy regarding politics and civic involvement are widespread (BBC News 2008), individual faith remains an area where people can experience a sense of control and agency in their lives. It may be that this will be the avenue through which women will emerge as (even more) direct contributors to social and political change.

Chapter 7:

A Framework for Examining Human Action

In the previous chapter, I attempted to render the desires and commitments of pious women comprehensible, to clarify the logic of their decisions given their broader context, opportunities and constraints. As part of this, I identified many of the social and psychological benefits of participation for women in the movement. An assertion might reasonably be deduced from such a description that perceived rewards act as a significant motivator, inducing desire for adopting the ideals and practices of the movement. According to this logic, which is essentially a condensation of rational choice theory (Allingham 2002), the women see the rewards of aligning themselves with the beliefs and practices of the piety movement, even if they are not immediately apparent to outsiders, and they act to capitalize on them. Once an observer comes to see the practical, social and psychological benefits of involvement to a woman, her motivation for joining becomes clear. Inherent in this thinking is an assumption of free choice, and of a subject who is autonomous, unencumbered and acts unproblematically to achieve her desires, generally following a detached calculation of gains and losses of various courses of action. Of course, it is not so simple. Rational choice theory does offer a way to think about push and pull factors that draw women to the piety movement, but it is inadequate as a total explanatory model. It fails to account for mediating factors in the social environment, such as economic and political realities and constraints. It is similarly unable to account for the powerful

influence of cultural norms, values, expectations, and the social relationships that reinforce these, on our choices. Finally, the whole of the unconscious and its influence on our actions is missed in a rational choice model of human behavior.

The first goal of this chapter is to delineate the array of factors that influence, shape, complicate and direct human behavior. I propose a framework with three intersecting, interrelated categories of influence, one constant, and two variable. The first consists of a set of three internal drives, theorized to be common to all people. Mahmood (2005), using the data from her own research with a group of similarly pious women in Egypt, problematized the assumption that a desire for freedom from external constraints is a universal. I believe she is correct in showing that not all people are impassioned by the same desires, and that there is a danger in presuming that themes in the western secular tradition should apply to all people across time and space. However, I want to explore the possibility that there *is* some common denominator of desire that can be understood to be at the core of individual motivation for projects as diverse as strict religious piety and self-transformation, social and political mobilization with a radically secular agenda, and “ordinary” women enacting of traditional norms of marriage and childrearing.

My attempt here will be to reduce the vast range of human desire and action to three unifying common denominators that can connect humanity across chasms of difference. These include 1) a desire to understand and find meaning in the world and in one’s own life; 2) belongingness, or a desire to be in relation or connection with others; and 3) a drive for a sense of mastery, self-efficacy and control.

The variety of ways in which these drives or desires are translated into specific projects and actions has to do with the interrelated, interacting variables of the external environment, and the individual. Thus, the cultural models, discourses and values of a given setting, and the prevailing social norms, political and economic conditions, all comprise the backdrop within which actors operate. But people are not static; they respond to and, in turn, influence their surroundings. Individuals are in a constant interaction with their social and physical environment, and factors such as temperament, personal history, location in the socioeconomic matrix, and social networks affect a person's perceptions of, and orientation to, the world.

Given the obvious complexity of this model, I am not proposing that it is predictive in any way. It is doubtful that any theory has the ability to accurately predict human behavior due to the multiplicity of variables. Neither, as I will argue, can we determine the causality of human behavior. One of the points of this chapter is that there is no single motivation or cause for any one individual's behavior. Nevertheless, recognizing that external and internal variables will inevitably create differences in individual projects and desires, we can use this knowledge in our analysis to elucidate deeper motivations, ones that may be shared by individuals across groups with even significant ideological differences.

7.1 Internal Drives

The first category of influences on human motivation and action consists of psychological needs or drives affecting all individuals. The notion of a set of universal needs or drives is not new; numerous scholars have posited human universals. Freud (1922) hypothesized dual life/sexual and death/aggressive drives (*eros/libido* and *thanatos*). Maslow (1954) put forth a hierarchy of needs that began with basic physical (“deficiency”) needs and extended, upon the satisfaction of these “lower level” needs, to higher level psychological needs for growth, including affiliation, acceptance, competence and recognition. Preceding Maslow, William James (1892/1962) hypothesized three levels of needs: material (physiological, safety), social (belongingness, esteem), and spiritual. Other tri-level need hierarchies followed: Mathes (1981) proposed three levels of needs (physiological, belongingness, and self-actualization) and Alderfer (1972) developed his ERG (existence, relatedness, and growth) theory. The subject has continued to draw interest from researchers. Ryan & Deci (2000) suggested three needs, although they are not necessarily arranged hierarchically: the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Thompson, Grace and Cohen (2001) argued that the most important needs for children are connection, recognition, and power. Nohria, Lawrence, and Wilson (2001) provide evidence from a sociobiological theory of motivation that humans have four basic needs, including to: (1) acquire objects and experiences; (2) bond with others in long-term relationships of mutual care and commitment; (3) learn and make sense of the world and of themselves; and (4) defend themselves, their loved ones, beliefs and resources from harm. Although a range of needs are posited, a component of every

theory is some form of bonding and relatedness, and variations on control, learning and meaning. The specific drives I hypothesize find support both in my own observations and in the literature. Although I posit three core human drives, there is great diversity in the manner in which they manifest and are pursued, as desires.

7.1.1 Meaning

He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.

- Nietzsche

A drive for meaning and understanding has been theorized within both anthropology and psychology. Weber (1930) memorably argued that the strength of people's search for meaning was in part what propelled the beginnings of the industrial revolution and the "Protestant work ethic" that sustained it. As Calvinism developed, with its doctrine of predestination, a deep psychological need for clues about whether one was actually saved arose within the anxious populace. Casting about for a way to order and discern the meaning of the world around them, Calvinists looked to their success in worldly activity for clues about their spiritual status. They came to value profit and material success as signs of God's favor. Weber showed that certain types of Protestantism favored the rational pursuit of economic gain, as spiritual and moral meaning were extracted from worldly signs, activities and successes. Ultimately, it was this search for meaning that broke down the traditional economic system, paving the way for modern capitalism. The power of the human search for meaning is a powerful motivating force for human action.

Victor Frankl (1946) believed that the main motivation for living is the human will to find meaning in life. He theorized a form of existential analysis that focuses on a “will to meaning.” Alternate theoretical arguments at the time were proposed, including Adler’s (1956) Nietzschean doctrine of “will to power,” and Freud’s (1989) “will to pleasure.”

In her work with Lebanese women, Deeb (2006) saw their public piety partly as a response to feelings of uncertainty in the context of political conflict, war and threat of war, globalization and pressures towards a particular brand of modernization. Public expression of faith became outward evidence of their resolution of uncertainty, and their gaining of a sense of meaning and understanding through their membership in a pious community.

During my time in Egypt, people regularly tried to make sense of significant personal and social difficulties and problems, just as people do around the world. Some people saw different manifestations of human suffering as a direct result of social, economic and political injustice, and of the corruption and greed of certain groups and individuals. Others explained problems like abuse, drug use, prostitution and theft as the moral failings of individuals who had succumbed to the temptations of evil. Some, faced with the suffering of children with terminal illness, or the sight of families living in squalor, accepted (sighing) that God has a plan that is unknowable, but doubtlessly correct. Those who suffer, they believed, would find greater reward in heaven. Implicit in this sentiment is a narrative about suffering, redemption and reward, one that gives meaning and makes that suffering tolerable.

7.1.2 Relational Connection

Early anthropological studies of religion and society highlighted the importance of relational connection and belonging as critical to humans, and to human society (Durkheim 1915; Turner 1967). Durkheim (1915) spoke of the importance of social cohesion and solidarity, and believed that these phenomena, when present in people's lives, buffered the blow of personal crises. Although Durkheim and Turner's (1967, 1969) approaches to understanding religion differ, at the root of Durkheim's concept of *effervescence* and Turner's *communitas* is a recognition that human beings seek at times to transcend their individuality and separateness, to identify with and be a part of a larger group, movement, community or cause. Thus, human beings regularly align themselves with others who share their values and convictions.

Feminist work on ethics over the past few decades has identified the importance of relation and connection to women's sense of right moral action (Belenky 1997, Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984). Carol Gilligan suggested that women have traditionally been taught a different kind of moral outlook from men that emphasizes solidarity, community, and caring about one's special relationships. Jean Baker Miller's work (<1976>1991) suggested that growth-fostering relationships are a central human necessity, and disconnections are the source of psychological problems. Both men and women flourish in the context of positive, supportive relationships in which they are valued and loved. At the same time, because women and men tend to

be socialized into different roles and expectations within families and society, relational connections are of particular importance to women, and their presence, absence and quality all have significant implications for a woman's sense of contentment and well-being.

Na'ima's story, related in chapter six, served to exemplify the importance of relationship and connection in women's lives, and of the devastating effect that the loss of meaningful relationships can have on psychological and even physical well-being. This is particularly true for women in Egypt since the bulk of their attention and value is linked to their connections to intimate others (husband, children, extended family). Whereas men typically identify themselves beyond family with their occupational role, and have the option of seeking connection with other men through sports, clubs and cafés, many women's lives are exclusively or primarily centered on family networks and affairs. The relationships they develop through their involvement with religious groups provide a critical, and morally unassailable, secondary support network.

7.1.3 Sense of mastery, control and efficacy

Some psychological theories of motivation explicitly identify a drive for control as the root of human motivation (Glasser 1984). As a sole explanatory it holds little promise, however, understood as part of a cluster of drives, mediated by internal and external factors, a desire for some sense of control, mastery and self-efficacy in one's life seems reasonable and compelling. Indeed, many spiritual traditions

acknowledge the potential for chaos, and seek, through strict rules and roles, to maintain order and keep that chaos at bay (Asad 1984; Lambeck 2002; Yinger 1969).

Malinowski (1948) saw religion and magic as responses to a psychological need to control destiny and chance. He believed that wherever situations of danger or uncertainty arise, for example a rift between ideals and realities, or some crisis resulting in anxiety and fear, religion and magic offer the means to resolve, mediate and/or lessen that anxiety. Supernatural systems provide the perspective, framework and procedures to regain a sense of order and control. Peter Berger (1967) theorized that religion acts as a “sacred canopy” that brings order and meaning to a society through its myths, rituals, roles and cosmology. This critical function of religion, he said, was especially salient and effective in smaller scale societies in which religion was all-encompassing and unchallenged by alternate cosmologies. Geertz (1960, 1977, 1985), who also saw religion (and culture) as a “web of significance,” described the paralyzing effect on Javanese villagers when, following the unexpected death of a child in the village, mortuary rituals were delayed indefinitely due to some political maneuvering outside of the villagers’ control. He described in detail the blank, detached expression and the near catatonia that set in as people were unable to undertake the formal rituals that would bring order and meaning to this devastating event. As his example showed, order, meaning and control are necessary for both the psychological well-being of individuals, and for the ability of society to function.

Foucault’s theory of power (1988) carries implicit in it a recognition that feelings of competency, mastery and efficacy are compelling for humans. Foucault

showed how technologies subjugate subtly, by encouraging the development of competencies, rather than by simply taking power away. As described in previous chapters, feminist scholars (e.g., Bartky 1988; Bordo 1988) have taken Foucault's basic arguments and used them to analyze regimes of discipline among women in western settings, particularly those related to health, dieting and eating disorders. One reason that such technologies are so effective and gripping is that they involve the acquisition of skills. Adherence to a strict regimen of diet and exercise, for example, enhances the feelings of power, competency and self-efficacy of the subject. She engages in them willingly, not realizing that her own efforts serve to reinforce and reproduce standards of beauty that constrain her, and devalue the vast array of human forms that fall outside of the narrow feminine ideal.

Self-mastery is deeply satisfying, both internally and as a conduit for external kudos. It may be that in a context in which individuals have very little control over their civic, political and economic affairs, that individual moral discipline and self-mastery become the focus for this drive. People crave, and seek to create, a sense of predictability and control in their lives. When political and economic conditions render this difficult, especially over an extended period of time, people adapt by cordoning off pockets of their worlds that they *can* control.

I do not imagine that the three aforementioned drives motivate with equal urgency at all times, with all people. For some individuals, one drive will be of far greater personal relevance for large portions of their life. For others, there may be an equal draw to fulfill each. The saliency of each is also linked to cultural ideals, and

the extent to which an individual has internalized them. For example, in a cultural setting in which a man being in control of his life figures prominently in the cultural model of masculinity, to the extent that any given man has internalized this model, he will put great stock in his ability to assert control. The prominence of any one drive is also linked to, and affected by, individual background and experiences. An individual who has suffered, or who has witnessed the suffering of others, may be more deeply compelled by a search for meaning.

7.2 External Variables

Actors' decisions and actions are inevitably overdetermined. They are limited and shaped by modern social practices, institutions and discourses, often without conscious awareness. Economic conditions, family traditions and political and religious pressures and policies influence behavior as well. And yet, in spite of these molding forces, people are agents; they act, they choose from among multiple subject positions. They affect the very social field that constitutes them. How do we account for their decisions and actions? In the case of pietists, and their feminist counterparts, what accounts for different individuals' attachments to one moral project or another? The women in each of these movements engage in activities that they consider deeply worthy, meaningful and right. Each is propelled by a sense of purpose and moral certitude. Their understanding of what is "right" and "best" varies considerably, but at their core, their concerns are the same: the betterment of the world, humanity and themselves.

“Pure” psychological theories of motivation focus on the individual mind without taking into sufficient account the effect of the dynamic sociocultural and historical contexts within which individual experience, perception, “choice” and action are embedded. I propose that individual motivation and action arise out of a permutation of complex factors that can be categorized into three groups: external, internal and particular. Factors in each of these groups must be taken into consideration in analyzing the decisions and actions of individuals.

The external category consists of the whole of the sociocultural and environmental realm, much of which was outlined in chapter two. It includes the social and economic context, cultural norms and discourses, historical trends, political systems, and institutionalized practices such as nepotism, corruption and torture. Demographic changes, gender role expectations, cultural values, religious dictates and beliefs, the physical environment, and broad health patterns all play a role as well. Broadly, these patterns can be condensed into two categories: ideas and social facts (Durkheim 1950 [1895]) on the one hand, and on the other, material trends and circumstances, which have the effect of expanding or limiting an individual’s resources and opportunities, depending on her location in the socioeconomic matrix. Together these read a bit like Marx and Engel’s (2005 [1848]) notions of base and superstructure. However, whereas Marxism privileges the means of economic production as the causal force in human relations, and consider it generative of sociocultural realities, it is argued here that the dual extrinsic forces have a powerful and generally equal effect on the lives and thinking of individuals. These diverse and

intersecting external influences structure, enable and constrain the array of choices in people's lives. One of the ways they do this is through shared cultural models. As Strauss (1992) has shown, widely shared cultural models are linked with emotionally salient personal experiences and schemas of the self. Schemas act as a strong motivating force (D'Andrade 1995).

7.3 Individual Variables: the particular circumstances of each individual

The third factor influencing motivation is the character, disposition and orientation of each individual which arises out of her unique set of circumstances and life experiences. We do not enter the world as a blank slate, contrary to John Locke's (1979 [1689]) assertions. Babies, as has been well-documented (Kazuo et. al. 1985; Lahey, et. al. 2008; Rothbart 2002) enter the world with dispositions and temperaments that affect their interactions with caretakers, reactions to sounds and other experiences. At the same time, there is an extended period of physical and psychological development which arises out of our engagement with our physical and social environment. Our view of the world, and our experiences in it, are largely shaped by such factors as our socioeconomic status (SES), family culture and manner of upbringing (i.e., strict, indulgent, conservative, liberal, loving, etc.), friends and other social referents, teachers and professors, employers and coworkers, exposure to non-normative ideas, and experience of marriage and family. The way each experience plays out, and the way we interpret it, affects our future inclinations, attachments and actions. In chapter eight, I will describe the lives and commitments

of six pietists. Their examples will demonstrate the ways in which internal drives combine with external and individual variables to shape each woman's orientation towards, and operation within, the movement.

7.4 Reinforcers: Social Approbation and Cultural Legitimacy

One's social circle and broader society can reward and reinforce, or alternately, punish, a particular behavior or courses of action. The drives posited here can be satisfied in various ways, but it is generally true that there are greater social and psychological rewards, and fewer negative social consequences, if the form that gratification takes receives social approbation. This is one area where the resources and other advantages of (higher) socioeconomic status open up a wider range of possibilities. It is true that individuals might (theoretically) seek out affiliation, acceptance and solidarity from subcultural groups, even from the international community, if a woman feels enough a part of such a group. However, few people have access to these subcultures and transnational affiliations. Nor do they have the means to comfortably eschew the disapproval of family, neighbors and wider society. Consequently, far more people choose to meet their needs in a socially and culturally acceptable manner. Although the ranks of the piety movement spread across the poorer to the upper classes, the same is not true for the secular and Islamic feminists. All of the women I spoke with from these groups hailed from the upper and upper-middle classes, and all had been educated through the level of university. Thus, within

the bounds of socioeconomic constraints and amidst the cultural soup of common understandings, practices and prevailing values, people act.

It is the rare anti-social being that does not seek or enjoy the approval and validation of others. Social approbation and cultural legitimacy matter to us, and this helps explain why the piety movement has so many more adherents than either the secular or Islamic feminists. All three movements satisfy many of the core needs I have discussed. However, it is the dictates of the piety movement that most coincide with traditional gender norms and expectations. They also draw on traditional interpretations of Islam which are the most salient idiom and form of moral and social currency in Egypt today. At the same time, all three are high cost: they demand a significant commitment of time, energy and discipline. In the case of the on-the-ground activists (piety and secular activists alike), the work is physically demanding. Among the secular feminists, it can also be psychologically challenging as well, as when religious or political opinions against them turn to open persecution¹⁷. The fact that the piety movement also demands a high cost of time, energy and commitment helps explain why, despite general trends toward increased religious and social conservatism, the majority of the population has not adopted the commitments of any movement.

¹⁷ In 2002, one of my interviewees, Nawal El Sadawi, a prominent international writer and scholar, was accused of apostasy and conservative forces tried to legally and forcibly divorce her from her husband. She ultimately won the case but it took many years, and a great toll. El Sadawi has had to endure many other incidents of persecution as well.

7.5 Constructing desire

The combination of external, internal and particular factors, outlined in the previous section, act on our decisions and actions in potentially two ways: directly and indirectly. Direct influences on the actions of individuals are the easiest to identify and describe. It is apparent that factors like physical access to resources: wealth, connections, knowledge, for example, can limit or augment options and opportunities. More subtle, and thus, more difficult to recognize, are the ways that our social and physical environment, and our own interaction with it, influence our perceptions and desires. Secular-liberal models, such as that of Mahmood's (2005) critique, fall apart because they presume a universal desire for freedom and self-determination, the realization of which is understood to be blocked by social, economic and political factors. According to such a model, circumstances such as poverty, a dominant gender ideology, or political repression clearly and directly affect the ability of an individual (or a class of individuals) to act in pursuit of their desires to be free of social, economic, religious and political constraints. It does not account for the influence of the aforementioned factors, as well as such powerful, formative influences as cultural models (D'Andrade & Strauss 1992; Strauss & Quinn 1998) and values, on the formation of desires in the first place. Claims to universality are difficult to support for this very reason: with such a broad range of values, beliefs and practical concerns involved in a calculus of desire, the likelihood that a single pursuit/concern should command the passion and commitment of every soul on the planet is low.

We act in ways which gratify us in some way, i.e., that make us feel good; and in ways which we feel we *should*, according to external rules or norms, principles we have internalized, or a perceived larger goal or future reward. Thus, on a conscious level, we pursue objects, people and states of being that give us pleasure, or we feel we ought to pursue. What is beneath our consciousness is *why* we like what we like, and why we want what we want. Most people do not know the genealogy or architecture of their own desires. Lacking an awareness of the manner and extent to which desires are constructed, most people fall prey to a fallacy wherein they are convinced that their own desires are normal, natural and flowing logically from biological facts and structures. They universalize the particular, believing that (their) desires are “natural,” so they must be natural to everyone. When someone or some group fails to exhibit such desire, they are seen as anomalous. Anomaly begs explanation.

Women in conservative religious movements seem to defy assumptions about a universal desire for freedom and autonomy because they embrace an ideology that places them in a subordinate position vis-à-vis men. They valorize gender segregation and a separate sphere for women and men. They adopt dress that seems to limit their mobility and comfort, and to take away their individual identity. With the exception of Mahmood (2005) and Abu-Lughod (2002), most discussion on this topic accepts the underlying premise that there is a “real” human desire (for freedom in the face of external constraints) that has somehow been squelched in the case of women willingly adopting modest Islamic dress. One response has been to show that the wearing of

more constrictive, modest dress *increases*, rather than limits, a woman's movement and liberty (Abu-Lughod 2002; Hoodfar 2001; Macleod 1993). Thus, in this interpretation, women use an outwardly constraining garment to achieve the autonomy and freedom they seek and deserve. The underlying assumption of a universal desire for freedom remains unchallenged.

Another approach to the seeming paradox has been to explain the acquiescence to conservative and constricting norms as a trade-off, e.g., a patriarchal bargain (Joseph 1996), in which there is some gain, and some loss. It is a trade-off, a rational choice in a particular context given a limited set of experiences and opportunities. Finally, other projects and responses have been to search for hidden acts of resistance among women to constraints on their movement and desires (Abu-Lughod 1986; Atiya 1982; Davis 1983; Early 1993; Fernea 1985; Wikan 1991). Rather than reset the frame, such analyses simply reaffirm the implicit claim of the universality of our desire for freedom and autonomy (Abu-Lughod 1998, 2002, 2010).

7.6 Limits of understanding: the problem of the frame

There is a tendency within the sciences and social sciences to become attached to one theoretical school, and to be so wedded to that view that one falls prey to a confirmatory bias (Plous 1993), seeing in the data only that which confirms the theory. There has been an interest, for example, in the character and rise of "fundamentalist" religious movements. A major goal of the Fundamentalism Project (1988-1993) has been to catalog and analyze these movements, with special attention to the social and

structural constraints that are placed on members, particularly on women. While the project has yielded some useful insights, it cannot capture the richness, complexity and appeal of such movements because the entire frame of analysis has to do with the constraints and conservatism of the groups. Viewed through such a lens, aspects of the movement that have to do with limitations on personal freedoms and forms of expression will be come to be highlighted, and to be seen as defining characteristics.

In chapter six, I proposed an alternative to viewing the piety movement from a perspective of limitation and constraint: that of seeing the work of the pietists (both their moral self-discipline, and their direct work with women of the poorer classes) through a heuristic of action and activism towards social change. There are additional ways to view and understand the movement. Those who read nationalisms and religious movements as expressions of identity politics (Hobsbawm 1994), will see women's participation and action through this lens. Observers trained in psychoanalysis will see all significant motivations among the participants as stemming from unconscious psychic tensions rooted in early childhood. Pietists themselves have a different view altogether: they describe their transformation, and their faithful commitment to pious practices, as a logical and inevitable outcome of realizing the truth about, and love for, God and Islam. For them, it is simply the right, the straight, the moral path.

To reject any single theory as a total explanatory model does not preclude its use as a partial model or heuristic. Rational Choice theory, for example, still has some utility. I do believe that there is a general logic to human behavior. People tend to act

in ways that they perceive to be in their interest. It is this issue of perception, of how people perceive the experiences and events in their lives, that complicates matters and accounts for much of the diversity of human behavior. The manner in which life events, stories and interactions are perceived depends on an individual's belief system and attachment to different cultural models of what it means to be a woman, a man, and a good Muslim. By drawing on multiple heuristics, actions and events can be examined from different angles, and ultimately, more fully understood.

Much interpretive work has to do far more with framing and perspective than with any characteristics inherent to the phenomenon in question (Goffman 1974; Kuypers 2009; Snow et. al. 1988). Since our observations are refracted through our own lens of experience, education and sets of meanings, we interpret them in distinct ways, according to these variables. How they are presented or framed also has a powerful effect on our interpretation. Depending on the way in which the speech and action of unfamiliar individuals and groups is presented, the behavior of "others" can be made to seem understandable, reasonable and logical, or conversely, they can be exoticized, that is, made to appear strange, different or threatening.

One way that members of conservative religious movements and organizations have been presented is through the frame of constraints, as I described earlier. Some analyses within religious studies and feminist studies have used this frame to observe and interpret women's involvement in the movement. The Fundamentalism Project (1988-1993), referred to in chapter six, is one example of this. It is also a prominent theme in western mainstream media, as Muslim women are presented as victims of

oppressive husbands and patriarchal systems alike (Abu-Lughod 2002). The idea of restricting one's own liberty strikes a chord of concern among Americans. We imagine what it would be like to have to structure *our* days around prayer and piety, to eschew the casual company and intellectual collaboration of the opposite sex, and to be constrained in our choice of clothing. We are inwardly appalled at such a circumstance, certain as we are that we would not tolerate such inequality and oppression.

I was guilty of this myself. I am certainly a product of my cultural upbringing, having internalized not only the values, but the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) related to the values of individual choice and personal liberty. I *did* chafe at the grossly unequal distribution of labor between men and women in the home in Egypt. I bristled at assertions that men were stronger, more logical, and more capable leaders than women. I felt oppressed by the modest clothing norms, especially on hot summer days when I had to walk downtown. As sweat streamed down my modestly covered arms and legs, I longed to be in a place where bare elbows and knees meant nothing more than that the weather was hot.

But over time, these preoccupations receded into the background as I became more engrossed in the lives and projects of the women around me. I found that dress, or limitations on freedoms (about where and when one might travel, and with whom one might spend time) did not seem to be of significant concern to the women I knew, at least not as a force in their lives which they considered to constrain or diminish them in any way. On the contrary, in a context where modesty and piety define a

young woman's success at being a "good Muslim" and a clear and verifiable "good girl," restriction of movement outside the home on the part of parents, brothers or husband, can be understood, and is generally seen as, a marker of love and concern. Far worse for a girl would be for family members not to care at all about her safety and reputation.

Interestingly, some of the more sophisticated women I knew in the piety movement were aware of the negative ways that their choices and actions are perceived by westerners, as well as by fellow Egyptians. Rather than shift the framework for analyzing and evaluating their own activities, however, they utilized the first of the strategies described above, protesting the claim that their choices caused them to suffer limits upon their individual comfort and liberty.

"It is American women who are trapped and limited," they told me. "They think they have so many choices, but they are sexually objectified everywhere they go! They feel free to dress in tiny little outfits that show off their bodies, but what does this get them? They get male attention, but do they think men are valuing their minds? With us, we take this objectification out of the equation. When we interact with men, they are forced to see us as people because they are not distracted by revealing clothing."

These women spoke in terms of choice and limitations because they recognize these as the values of concern to westerners. In truth, however, the piety movement valorizes a different set of traits, and pietists define themselves in very different terms than those used in this conversation. Pietists share cultural models of femininity and

“good, pious Muslim” that differ somewhat from mainstream Egyptian ideals, and significantly from western secular liberal ideals. Similarly, it valorizes an entirely different set of principles, qualities and ideas. It is love and fear of God, self-respect (evidenced through modesty, *haya'* (shyness), being careful of one’s actions and their effects), and respect for others (basic kindness, “right” action and living) that should, it is believed, undergird all action. It is an entirely different conception of what makes a good life, and a good world. Viewed through this value lens, women’s actions take on an entirely different meaning.

7.7 Two Tales of Segregation

Each individual’s understandings and interpretations are refracted through her core values. This is true of members of any group. Prominent values in western culture include autonomy, independence, self-sufficiency, individualism and freedom. As such, experiences of pleasure, contentment and success are presumed to be linked to the presence or absence of these very factors.

One of the markers of difference and concern among westerners about “fundamentalist” Islamic movements has been the relegation of women to different spheres of work, sociality and worship from men. Symbols of segregation have strong negative connotations in the west, and for Americans in particular, since all instances in our collective history of segregation have arisen out of, and contributed to, injustice

and inequality¹⁸. It is a major reason that Americans rankle so much at the idea of the separation of men and women in mosques, and specifically to the relegation of women to the back of the mosque. The very notion of the “back of the mosque” conjures up images of race-based “back of the bus” discrimination during the civil rights era, and periodic pressures on women to leave the work world to me, and go “back to the home.” Gender segregation is, thus, generally read as an issue of gender-based inequality. It is worth noting that the placement of women behind men is not universal: most (though not all) mosques do have separate space for men and women, but women are sometimes upstairs, overlooking the men, and sometimes to one side of the mosque, with men on the other. The point, as many Muslims will explain, is not to devalue women, or to relegate them to inferior space, as many imagine, but to enable women and men both to concentrate on God and the act of prayer without being distracted by members of the opposite sex. Viewed with an understanding of its intent, the practice may be seen in a new light.

The point of offering an alternate perspective is to demonstrate the way in which a single practice may be perceived and interpreted in very different ways depending on one’s interpretive frame. The story of Sumaiya, a woman I will describe in greater detail in the next chapter, offers another example of the power of perception, and the challenges it creates for interpreting the behavior of others. Sumaiya was a

¹⁸ For example, slavery and subsequent Jim Crow laws in the south; de facto racial segregation owing to discriminatory policy and public racist attitudes; Japanese-American internment camps during WW2; the congregation and segregation of marginalized groups, such as Native Americans on reservations, people with physical and cognitive disabilities in institutional settings, etc.

friendly, gregarious woman in her late twenties. She was unmarried, and had adopted the physical and disciplinary markers of the piety movement about two years prior to our first meeting. Sumaiya avoided the company of unrelated men at all times, and to an extent far greater than even the most devout of her peers in the movement. Truly, on this count, she appeared to her peers and outsiders alike to be pious almost to a fault. Most women, in the course of daily affairs, interact with men as a matter of necessity. They do so with modesty and propriety, and they strictly avoid physical contact, but beyond this, there is no stigma attached to something so unavoidable.

Sumaiya managed to structure her life in such a way that she could avoid all such interactions. She left all administrative and practical affairs involving men to her family. While at her apartment, she was a dutiful daughter: cooking, cleaning and attending to a large portion of the family's daily needs. If her father or brothers had male guests over, she remained in the recesses of the house, unseen, until they departed. She had a job outside the home, but she refused to ride in any but the "women-only" section of the Metro when she travelled there. Her work was with adults with severe developmental disabilities and cognitive deficits, so although men and women were both represented in this group, the men were not perceived, nor did they behave, in the same way as men in the general population.

Over time I learned, through a growing intimacy with Sumaiya, that she disliked men in the extreme. Her feelings about her own father and brother bordered on loathing. Using them as the basis for her judgment, she regarded all men as disgusting, lazy, and sexually-obsessed. She would not hear any contradictory

evidence. The perception she had of men fueled an almost paralyzing fear, which led her to take extreme, and at times comical, pains to avoid being in their presence.

Sumaiya's work with *il mesekeen* (the unfortunates), and her extreme avoidance of men, were both interpreted by those around her through the lens of the movement, that is, as expressions of piety, modesty and proper female behavior. Her work fit well with the image of a selfless, nurturing, sacrificing woman. It also served as a legitimate vehicle for escape from the house, away from father and brothers, to her relief and delight. Her fear of men was read as *haya'* (shyness). In my own estimation, the content of Sumaiya's feelings toward and about men was far more negative and complex than was suggested by the terms *haya'* and modesty, and it appeared to me that these deeper feelings were the deeper motivation behind her actions. Her choice of job, her tireless devotion to it, and her emphatic avoidance of men did not seem to be so much about love of God as about fear or distaste for men. Adoption of the beliefs and practices of the piety movement enabled Sumaiya to avoid men in a way that would not call her normalcy or status as a good daughter in to question.

Given Sumaiya's feelings and behavior, and the cultural and religious milieu in which they were embedded, how should her motivations and actions be understood? Do her decisions and actions arise out of anxiety and an unconscious fear of men? Is she, instead, merely enacting the ideals of both the movement and a traditional model of femininity? Is she doing both? The issue of perception raises questions about how we evaluate motivation and action. Because this situation can be read in a variety of

ways, and because even Sumaiya herself may not be entirely aware of her motivations (and may be unwilling to be honest about motives that place her outside of cultural ideals of femininity, religiosity and normal adulthood), our capacity to know the “truth” and meaning behind individual action is called into question.

The value and veracity of an etic perspective has long been problematized (Headland, Pike & Harris 1990). At the same time, as the example of Sumaiya shows, even an emic perspective has its potential pitfalls because actors themselves may be unaware of all of their own motives. The best we can do is to maintain an awareness of our potential biases and misunderstandings. I would suggest that it is also critical to examine actions through the lens of each individual’s value system. In the case of the pietists, practices tend to consciously reflect such principles as piety, modesty, morality and respect. Beyond this exercise, we can acknowledge the shared human drives for meaning, belonging and control, and explore the ways these desires are shaped by external and individual variables, and refracted and expressed through cultural values and idioms in particular contexts. Finally, we can utilize available theories of human behavior as heuristics to explore the contours of individual lives, and the heterogeneity of social and religious movements.

Chapter 8:

Case Studies

The previous chapter attempted to outline the array of factors, some variable, some constant, that combine to create opportunities, pressures and constraints on individuals, influencing their choices and actions. Given the multifactorial nature of the framework, the motivations underlying the participation of different individuals, even members of an ostensibly homogeneous group, can be very diverse.

While individuals might be compelled by the same message, and set of beliefs and practices, the specific appeal and desires of each person will vary significantly depending on her (his) particular history and circumstances. The six forthcoming case studies demonstrate this heterogeneity. At the same time, they point is made that beneath the surface, all six women are driven by some or all of the core human needs theorized in chapter seven: desire for meaning, connection and control.

8.1 Love, Meaning and Identity (Aisha)

Aisha was an unmarried woman in her mid-thirties who I met during my first pre-doctoral visits to Cairo. She had the passion and fire of a convert, so I had formed the image in my mind of a person newly come to religious commitment. There is a quality about such people, an unquestioning faith and a deep conviction of the truth and rightness of their position, untrampled and untempered by contradictory evidence or experience. Aisha had that. Since I knew that she had come from a family of only

moderate religiosity, I assumed that she had been drawn to a pious expression of Islam as a result of some confluence of adult disappointment with life events, social and economic change in Egypt, the presence of a burgeoning Islamic revival, and a resultant search for deeper connection and meaning.

I was surprised, consequently, when Aisha told me that she had been religious from early on. It raises questions about the veracity of memory: do we merely retrieve memory, or do we construct and reconstruct it to fit with a current version of ourselves? It is likely that we all select and privilege past images and remembered actions that “fit” with the values and identities by which we define ourselves in the present (Ben-Amos & Weissberg 1999; Weldon 2009). Aisha remembers riding her bicycle to the mosque for Friday prayer when she was a girl of eleven or twelve. This was a time, she said, when it was not common for girls to attend *goma* prayer. Religious women generally prayed at home; the mosque, particularly at Friday prayer, had been very much male space. Retrieving such a memory had implications for Aisha’s redefinition of her own identity.

The presence of women at local mosques is one of the areas of gradual but significant social change in Egypt. As the broader Islamic revival has grown, Muslim women in Cairo have come to inhabit local mosques in increasing numbers and in different capacities: as supplicants, but also as teachers, students, administrators and *da’iyyat* (roughly, proselytizers). Among the women I know, there is a casual confidence that they, that *all* people, women and men both, belong to and should be welcome in, this place of reverence for Allah. Once, when we were out for a number

of hours visiting local orphanages and bringing toys and clothes to the children there, the *muazzin* sang out the call to *doHr* (mid-day) prayer. If the women had been at home, they would certainly have prayed there. It is the very devout men who feel compelled to leave their apartments, and sometimes their work places, five times a day to go pray with other men in the small, non-descript neighborhood mosques (*mesegeed*) or larger mosques (*gama'a*) of the city. Women, though they too state that prayer in groups is preferred by God and more highly rewarded, will generally not travel outside of the house to pray at a mosque. But my companions, Salima and Iman were a distance from their homes, so they stopped at the nearest (*gama'a*) mosque and went in to pray without compunction or hesitancy.

Aisha embodied a confidence and centeredness that I tend to associate with people who have a sense of place in the world. She had been raised (and in fact remained) in the bosom of a loving, middle class family. However, although this surely contributed to her generally warm and compassionate personality, it did not necessarily account for the calm, peace and joy she exuded. I knew a number of people in similar socioeconomic and familial circumstances who did not share her affect and composure. Instead, they seemed to be searching for a direction, a purpose, a place. It was clear that Aisha felt a deep sense of the “rightness” about her own life path, and about her commitment to Allah.

Aisha considered herself an imperfect vessel and she had a great deal of humility about her failings. “One battles with one’s *nafs*,” she said, one’s “self.” The *nafs*, I learned, is vulnerable to temptation: it wants forbidden things: indulgences,

excess food, sex; it encourages sleep when it is time to pray. It is lazy, undisciplined, rapacious. Aisha admits that she struggles with this imperfect aspect of herself. A desire for more sleep, and a disinclination to awaken for the early prayer, are two of her greatest challenges. “Oh I struggle with it, Leslie!” And I can see that she does, looking at her bleary eyes in the morning. She is a night owl by her own admission. She stays up until the wee hours of the morning, praying and reading, praying and reading.

The early morning *fegr* prayer is the most difficult, by everyone’s admission. The first of five prayers throughout the day, it is called before any light can be seen in the sky. Faithful Muslims drag themselves out of warm, comfortable beds and prostrate themselves on chilly floors to fulfill their commitment to God. Aisha has been known to fall asleep on her prayer rug in a supplicatory position in the midst of, or following, *fegr* prayer.

She struggles, also, with some of the dictates she embraces: prescriptions and proscriptions on when and what she can eat, and the admonition not to speak in anger. “We are told,” she says, “that if you are sitting and you become angered, stand. If you are standing and become angered, sit.” At times, Aisha finds herself provoked to anger by her brother, or by other circumstances, and she makes a great effort to master her emotions. At her core, Aisha feels certain that hers is the right cause, the ultimate truth, that her efforts to live a good life and to please God are valuable and fundamentally correct. Her life has purpose and meaning. Although she is in her late thirties, without children or prospect of a husband, she has social standing, many

strong connections and a sense of control over herself and her world. She is a model Muslim: pious, reverent, compassionate and attentive to not only the pillars and principles of Islam, but to the spirit of Islam as she understands it.

Aisha has *haya* (“shyness,” and perhaps also a sense of propriety). She is modest and looks to the Prophet Mohammed and his wives for guidance in day-to-day living, interaction and dress. She is sought out for, and frequently dispenses, informal advice on proper points of study, prayer and Islamically-correct living. Spurred on by a natural curiosity for learning and a love and reverence for the topic, Aisha reads texts of and about the Prophet Mohammed and the Qur’an. Her undergraduate degree, earned fifteen years prior, was in law.

She was accepted at a university a long distance from their home which meant a one-hour commute each way. She often was so late getting out the door that it became pointless to board the train. She attended the bare minimum of her classes. As a result, although she was an intelligent and inquisitive person generally, she did not do well in school. She managed to graduate, but only barely.

Aisha never used her law degree. She took, instead, an administrative job within a lesser branch of the government. Such positions had become plentiful, in the wake of former president Nasser’s educational and employment initiatives on behalf of women during mid-century. She drew a good salary: almost twice the annual per capita of \$1400/year, and the money was solely for her own spending; she had no household financial responsibilities.

After many years at this job Aisha quit. She left in the heat of anger over what she considered to be rude and unreasonable behavior on the part of her supervisor. Hotheadedness was a trait she shared with her father and siblings. When she became angry it overruled her typical reserve and she blew up at the source of her annoyance. It caused her to act rashly without concern for consequences, and her present state of unemployment was one of the unfortunate results.

Aisha had a little savings, so the loss of her job did not upset the comfort of her life for a time. Later, she ran out of personal spending money. By this time her father had died, a significant emotional blow for her since, as the youngest daughter, she had been particularly close to, and coddled by him. Her brother supported the family completely now, but this money went to her mother for household and family expenses. She could request some for personal spending, but the money was limited, and she did not like to ask. As months passed and she languished at home, unable to afford outings alone or with friends, she sought solace in books and music. Remembering that her father had been able to recite the entire *Qur'an*, a skill inculcated in him during his youth, she picked up the family's ornate copy and began to read. It was difficult. She remembered this from religious class at school. The words were like a different language: beautiful to the ear, but so hard to puzzle out on the page. She decided she should know it, and set about to learn.

Aisha's genealogy of religiosity, as she tells it, was variegated and saw a fair share of fits and starts. She took the veil early in her twenties, but then removed it a year later when it didn't fit with her life. She decided to wear it again in her mid-

twenties, this time keeping it for good. She became more and more convinced of the importance and all-consumingness of God's word. For Aisha, Islam was an entire world view, a compendium of divine knowledge and guidance that should infuse every aspect of one's life. This should be reflected, in the very least, in one's mode of dress. It became more and more important to her that she dress "Islamically," modestly, not merely as a visual index of her piety, but as a constant reminder to think and act in ways that would please God. This was her goal. This, and learning as much as she could about her faith.

Initially, Aisha covered her hair and neck in colorful scarves, wore long-sleeved, conservative blouses, and long pants and skirts. Later she would graduate to a full-bodied black over-garment as well, in order to obscure all potentially alluring bodily curves. She began to attend public sermons at a downtown mosque famous for the passionate oratory of its sheiks. They were indeed persuasive. The sermons were riveting: filled with fire and brimstone but also encomium for the beauty and magnificence of *Allah's* creations. They carried a prescription for a better world. Aisha wanted to be a part of its realization. Her own life was bereft of inspiration or direction and here was something large and important calling to her. She found it deeply resonant. It offered a refreshingly clear analysis of the woes of the world, a compelling vision, and a formula for positive change.

She learned of *durus*, religious lessons being offered at various mosques throughout the city by women sheiks, *hajjas* who had made the honored pilgrimage to Mecca. She began to attend, and met other women there who shared her passion. It

was here that she came into her own. Inflamed with a nascent passion for learning, and offered tools and mentorship from within the movement, she blossomed. She was directed in the correct way to eat, sleep, wash, pray, dress, speak and interact with others. She learned the sources of knowledge within Islam, the stronger and weaker *ahadith*. She became convinced that she should follow the Prophet Mohammed in word and deed in all things. She fasted on the days that he had fasted. She ate dates and even forced down gamey camel's milk because the Prophet had celebrated their health virtues. She covered herself entirely when in the presence of unrelated men because the Prophet's (later) wives had done so. She became so knowledgeable on the topic of Islamic law and practice that other women sought her out for advice. With her new expertise came a sense of self-assurance and contentment. She became more confident and forthright.

As she approaches middle age, her interests have turned to Islamic law and other scholarly pursuits. She attends an institute for Islamic learning, offered at very low cost to all interested and devout Muslims. Aisha does not attend as frequently as she says she should, and she does not complete the readings and exams on time. This is one of her self-reported failings: she lacks the motivation to carry through, and it has slowed her progress in the school. Nevertheless, she reads a wide variety of texts related to Islam, attends lectures and listens to sermons on cassette and CD wherever she goes.

As a result of this, she is a font of knowledge to extended family members and friends. She is sought out by phone and in person. Her own very modest style is an

example to other women and indeed, many of her cousins and cousins-in-law have now adopted the long, wide, flowing *izdell* with gloves and *niqab*. At family gatherings, the women and men segregate to separate rooms and the women relax, throwing off their outer garments and discussing different points of the Qur'an or *Ahadith*. As time passes, the conversation drifts to news of family and friends, of relatives living abroad, of the successes and challenges of children, of marriage prospects and realities. God is always part of the flow of dialogue, regardless of the subject being discussed. Allah is invoked for hopes, thanks, praise and for warding off ill winds.

In large social gatherings, Aisha has a tendency to fade into the background, especially as her more gregarious sister regales roomfuls of people with stories and jokes. This enables her to observe those present, and to undertake acts of kindness and consideration on behalf of others. She notices if someone is neglected in the round of refreshments. She sees, when no one else sees, if a particular guest is sad or ill. She always finds an unobtrusive way to inquire after people's health and emotional well-being. This talent is mostly unsung.

The confluence of individual, external and internal factors in Aisha's life foster her unique brand of desires and tendencies. Her focus on compiling knowledge about the life of the Prophet and his wives, and her perfecting of the habits and discipline that Mohammed lauded, is well known and admired in her community. It is clear that her self-mastery is deeply gratifying. It forms the basis of her new identity as a model

pious woman. Further, it fosters a network of peer and mentor relationships. Finally, it gives her a sense of control over her immediate world.

Aspects of Aisha's life suggest ways to think about the exceptional depth of her commitment. As I have mentioned, Aisha stands out among her peers, young and old alike, for her passion. When she speaks of Allah, her face becomes ebullient, her eyes shine, she sighs. She once expressed to me that she could hardly contain the love she felt for God. The strength of her feelings was striking; of all the women I knew in the movement, hers was the greatest passion.

Aisha is relatively "old" to still be single, by Egyptian standards. This is true even in light of trends towards later marriage, brought about by economic necessity. Because of her exemplary piety, Aisha does receive marriage inquiries from devout, often foreign men. She refers these to her brothers for initial review. For reasons unknown to me, during our year and a half stay in Egypt, only one suitor materialized for a (chaperoned) face to face meeting with Aisha. This match initially looked promising, but fell apart during negotiations over *maHr* and *shabka*, gifts of money and gold respectively, from husband-to-be to intended wife.

During these proceedings, Aisha was pleasant and accommodating, but I did not have the sense that she felt much excitement over the prospect of marriage. It strikes me even now that although she nods graciously every time someone says, "*Insha'Allah*, you will marry soon!" and she replies with the appropriate response, "May God grant that it be so," in truth, her passions are directed elsewhere. Simply put, God is the object of her love and devotion. This is not such an odd thing; in the

Catholic tradition, nuns are understood to be “married to Christ.” As a love object, God is incomparable: omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and all-merciful. It does not get better than that. Aisha’s emotional, intellectual and physical energies are focused on her love for Allah.

Erikson (1950, 1959) theorized that a series of psychosocial stages present crises at different points in an individual’s life. Each serves as a critical opportunity for identity development. Each stage is concerned with becoming competent in some area of life. The conflict that Erikson theorized for young adults is one between isolation and intimacy. In general, this stage is about developing close, committed, intimate relationships, and it tends to be satisfied by a mature love relationship, e.g., through marriage. In Aisha’s case, this did not happen. And yet, a desire for intimacy and relational connection, in short, for love, likely remained. Her pious devotion may originally have been a displacement of desires for genuine intimacy when, as a woman in her twenties, there were no prospects for marriage, and no alternate options for the expression of sexual love or desire.

Aisha was able to transfer those emotional energies to a pure and pious adoration of God. Although this was not a point of discussion, since it would be considered both strange and inappropriate to discuss the possibility of willingly eschewing marriage, I silently questioned the genuineness of Aisha’s interest in getting married. Considering her level of commitment to God through prayer, fasting, reading, recitation and learning, marriage to a man would significantly disrupt her everyday routines and devotions. A husband would invariably expect regular attention

and activities, foremost among them cooking, cleaning and sexual relations. Her time would no longer be her own. Once children came along, Aisha's responsibilities would increase exponentially.

Aisha's passion and commitment to God is strong. Participation in the piety movement gives her a sense of meaning, mastery and positive identity. At the same time, it offers a means, and an object towards which she can direct her love and desire in a culturally acceptable way.

8.2 Legacy (Salima)

Chapter five detailed the piety activism of Salima and her friend, Iman. Salima is a woman whose level of religiosity has risen over the previous ten years, inspired by the joint circumstance of her husband's relatively early death and her daughters' *sahwaa* or "awakening" to the need to practice Islam more correctly and piously. The family is firmly middle class, educated, and well-traveled. Salima raised five children and now devotes herself full-time to prayer, *da'wa*, charity and other good works. She is also the oldest remaining relative in a large, extended family. Thus, both her structural position, and her well-known piety activism lend her prestige and cause many people to seek her out for advice, guidance and aid. Salima has made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and she teaches a weekly class on translating the lessons of the Qur'an to everyday life. As a consequence, she is frequently addressed as *Haaga* (colloquial pronunciation of *Haaja*, a woman who has made the pilgrimage), and

Sheikha (religious elder or learned one), both terms of high respect. She is a pillar in the community, and truly a model of devotion through both good works and learning.

What stands out about Salima is the extent to which her time and her identity are centered on her activities on behalf of God. Salima's nearly every waking moment, with the exception of occasional meals for her two grown children still living at home, is devoted to study, recitations, class and, most predominantly, charitable work on behalf of the disadvantaged. She and her informal group of friends visit orphanages and cancer wards, providing succor and gifts of toys and money. They travel up to two hours away to poor neighborhoods to deliver food, clothing, medicine, money and their Islamic message. They aid individuals in getting free medical care, housing and schooling for their children. One of Salima's greatest goals is to establish some sort of training center in a poor neighborhood so that women who have been abandoned, or whose husbands have died, can develop skills for employment.

Drawing again on Erikson's (1950, 1959) framework for individual development, Salima seems to be working out the conflict of the next adult stage, that of generativity vs. stagnation. Erikson asserted that those who are successful in this stage come to feel that they are contributing meaningfully to the world. This may be through being active in their home, or in the community. Those who fail to attain mastery in this stage feel unproductive and uninvolved in the world.

Salima's life circumstances were such that the former objects of her love and attention are gone, or no longer in need of her sustained attentions. Her husband died at a relatively young age, and her children were grown. She was never inclined, she

said, to remarry, nor were there many options for husbands. Thus, her traditional roles, and original source of self-definition as a wife and mother, were gone. Salima's newly awakened religiosity served as the source and impetus for a self-transformation. Her new role and identity, as learned elder and religious leader, were at once personally meaningful, and socially and religiously-valued. By directing her generative energies to those in broader society, Salima established a legacy of care and assistance with positive reverberations across many communities.

8.3 Practicality, Belonging and the “Will to Believe” (Fareeza)

I met Fareeza on one of my first visits to Egypt in 2003. At that time she was 24 yrs old, sharing a two-bedroom flat with two sisters, her brother-in-law and three nephews. Both of her parents had died a number of years earlier. Fareeza was living on a small pension from her deceased father, and had no plans for her future. She was untrained beyond a high school education, and disinclined to look for a job because salaries are low and she knew that she would forfeit her small pension were she to become employed. She spent her days in the sisters' shared apartment, doing little. Her life seemed stagnant.

Fareeza stood out to me initially because she was the only woman in the extended family who did not veil. Her clothes looked like typical western styles, though she dressed with basic modesty, not wearing anything overly tight or revealing. She also did not have the ease and comfort of other, more favored family members. It was apparent to me from early on that there was an unspoken hierarchy within the

family that was based on a complex calculus of economics, personality and history. At the pinnacle was Salima, the family matriarch and the only remaining member of her generation. She was aunt, mother and source of advice and assistance to all. Her structural authority was reinforced by the fact that she enjoyed the steadiest and highest source of income in the family by far, through her two oldest sons who sent her money every month from abroad. It was further bolstered by Salima's own formidable piety, knowledge of the Qur'an, and activities in the community, which included teaching and charity.

Fareeza, by contrast, was at the very bottom of the family "totem pole." She was not invited into back bedrooms for private conversations. She was not included in consultations about family matters, and was not invited to attend the more informal and intimate family gatherings with the closer cousins. As I observed Fareeza, she appeared subdued, lapsing into a detached aloneness when not directly engaged by a question or conversation. When addressed directly, she smiled and interacted with apparent energy. When she was not engaged with others, however, she lost all animation, her face glazing over.

Over the course of our stay we saw Fareeza transform from an ordinary and not particularly religious young person to a pious and fully-veiled woman. Although the transformation may have been preceded by a good deal of thought and reflection, it appeared sudden and abrupt to me, as she repackaged herself in a way that altered her life.

I was there the night that the women of the family gathered together and she told the story of her “awakening” to the truth and beauty of Allah, and to realization that she must live a life that was true to Islam and God’s commandments. There was no doubt that she felt genuine excitement about her epiphany and life change, and her female relatives gathered around and listened with great enthusiasm. The energy in the room was palpable. After that night, Fareeza’s life did seem to improve. She came over to the main family’s house more frequently and was admitted into the back rooms, a privilege not granted to all. She was praised for her new discipline and efforts at self-improvement. She responded by attending more and more religious lessons and sermons.

While Fareeza’s outward dress and actions suggested a committed religiosity, her actions seemed to me to be strongly influenced by her familial and social circumstances. When she was unveiled she wasn’t ostracized precisely, but her choice of dress did set her apart from the rest of the family, all of whom were gradually becoming more and more devout. She came to (some) family events and was greeted warmly enough but, as I indicated, she did not make the “cut” for the inner circle. Her marriage prospects were also limited. This was because most “respectable” men look only to veiled women as potential wives, and because family connections and approval are needed to lend legitimacy to contractual arrangements related to marriage. Fareeza was without a father or brothers so she would need the support of her extended family to help place her in high esteem within the community.

When Fareeza was (re)awakened to *Allah* and started on this new path, her transformation was total: outward attitude, behavior, dress. Most importantly for her, it precipitated love and acceptance. She was welcomed into the inner fold, now having greater and more legitimate access to women at the top echelons of the family hierarchy through her advice-seeking. She would call and come by with questions about the meaning of a particular passage in the *Qur'an*, or how she should apply the teachings of a particular *hadith* to her life. The women, delighted with her interest and transformation, one which reinforced many of their own beliefs and hopes, received her with enthusiasm and pride.

Fareeza became noticeable to men at the mosque as soon as she began to wear the *izdell* (long, roomy, black, head-to-ankle garment) since it marked her as pious beyond the norm. Potential suitors began to ask about her. The first man who expressed real interest in Fareeza was a Caribbean-British Muslim convert studying in Egypt. This potential union fizzled out after two chaperoned meetings at the house. The second suitor, a young Frenchman, who was also a recently converted Muslim, was more compatible and agreeable. After a few short weeks of meetings and negotiations, Fareeza, acting through her male representatives, accepted his offer for marriage.

It is hard to say if Fareeza's circumstances have improved since her marriage, but I think on balance she would say they have. She had greater (theoretical) freedom before: she governed herself and had no one to answer to except public opinion (a force which should not be underestimated since it can make or break marriage

possibilities, but has no actual coercive power). But though she could go out when she wished, she had no money, no pastimes and few friends. She is better off financially now, not by a great deal, but enough to make her life more comfortable. Most importantly, she is married, which makes her a respectable woman, and marks her transition to adulthood in a culturally “real” way. It must also be said that she is also living with a man she hardly knows. The conception of “Islamic” marriage in Egypt today allows for very little contact between affianced women and men prior to marriage. It also comes with the presumption that only one person can head a household (as opposed to a model, for example, of two equal partners sharing that responsibility). The head-of-household is necessarily male, people argue, because men are financially responsible for women. Since men bear the burden they have the prerogative in running the house. Thus, Fareeza’s husband dictates the rules in their home. One of these rules is that she cannot see, interact with or even talk by phone with any other men, not even her male cousins. This proscription seriously curtails her participation in the outside world, since men inhabit that sphere. When Fareeza needs to go out shopping, her spouse accompanies her.

Fareeza’s husband is not unjust or unreasonable; he is neither cruel, nor dishonest, nor a miser. He is new to Islam and, as frequently happens with converts to any faith or belief system, he is very passionate and enthusiastic in his practice. He goes to the nearby mosque for all five prayers each day whenever possible, which bespeaks a powerful commitment. Other issues notwithstanding, he is fair and consistent, applying his injunction against intersex contact to himself as well. He does

not interact with unrelated women, neither shaking their hands nor talking with them beyond a cursory "*Salaamualekum*" ("Peace be upon you"). When my husband and I visited them at their apartment he lowered his gaze respectfully and did not look at me. The two men went to a separate room to converse while I interacted with Fareeza, and helped her in the kitchen. The children acted as ambassadors from one world to the other.

Fareeza's transformation never ceased to strike me as one of practicality, that is, pursuing the best option, given a limited field of choices. Stark and Bainbridge (1996) described decisions that individuals make concerning religious commitments as based on a rational calculation of perceived costs and benefits. Fareeza does appear to exemplify their model well: given limited, but still "live," or viable, options, Fareeza determined the course of action that would offer her the most, and best, opportunities, and took it.

And yet, I do not believe that Fareeza's action was quite as detached and calculated as such a model seems to suggest. William James' (1896) concept of a "will to believe" may be useful for understanding the psychological process that lay beneath Fareeza's alteration. James argued that there are some major life questions that simply cannot be answered. One such unanswerable is whether religious claims are true. Since such a thing is unknowable, it is not worthy of pursuit as a serious question, according to James. Instead, he said, one should assess the value of adopting a particular set of beliefs and practices by looking at the practical effects on people's lives. If adopting a particular expression of faith fosters greater happiness, promotes

positive interactions, or provides other benefits, then it is a worthy pursuit. If it is, then one can will oneself to believe. One can adopt the attitude, the speech, the activities of co-religionists. One can act “as if,” and the benefits, and genuine belief, will follow.

Such a notion coincides nicely with ideas of an embodied morality within the piety movement (Mahmood 2005). One adopts pious forms of dress and behavior both to *express* a particular disposition, but also to *cultivate* it. One becomes pious by acting pious. There is a physical, not only mental, act of will. It is unclear whether Fareeza will maintain the level of devotion she exhibited at the outset of her transformation, but her embrace of a path of piety did garner her a husband and growing family. She did indeed enjoy an expansion of her network of support. And in her new life, she does have a sense of purpose and belonging that seemed to be lacking in her pre-pious days.

8.4 Order/Control (Zahra)

One of my informants from the piety movement is named Zahra. As a well-educated professional, Zahra represents the segment of the piety movement that most puzzles secular observers, since their participation in religious movements flies in the face of modernization and secularization theories (Martin 2005; Norris & Inglehart 2004). Zahra is neither poor nor uneducated, yet she believes passionately in a very conservative interpretation of the Qur’an and *Sunna*. A description of Zahra’s life and

current circumstances may aid us in understanding her motivations and desires, as well as some of the internal conflict and contradictions that can be seen in them.

Zahra is a physician specializing in obstetrics and gynecology. She has a successful solo practice with morning clinics at an attractive office she rents in Heliopolis, an upscale Cairo neighborhood. She is well-trained, efficient and confident, though not overly-warm. Very much a businesswoman, Zahra is precise and organized about every aspect of her life, from her interactions with patients, and the raising of her two nearly-grown sons, to her steady and methodical expression of her religious beliefs, and adoption of increasing markers of piety.

Zahra is a widow. At the point of our conversations, her husband had fallen ill and died five years prior. While her husband was alive, Zahra lived and worked in Saudi Arabia for many years, adjusting her clinical practice to accommodate wifely and domestic expectations, and the demands of small children. She did not chafe against the restrictions of Saudi society as many people (women and men both) do, nor did she complain about the second-class citizen status of foreigners in the country. On the contrary, she praised the orderliness and organization of Saudi society, and spoke longingly of it, particularly at times when she had to do battle with Egypt's notorious bureaucracy, red tape and "kosa," or corruption.

Zahra spoke very good English, though she had a strong accent. She also had a zeal for proselytizing. This made her a willing conversation partner, although her tireless attempts to convert me turned our interviews into an unspoken struggle between her agenda and mine. Zahra was deeply invested in adherence to strict gender

role separation, at least in word, and to the notion that men and women are constitutionally different “by nature.” She believed that they should act and dress in ways that respected and reflected this difference. One of the problems with modern society, she said, was that women were trying to look and act like men, and men like women. “They should not!” she insisted, “Men are different from women. This is how God made us!” She went on for some time along these lines, noting important differences between the sexes. Of particular importance to her, as to many people in the movement, was that men should have beards. This was a visible, and for Zahra, a critical marker of masculinity.

Zahra argued adamantly that men were stronger than women, and that women should leave the workplace and return to the home. Other women in the movement may have shared this belief, but she was the most vocal about such opinions. When I pointed out that she worked in the public sphere, she tsk-tsked me and said that women were necessary for a few professions, medicine being one of them, since women should not go to male doctors with anything as intimate as “female problems.” By her own actions, Zahra contradicted many of her own assertions. She was a very strong person, and she arguably worked harder than all of the men I knew. Her own work did not end when her clinic closed, but extended into the evening as she parented, prepared meals and cleaned, then later handled accounting and administration for her medical practice. She seemed completely unaware that her own example contradicted the beliefs she so passionately espoused. A clear delineation of

roles and responsibilities, based on gender in her case, was too important to be dislodged by even immediate contrary evidence.

When I first met Zahra she was passionately and diligently observant of religious dictates, and consistently wore dark, wide, layered Islamic garments. As the months went by she “became convinced” that she should adopt the *niqab* (face veil). After a visit to Saudi Arabia and a period of deliberation, she added the bit of fine black mesh material that now blocked all but her eyes from public (male) view. The change marked her as a woman of serious piety, modesty and commitment to faith. At the same time, it added a not-incidental strain to her already busy schedule. Zahra struggled with tardiness, a bane and frustration that marred her otherwise ordered world. She was chronically late, and not just by minutes, but usually by an hour, minimally. Her growing piety only added to this. In the morning, amidst the pressures of getting two boys ready and off to school, and making it to her morning clinic, Zahra had to assemble, adjust and secure her layers of skirts, *abeya*, head scarf, *niqab* and gloves with ties and pins. Because her face scarf affected Zahra’s range of vision, it altered the ease with which she had previously moved from place to place. She had to walk more slowly and self-consciously, and by her own admission, she had almost gotten into car accidents twice because of her reduced visual range. Furthermore, in the heat of the day, Zahra suffered.

On the day of one of our interviews, the city was thick and heavy with the summer heat. Zahra arrived for the meeting perspiring and grunting. “*Hamduleh*,” she said, thanking God in spite of her obvious discomfort. It was a comment I heard

often from pious women. They said it when they were exhausted and at their wits end. I heard it through clenched jaws of women when they were angry and trying to calm themselves (as modeled and advised by the Prophet Mohammed). Even those who were chronically ill or debilitated thanked God for the gifts and life they did have, for His infinite wisdom, and the mystery of his ways. “*Hamdulah*,” they said, because “things could always be worse.”

In the midst of our conversation we came upon the topic of heaven, a source of interest and conversation among women and men both. Heaven is a constant inducement to good behavior, and a contrast to the genuinely and profoundly frightening specter of hell. I asked Zahra whether she thought that being a good person (i.e., good and helpful to other people, never knowingly harming others or doing wrong) was enough to gain entrance to heaven. She became at once animated and defensive.

“Why should someone who has just been ‘good’ get into heaven when I am also good but I have suffered so much??!” she challenged, with more force than either of us anticipated. “I do all that God asks,” she made a sweeping gesture indicating her heavy, black garment, “...I sweat and suffer under this in the heat and sun and you, who get to walk around in cool clothes, you should get to go to heaven just because you’re a good person?!”

Two things became apparent to me in this exchange. One, it indicated some level of hostility and resentment beneath the serene surface of a practice that is nonetheless engaged in voluntarily. Two, it affirmed something that I had observed

previously: that some measure of suffering is (perceived to be) integral to pious practice. Being merely nice or kind is not enough. One must learn, and then follow, God's precepts. And suffering is equally important. When one suffers of their own volition, it is proof of commitment and devotion to God. The blighted masses, whose suffering (poverty, chronic disease, etc.) is not by choice but is nonetheless their cross to bear, also have the promise of reward and succor in heaven. For women of comparatively comfortable circumstances, it may be that creating conditions of suffering is a way to both put oneself in the mindset of God, and accrue future rewards. I often heard that the more one suffered here on earth, the greater would be her celestial reward. One of my informants, who was sixty years old and a diabetic, made numerous voluntary day-long fasts from food and drink and busied herself with charity work and proselytizing all day in the heat. By nightfall, when she finally broke her fast she would be nearly faint with exhaustion. When I voiced concern about her physical condition, and the effect of the fasting on her health, a concern echoed frequently by her children, she shrugged off my concern, bowed her head and said, "I pray that God will accept my fast."

Zahra similarly perceived her discomforts and sacrifices as a sort of credit toward passage to heaven. In this sense, her motives seemed to fall in line with Stark and Bainbridge's Rational Choice Theory (1996). Religion, within this theoretical construct, is provisionally defined as a system of compensators based on supernatural assumptions. In other words, religions provide social, psychological and spiritual

rewards to people who accept their view of the world and cosmos, and act according to particular dictates.

As previously indicated, Zahra is a business-minded, goal-oriented and calculating person. She sees life as a series of logical propositions: certain actions lead to morally appropriate outcomes. Thus, living “rightly” leads to the ultimate reward, the opportunity to be with God. Heaven, for all the talk of virgins and eternal bliss (which smacks heavily of the material and sexual desires of men on earth), is envisioned differently by the women with whom I spent time. Some described heaven as a place where husbands love their wives deeply and the couple lives in harmony for eternity¹⁹. This was certainly appealing to women whose husbands were gone. Zahra did talk about being joined with her husband in heaven, although she was not in the least effusive about him. It was not clear to me whether she longed for his love, or for the security and order his presence would bring. His early death brought an abrupt and shocking change to her life. She had had to become responsible for all financial and administrative aspects of his funeral, as well as the family’s move to, and new life in, Cairo. It is not surprising that she would long for, and even idealize, the years and the ordered life she enjoyed when her husband was alive.

A desire for a clear, ordered, structured world was clearly a motivating force for Zahra. Adherence to set roles and categories was very important to her mental construction of the world, even as she herself failed to live up to some of her own

¹⁹ The highest “level” of heaven, described by the most devout women, was the opportunity to behold the face of God. It was this to which they truly aspired.

assertions. Thus, for Zahra, a woman without a husband, who greatly values order, logic and control of her world, involvement in the comparatively regimented piety movement has tremendous appeal. Zahra's faith offers her not just a sense of purpose to drive her life, but a clear structure within which she can sensibly and legitimately operate. There may be a second motivator. Widows and divorced women are looked upon with some suspicion within the broader population of married women, representing, as they do, a threat to marital fidelity since they are technically available women (Inhorn 1995). By adopting clear and strident markers of piety, she effectively signals to others in the community that she is a moral, upstanding, trustworthy woman, a move with important social implications.

8.5 Connection (Na'ima)

I described Na'ima in an earlier chapter. She was a woman who had made a gradual evolution towards greater and greater piety (in dress, prayer and everyday comportment) following an incident in which she experienced profound disconnection from family, her primary source of social and psychological support and intimacy. Her fidelity and morality had been called into question over suspicions of an affair. When accusations first flew, Na'ima protested her innocence, but since her credibility was suspect due to gossip at the start of her marriage, she was unable to dispel the rumor.

Over time, Na'ima began to adopt more modest dress and pious practices. Initially her husband and others around her were skeptical about the changes she was

making, doubting the authenticity and depth of her feelings. She persevered. Na'ima prayed with regularity, and took great solace in reading the *Qur'an*. Eventually, her husband gave her permission to attend public sermons and religious lessons in the company of his female relatives.

Na'ima's life changed dramatically and positively as a result of her "Islamic awakening." An entire social world (re)opened to her. Previously, through her most difficult stretch of months, her contacts had been limited to her husband and two children, and occasionally her natal family. Once Na'ima had established the legitimacy and genuineness of her pious sentiments and behavior beyond a reasonable doubt, she began to be included in conversations. She laughed and joked. She chatted with neighbors.

The changes extended yet further. As she transformed from a woman of dubious reputation and low familial standing, to a woman of morality, piety and submission to God, the scope of her movement outside the home, and her power and authority within the home, expanded. With firmer ground to stand on, she began to make occasional bids for greater control over her own life. At one point, after I had been in Egypt for over a year, Na'ima's cousin-in-law, who was her frequent advisor, told me that Na'ima was considering taking the *niqab* (face veil, a sartorial addition that signaled even greater heights of piety and modesty). Na'ima's husband, Mohammed, was resisting her attempts.

Na'ima and Mohammed's stand-off over the *niqab* reflected broader public discourses at the time over the meanings and requirements of women's dress. On the

one hand, there was concern (and ridicule) that some women used the *hijab* simply for social convention, without the accompanying disposition of shyness and modesty before God and others. These were women who veiled, but who (purportedly) acted immodestly, or who paired demure head scarves with western-style jeans and skirts that were anything *but* modest. Newspaper cartoons occasionally poked fun at this (alleged) hypocrisy. In one, a game show host showed a picture of the head of a modestly veiled woman and offered a thousand Egyptian pounds to anyone able to correctly match it to her “bottom half.” A backside view of three women’s bodies filled the next frame. None of the three was particularly modest, and two were exaggerated portrayals of women in tight, immodest clothing.

Another frequent accusation made (usually by dismissive, upper-middle class secular men at dinner gatherings) was that modest Islamic dress was mere cover for bad hair days, or laziness on the part of women over presenting themselves appropriately in public. At the more extreme end of this discourse, there was an even more scandalous accusation that young women were wearing modest Islamic dress as cover for ducking out of under their parents’ watchful eye. They showed up later that night, so went the rumor, at local nightclubs where they tossed their outer garments aside amidst the flashing lights and provocative music.

Within the piety movement, and the broader Islamic revival, there was a debate of a far different nature prevailed, that of whether the *niqab* was required, or merely preferred by God. That the *hijab* was required was beyond doubt, although there are

Muslims in other parts of the world who challenge this²⁰. The tension between Na'ima and Mohammed rode the currents of this latter debate. Na'ima wanted to adopt the *niqab*, but according to Egyptian norms, and to her own interpretation of the *Sunna*, she was required to “take permission” from her husband on significant decisions in her life. Thus, they were locked in a power struggle, but it was complicated because while Mohammed could draw upon his legitimate power as man, head-of-household and primary provider, Na'ima could call on the clearly higher authority of God and Islam. If she could convince Mohammed that the *niqab* is not only desirable, but a requirement of her, she would have her way.

What was at stake for Na'ima here? Why might she want to adopt the *niqab*? At the time of her decision, it was still the case that only a minority of women in the movement wore it. Further, the choice to do so involved some physical challenges. On warm days, to have material directly in front of the face can feel suffocating. Further, the material frequently shifts, obscuring one's vision and requiring adjustment. From this perspective, it is not an appealing prospect. On the other hand, although I can attest to the physical challenges, having worn the whole outfit on an excursion through the city, I can also say that there is something empowering and freeing about being able to walk through public space and anonymously take the

²⁰ Some progressive Muslims define modesty broadly, insisting that it is an attitude that both men and women should adopt. They argue that understandings about what “counts” as modest varies across cultures. A message from God about modesty delivered to 7th century Arab tribes, for example, is meant to apply to that time, but not to be a universal standard. The principle of modesty is what persists; not veiling per se. For more on this perspective, see Wadud (1999, 2006), Barlas (2002), and Muslim Wake Up!

measure of others. One can observe without being observed. This is a rare experience for a woman in Egypt, since the opposite is usually the case²¹. I doubt that women think about it in these terms, but they likely feel the weight of the male gaze lifted when they make this final sartorial addition. I heard many comments along these lines when I was discussing my own experiences with sexual harassment.

“One should not veil for reasons of avoiding men’s stares,” I was told. “It should be for God, but the peace you feel on the street is a gift.” Thus, the garment gives women some relief in public, even as it also physically affects their movements. As another woman said, “Allah makes the way easier for us-this is just one of many examples of the way His dictates ease our load. He knows what is best for us.” In other words, although it should not be the reason for enacting a self-transformation (a move toward greater piety should be undertaken only for the “right” reasons: love and fear of God), there are benefits to wearing strictly modest Islamic dress.

It would be difficult to account for all the factors and circumstances that have fueled Na’ima’s desire to adopt the *niqab*. She seemed to have trouble articulating it herself, saying only that it “felt like the right thing to do.” It may have been simply that the physical symbol of the greatest heights of piety to which she aspired, and its adoption would be the culmination and expression of an elaborate self-transformation project in which she was engaged.

²¹ As I noted previously, sexual harassment is rampant on the streets of Cairo (Hassan, et. al. 2008), and public space is gendered male (de Koning 2009)

Na'ima might simply be motivated to resist the will of a husband (and circle of dubious relatives) who, for a long time, limited, doubted and belittled her. For Mohammed's part, what he has lost in the total power and, in his mind, justified ill-treatment of Na'ima, he has gained back in a calm, pliant, pious wife who embodies popular religious ideals. There is some measure of social capital to be gained in his neighborhood and about Cairo by clear expressions of modesty, Islamic morality and devotion. However, Mohammed, a man of the lower middle class, also has aspirations of class advancement. In some ways, the tension with Na'ima over the *niqab* is emblematic of Mohammed's own dual and competing desires for modern (western-style) advancement on the one hand, and local, Islamic markers of goodness and righteousness on the other.

Variations on the hijab have become so normalized that they have become, if not seamlessly, at least fairly well integrated in the collective vision of a future modern Egypt. The *niqab*, in contrast, continues to have associations of religious radicalism in Egypt (as elsewhere), and having a "*niqabi*" wife doesn't fit with Mohammed's image of himself, his family and his hopes for improvements in his life circumstances. Probably for this reason, in addition to the sheer import of reasserting familial and spousal dominance, he blocks Na'ima's attempts to wear the *niqab*. Because the desire and dictates of God are genuine factors, however, and because there is support in many neighborhoods, his own included, for strong expressions of piety, he is not so bold as to outright deny Na'ima's request. Instead, he couches his resistance in terms of the language of "needing to be convinced" of God's desires.

When I first learned of Na'ima's deliberations over the *niqab*, I asked what the considerations were. "She wants to take the veil," I was told, but her husband "is not yet convinced." This created a stand-off, although there was no overt power struggle. All parties, husband, wife and interested family members, implicitly agreed that Na'ima should await Mohammed's approval and blessing before wearing the *niqab*. At the same time, he surely felt some measure of pressure to allow this since, while the *niqab*'s status as a requirement is still up for debate, it is morally (and thus socially) difficult to argue against an individual's desire to embrace and express a passionate religiosity.

Na'ima's initial orientation toward a new piety likely arose out of her personal crisis: the desolation of loneliness and the need for a sense of connection, belonging and her own (renewed) worth. In seeking the comfort of God, she found the warmth of family and friends again. Anchored by her new relational connections and support, and with her identity as a devout, modest and moral woman solidified, a new desire for control over her own life contributed to the motivations underlying her actions. Thus, for Na'ima, each drive, but particularly those for relational connection, and later, for control, fueled her pious pursuits, and were satisfied through her participation in the movement.

8.6 Control/Cultural Symbols (Sumaiya)

Part of Sumaiya's story surfaced in the previous chapter. She was the young woman who was deeply averse to interactions with men. I met Sumaiya fairly early

on in my stay during a gathering of women at my mother-in-law's apartment. She was clad in an all-black *abeya* and *hijab*, in stark contrast to her younger sister, who had splashes of color, and clearly attended more to her appearance. Sumaiya was pleasant-faced and plump with a ready smile. She attended the gathering with her mother and younger sister, but tucked herself in a hidden corner of the room as soon as she arrived. When I joined the group later, after serving tea, I sat by her in one of the few available spots on the couch. I was surprised at her openness and how quickly our conversation turned from the polite exchange of a new acquaintanceship to a very honest and despairing diatribe on the part of Sumaiya about her life and family. Our exchanges were a mix of two languages, each of us stumbling good-humoredly with the other's mother tongue, with occasional appeals to others nearby who spoke both languages well.

Sumaiya came to visit regularly with her mother, a long-time friend of Salima, and her younger sister. She seemed to be at ease in this group, though she was periodically criticized by her mother, who seemed to wish that Sumaiya would "try harder" to make herself appealing to men so that she might marry some day. Her sister, who was about ten years her junior, was slightly prettier, more slender and not as loquacious as Sumaiya. It became clear to me through the course of broader conversations in the salon (the sitting room which we women occupied), that her sister was the favored sibling, perceived by her family as the more attractive and likely to get married. Sumaiya, by contrast, was understood to be the source of constant

problems and complaint. The family was rounded out by, in Sumaiya's words, a domineering father and two lazy brothers.

I found the level of vitriol that Sumaiya felt towards the men in her family striking. In the course of women-only conversations, many women complain of husbands, fathers and sometimes brothers, but it is usually tempered by affection as well, or at least some eye-rolling that implies a sense of resignation at the universality of this behavior.

"All men are like this," they agreed, but with more exasperation than bitterness. Sumaiya's negative feelings toward her male family members teetered on hatred, and they spilled over onto her feelings towards men in general.

"I detest my brothers," she confided in me in hushed tones as the salon conversation carried on without us. "They do NOTHING at home, never lift a finger, and my father just praises them. Me, he only criticizes. They all order me to do things and I just have to. I cook and I clean and I wash, and I am SO relieved when I can go to my job. My father tells me I should quit my job because they don't pay me very much but I don't want to quit it. I go there for as many hours as I can."

Sumaiya's job, one working at an adult daycare of sorts for people with developmental disabilities, does indeed pay a pittance. She works very long hours six days a week and earns about 150 pounds (about \$25 a month) for her labors. Her face lit up, however, when she spoke of the individuals with whom she worked. These were men and women with severe physical disabilities and mental retardation. Their needs were great, but significantly, they were neither verbally demanding nor

unappreciative. They adored Sumaiya and were always excited to see her. The way that Sumaiya spoke of the men and women with whom she worked was warm and loving, but it was also infantilizing. This, I surmised, might be the appeal of the job. These were individuals who were de-gendered and considered asexual, both in Sumaiya's eyes and in the eyes of broader society. Among them, the usual pressures of being marriageable or the model of "good" Egyptian womanhood were moot. Surrounded by "child-like" individuals, the usual emphasis (or at least inevitability) on her of gender expectations nearly disappeared.

In every other area of her life, Sumaiya disdained or feared the presence of men. Whenever she visited, she became very anxious at the prospect of seeing, or being seen by, my husband or any of the other men gathered in the adjoining room. Since a trip to the bathroom necessitated walking through this (temporarily) male space, Sumaiya put off her body's demands as long as she could. This was no small feat, since visits typically lasted from four to six hours, and tea cups were filled and refilled at least twice during that time. When, finally, she could no longer wait, she asked, with some embarrassment (and to the sound of some emphatic humphs from her exasperated mother), if the men could step into another room just while she passed through the inner *sala* (family room) to the bathroom.

Such a request might be (and in fact was by some) perceived as the request of a woman who was extremely modest, pious and *maksoofa* (shy), all qualities that are generally seen as desirable in Egyptian women. I noted that Sumaiya did not attempt to disabuse anyone of this notion. But this was not the coquettishness of a young,

unmarried woman, nor, as far as I could tell, did she display the self-conscious, passionate piety I had seen in other women in the group. Although she made reference to God, and peppered her speech with the appropriate inclusion of “*Insh’Allah*” (May God grant...) and “*Hamduleh!*” (abbreviated form of “thank God”), and although she surely believed in God and was a good, praying Muslim, she still was unlike many other women that I knew in the movement. She dressed the part. Her clothing was very modest: wide, flowing *abeya*, loose *hijab*, gloves outside (although not the *niqab*, or face veil). But she did not *sound* the part. When we spoke, her facial expressions, body language and choice of discussion topic suggested that she did not share the same reverence or pious preoccupation as other women. She believed in God, and had enthusiastic faith in His ultimate goodness and justice, but she did not “buy into” assertions about the superiority of men.

By contrast, even among the most prominent of women in the piety movement, women who were sought out for religious and practical advice, not only by other women, but by younger men in their families, there was an untroubled acceptance of the rightful dominance of men over women. It need not be domineering, they said, and it did not extend to moral or spiritual equality (each individual is deemed to be equal in the eyes of God, and judged entirely on their own merits in this arena). However, it was understood that order within the family and within society demanded a hierarchy.

“A ship cannot have two captains,” I was told in a tone that suggested this should be obvious. Most women embraced this notion unproblematically. Sumaiya

did not seem to. It was clear that she thought women worked harder than men, and that a woman's work never ended.

“Men don't do anything around the house!” she complained to me once in muffled tones as we sat in a quiet corner at a gathering of women. “They go to work and then they come home and expect to be catered to by their wives and mothers and sisters! Haven't the women been working all day too? *Taban!* Of course! They're working harder! And still they serve the men when they come home and the men never lift a finger. It is unfair.”

What was striking to me about this diatribe was that such sentiments, given a different setting and set of circumstances, might be the seeds of discontent that flowers into a so-called feminist consciousness. In a different story, the heroine would throw off the shackles of family and tradition. She would leave her stultifying home and make her own way in the world. But while Sumaiya's complaints were bitter, they did not move her to any such reflection or action. Given the “web” of rules, connections and meanings surrounding her, and given the (powerful) social bonds and expectations, the cultural models and scripts, and the economic realities of her life, Sumaiya's response to her frustrations and constraints was at once more conventional and more ingenious. Lacking both the necessary alternative (countercultural) models of womanhood, and the practical means to leave family and home for a new identity and path, Sumaiya found ways to forge a meaningful existence out of her life circumstances.

A long tradition of feminist literature on resistance documents instances in which women, constrained by institutions and individuals, nonetheless find ways, both overt and covert, to voice opposition to arrangements and decisions beyond their control, to protest ill treatment, etc. (Abu-Lughod 1986; Early 1993; Fernea 1985; Wikan 1991). Sumaiya could be read as resisting in various ways: she worked as many hours as possible at her job despite extremely low pay in order to avoid catering to a houseful of ungrateful male relatives she abhorred. When at home, she moved slowly or finished tasks in ways that irritated her father and brothers. But she also found both solace and sanctuary in the adoption of a pious religiosity. She looked to Allah as a being above the pettiness, laziness and unfairness of her life. He was the figure to whom she could look and pray for guidance, patience, and ultimately, justice and reward. He was all-powerful, a source of ultimate retribution, but also safely distant and, in spite of a heavily male cast to His evocation, safely without (or at least above) gender and sexuality.

Among other women in the movement I observed, as outward evidence of their piety increased, they found themselves to be more sought after by pious men who were looking for the same quality in a wife. But there was a measure of posturing and performance in many of these cases: a way of being seen at the mosque in the most modest of dress, and of allowing oneself to stand out as exceptionally devout. In contrast to this, Sumaiya went out of her way NOT to be noticed. She avoided men in all settings, did not attend the mosque for prayers and actively discouraged any matchmaking. She parroted her mother's comments about the beauty and

marriagability of her younger sister, probably at least in part to deflect attention from her own lack of interest.

Without marriage she could not reasonably expect to ever move away from her father and brothers. Still, the alternative, living with an unknown and potentially loathsome husband, was ever more unpalatable. By aligning herself with the piety movement, Sumaiya in effect expanded the range of possibilities open to her given the cultural, economic and familial constraints of her life. She created a situation in which she could legitimately avoid interacting with men at large in society, dodge marriage in a face-saving way, and significantly reduce her time with, and services for, her father and brothers.

As I have indicated, Sumaiya appeared to be deeply and genuinely afraid of unfamiliar men. This fear may have roots in anger, but anger is a far less acceptable emotion and posture than fear, which can more easily be interpreted as innocence, shyness or extreme modesty. The origins of Sumaiya's feelings, whether anger, fear or both, can only be speculated. In none of our conversations did the topic of sexual abuse come up (it is the height of taboos and unlikely to be talked about by anyone to anyone), but it is possible that Sumaiya's fears of adult men (and her unmitigated disdain for her father and brother) may have arisen from some form of physical or sexual abuse when she was younger. Her behavior fit patterns (Beitchman 1992) I had become accustomed to in observing and working with sexual abuse survivors in the U.S. Of course, it is impossible for me to know for sure, but regardless of origins, it was clear that Sumaiya's negative feelings toward the men in her family were strong

and not tempered by normal bonds of familial love and affection. It was also plain that her fear of men, even teenage boys, was real and powerful. By embracing the ideals and practices of the piety movement, Sumaiya attached herself to a culturally legitimate and laudable model of womanhood that did not require her to interact with men. The more she separated herself from men and committed herself to prayer, study and acts of charity, and the more overtly modest and shy in her dress and bearing, the more she placed herself above reproach.

Obeyesekere (1981), in his work with ecstatic priestesses of Sri Lanka, documented similar situations in which women coped with different psychological needs using religious symbols. “Cultural ideas are not only shared but also manipulated by persons and groups to resolve problems of meaning (112).” According to Obeyesekere, individuals interpret or redefine their own idiosyncratic experiences in terms of a culturally relevant language of symbols and meanings. Through a process of subjectification, “cultural ideas are used to produce, and thereafter justify, innovative acts, meanings, or images that help express the personal needs and fantasies of individuals (137).” Through this process of subjectification, Sumaiya is able to integrate personal desires and fears with cultural expectations. According to Obeyesekere, this role resolution of psychological conflict is one of the most powerful integrative mechanisms in human society.

Although Sumaiya did not contrive and calculate to “solve” her problems by joining the piety movement, her participation nonetheless did address her predominant

concerns. By adopting the dress, language and attitude of the piety movement, Sumaiya created a situation that both masked and solved her greatest fears.

8.7 Conclusion

This examination of six women's lives is an attempt to demonstrate the diversity of motivations, not only across the members of the group, but for each individual within the group. Actions arise out of a multiplicity of factors: cultural habits, social pressures, individual impulses and both conscious and unconscious goals and desires. One important point of this chapter, and the larger dissertation, is that there is tremendous heterogeneity within this (as within any) movement. Similarly, the behavior of participants defies assumptions, expectations and simple categorization.

This is not to deny that significant similarities, such as visual markers, beliefs and practices, unify members of the Egyptian Islamic piety movement. However, participants are drawn to the movement for different reasons, and use its tenets, norms and expectations in diverse ways: the reclamation of social bonds, for re-assertion of order and control, for resolution of psychological crises, and for redefining identity and purpose. Deeper human longings for meaning/identity, connection/belonging, and order/control can be seen at the root of the goals and actions of all of the women described here. This is a condition they share with every other individual across the world.

Chapter 9:

Conclusion: Diverse Frames, Simultaneous Truths

This work joins previous scholarship (Brenner 2005, 1998, 1996; Deeb 2006; Foley 2004; Mahmood 2005; Rinaldo 2006, 2008) attempting to provide some depth, contextual understanding and psychological insights to a growing Islamic piety movement in Egypt and elsewhere, and by extension, to devout religious movements across the world. The specific goals of this dissertation have been four-fold. The first has been to convey the complex character, internal diversity and contradictory social effects of the movement. The second has been to show the multiple ways that women utilize, engage with, and internalize the beliefs and practices of the movement to meet their own distinct needs. The third has been to understand the cultural logic of the movement by viewing it through its own value lens. The fourth goal has been to propose a set of common human desires that transcend ideological and practical differences, and represent a point of commonality across diverse human projects and pursuits.

Far from being a simplistic and easily-defined phenomenon, marked by homogeneous membership, strict and uncomplicated conservatism and the marginalization of women, the grassroots Islamic piety movement in Egypt encompasses diverse membership, multiple practices and complex and contradictory individual and social effects. Women are drawn to the movement for many different reasons, and benefit in a multitude of ways. Although experiences within the piety

movement vary significantly according to class, the extent of an individual's social connections, and her access to supports and resources, it has had positive consequences for many individual participants. It has broadened opportunities, offered new sources of mastery, control and self-confidence, and served as a source of social and religious capital for well-placed women. At the same time, because of its valorization of orthodox interpretations of the *Sunna*, and stringent norms of behavior and interaction, old forms of expression and influence previously available to women have been devalued and discouraged, and new forms of surveillance and constraint have developed. These contradictory effects bespeak the complexity of the movement.

The piety movement is also marked by internal diversity, a fact which is revealed when the lives of individuals within it are examined. While the women have shared understandings of the importance and correct execution of pious acts, and while they are united in their worldview, as centered on the glory, beneficence and dictates of God, each woman's engagement with the practices of the movement is spurred by a distinct set of needs and circumstances, and achieves different ends.

In her study of marital politics and survival strategies among low-income families in Egypt, Hoodfar (1997) argued that women manipulate norms and institutions in order to promote their own interests. The same is true of women in the piety movement to an extent, although the statement implies a conscious undertaking that likely overstates the extent to which each individual rationally calculates her decision. While there is a conscious element to individual women's decisions to adopt

the practices and beliefs of the piety movement, there is much beneath the surface of awareness that contributes to the equation. Individuals do act in ways that enhance their connections, and sense of belonging and control. They do seek ways to make their lives meaningful. However, they do not tend to articulate their desires in these terms. There is a vast and complex machinery behind major decisions and actions in individuals' lives, and behind our perceptions of them. These deeper desires tend to be filtered through existing cultural models, resonant ideologies, and familiar idioms of distress and well-being. Obeyesekere (1981) argued that, in a process of *subjectification*, actors draw on cultural symbols to express, make sense of, and resolve psychological dilemmas. Such a process appears to have transpired in the case of Sumaiya, described in chapters seven and eight. She aligned herself with the beliefs and practices of the piety movement ostensibly (and genuinely) out of love, fear and a sense of hope, all centered around God. These emotions were real. But the movement also provided legitimate cultural and religious space for her to separate herself from men, a group about whom she had very strong negative feelings. Indeed, since it offers a legitimate, even valued social role and model of femininity that is mostly apart from men, it provides a viable option for women beyond marriage. In this sense, it accords Sumaiya, and other women, more control over their lives.

Multiple layers of truth and interpretation are at play, with regard to the motivations and actions of women in the piety movement. On the surface there are shared practices, based on cultural and religious symbols and models, that give the actions of individual women widely-shared meaning. Beneath the surface, the specific

sorrows, joys, hopes, constraints and aspirations of each individual combine to fuel her decisions and particular enactments. Thus, there is internal diversity at this “middle level,” with regard to the particular circumstances and psychological strategies of individual women. At the deepest layer there are, it is argued here, a deeper set of core needs and desires to which the women aspire, and which they share with one another, with other Egyptians, and with broader humanity.

The fourth major objective of this dissertation has been to provide a new lens through which to view the actions of participants, a way of understanding its aims and practices that is a departure from the ways it is frequently framed. The way pious women are viewed, and the ways their actions are interpreted, has implications for how the (local and international) public respond. Heuristics have practical effects. The manner in which this and similar religious movements have frequently been portrayed has been in the frame of fundamentalism. This framework centers its inquiry around markers of limitation and constraint, particularly those placed on female participants. Seen through this lens, pietists do “fit the description.” They are certainly devout. They do indeed embrace the ideas, dictates and practices that they deem to be fundamental to Islam. They idealize the life and times of the Prophet Mohammed, and attempt to live by his words and the model that he and his wives set for living. They accept without question a policy and practice of strict gender segregation. They never challenge the prevailing interpretation of the Qur’an and *Sunna*, which is a primary activity of Islamic feminists who see accepted interpretations as products of the era and culture out of which they arose.

However, the women described here are not passive or browbeaten, meekly bowing to a broader movement and its female-subordinated ideology. On the contrary, they are change agents at the forefront of a societal transformation. Their primary focus is the self, i.e., to embody and perfect female piety, modesty and morality. However, this model of “good Muslim woman” entails and idealizes significant self-sacrifice and aid to others. These women are passionate: strong in their convictions, persuasive, determined, and stalwart in their self-discipline. The women of the piety movement studied, taught, proselytized, collected and distributed aid, and worked tirelessly to solve problems for a great number of people. They sought to relieve suffering through financial and material aid, medicine and the salutary effect of their presence and compassion. One woman ran the entire community “arm” of the main local mosque, including classes for both adults, an Islamic school for children, and other community programming. Another group of women spent eight to ten hours each day soliciting donations at mosques, collecting clothes, and buying food, medicines and toys which they then delivered to poor and sick families in clinics with loved ones, or in the poorest neighborhoods in Cairo. The pietists aimed at self-improvement, but this was at least partially defined by bettering the lives of others.

The piety movement is oriented to, and guided by, a system of values that distinguishes it from that of mainstream western culture, but connects it to many other spiritual traditions. Rejecting the pursuit of individual pleasure and freedom as guiding principles, these women exercise self-denial, engage in compassionate care

and service, and advocate a fairer distribution of resources across society. This is not to say that they harbor inchoate socialist sensibilities. There is a strong belief that some form of social and economic hierarchy and even inequality is normal and necessary for the running of society. As Iman once said, “Everyone doesn’t need to have the same things (in society), but there should never be such a disparity that the people with less suffer.” In other words, humility and accepting one’s place in the world is good; being abjectly poor is not, and people with more resources have a responsibility to make sure that the poorer among them have enough to survive and live decently.

Piety activists, in particular, structure their lives around service to God, or on behalf of people who suffer, out of love for God. Such an orientation is reminiscent of Thich Nhat Hahn’s (1993) engaged Buddhism, his emphasis on service to others, to experiencing suffering, and to learning compassion from it. His life has been dedicated to the work of inner transformation for the benefit of individuals and society. For pietists, it is reversed: their work on behalf of others helps to positively transform the self. The (positive) social effect is the same. Compassionate action is also something seen in the the direct, hands-on caring work of some practitioners in the Catholic tradition, including followers of Mother Theresa and Jean Vanier’s L’Arche Communities (Vanier & Hauerwas 2008). The focus in all cases is to work hard, endure their own hardships, and seek to assuage the suffering of others.

The predominant ethic for the pietists is one of patience, humility, modesty, self-denial, and an effort to always be *muttaqun* (God-conscious), which encourages

perspective and humility. These are similar to those advocated by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, the founder of a form of Islam that is committed to non-violence (Markham & Ozdemin 2005). According to Nursi, the *nafs ammara*, or human carnal soul, is inclined towards impatience and other negative traits. By fighting against this, by denying the power, control and temptation of the *nafs ammara*, the pietists cultivate patience in worship, in refraining from sin, in the face of disaster or difficulty, even anger or frustration. If individuals do not actively restrict and refine the *nafs ammara*, it is believed, they will inevitably be led down the path of physical indulgences and spiritual ruination. Stories of such ruination ring out from live and cassette sermons alike across the neighborhoods of Cairo, and are repeated in daily conversations as warnings from friends to one another, from parents to wayward children.

The everyday dress, speech and practices of the pietists represents a *muting* of the very “self” that is so glorified and valued in the West. Clothing is designed to draw attention away from individual physical attributes. In this they are in stark contrast to most westerners, and the majority of Egyptians of means, for whom clothing is used to express individuality and to display one’s assets. Speaking of young, ostensibly devout Egyptian women who adopt the *hijab*, but do so with an eye to style, choosing sumptuous, flowing garments in beautiful, vibrant colors, pietists often said, “We should not criticize them; they have taken a first important step towards knowing God more fully. But this kind of clothing defeats the point of modesty, since it is appealing and certainly draws the attention to the wearer.”

The language used by the women both conveys, and acts as a reminder to maintain, humility. Expressions like “*Insha’Allah*” (May God grant...), “*Il-hamdulileh*” (Thank God), and “*Masha’Allah*” (all credit and glory to God, usually for an individual’s skill or asset) pepper every conversation. Each of these deflects attention from the individual possessor of a skill or characteristic. An individual is not seen as the sole creator of her destiny, nor the sole procurer of her acquisitions, health and personal qualities. Practices of the movement emphasize humility and self-sacrifice, and the betterment of individuals and families in need, all out of love for God. The desires and needs of individual selves are minimized, muted, and downplayed. The attention is focused on the needs of others: poor families, sick families, individuals in dire straits, and to the “ultimate” other, the largest source of purpose and meaning: God.

Implicit in this orientation of the pietists is not a blind rejection of all western culture or values, but only those values and tendencies which cause people to neglect and devalue compassion, community and the needs of vulnerable others. Individual distinction, per se, is not problematized. On the contrary, specific individuals are celebrated and held up as models for others: the Prophet Mohammed, his wives and companions, but also current, local *da’iyyat* (proselytizers) and paragons of piety, modesty and compassion. It is instead the ideology of individualism and its consequences (self-aggrandizement, greed) that is rejected. It is not the ruggedness of “going it alone” that is celebrated, but the moral strength to defer one’s own needs and comfort for the benefit of others. Individuals lauded by others in the piety movement

are distinguished not for what they do for themselves (i.e., for their achievements or advancements in business, politics, etc.), nor for the prestige, power or financial gain that they can display, but for what they do for others, and ultimately, for God. It is an entirely different economy, one based on a particular brand of morality.

An ethics and orientation to work on behalf of others in the community might be read as evidence of an abiding and all-encompassing communitarian spirit among the pietists. Simple binaries have been proposed in the past to distinguish “individualistic” and “communitarian” societies. Foley (2004) recently proposed such a dichotomy in her analysis of Malaysian Muslim feminists. But the Egyptian pietists, while their sacrifices on behalf of others are frequently great, do not discount the tendency, even within themselves, to pursue individualistic desires. They see the imperfection of all humans, and our shared tendency (the tendency of our *nafs*) to be selfish and self-serving. They see the God-given dictates and structures of Islam as wise and revealed correctives to human tendencies toward self-service, self-aggrandizement and selfish individual desires.

At one level of discourse in anthropology, there is a debate about what devout religious movements mean for our understandings of human desire, agency and subjectivity, and differences of opinion about whether piety movements are, or are not, separate from Islamist movements in terms of causes and effects. Mahmood's (2005) intent, in her own study of pious women in Egypt, was to draw us out of our complacency, and challenge assumptions of the universality of a prominent narrative in the western-secular tradition, that of a desire for liberation from external

constraints. She demonstrated that such a desire is, in fact, not universal, that agency and desire extend far beyond emancipation, to encompass the desire to embody and perfect disciplinary norms, even of those driven by values and practices that appear to limit an individual's self-determination and expression. One of the goals of this dissertation has been to propose the possibility, without negating the assertion of the non-universality of this specific desire, that there may still be a "common denominator" of human desires that can be said to be shared across all human groups. The question has been examined here by drawing on the lives, circumstances, motives and experiences of individual women in the movement, and comparing them with those of women who are not a part of the movement: secular and Islamic feminists, and "ordinary" Egyptian women.

Why should this question matter? Ideally, it may tell us about human longings and desires that transcend particular movements and ideologies. Knowing about specific cultural, historical, socioeconomic, political and religious circumstances, and individuals' location and experiences within that context enables us to understand the appeal of particular messages and movements within those settings. But ultimately, it is argued here, all people share a fundamental desire for, and actively work to attain, similar experiences in the world: for those of meaning, of connection and belonging, and for those of mastery and control. Such commonality has important implications, not only for academic understandings of human motivation and action, but for relations among people across seemingly wide divergences of religion, ethnicity, creed, political orientation, gender, nationality, age, disability and sexual orientation.

The piety movement offers a different construction of selfhood and community belonging, one that appeals to a growing number of people. It represents one way to respond to the combined individual psycho-social needs and the exigencies of life in a pluralistic, economically insecure social world. It is a successful and growing movement with obvious and important effects on both the social and political sphere. Its success has to do with the fact that it is culturally resonant, responsive to many of the stresses and concerns individuals face in the current political and economic context in Egypt, and unobstructed by political powers-that-be because it is not perceived to pose a threat to prevailing power structures. For these reasons and more, its popularity and growth is unlikely to diminish, and it will continue to teach us about both the particularities, and the commonalities, of human desire.

References-chapter 1

- Abdo, Genevieve. 2002. *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*. Oxford University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. University of Chicago Press
2001. "Women on Women: Television, Feminism and Village Lives" in Suad Joseph and Susan Slymovics' (Eds) *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
1998. *Remaking Women: feminism and modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
1997. "Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt" in *The Gender/Sexuality Reader*, Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo, eds.
1996. "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle Eastern Roles" in Kandiyoti, D. (Ed) *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and poetry in a Bedouin society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Afshar, Haleh. 1994. *Islam and the Post Revolutionary State in Iran*. Macmillan.
- Ahmed, Leila. 2000. *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America-A Woman's Journey*. Penguin
1993. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
1982. Western ethnocentrism and perceptions of the harem. *Feminist Studies* 8 (3): 521-34.
- Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP
- Azmeh, Aziz. 1993. *Islams and Modernities*. London: Verso.
- Badran, Margot. 1995. *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Barker, Eileen. 1995. *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction*, [new edition], London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Baron, Beth. 2007. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*. University of California Press
1994. *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Beeman, William. 2002. Fundamentalism and Religious Revival. In J. MacClancy, ed. *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Berger, Peter; Sacks, Jonathan; Martin, David; Weiming, Tu; Weigel, George; Davie Grace; Naim, Abd Allah Ahmed (Eds). 1999. *Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Bibars, Iman. 2001. *Victims and heroines : women, welfare and the Egyptian state*. London: Zed; New York: Palgrave.
- Blank, Jonah. 2001. *Mullahs on the Mainframe*
- Brenner, Suzanne. 2005. "Islam and Gender Politics in Late New Order Indonesia, in Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George, eds. *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.
1998. *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
1996. "Reconstructing self and society: Javanese Muslim women and 'the veil'" *American Ethnologist* 23(4).
- Bunt, Gary. 2009. *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Burrows, Robert. 1987. "The Coming of the New Age," In *The New Age Rage*. Karen Hoyt (Ed). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co.
- Comoroff, Jean. 1985. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. University of Chicago Press.

- D'Andrade, Roy & Strauss, Claudia Strauss. 1992. *Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Danforth, Loring. 1989. *Firewalking and Religious Healing*. Princeton University Press.
- Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eickelman, Dale. 1999. "The Coming Transformation of the Muslim World." Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute *WIRE* 7(9).
1997. "Reconstructing Islamic Thought in the Late Twentieth Century: Mass Education and the Mass Media." Paper presented at the Conference on Mass Media and the Transformation of Islamic Discourse, International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden, March 18.
- Eickelman, Dale and Jon Anderson. 1997. "Print, Islam and the Prospects for Civic Pluralism: New Religious Writings and Their Audiences." *The Journal of Islamic Studies* 8(1): 43-62.
- El Guindi, Fadwa. 1999. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. New York: Berg
- Esposito, John (ed.). 1995. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Esposito, John & Burgat, Francois. 2003. *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in the Middle East and Europe*. Rutgers University Press.
- Fernea, Elizabeth, ed. 1985. *Women and family in the Middle East: New voices of change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Foley, Rebecca. 2004. Muslim Women's Challenges to Islamic Law: The Case of Malaysia. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6(1), 53-84.
- Hatem, Mervet. 1994. "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48(4): 661-76.
1993. "Toward a Critique of Modernization: Narrative in Middle Eastern Women's Studies," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 15(5): 117-22.

- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics, Cultures of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
2001. "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counterpublic" in *Cultural Anthropology* 16(1): 3-34.
- Hoodfar, Homa. 1997. *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. 1988. "Egypt's Islamic Activism in the 1980s," *Third World Quarterly*. Vol 10 (2), p.632.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz (Ed). 1996. *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
1995. "Reflections on Gender in Muslim Societies: From Nairobi to Beijing." In Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World, ed. Mahnaz Afkhami, 19–32. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
1994. "Reflections on the Policies of Gender in Muslim Societies: From Nairobi to Beijing." In Afkhami, Mahnaz . *Faith and Freedom. Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse. pp. 19-32.
1991. *Women, Islam and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Keddie, Nikki. 2006. *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*. Princeton University Press.
1999. "The New Religious Politics and Women Worldwide: A Comparative Study." in *Journal of Women's History* 10(4) p.11-24.
- Keddie, Nikki & Baron, Beth (eds) 1991. *Women in Middle Eastern History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lewis, James. 2004. *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lubeck, Paul. 2000. "The Islamic Revival: Antinomies of Islamic Movements under Globalization," R. Cohen and S. Rai (eds.), *Global Social Movements*. London/New Brunswick, NJ: Althone Press
- Macleod, Arlene. 1991. *Accommodating protest: working women, the new veiling*,

and change in Cairo. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

2003. Ethical formation and politics of individual autonomy in contemporary Egypt - Part III: individual, family, community, and state. *Social Research.*

2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." In *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2) p. 202-230.

Martin, Marty and Appleby, Scott, Eds. 1991. *Fundamentalisms Observed.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Martin, Marty. 1998. The Future of World Fundamentalisms. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 142, No. 3, September 1998.*

Moghadam, Valentine. 1998. "Women, work, and the changing political economy in the Middle East and North Africa" in *Mediterranean Review* (5) 36.

Marsden, George. 1980. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: the shaping of twentieth century evangelicalism, 1870-1925.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Marsot, Afaf Lufti Al-Sayyid. 1984. *Protest Movements and Religious Undercurrents in Egypt: Past and Present.* Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Occasional Papers Series. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. Middle East and North Africa" in *Mediterranean Review*

Martin, Marty. 1996. Too Bad We're So Relevant: The Fundamentalism Project Projected. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 49(6): 22-38

Micklethwait, Michael & Wooldridge, Adrienne. 2009. *God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World.* Penguin Press HC

Murphy, Caryle. 2002. *Passion for Islam: Shaping the Modern Middle East: The Egyptian Experience.* Scribner.

Nagata, Judith. 2001. Beyond Theology: Toward an Anthropology of "Fundamentalism" in *American Anthropologist* 103(2).

- Ong, Aihwa. 1987. *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Rinaldo, Rachel. 2008. *Pious Islam and women's activism in Indonesia*. Women and International Development Working Paper, East Lansing, MI: Center for Gender in Global Context, Michigan State University.
2006. "Veiled Feminism: Islamic Religious Piety and the Women's Movement in Indonesia." Paper given at the American Sociological Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada, August 12, 2006.
- Rostam-Kolayi, Jasamin. 1999. "The Politics of Women's Rights in the Contemporary Muslim World." in *Journal of Women's History* 10(4) p.205-211.
- Shakry, Omnia. 1996. "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn of the Century Egypt." in Margot Badran's (ed) *Feminists, Islam and Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sharabi, Hisham. 1988. *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Smith, Christian (ed.). 2003. *The Secular Revolution: Power, interests, and conflict in the secularization of American public life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wallace, Anthony. 1966. *Religion; an anthropological view*. New York: Random House.
- Warren, Nancy. 2005. *Women of God and Arms: Female Spirituality and Political Conflict, 1380-1600*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wikan, Unni. 1996. *Tomorrow, God willing: self-made destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zuhur, Sherifa. 1992. *Revealing revealing: Islamist gender ideology in contemporary Egypt*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

References- Chapter 2

- Abdel-Latif, Omayma. 2005. Dealing with a new reality. *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* Issue No. 770, November 24 – 30, 2005
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/770/fr1.htm>
- Abdelhadi, Magdi. 2005. Voter Apathy Marks Egypt Poll. BBC News.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4222508.stm Retrieved November 5, 2009.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2004. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ahmed, Amira. 2007. “Locals and Aliens: Maids in Contemporary Egypt,” Unpublished manuscript based on ongoing PhD research.
- Ahmed, Leila. 1993. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Baron, Beth. 2007. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*. University of California Press
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- BBC News 2007. Anger Over Egypt Vote Timetable.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6472031.stm Retrieved March 5, 2008.
- Blaydes, Lisa. 2006. “Who Votes in Authoritarian Elections and Why? Determinants of Voter Turnout in Contemporary Egypt” Paper prepared for delivery at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 31 - September 3 2006, Philadelphia PA
- Boukhdar, Slim. 2009. New Impetus for Egypt’s Opposition? Qantara.de
http://en.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-1115/i.html
 Retrieved January 20, 2010.
- De Koning, Anouk. 2009. Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women. *Antipode* 41:3 pp. 533-556.

- Egyptian Human Development Report. 2008. United Nations Development Programme and the Institute of National Planning, Egypt.
<http://www.undp.org.eg/Portals/0/2008%20Egypt%20Human%20Development%20Report%20Complete.pdf> Retrieved February 15, 2010.
- Faludi, Susan. 1991. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. AnchorBooks.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. 2006. "Fighting hunger and obesity." <http://www.fao.org/ag/magazine/0602sp1.htm> Retrieved May 12, 2009.
- Galal, Osman. 2002. The nutrition transition in Egypt: obesity, undernutrition and the food consumption context. *Public Health Nutrition*: 5(1A), 141–148
<http://www.cpc.unc.edu/temp/edv/nutrans-old/research/multi-country/bellagio/papers/PHNEgypt-Galal.pdf>
- Gericke, Christian. 2004. Comparison of Health Care Financing Arrangements in Egypt and Cuba: Lessons for Health Reform in Egypt.
<http://www.w.tuberlin.de/diskussionspapiere/2004/dp03-2004.pdf> Retrieved May 12, 2009.
- Hargreaves, E. (2001). Assessment in Egypt. *Assessment in Education*, 8(2), 247-260.
- Hassan, Rasha Mohammad, Aliyaa Shoukry and Nehad Abul Komsan. 2008. 'Clouds in Egypt's Sky': *Sexual Harassment: From Verbal Harassment to Rape (A Sociological Study)*. The Egyptian Women's Rights Association
http://ecwronline.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=275&Itemid=72
- Hatem, Mervet. 1994. "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48(4): 661-76.
- Hirshkind, Charles. 2001. "Religious Reason and Civic Virtue: An Islamic Counter Public." *Cultural Anthropology* 16(1):3-34.
- Human Rights Watch. 2010. Egypt: Investigate Officers Who Attacked Peaceful Protestors.
<http://terrorism.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=terrorism&cdn=newsissues&tm=103&f=00&tt=2&bt=0&bts=0&zu=http%3A/hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/13/egypt14829.htm> Retrieved July 3, 2010.

- Lopez,-Claros, Augusto and Zahidi, Saadia. 2005. "Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap." *World Economic Forum*.
- Macleod, Arlene. 1991. *Accommodating protest: Working women, the new veiling and change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2003. Ethical formation and politics of individual autonomy in contemporary Egypt - Part III: individual, family, community, and state. *Social Research*.
- Mankekar, Purnima. 1999. *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*. Duke University Press.
- Muller, Reinhard. 2008. *Marienthal: Das Dorf, die Arbeitslosen, die Studie*. Innsbruck StudienVerlag
- Murphy, Carlyle. 2002. *Passion for Islam: Shaping the Modern Middle East: The Egyptian Experience*. Scribner.
- Myllylä, Susanna. 1995. *Cairo: a Mega-City and its Resources*. Paper given at the Third Nordic conference on Middle Eastern Studies: Ethnic encounter and culture change. Joensuu, Finland, 19-22 June 1995
<http://www.smi.uib.no/paj/Myllyla.html>
- Shaoul, Jean. 2010. *Egypt Grippled by Social Unrest*. *International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)*. *World Socialist Web Site*:
<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/may2010/egyp-m13.shtml> Retrieved June 8, 2010.
- Shoeb, Randa. 2004. Public Education in Modern Egypt. Unpublished manuscript. Pacific Lutheran University
- Soueif, Ahdaf. 2006. A Confrontation to hold off collapse and revolution. *The Guardian*, 26 May 2006 <http://ahdafsoueif.com/Articles/Confrontation.pdf>
- Swiss Bank USB. 2009. The most expensive and richest cities in the world.
http://www.citymayors.com/economics/expensive_cities1.html Retrieved June 2, 2010.

World Bank. 2004. Most Dangerously Polluted Cities.
http://www.allcountries.org/air_pollution.html Retrieved March 5, 2007.

References-chapter 3

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley & London: University of California Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1990. *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine and Thornton Dill, Bonnie. 1996. "Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism," *Feminist Studies* Vol. 22, No. 2
- Bressler, Eric and Sosis, Richard. 2003. Cooperation and Commune Longevity: A Test of the Costly Signaling Theory of Religion. *Cross-Cultural Research*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 211-239
- Brown, Laura. 1994. *Subversive Dialogues: Theory in Feminist Therapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Espín, Olivia. 1995. 'On Knowing you are the Unknown: Women of Color Constructing Psychology' in J. Adleman and G. Enguicanos (eds). *Racism in the Lives of Women: Testimony, Theory, and Guides to Antiracist Practice*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Hollingshead, August. 1965 (1957 copyrighted). *Two-factor Index of Social Position*. New Haven, CT: privately printed.
- Hollingshead, August & Redlich, Frederick. 1958. *Social Class and Mental Illness: A Community Study*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Hooks, Bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge.
- Kamel, Yomna & Mashhour, Sara. 2004. "More and more Egyptian stars take the veil." Blog entry at [yomnakamel](http://yomnakamel.blogspot.com/2004/05/more-and-more-egyptian-stars-take-veil.html), May 20, 2004.
<http://yomnakamel.blogspot.com/2004/05/more-and-more-egyptian-stars-take-veil.html>
- Levy, Robert I. (1973) *Tahitians: mind and experience in the Society Islands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

- Lutrell, Wendy. 1997. *School-smart and Mother-wise: Working-Class Women's Identity and Schooling*. Routledge.
2003. *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds: Gender, Race, and the Schooling of Pregnant Teens*. Routledge.
- Wikan, Unni. 1996. *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-made Destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

References-chapter 4

- Abdel-Kader, Soha. 1987. *Egyptian Women in a Changing Society 1899-1987*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Abu Bakr, Omaima. 1999. "Gender Perspectives in Islamic Tradition." Edited transcript of talk given at the Second Annual Minaret of Freedom Institute Dinner, Gaithersburg, Maryland, June 26, 1999.
<http://www.minaret.org/gender.htm>
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1998. *Remaking Women: feminism and modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. 1995. *The State of Religion in Egypt Report*. Cairo: Al-Ahram Foundation.
- Al-Ali, Nadjie. 2002. "The Women's Movement in Egypt, with Selected References to Turkey." *Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 5*. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
1997. "Feminism and Contemporary Debates in Egypt" in Chatty, D. and Rabo, A. (eds) *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Women's Groups in the Middle East*. Oxford and New York: Berg.
- Al Shalchi, Hadeel. 2010. Women Judges Stir up Old Debate in Egypt. The Jordan Times. <http://www.jordantimes.com/?news=25506> Retrieved April 20, 2010.

- Badran, Margot. 1994. "Gender Activism: Feminists and Islamists in Egypt." In Moghodom, Valentine (ed), *Identity, Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.
1996. *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
1999. "Toward Islamic Feminisms: A Look at the Middle East" in *Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female Public Space in Islamic/ate Societies*, Asma Afsaruddin, ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
2001. "Understanding Islam, Islamism, and Islamic Feminism." *Journal of Women's History* 13.1: 47.
2002. "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?" *Al Ahram Weekly Online*, #569 <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/569/cu1.htm>
- Baron, Beth. 1997. *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
2005. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Beinin, Joel. 2005. Popular Social Movements and the Future of Egyptian Politics. Middle East Report Online. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero031005.html>, Retrieved December 20, 2009.
- Booth, Marilyn. 2001. *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001
- Botman, Selma. 1999. *Engendering Citizenship in Egypt: The History of Society of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chen, Martha; Joan Vanek & James Heintz. 2006. Informality, Gender and Poverty: A Global Picture. *Economic and Political Weekly*. Pg. 2131-2138.
- CIA World Factbook. 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/eg.html>
- Cowell, Alan. 1990. Cairo Journal; For Women Only: A Train Car Safe From Men.

- The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/15/world/cairo-journal-for-women-only-a-train-car-safe-from-men.html> Retrieved June 20, 2010.
- Gurtel, Jorg & Kuppinger, Petra. 1994. Space, social reproduction and food security in Cairo/Egypt. *GeoJournal*. Volume 34 (3): 277-286.
- Hafez, Sherine. 2003. *The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic Women's Activists in Egypt*. Cairo Papers in Social Science. Vol. 24, No. 4. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo.
- Hatem, Mervat. 1994. "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48(4): 661-76.
1992. "Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 24: 231-51.
1986. The Enduring Alliance of Nationalism and Patriarchy in Muslim Personal Status Laws: The Case of Modern Egypt. *Gender Issues* 6(1): 19-43.
- Hoodfar, Homa. 1997. *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hourani, Albert. 1983. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. 1991. *Women, Islam and the State*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press Limited.
1996. (ed.) *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse, N.Y. : Syracuse University Press
- Karam, Azza. 1998. *Women, Islamisms and the State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Khan, Shahnaz. 1998. Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space. *Signs* 23(2): 463-494.
- Khater, Akrao and Nelson, Cynthia. 1988. "Al-Harakah Al-Nissa'iyya: The Women's Movement and Political Participation in Modern Egypt," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11(5): 465-483.

- El Laithy, Heba (2000) *The Gender Dimensions of Poverty* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo).
- Ezzat, Heba Raouf. 2008. Rethinking Secularism ... Rethinking Feminism. Posting on Suhaib Webb. <http://www.suhaibwebb.com/blog/general/rethinking-secularism-...-rethinking-feminism-by-dr-heba-raouf-ezzat/> Retrieved 7/15/2009.
- Lewis, Leslie R. 2007. "Scandalous behavior: what transgressive acts tell us about social norms, values and gender ideology." Unpublished paper given at biannual conference of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, March 8-11, Manhattan Beach Marriott Hotel, Manhattan Beach, CA
- Lewis, Pauline. 2007. *Zainab al-Ghazali: Pioneer of Islamist Feminism* Michigan Journal of History. http://www.umich.edu/~historyj/pages_folder/articles/W07_Lewis.pdf
- Macleod, Arlene. 1991. *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." In *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2) p. 202-230.
2003. Ethical formation and politics of individual autonomy in contemporary Egypt Part III: individual, family, community, and state. *New School for Social Research in association with The Gale Group and LookSmart*. Retrieved April 15, 2004. http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m2267/3_70/110737781/print.jhtml
- 2005 *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mazrui, Alamin & Abala, Judith. 1997. Sex and Patriarchy: Gender Relations in Mawt al-rajul al wahid 'ala al-ard (God Dies by the Nile). *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 28.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1999. Dreamland: The Neoliberalism of Your Desires. *Middle East Report* No. 210. <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer210/mitchell.html>
- Moghadam, Valentine. 1994. *Identity, Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.

- Murphy, Caryle. 2002. *Passion for Islam: Shaping the Modern Middle East: The Egyptian Experience*. Scribner.
- Najjar, Fauzi. 1996. The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt. *Arab Studies Quarterly (ASQ)*, Vol. 18.
- Nassar, Heba (1997) "Vulnerability of Women to Poverty " A Paper presented to Workshop on Social Security and Income Generation Projects for Vulnerable Groups with special focus on Working Children and Female Headed House Holds : The Social Research Centre, American University In Cairo.
- Nelson, Cynthia. 1996. *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart*. Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida
- Russel, Sharon. 1992. International Migration and Political Turmoil in the Middle East. *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 18 (4): 719-727.
- Singerman, Diane. 2006. Restoring the Family to Civil Society: Lessons from Egypt. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2(1): 1-32
- Valenti, Jessica. 2007. Is segregation the only answer to sexual harassment? The Guardian.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2007/aug/03/healthandwellbeing.gender>
 Retrieved June 20, 2010.

References-chapter 5

- Abdo, Geneive. 2002. *No God But God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2010. *The Active Social Life of "Muslim Women's Rights": A Plea for Ethnography, Not Polemic, with Cases from Egypt and Palestine*. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6(1):1-45
2002. Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 783-790.
1998. The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective repudiation as a dynamic of postcolonial cultural politics. In Abu-Lughod (ed) *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pp. 243-269.

1995. Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt. *Social Text* 45: 53-67.
- Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Al-Ali; Nadjie (2000) *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
(2003) Gender and Civil Society in the Middle East. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 5:2
- Asef Bayat. 2000. *Social Movements, Activism and Social Development in the Middle East*. Civil Society and Social Movements Programme. Paper no. 3. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Badran, Margot. 2002. Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name? *Al-Ahram Weekly*, January 17-23.
1996. *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Barlas, Asma. 2002. "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. University of Texas Press.
- Baron, Beth. 2005. *Egypt as a woman: nationalism, gender, and politics*. University of California Press.
- Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. 1986. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. 10th Anniversary Ed. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Black, Anthony. 2002. *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*. New York: Routledge.
- Bloss, William. 2009. "Cultural Clash: Investigating the Nexus Between Western Muslim Ideological Dissonance and Islamist Terrorism." In Gilly, Thomas (Ed) *The Ethics of Terrorism: Innovative Approaches from an International Perspective*. Charles C Thomas Pub Ltd.
- Bramadat, Paul and Biles, John. 2005. The re-emergence of religion in international public discourse. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. 6(2): 1874-1884.
- Brenner, Suzanne. 2005. "Islam and Gender Politics in Late New Order Indonesia, in

- Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George, eds. *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.
1998. *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
1996. Reconstructing self and society: Javanese Muslim women and 'the veil' *American Ethnologist* 23(4).
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Clark, Janine. 2004. *Islam, Charity, and Activism. Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dekmejian, R. Hrair. 1980. The Anatomy of Islamic Revival: Legitimacy Crisis, Ethnic Conflict and the Search for Islamic Alternatives. *Middle East Journal* 34(1): 1-12
- Dina Ezzat and Amany Abdel-Moneim. 2005. *Feminist priorities*. Al Ahram Weekly. Issue No. 747 (16 - 22 June 2005).
- Durkheim, Emile. 1954 [1912] *The Elementary forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by J. W. Swain. New York: The Free Press.
- Duval, Soraya. 1998 "New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women's Groups in Egypt." In *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations*, Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland, eds., 45-72. Oxford & New York: Berg
- El Guindi, Fadwa. 1981. Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's contemporary Islamic Movement. *Social Problems* 28(4): pp
- Enayat, Hamid. 2005. *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century*. Palgrave Macmillan
- Esposito, John. 1998. *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Fernea, Elizabeth. 1998. *In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global Journey*. Anchor Press.
- Foucault, Michael. 1988. "Technologies of the Self" in *Technologies of the Self: a seminar from Michael Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Fuller, Graham. 2003. *The Future of Political Islam*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Göle, Nilüfer. 2000. Snapshots of Islamic Modernities. *Daedalus* 129(1): 91-117.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1994. *Letters from Prison*, 2 vols., ed. Frank Rosengarten, trans. Raymond Rosenthal. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Haddad, Yvonne; Voll, John; Esposito, John. 1991. *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography*. Greenwood Press.
- Hafez, Sherine. 2003. The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt. *Cairo Papers in Social Science*. Cairo: AUC Press.
- Hefner, Robert. 2000. *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics, Cultures of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
2001. "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counterpublic" in *Cultural Anthropology* 16(1): 3-34.
- Husain, Mir. 2002. *Global Islamic Politics* (2nd ed). Longman.
- Kagiticibasi, Cigdem. 2005. Autonomy and Relatedness in Cultural Context: Implications for Self and Family *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 2005; 36; 403
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. 2001. The Politics of Gender and the Conundrums of Citizenship. In: Joseph, S and Slymovics, S, (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle East*. University of Pennsylvania Press (USA), pp. 52-58.
1988. Bargaining with Patriarchy. *Gender and Society*. 2(3): 274-290.
- Karam, Azza. 1998. *Women, Islamisms and the State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kramer, Martin S. 1996. *Arab awakening and Islamic revival: the politics of ideas in*

- the Middle East*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Lapidus, Ira. 2002. *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lubeck, Paul. 2003. *Antimonies of Islamic Movements Under Globalization*. CGIRS Working Paper Series –WP#99-1, <http://www2.ucsc.edu/cgirs>
- Macleod, Arlene. 1991. *Accommodating protest : working women, the new veiling, and change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2003. Ethical formation and politics of individual autonomy in contemporary Egypt - Part III: individual, family, community, and state. *Social Research*.
2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." In *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2) p. 202-230.
- Miller, Jean Baker. 1976. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.
- Milton-Edwards Beverly. 2004. *Islam and Politics in the Contemporary World*. Polity.
- Moghodam, Valentine. 2002. Islamic Feminism and its Discontents: Toward Resolution of a Debate. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 27(4): 1135-1171.
- Murphy, Caryle. 2002. *Passion for Islam: the Egyptian Experience*. Scribner.
- Ochsenwald, William. 1981. Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13: 271-286. Cambridge University Press.
- Rinaldo, Rachel. 2008. *Muslim women, middle class habitus, and modernity in Indonesia*. *Contemporary Islam* (2:1)
- Rudnyckyj, Daromir. 2010. *Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia*. *Cultural Anthropology*. 24(1):104-141.
- Starrett, Gregory. 1995. Signposts Along the Road: Monumental Public Writing in

Egypt. *Anthropology Today* 11:4.

Suad Joseph. 1996. "Gender and Family in the Arab World." In *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, Suha Sabbagh, ed., 194-202, New York: Olive Branch Press.

Surrey, Janet. 1985. *Self-in-Relation: A Theory of Women's Development*.

Tucker, Judith. 1993. 'Introduction' in Judith Tucker (ed.) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries-New Frontiers*. Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

Van Nieuwkerk, Karin. 2008. *Creating an Islamic cultural sphere: contested notions of art, leisure and entertainment. An Introduction*. *Contemporary Islam* 2(3): 169-176.

Westerlund, David (Ed). 1995. *Questioning the Secular State: Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd.

Wickham, Carrie. 2002. *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wikan, Unni. 1996. *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-made Destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zubaida, Sami. 1989. *Islam, the people and the state : essays on political ideas and movements in the Middle East*. London; New York: Routledge.

References-chapter 6

Abdo, Geneveive. 2000. *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. University of Chicago Press

1997. "Movie Stars and Islamic Moralism in Egypt" in *The Gender/Sexuality Reader*, Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo, eds.

1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and poetry in a Bedouin society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Abugideiri, Hibba. 1976. "The Scientisation of Culture: Colonial Medicine's Construction of Egyptian Womanhood, 1893–1929." *Gender & History*. Volume 16 Issue 1, pgs 83-98.
- Ahmed, Leila. 2000. *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America-A Woman's Journey*. Penguin
1993. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
1982. Western ethnocentrism and perceptions of the harem. *Feminist Studies* 8 (3): 521-34.
- Alterman, Jon. 2000. Egypt: Stable, but for How Long? *The Washington Quarterly*, Volume 23, Number 4:107-118
- Althusser, Louis. 1984. *Essays on Ideology*. London : Verso
- Atiya, Nayra. 1982. *Khuk-Khaal: Five Egyptian women tell their stories*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Badran, Margot. 2009. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oneworld Publications.
1996. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Baron, Beth. 2007. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics*. University of California Press
- Barlas, Asma. 2002. *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. University of Texas Press.
- Bartky, Sandra. 1988. "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminism and Foucault: Paths of Resistance*. Ed. lee Quinby and Irene Diamond. Chicago: Northeastern University Press.
- BBC News. 2008. Egyptian Views on Strike and Poll.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/talking_point/7334832.stm
 Published: 2008/04/07 17:15:43 GMT; Accessed 5/26/10.
- Beeman, William. (2001). Fighting the Good Fight: Fundamentalism and Religious Revival. In J.MacClancy (Ed.), *Anthropology for the Real World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

- Bunt, Gary. 2009. *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Boddy, Janice. 1989. *Wombs and alien spirits: Women, men, and the Zar cult in Northern Sudan*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Brusco, Elizabeth. 1995. *The reformation of machismo: Evangelical conversion and gender in Colombia*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge.
1999. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Psychology of Gender*
- Cooke, Mariam. 2000. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature*. Routledge.
- Davis, Susan. 1983. *Patience and power: Women's lives in a Moroccan village*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.
- De Koning, Anouk. 2009. "Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women." *Antipode*. Volume 41, Issue 3, Pages 533 – 556.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1954 [1912] *The Elementary forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by J.W. Swain. New York: The Free Press.
- Duval, Soroya. 1998 "New Veils and New Voices: Islamist Women's Groups in Egypt." In *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations*, Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland, eds., 45-72. Oxford & New York: Berg
- Early, Evelyn. 1993. *Baladi women of Cairo: Playing with an egg and a stone*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Eickelman, Dale. 2002. *The Middle East and Central Asia: An Anthropological Approach*, 4th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Eikelman, Dale & Anderson, Jon, Eds. 2003. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. Indiana University Press.
- Fernea, Elizabeth, ed. 1985. *Women and family in the Middle East: New voices of change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Foucault, Michael. 1995 (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House.
1988. "Technologies of the Self" in *Technologies of the Self: a seminar from Michael Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
1982. *Afterword: On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress*, in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, eds., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
1978. *The history of sexuality*. New York : Pantheon Books.
- Frankl, Victor 1997 (1946). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Pocket.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hafez, Sherine. 2003. *The Terms of Empowerment: Islamic Women Activists in Egypt*. *Cairo Papers in Social Science*. Cairo: AUC Press.
- Hale, Sondra. 1987. *Women's culture/men's culture: Gender, separation and space in Africa and North America*. *American Behavioral Scientist* 31 (1): 115-34.
- Hassan, Rasha & Shoukry, Aliyya. 2008. *Clouds in Egypt's Sky: Sexual Harassment From Verbal Harassment to Rape*." Egyptian Women's Resource Centre.
- Hatem, Mervet. 1994. "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48(4): 661-76.
1993. "Toward a Critique of Modernization: Narrative in Middle Eastern Women's Studies," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 15(5): 117-22.
- Hegland, Mary. 1998. *Flagellation and fundamentalism: (Trans)forming meaning*,

- identity, and gender through Pakistani women's rituals of mourning. *American Ethnologist* 25 (2): 240-66.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics, Cultures of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
2001. "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counterpublic" in *Cultural Anthropology* 16(1): 3-34.
- Hoffman, Valerie. 1995. *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt*. University of South Carolina Press.
- Hoodfar, Homa. 1997. *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. Los Angeles: University of California Press
- Ilahi, Nadia. 2007. "Gender and Street Harassment: Women's Access and Claims to Public Space." *Proceedings of the Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF) Africa/Europe Regional Forum*. Bochum, Germany, June 26-27, 2007.
- Kastenbaum, Robert. 1993. *Encyclopedia of adult development*. Oryx Press
- Katulis, Brian. 2004. "Women's Rights in Focus: Egypt." Findings from May-June Focus Group with Egyptian Citizens on Women's Freedoms. Freedom House's Survey of Women's Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Lewis, Leslie. 2007. "Scandalous behavior: what transgressive acts tell us about social norms, values and gender ideology." Given at biannual conference of the Society for Psychological Anthropology, March 8-11, Manhattan Beach Marriott Hotel, Manhattan Beach, CA.
- Lubeck, Paul. (2003). *Antimonies of Islamic Movements Under Globalization*. CGIRS Working Paper Series –WP#99-1, <http://www2.ucsc.edu/cgirs>
- Macleod, Arlene. 1991. *Accommodating protest: Working women, the new veiling and change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
2003. Ethical formation and politics of individual autonomy in contemporary Egypt - Part III: individual, family, community, and state. *Social Research*.

2001. Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival. *Cultural Anthropology*, 6 (2): 202-36.
- Martin, Marty and Appleby, Scott, Eds. 1991. *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Martin, Marty. 1998. The Future of World Fundamentalisms. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 142, No. 3, September 1998.
- Miller, Jean B. 1976. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Beacon Press Books.
- Molyneux, Maxine. 1985. Mobilization Without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua. *Feminist Studies* 11: 227-54.
- Natvig, Richard. 1988. Liminal Rites and Female Symbolism in the Egyptian Zar Possession Cult. *Numen* 35(1): 57-68
- Robbins, Joel. 2004. "The Globalization of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33:117-143.
- Schieman, Scott, et. al. 2003. Religiosity, Socioeconomic Status, and the Sense of Mastery. *Social Psychology Quarterly*. Vol 66 (3): 202-221.
- Shaoul, Jean. 2010. "Egypt Gripped by Social Unrest." World Socialist Website. Retrieved May 29, 2010 <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/may2010/egyp-m13.shtml>
- Singerman, Diane and Hoodfar, Homa (Eds). 1996. *Development, Change and Gender in Cairo: A View from the Household*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Singerman, Diane and Ibrahim, Barbara. 2002. "The Cost of Marriage in Egypt: a hidden variable in the new Arab demography." *Cairo Papers in Social Science*. Cairo: AUC Press.
- Stark, Rodney and Bainbridge, William. 1996. *A Theory of Religion*. Rutgers University Press.
- Starrett, Gregory. 1995. Signposts Along the Road: Monumental Public Writing in Egypt. *Anthropology Today* 11:4.

- Suad Joseph. 1996. "Gender and Family in the Arab World." In *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, Suha Sabbagh, ed., 194-202, New York: Olive Branch Press.
- Tucker, Judith. 1993. 'Introduction' in Judith Tucker (ed.) *Arab Women: Old Boundaries-New Frontiers*. Bloomington & Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Wadud, Amina. 1999. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- Warren, Nancy. 2005. *Women of God and Arms: Female Spirituality and Political Conflict, 1380-1600*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Westkott, Marcia. 1989. "Female Relationality & the Idealized Self." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 49, No. 3: 239-250.
- Wikan, Unni. 1996. *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-made Destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wolfe, Margery. 1972. *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Zaied, Al-Sayed. 2008. Da'wa for Dollars: A New Wave of Muslim Televangelists. *Arab Insight* Vol. 2, No. 1

References-chapter 7

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2010. The Active Social Life of "Muslim Women's Rights": A Plea for Ethnography, Not Polemic, with Cases from Egypt and Palestine. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6(1):1-45
2002. Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 783-790.
1998. The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective repudiation as a dynamic of postcolonial cultural politics. In Abu-Lughod (ed) *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Pp. 243-269.
1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and poetry in a Bedouin society*. Berkeley

and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Adler, A. (1956). *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*. H. L. Ansbacher and R. R. Ansbacher (Eds.). New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Alderfer, C. (1972). *Existence, relatedness, & growth*. New York: Free Press.
- Asad, Talal. 1984. Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz. *Man*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Jun., 1983), pp. 237-259
- Atiya, Nayra. 1982. *Khuk-Khaal: Five Egyptian women tell their stories*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. 1986. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. 10th Anniversary Ed. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Berger, Peter. 1967. *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Doubleday.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, Susan. 1983. *Patience and power: Women's lives in a Moroccan village*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.
- D'Andrade, Roy. 1995. *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press.
- D'Andrade, Roy & Strauss, Claudia, Eds. 1992. *Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Deci, E., & Ryan, R. (1991). A motivational approach to self: Integration in personality. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Perspectives on motivation*. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1950 [1895]. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Translated by S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller. New York: The Free Press.
- 1965 [1915]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press.
- Early, Evelyn. 1993. *Baladi women of Cairo: Playing with an egg and a stone*.

Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Erikson, Erik. 1980. *Identity and the Lifecycle*. WW Norton & Co.

Fernea, Elizabeth, ed. 1985. *Women and family in the Middle East: New voices of change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Foucault, Michael. 1988. "Technologies of the Self" in *Technologies of the Self: a seminar from Michael Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Freud, Sigmund. 2009 (1922). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Kessinger Publishing, LLC.

1989. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Liveright; Standard Edition edition.

Geertz, Clifford. 1985. *Religion as a cultural system*. *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion*. London, Tavistock: XLIII, 176.

1977. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.

1960. *The Religion of Java*. Free Press of Glencoe, Illinois

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York, NY et al.: Harper & Row.

Headland, Thomas; Pike, Kenneth and Harris, Marvin (Eds). 1990. *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*. Sage Publications.

Hobbes, Thomas. 1983 (1651). *Leviathan*. Penguin Classics.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1994. *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Hoodfar, Homa. 2001. *The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women*. In Castelli, Elizabeth and Rodman, Rosamond (Eds) *Women, gender, religion: a reader*. Palgrave Macmillan.

James, William. 1962 (1892). *Psychology: Briefer course*. New York: Collier.

- Kuypers, Jim. 2009. *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*. Lexington Books.
- Lahey, Benjamin. 2008. Temperament and Parenting during the First Year of Life Predict Future Child Conduct Problems. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 36(8): 1139-1158
- Lambek, Michael. 2002. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Blackwell Anthologies in Social and Cultural Anthropology). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Locke, John. 1979 (1689). *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford University Press, USA
- Macleod, Arlene. 1993. *Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. 2005 (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. Free Access Ebook <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/61>
- Maslow, Abraham. 1954. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper.
- Mathes, E. (1981, Fall). Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a guide for living. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 21, 69-72.
- Miller, Jean Baker. 1976. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*.
- Miyake, Kazuo, Chen, Shing-Jen and Campos, Joseph. 1985. Infant Temperament, Mother's Mode of Interaction, and Attachment in Japan: An Interim Report. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*. 50 (1/2): 276-297
- Noddings, Nel. 1984. *Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nohria, N., Lawrence, P., & Wilson, E. (2001). *Driven: How human nature shapes our choices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Plous, Scott. 1993. *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*. McGraw-Hill
- Rothbart, Mary. 2002. Measuring Infant Temperament. *Infant Behavior and Development* 25: 113-116.
- Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197

219.

- Strauss, Claudia. 1992. "Models and motives." In Roy D'Andrade and Claudia Strauss, eds.(1992) *Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 1-20.
- Strauss, Claudia & Quinn, Naomi. 1998. *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Suad Joseph. 1996. "Gender and Family in the Arab World." In *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, Suha Sabbagh, ed., 194-202, New York: Olive Branch Press.
- Thompson, M., Grace, C., & Cohen, L. (2001). *Best friends, worst enemies: Understanding the social lives of children*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Wikan, Unni. 1996. *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-made Destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yinger, Milton. 1969. Structural Examination of Religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 8(1): 88-99.

References-chapter 8

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and poetry in a Bedouin society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Barlas, Asma. 2002. *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. University of Texas Press
- Beitchman, Joseph; Zucker, Kenneth; Hood, Jane, et. al. 1992. A review of the long term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16(1): 101-118.
- Ben-Amos, Dan & Weissberg (Eds). 1999. *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*. Wayne State University Press.

- De Koning, Anouk. 2009. Gender, Public Space and Social Segregation in Cairo: Of Taxi Drivers, Prostitutes and Professional Women. *Antipode* 41:3 pp. 533-556.
- Early, Evelyn. 1993. *Baladi women of Cairo: Playing with an egg and a stone*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Erikson, Erik. 1980. *Identity and the Lifecycle*. WW Norton & Co.
- Fernea, Elizabeth, ed. 1985. *Women and family in the Middle East: New voices of change*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1989. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Liveright.
- Hassan, Rasha Mohammad, Aliyaa Shoukry and Nehad Abul Komsan. 2008. 'Clouds in Egypt's Sky': *Sexual Harassment: From Verbal Harassment to Rape (A Sociological Study)*. The Egyptian Women's Rights Association http://ecwronline.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=275&Itemid=72
- Inhorn, Marcia. 1995. *Infertility and Patriarchy: The Cultural Politics of Gender and Family Life in Egypt*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Martin, David. 2005. *On Secularization: Toward a Revised General Theory*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Norris, Pippa & Inglehart, Ronald. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1981. *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*. University of Chicago Press.
- Stark, Rodney and Bainbridge, William. 1996. *A Theory of Religion*. Rutgers University Press.
- Wadud, Amina. 2006. *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Oneworld Publications.
1999. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- Weldon, G 2009, *A comparative study of the construction of memory and identity in the curriculum in societies emerging from conflict :Rwanda and South Africa*, PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria

Wikan, Unni. 1996. *Tomorrow, God Willing: Self-made Destinies in Cairo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

References-chapter 9

Brenner, Suzanne. 2005. "Islam and Gender Politics in Late New Order Indonesia, in Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George, eds. *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications.

1998. *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

1996. Reconstructing self and society: Javanese Muslim women and 'the Veil.' *American Ethnologist* 23(4).

Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Foley, Rebecca. 2004. Muslim Women's Challenges to Islamic Law: The Case of Malaysia. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6(1), 53-84.

Hahn, Thich Nhat. 1993. *'Interbeing': Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Hoodfar, Homa. 1997. *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. Los Angeles: University of California Press

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Markham, Ian & Ozdemir, Ibrahim (Eds). 2005. *Globalization and Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Ashgate Publishing.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1981. *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*. University of Chicago Press.

Rinaldo, Rachel. 2008. Pious Islam and women's activism in Indonesia. Women and International Development Working Paper, East Lansing, MI: Center for Gender in Global Context, Michigan State University.

2006. "Veiled Feminism: Islamic Religious Piety and the Women's Movement in Indonesia." Paper given at the American Sociological Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada, August 12, 2006.

Vanier, Jean & Hauerwas, Stanley. 2008. *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness (Resources for Reconciliation)*. Intervarsity Press