INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Public Sphere
and the Subject of Gender:
The Politics of the Personal

One of the most visible public faces of the 2011 revolution in Egypt was Asmaʾ Mahfouz, a young woman who posted a video blog on Facebook calling for the January 25 protest in Tahrir Square "so that maybe we the country can become free, can become a country with justice, a country with dignity, a country in which a human can be truly human, not living like an animal."[1] She describes a stark imbalance of power: a lone girl standing against the security apparatus of the state. When she initially went out to demonstrate, only three other people came to join her. They were met with vans full of security forces, "tens of thugs" (balṭagiyyīn) that menaced the small band of protesters. Talking about her fear (ruʿb), she epitomizes the voice of righteous indignation against the Goliath of an abusive military regime. "I am a girl," she says, "and I went down." The skinny, small, pale girl bundled up in her winter scarf and sweater speaks clearly and forcefully, despite a slight speech impediment, rallying a political community to action against tyrannical rule. Mahfouz's vlog is not necessarily famous for actually sparking the revolution, as some have claimed in the revolution's aftermath. Rather, she visually embodies and vocally advocates what the Islamic activist Heba Raouf Ezzat calls "soft force," al-quwwa al-nāʿima. Raouf Ezzat uses the term to refer to nonviolent protest, or what she calls "women's jihad," wielded against "tyrannical government."[2] Connoting a kind of feminized smoothness, goodness, and grace, niʿma

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[1] *Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the Vlog That Helped Spark the Revolution*, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

[2] Heba Raouf Ezzat, *al-Marʾa wa-l-ʿAmal al-Siyasi: Ruʾya Islamiyya* (Herndon, VA: Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995), 156–57; Heba Raouf Ezzat, "al-Quwwa al-Naʿima" (Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, October 13, 2011), http://studies.aljazeera.net/files/2011/08/20118872345213170.htm. Raouf Ezzat reinterprets Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power " but in a feminized sense and for an Islamic context. See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

is wielded as a weapon against what political scientist Paul Amar calls the "thug state."[3] Resonating with connotations of righteousness, it is a keyword used for imagining and creating a just society rooted in the grace of the right path.

"Soft force" is the gradual institutional change—and the war of ideas—that has been one of Islamic organizations' most powerful tools in Egypt. The concept of soft force found its way into the controversial 2012 constitution, authored by the Islamist government of Muhammad Morsi. The constitution's eleventh and final principle stated:

> Egypt's pioneering intellectual and cultural leadership embodies her soft force (*quwāhā al-nāʿima*), exemplified in the gift of freedom of her intellectuals and creators, her universities, her linguistic and scientific organizations, her research centers, her press, her arts, her letters, and her media, her national church, and her noble Azhar that was throughout its history a foundation of the identity of the nation, protecting the eternal Arabic language and the Islamic shariʿa, as a beacon (*manāra*) of enlightened, moderate thought.[4]

This book is about the soft force of Islamic cultural production in the decades leading up to the 2011 revolution in Egypt. It is about the passive revolution of Islamic popular culture, mass media, and public scholarship, a war of position developed within the structures of a semiauthoritarian, neoliberal state.[5] It is about the role women play in articulating that revolution, in their writings, activism, and discursive transformation of Egypt's social, cultural, and political institutions. It is intended as an antidote to dominant representations of women as oppressed by Islamic politics, movements, and groups. *Soft Force* details women's contribution to the emergence of an Islamic public sphere—one that has trenchantly critiqued successive dictatorships in Egypt, partly through a liberal ideology of rights, democracy, freedom, equality, and family values. Women's Islamic cultural production—their lectures, pamphlets, theses, books, magazines, newspapers, television

[3] Paul Amar, "Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 3 (2011): 299–328; Paul Amar, *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 210–13.

[4] Jumhuriyyat Misr, "al-Dustur," December 26, 2012.

[5] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 289–300, 481–95; Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 132–38, 194–95.

shows, films, and Internet postings—has been a critical instrument of this soft revolution.

The Islamic family, a bastion of Islamic law and a site for the cultivation of Islamic subjectivities, has been a central axis of public discussions of an Islamic politics. The private sphere of intimate relations has been the site of a particularly intense process of creative self-fashioning, a place for cultivating the techniques of self so critical to Muslim piety in the age of the Islamic awakening.[6] In Islamist intellectual and cultural production, women are interpreted as having a privileged role in overseeing the transmission and reproduction of these techniques of self. They do this partly through the biological reproduction of the Islamic *umma* (the Islamic community) but also through its ideological reproduction. They not only participate in the inculcation of new Islamic citizen subjects through the labor of childrearing but also discursively construct new gendered subjects through their cultural production. The revivalist preacher and writer Niʿmat Sidqi describes this as the different dimensions of jihad, talking about jihad of the tongue, of the pen, of education, and even of childrearing.[7] She interprets the classical Islamic concept of jihad in novel ways, reorienting the struggle for an Islamic society in femininized spheres of influence, concepts that would be taken up by later Islamic thinkers like Heba Raouf Ezzat.

A women's jihad of childrearing assumes an essentialized femininity of biological motherhood, an essence that revivalist writers see as the *jawhar* (core, interior, gem, jewel) of a resplendent, luminous material world harmonized to the divine order. This jawhar, or essence, is also the core of a resplendent, luminous self—one that is enlightened, awakened, and revived by the divine word.[8] It is priceless and must be protected and safeguarded but also polished and hewn to shine. Jawhar is a kind of spiritual interior cultivated through proper Islamic practice but also refers, in an almost erotic way, to the female body's material beauty. The spiritual jawhar described in some of these writings suggests Qurʾanic images of paradise (55:22, 56–58), the rubies and coral that the Qurʾan likens to the chaste women that inhabit the garden, untouched by any man (55:56–58). Revivalist writers understand this feminine essence as a source of an instinct for the divine, constructing images that connect women's softness to God's grace (*niʿma*). They talk about *fiṭrat Allah*, the instinct that God implanted in the human breast, guiding human beings to peace, affection, and mercy (30:21, 30). In

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[6] Nikolas S. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43, 74.

[7] Niʿmat Sidqi, *al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah* (Cairo: Dar al-Iʿtisam, 1975).

[8] Samah Hasan Maraʿi, *Yaqazat al-ʿIffa: Rihlati min al-Sufur ila al-Hijab* (Beirut: Dar al-ʿUlum li-l-Tahqiq wa-l-Tibaʿa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawziʿ, 2004), 9, 15.

contrast to the stain of Christianity's original sin, *fiṭrat Allah* suggests an essential goodness in the material world of the female body, a feminine grace that smooths the path for the social, biological, and ideological reproduction of the Islamic community, the umma.

Women's Words: An Islamic Body of Texts

Through the life and work of a series of prolific public intellectuals, *Soft Force* chronicles women's role in the awakening of Islamic sentiments, sensibilities, and senses in Egypt. The authors are professors (Bint al-Shatiʾ) and preachers (Niʿmat Sidqi), journalists (Iman Mustafa) and theater critics (Safinaz Kazim), polemicists (Muhammad ʿImara, Muhammad Jalal Kishk) and activists (Heba Raouf Ezzat, Zaynab al-Ghazali), Azharis (ʿAbd al-Wahid Wafi) and muftis (ʿAtiyya Saqr), actresses (Shams al-Barudi) and television personalities (Kariman Hamza), wives and mothers. Their diverse nature—hailing from different disciplines, social milieus, and institutions; writing in different genres and styles; publishing in different outlets—speaks to the multifarious nature of the revival. Rather than a single movement, the *ṣaḥwa* (awakening) is a broad set of processes that has contributed to the revival of religious commitments and the circulation of religious materials articulating those commitments. I draw on a variety of forms: fatwas, sermons, lectures, theses, biographies, political essays, newspaper articles, scholarly essays, and exegeses of the Qurʾan, as well as websites, Facebook postings, Tweets, and YouTube videos. The echoing of a set of similar themes—about family, gendered identities, and women's rights and responsibilities in an Islamic society—suggests the consolidation of a hegemonic position around these issues in Islamic thought. Echoes of similar understandings of women's rights, roles, duties, and relationship to the family can be found across the umma.[9] It is through this shared world of Islamic letters that the revival has been able to imagine itself as an integral whole, cultivating gendered subjectivities understood to underpin both an Islamic cosmology and an Islamic praxis. Moreover, it is a vision of Islamic womanhood that has proliferated throughout the Islamic umma, as ideas about women's roles and women's work, women's knowledge, and women's bodies

[9] See Hibba Abugideiri, "On Gender and the Family," in *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Jeanette S. Jouili and Schirin Amir-Moazami, "Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 4 (2006): 617–42; Zakia Salime, *Between Feminism and Islam: Human Rights and Sharia Law in Morocco* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

have been disseminated and reproduced, first through print media and Islamic presses and later through the digital circulation of images and words.

Soft Force chronicles the exponential rise in Islamic writings on women and gender that accompanied—and catalyzed—the revival in Egypt over the final decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century. The reproduction and translation of these ideas in writings, blogs, and social media pages in Indonesia, France, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and postrevolutionary Iran attest to their far-reaching impact. Some of their main concepts have proliferated throughout the umma, influencing the very terms in which women's roles in contemporary society are conceptualized. Along with the revival of classical concepts like jihad, writers connected to a global Islamic awakening reinterpret and recycle older terms toward a new hermeneutics of the Qurʾan for modern Islamic society. These include key words like *tabarruj* (a kind of sensual adornment interpreted as sexual display from Qurʾan 33:59), *sakan* (peace, abode) and *mawadda* (affection, love, both from 30:21), and *fiṭra* (instinct, human nature from 30:30). Revivalist writers describe themselves as waging jihad in the family, in the home, in childbearing and childrearing, in their selves and souls, on their bodies, and in the body politic. They identify the conjugal family, gendered rights and duties, and women's bodies and sexuality as key pillars of Islam, equivalent to its five ritual practices, as the heart and soul of Islamic law, and as sacred domains for the cultivation of Islamic piety. This jihad is executed within the "social units of the Islamic umma," in Islamic organizations and groups, in communities, in the family, and in the home.[10] Reorienting Islamic politics in women's spheres of influence, these writers put gender justice in the family on par with ritual worship in Islam, make this justice the heart and soul of Islamic law, and understand the family as a sacred domain for cultivating Islamic piety. They describe biopower[11] from the ground up: grassroots forces harnessed against the oppressive weight of dominant political forces like secularism, militarism, authoritarianism, neoliberalism, and colonialism. Women are the crux of this biopower, as its very levers, mechanisms, and controls. Wielding this power, they contest the governmentality of the state through an Islamic politics of

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[10] Raouf Ezzat, *al-Marʾa wa-l-ʿAmal al-Siyasi*, 161.

[11] This Islamic biopolitics became a "set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, a general strategy of power," one that contested the biopolitics of the secular state. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 140; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), 1.

self-cultivation at the level of the body, soul, family, and community. Islamic *adab* (discipline) becomes a mechanism for challenging state control over the bodies of the population.

Can these writers be considered as constituting a movement? They are surprisingly disconnected from one another. Despite reiterating a consistent set of themes and motifs, they rarely cite, acknowledge, or refer to one another, though they are clearly influenced by concepts, terms, and interpretations that circulate among them. Instead they copiously draw on other, male authorities, who write introductions to their works and whom they invoke for the purposes of legitimization, cite in footnotes, and pay tribute to in the course of their writings.[12] These women writers reject female solidarity, making clear that their discursive framework is Islamic, not feminist. Though there are clearly historical, stylistic, and generic parallels among their writings, they consistently assert that they are connected through Islam, not gender. They are connected by the rise in Islamic ethos and sensibility characterizing the Islamic revival in Egypt.[13] Moreover, they are connected through an Islamic public sphere emerging through the boom in the production, circulation, and consumption of religious writings and materials. These writers might be considered Islamic feminists, though they do not use this assignation themselves and often explicitly reject it.[14] They develop less a feminist theology for Islam than a gendered one, recentering Islamic knowledge around spheres of experience coded as feminine.

The writers are also connected by class. For the most part, they constitute an intellectual elite: Islamic professionals who romanticize the family; upper-middle-class citizens demanding their rights to self-government. They live comfortable lives of social status and are, for the most part, invested in concepts of private property and the family as an economic unit. (Kariman Hamza is described wearing fur; Niʿmat Sidqi had houses in Garden City, Alexandria, and Zamalek and is from a family of pashas, Bint al-Shatiʾ and Heba Raouf Ezzat have PhD degrees

[12] Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Medicines of the Soul: Female Bodies and Sacred Geographies in a Transnational Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 16–22, 86, 112, 173.

[13] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

[14] See Safinaz Kazim, "al-Fiminizm: Harakat al-Ghetto al-Nisaʾi." *al-Muqattam* (24 June, 1994), 45; Shahrzad Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism,'" *Feminist Review* no. 69 (2001): 124–46; Valentine M. Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, no. 4 (2002): 1135–71; Margot Badran, "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?" *al-Ahram Weekly Online*, January 17, 2002; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Beyond 'Islam' vs 'Feminism,'" *IDS Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (2011): 67–77.

and university positions; Iman Mustafa and Safinaz Kazim are journalists and cultural critics; Shams al-Barudi emphasizes that she is from a "good family" and did not work out of need.) Their preoccupation with the good economic, disciplinary, and pedagogical management of the family reflects their bourgeois concerns with the home as a "purified, cleansed, moralized, domestic space" for the "moral training" of children. In this way their visions of the Islamic family have played "a key role in strategies for government through freedom," with women as experts in cultivating Islamic techniques of self.[15]

Even though "political Islam" critiques the political marginalization of religion to social life and to the sphere of private relations, these writers demonstrate an extraordinary investment in religiosity expressed through the family, reproduction, childrearing, and private sexuality.[16] The family and its gendered division of labor have become a crux of public definitions of Islamic practice—the site of the practice and embodiment of religiosity. The politics of the personal, these writers assert, is where the heart, soul, and body of the Islamic citizen have their most primary formation and articulation. Women play leading roles in the inculcation of modern Islamic subjects and selves; they are lynchpins in the cultivation of an Islamic society, especially in their roles as mothers. These writings convey a sense of the family and its intimate relations as the sphere of feminine affect, emotion that becomes closely connected to faith as an interior experience, mediated through the body and the senses. Revivalist authors ground their descriptions of faith in the affective plane of the self and the sensory realm of the body. They describe healing the split between outer appearance and inner self, conduct and conviction, public politics and private spirituality. They are preoccupied with the moral construction of the self at the level of emotions, senses, and instincts, how these shape the structure of the family, and their centrality to the social and political practice of Islam.

The family becomes the nodal point through which the adab—the ethics and the literature—of the Islamic community is inhabited and expressed. This is what ethnographers of revivalist movements have referred to as "political motherhood," where family life and the domestic sphere constitute a private space with public or political importance.[17] Women use knowledge to transform definitions of religious

[15] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 43, 74.
[16] Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 112–13, 163–65.
[17] Pnina Werbner, "Political Motherhood and the Feminisation of Citizenship," in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Nira Yuval Davis (London: Zed Books, 1999).

authority, emphasizing the political and social importance of women's authority over home and family. In public discourse, the private sphere is envisaged as "a space that should be the basis for the creation of a collective subject, based on Islamic virtues."[18] The home has been the site for the cultivation of imagined communities, a central axis along which human identity is newly defined and affirmed in public space. "This critical exchange" around new human identities "itself came to constitute a public sphere."[19]

Overlapping literary, legal, economic, political, and religious discourses on the nature of intimate relations structured the emergence of an Islamic public sphere in Egypt. Only recently have Western theorists shifted their attention to the central role of religion in constructing public spheres, a subject that has been a central concern in recent anthropological and sociological scholarship of the Middle East.[20] Not only has religion been crucial to the emergence of modern secular public spheres, but Islam has been a central point of reference for the politics of both the colonial and postcolonial nation-state. These modern public spheres tend to engage Islam as a religion (and as a form of politics) through its private practices—focusing on women, their bodies, sexuality, and family life. This has been as true for early colonial and missionary (and orientalist) discourses as it has been for contemporary France and for the United States, and for imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite compelling research theorizing the emergence of an "Islamic public sphere,"[21] little scholarship has looked at its gendered nature in depth, even though debates over women's rights, roles, and responsibilities have been a cornerstone of revivalist writings on religion.[22] Though women writers actively contribute to public discourse and participate in the public sphere, they conceive of women's

[18] Jouili and Amir-Moazami, "Knowlege, Empowerment, and Religious Authority," 623.

[19] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 105–6.

[20] Michael Warner, "'An Evangelical Public Sphere' (lecture)" (presented at the Critical Speaker Series, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, September 23, 2011); Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[21] Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, eds., *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman, "Muslim Publics," in *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine, eds., *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Charles Hirschkind and Brian Larkin, "Media and the Political Forms of Religion," *Social Text* 26, no. 3 (2008): 1–15.

[22] Notable exceptions include Fariba Adelkhah, "Framing the Public Sphere: Iranian Women in the Islamic Republic," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Dale

place as principally within the domain of intimate relations—in the family, the conjugal couple, a gendered division of labor, and private sexualities.[23] Many of these writers conceptualize these roles through the trope of a liberation situated within the family, achieved through the processes of childbearing, motherhood, and childrearing.[24] Their writings identify affect, family, and gendered roles as the site for the cultivation of religion.[25] Motherwork and homespace become ways of nurturing Islamic community outside the reach of the secular state, military intervention, and foreign ideologies, even though these practices are clearly conditioned by the politics of domination within which they are proscribed and against which they mobilize.[26] This seeming paradox in contemporary Islamic thought—of liberation in the family and home—is at the heart of this project. It is a politics of the private sphere, a private piety cultivated in the public eye, women's inner life

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Eickelman and Armando Salvatore (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 227–41; Haifaa Jawad, "Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation," *Hawwa* 7, no. 1 (2009): 1–24.

[23] Margot Badran, "Competing Agendas: Feminists, Islam, and the State in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Egypt," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 219; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Case of the Feminist Movement," in *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982); Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Religious Ideology, Women, and the Family: The Islamic Paradigm," in *The Islamic Impulse* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987).

[24] Haddad, "Case of the Feminist Movement," 56; Mervat Hatem, "Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity in Egypt and the Evolution of the Postcolonial Nation-State," in *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 92–94. Hatem describes how Islamic activists (both women and men) "presented a romantic ideal of domesticity" embedded in the "familiar language of individual liberties and rights." This represents "a convergence between Islamic and modern discussions of the sexual division of labor that assigned women to the private (family) sphere and men to the public sphere."

[25] Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 243; Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own: Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women's Islamic Movements* (New York: NYU Press, 2011); Mervat Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?" *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (1994): 661–76; Hatem, "Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity."

[26] Two black feminists use the terms motherwork and homespace to refer to the family as a place of refuge from white racial oppression and a place for inculcating politically conscious subjectivities and collectivities. Patricia Hill Collins, "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminism Theorizing about Motherhood," in *Motherhood: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie Forcey (New York: Routledge, 1994); bell hooks, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990).

at the crux of public debate, a family where an Islamic biopower is both performed and transformed.

Controlling the visibility or the visuality of the intimate sphere has been critical to public debates about its Islamic nature. Despite prevalent representations of Muslim women as invisible, relegated to the domestic sphere, and condemned to a life of biological reproduction, proliferating discourses about women's rights and roles only highlight their centrality to national politics. These discourses revolve explicitly around women's actual visibility, what they reveal and conceal, what they veil and unveil, their presences and absences in public life. The outward sign of the veil has been critical to cultivating inner, pious selves, where the female body takes on a certain sacred inviolability. Moreover, veiling has been critical to public performances of an Islamic self—whether in print media, on television, or in the film industry. In fact, veiling narratives and veiled women have been key players in the emergence of an Islamic public sphere. This is perhaps as true in Egypt as it has been in France and Turkey, where veiling has been legally banned, and in Iran, where the veil is officially prescribed. The hijab has been a screen on which women have projected pious selves, writing new life stories through a classical signifier of Islamic faith. Proliferating veiling narratives dramatize new roles for women, cultivate an inner spirituality bounded by the hijab, but also facilitate movement between private and public spheres.

Revivalist writings on gender have not been translated; they are poorly understood; and their ideas have been flagrantly misrepresented or not represented at all, especially in European and American public discourse. Substantive scholarship has chronicled women's roles in mobilizing public piety and the performance of gendered identities within the movement. Much of this research has concentrated on the bodily cultivation associated with veiling, women's visible activism, and their intellectual production.[27] Writings on the proper practice of women's Islamic roles have been central to the movement. Yet there has been little deep or systematic analysis of this corpus of texts in general, or of how these writings help produce gendered subjectivities associated with the rise in Islamic sensibilities, even though scholars

[27] Fadwa El Guindi, "Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement," *Social Problems* 28, no. 4 (April 1, 1981): 465–85; Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 1 (1987): 23–50; Hatem, "Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity"; Abu-Lughod, "Marriage of Feminism and Islamism"; Mervat Hatem, "Gender and Islamism in the 1990s," *Middle East Report* no. 222 (2002): 44–47; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Badran, *Feminism in Islam*; Hafez, *Islam of Her Own*.

have stressed their importance.[28] I use literary analyses to do justice to these writers' intellectual contributions, the sources of their wide popular appeal, and their texts' fertile content and aesthetic impact. I detail not only *what* these writers say but *how* they say it (through style, genre, medium), and the texts and contexts with which they are in dialogue. I showcase the writers and their writings, situate them in the sociopolitical contexts that helped produce them (and that they helped produce), and use theoretical literature on the revival to interpret their influence on contemporary Egyptian politics. I closely chronicle their oeuvres, interlocutors, arguments, publishing houses, and fields, and the political context in which their writings were formulated. Through a holistic look at each author's body of writings, I detail the progression of their ideas, the evolution of their private and public personas, the political and social issues that they address, and how they position themselves as Islamic thinkers in the intellectual reformism associated with the revival. Through a thick description of the lives and writings of some of the most important Islamic intellectuals associated with the ṣaḥwa (awakening), I trace the tangled roots of their intellectual lineages and chart the political, economic, and legal contestations that their writings address and aim to influence. The Iranian scholar Ziba Mir-Hosseini calls for precisely such an approach, for a close examination of "the personal and sociopolitical trajectories of so-called Islamic feminists, in their own specific contexts."[29]

Drawing on processes initiated earlier in the twentieth century, these writers deploy new genres, disciplines, and stylistic approaches toward the production of Islamic knowledge. *Soft Force* focuses on how the language, texts, and concepts of the Islamic discursive tradition are reinterpreted and reconfigured through new, modernist hermeneutics. The writers use Arabo-Islamic disciplines, lexicons, literatures, and ethical systems to reinterpret not only ideas of rights and freedom but also the key position of women in a modern Islamic political community—a community that has for so long been strangulated by different forms of authoritarian secularism (or secular authoritarianism). Though formulated within the modernist project of secular liberalism (and in dialogue with it), these Islamic discourses challenge its key biases—about its grounding in Western political and cultural forms, its relationship

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[28] Hoffman-Ladd's article "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women" pioneered this field. Malti-Douglas's impressive *Medicines of the Soul* focuses on Islamist women's autobiographical production. Her incisive literary analyses inspired this book, even though I focus more specifically on the texts' relationship to Egyptian politics and their broader impact on popular Islamic discourse across the umma.

[29] Mir-Hosseini, "Beyond 'Islam' vs 'Feminism.'"

to religion and to the church in particular, and the political power of the private sphere.

The Islamic writings examined here envision the Islamic family—with mothers at the helm—as wielding biopower that shapes governmentality on a larger scale, as the root source of political community, and as an informal economy that stands over the most precious resources of the umma, its reproductive capacity. Rather than a sentence to subservience, women's submission to God becomes the chain that makes them free, a renunciation of sovereignty that is—however paradoxically—"the condition of democratic politics."[30] The writers see the family as the site for the construction of a common (Islamic) world, the realization of an Islamic ethics (its adab), and the practice of social justice on a microcosmic level. As Walaʾ ʿAbd al-Halim of Bayt al-ʿAʾila (Family House) said, "This is part of the reformist methodology of the Muslim Brotherhood. Shaping a righteous individual leads to shaping a righteous family, and by shaping a righteous family, you get a righteous society that can choose a righteous leader."[31] Family becomes the very basis (cell or unit) of political community—and its ethics of duty, self-sacrifice, care, and compassion, the basis for an ethical politics. Local networks of home and family foster an Islamic community outside the reach of the secular state, even though these realms are clearly conditioned by the politics of domination within which they are proscribed and against which they mobilize. A space for the cultivation of religious freedom became key for the practice of a modern Islamic politics at a grassroots level, through the inculcation of Islamic sensibilities and an Islamic ethics. These thinkers interpret "*family* or *personal life* as *natural to woman* and in some formulations *divinely ordained*; it is a domain governed by needs and affective ties, hence a domain of *collectivity*; and the hierarchy within it also constitutes the domain of 'real political life' for feminists."[32]

I focus on towering public figures, prominent contributors to debates over the nature of intimate relations, the people whose ideas and works have been widely circulated, disseminated, and reiterated in public discourse. I examine the ripple effect of their ideas, how their contributions influence new generations of writers and writings, as certain concepts "go viral" through the mechanical reproduction of the

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[30] Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 16, 19.

[31] Mona El-Naggar, "Family Life According to the Brotherhood," *New York Times*, September 4, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/05/world/middleeast/05iht-letter05.html.

[32] Wendy Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values," in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 147.

digital age. Each chapter is organized around a seminal figure or set of related figures, proceeding roughly chronologically through a thematic history of the ṣaḥwa in Egypt. I trace each writer's individual trajectory but also explore how their personal experiences transect with the larger discursive narratives of their age. They engage the overarching historical debates of their time, weaving them into their narratives, arguments, and worldviews. Moreover, their personal relationships are often closely interconnected with their intellectual sparring partners and with their spiritual guides. Sometimes the tangled narratives of personal lives overlap with the public dialogues in which these figures engage. Their ideas merge, converge, and conflict in both private and public, sometimes dictating their geographical and intellectual trajectories. The connective tissue of interconnected lives provides the very fabric of this revivalist Islam, through relationships with spouses, potential lovers, fathers, sisters, friends, colleagues, teachers, and mentors.

The book proceeds through a set of interlocking thematic debates about the continuing relevance of the early community and the Qurʾan for the modern world of letters and modern society (chapter 1); the nature of Islamic law and personal status laws (chapter 2); motherhood and childbearing (chapter 3); veiling and cultivating the self (chapter 4); women's labor in the face of developmentalist narratives, neoliberal expansion, free market reform, and structural adjustment (chapter 5); and the family as the political unit of the umma (chapter 6). The three parts show how an Islamic politics, a theology of emancipation from the grip of secular authoritarianism (part 1), helped foster new kinds of Islamic selves and identities (part 2), as well as new "cells" of modern society like a nuclear family (part 3). I analyze the cultural production of the revival with a cultural studies approach. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship of the revival, I use sociology, political science, women's studies, religion, and history to interpret how popular writings on gender function as powerful tools of social and political mobilization.

Soft Force focuses mainly on the awakening of the final decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century. But I also examine how these revivalist debates originated in the earlier, nineteenth-century awakening known as the *nahḍa*. Nahḍa ideas, books, and texts have been resuscitated for the late twentieth-century revival known as the ṣaḥwa. Through a process of publication and republication, new redactions, collections, and editions, newer works recycle the Islamic intellectual tradition for new political contexts and for ever wider popular audiences. The word *nahḍa* is often translated as the Arab "renaissance," but the word's true meaning is "awakening"

or "arising," with both political and spiritual connotations.[33] The more formal word *yaqaẓa*, which also connotes "awakening," has been used in literary texts but eventually gave way to the more colloquial ṣaḥwa.[34] The word *baʿth* (uprising or rebirth) was connected with the more secular era of Arab nationalism and its political parties in Syria and Iraq (especially with its pan-Arab connotations of Christian resurrection). Ṣaḥwa eventually won out for the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century revival, even though this ṣaḥwa has continued to connect itself to the earlier nahḍa as both a movement and a concept. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world, the use of nahḍa intensified, coming to refer to political parties, platforms, organizations, and movements for the postrevolutionary era. Nahḍa is often coupled with the concept of a dawn (*fajr*), suggesting a new era but also carrying connotations of "enlightenment." Enlightenment (*tanwīr*) has been a related concept widely circulated in revivalist texts, a light (*nūr*) of Islam that is part of a new Islamic vision (*ruʾya*) and a new Islamic weltanschauung (*taṣwīr*), conveyed through new modes of representation and new kinds of imagery. This taṣwīr connotes a new way of seeing and looking at the world, an Islamic worldview enlightened, awakened, and revived by the word of God, the Qurʾan, *al-bayān*.

Islamic Adab: The Context of the Texts

Soft Force engages in a qualitative analysis of new forms of cultural production so critical to producing an Islamic communal identity and to conceptualizing new kinds of Islamic selves, subjectivities, and sensibilities. Vivid dramatizations of the politics of the personal have been critical to imagining "new definitions of human identity."[35] *Soft Force* explores the political implications of this "signifying action"[36] and also how religion is constituted through these processes of representation, how it is lived, embodied, and experienced. Precisely because of the marginalization of Islamic groups from state power, they have

[33] The translation of the word as "renaissance" misleads with its Christian overtones of rebirth, glossing the ritualistic, Islamic connotations of awakening.

[34] Muhammad ʿImara, *Tayyarat al-Yaqaza al-Islamiyya al-Haditha* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1982) and *al-Tariq ila al-Yaqaza al-Islamiyya*, (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1990).

[35] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 106.

[36] Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 120. Wickham describes *daʿwa* as promoting "a new ethic of civic obligation that mandated participation in the public sphere . . . movement organizers act partly as 'signifying agents,' articulating and transmitting ideas that can serve as the basis for action."

been able to effect long-lasting grassroots mobilization at the level of civil society, local networks, associations, community groups, and Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).[37] Cultural production, or "print Islam," has been critical to articulating this "parallel Islamic sector"—popular pamphlets, tracts, books, journals, and newspapers that later extended to audiocassettes, cable channels, Internet sites, social media, and YouTube videos. "Islamic ideological outreach was typically a personal, even intimate process . . . relationships reinforced by the wide range of Islamic books, pamphlets, and cassette tapes produced in the parallel Islamic sector," writes Carrie Wickham in *Mobilizing Islam*. She argues that

> the dissemination of Islamist *da'wa* through print and audio technologies at the microlevel was intricately related to institutional developments at the macrolevel. Beginning in the mid-1970s and accelerating in the 1980s, independent Islamic publishing houses and bookstores launched new forms of cultural production and created channels through which their output could be distributed to a mass market. . . . If such technologies have assisted in the formation of broad national or communal identities, they have served equally well to disseminate more specific ideological frames, including, in this case, a new, activist conception of Muslim faith and observance.[38]

Soft Force examines how an Islamic public sphere developed within the specific national context of Egypt and charts its far-reaching significance for transnational politics. Scholarly, polemical, digital, and visual production in Egypt helped disseminate Islamic ideas across national boundaries, first through print media and more recently through new technologies, where they proliferate in new contexts. Certain keywords and concepts have taken root in new soils, in places as diverse as postcolonial France, postrevolution Iran, Indonesia, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, a process chronicled in this book. The Islamic public sphere developed in response to the local politics of Egypt but became closely tied to Islam's central importance to different public spheres across the globe. A close look at the mechanisms of Islamic cultural production in the specific case of Egypt helps demonstrate how it affected both national and transnational politics.

In Egypt the shift to a neoliberal economy in the mid-1970s helped contribute to the emergence of the revival during this same period.

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[37] Ibid.; Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*.
[38] Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, 135.

Economic liberalization was accompanied by political liberalization mandated by international governing bodies like the International Monetary Fund and USAID. When Anwar Sadat took power in 1970, he reversed his predecessor Gamal ʿAbd al-Nasser's oppressive policies toward Islamic groups, freeing Islamic political prisoners, allowing Islamic presses to resume publication, loosening restrictions on Islamic cultural production, and permitting Islamic organizations and groups to thrive. Sadat's campaign of partial political liberalization famously aimed at using the Islamists to counter the weight of the leftists, helping to contribute to a surge of Islamic textual production that accompanied and precipitated the Islamic Awakening.[39] Though Islamic groups were still marginalized from direct participation in state politics, the space that they were allowed to inhabit—in an increasingly Islamic public sphere, an Islamic civil society, informal networks, and the family and community—gave the Islamic movement powerful means to mobilize the populace, as it came to inhabit institutions that the state was unable to fully manipulate toward its own ends.[40]

Islamic politics has had a contentious relationship with the political core or center of the Egyptian state. The state's approach has ranged from cooptation (of religious institutions) and outright persecution under Nasser to accommodation under Sadat's and Mubarak's policies of partial (economic and political) liberalization.[41] The state's contra-

[39] Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, *Les gens du livre: édition et champ intellectuel dans l'Égypte républicaine* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1998); Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, 134–47; Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 1; Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine, eds., *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 15; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 3; Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 33. Mahmood defines the Islamic Revival as a "term that refers not only to the activities of state-oriented political groups but more broadly to a religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies. This sensibility has a palpable public presence in Egypt, manifest in the vast proliferation of neighborhood mosques and other institutions of Islamic learning and social welfare[,] . . . a brisk consumption and production of religious media and literature, and a growing circle of intellectuals who write and comment upon contemporary affairs in the popular press from a self-described Islamic point of view."

[40] Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Singerman describes the power of popular forms of mobilization among "informal networks" in Egypt, a power the Islamic movement has cultivated toward its own ends.

[41] Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 107. Nasser dismantled the shariʿa courts while integrating personal status law into the new national courts. At the same time, he nationalized the Islamic university al-Azhar, putting it under the control of the state, the "centripetal consolidation" referred to by Hirschkind in *Ethical Soundscape* (55).

dictory—or, one might say, paradoxical—approach to Islamic law has mediated its relationship with Islamic groups and institutions. Successive constitutions have slipped between defining shariʿa as *a* source of legislation (in 1971) to shariʿa as *the* source of legislation (in a 1981 amendment). The relegation of shariʿa to the laws of personal status has created a seeming paradox of "'the family' as both a private space and one that was central to the political order." The confinement of shariʿa "to domestic matters politicized the family both as a sphere of intimate, affective relations and as a repository of group identity of which religious affiliation was a defining legal and moral characteristic."[42] The relationship between secular and religious law, foreign and indigenous systems of government, and social and sexual contracts, along with the question of religious liberties and religious politics, have been constantly negotiated through public contestations over the personal status laws in Egypt and elsewhere in the Muslim world.[43] The official domain of shariʿa in Egyptian state law, these laws mainly concern the intimate sphere of gendered relations, family, and marriage (even though the *waqf*, or "religious endowments," and the economic and political autonomy of religious property are also governed by these laws). Through these laws, a tight historical bond has been forged among the family, gendered relationships, Islamic law, and religious politics, authority, and governance. Moreover, it has been closely connected to an economy of Islamic property that lies in the informal networks of private life.

The identification of family matters (and religious property) with religious law appears as a secular understanding of religious law's proper jurisdiction in the private sphere. These laws have the effect of creating the family as the sphere of religion, in which religion is both concentrated and confined. In *Formations of the Secular*, Talal Asad calls the personal status laws the expression of a "secular formula for 'privatizing' religion." Family is defined as an autonomous sphere of freedom seemingly outside the domain of the state, even while circumscribed and codified by state (religious) law. "The family becomes the unit of 'society' in which the individual is physically and morally reproduced and has his or her primary formation as a 'private' [or one might say 'religious'] being."[44] Asad views the reproduction of the private individual in terms of "citizen's rights," where the individual is understood

[42] Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 104.

[43] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 205–56; Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 145–46; Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 101–20.

[44] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 227.

as self-governing, self-regulating, and autonomous "as befits the citizen of a secular, liberal society."[45] It becomes a means of creating (an illusion of) the private domain of the family as an "extrapolitical" space of freedom outside of government rule—a space key not just to the free practice of religion but also to the critique of arbitrary government.[46] Because the seeming apolitical nature of the private has been so central to secularism's mythology of itself, Islamic thinkers have been able to capitalize on this assumption to build a safe space for the articulation of Islamic politics outside the reach of the secular state. The freedom of this sphere has been critical to the articulation of an Islamic public sphere predicated on both the free practice of religion and freedom of (religious) expression. Through this "freedom of public exchange," Asad says, "debates about Islamic reasoning and national progress, as well as about individual autonomy, could now take place publicly."[47] These "intellectual technologies" so key to governing have mediated the relationship between the law and the family, government and religion, public and private.[48] Asad understands this freedom as the condition of a secular modernity, but it is also the condition of a modern Islamic liberalism ("a national nonsecular modernity") that has challenged the very legitimacy of the secular state, even while operating within and against this secularism.[49] Islamic thinkers developed a critique not only of the state's illiberal authoritarianism but of secularism's inherent illiberality. Secular liberalism is not just hypocritical and tyrannical, they assert, but unenlightened and backward.

The identification of the family, and Islamic law, as sacrosanct domains outside of state control was a key maneuver performed within Islamic intellectual production. This is what the Islamic thinker Heba Raouf Ezzat terms a "politics of informality" mobilized through the "power of public spheres in Egypt."[50] Intellectuals like Raouf Ezzat play on—and subvert—secularism's core assumptions about the separation of church and state and of private and public, using these assumptions to define family relations as Islamic territory. Revivalist writings em-

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[45] Ibid., 226.

[46] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 72–74; Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*.

[47] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 236.

[48] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 27.

[49] Omnia El Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 128; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 11–14.

[50] Heba Raouf Ezzat, "Politics of Informality: On the Power of the Public Spheres of Egypt," Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, February 15, 2012.

phasize the crucial importance of the family's intimate relations to the cultivation of Islamic sensibilities, Islamic selves, Islamic subjectivities, and gendered Islamic bodies. They root this process in the classical tradition of adab, where the cultivation of bodily sensibilities, habits, and disciplines is critical to constructing an ethical Islamic self. Adab is a kind of pedagogy that cultivates virtue. Ebrahim Moosa defines it as "both the education itself and the internalization of norms in order to ingrain into the psyche a certain virtue (*faḍīla*). . . . *Adab* is that learning acquired for the sake of right living, a knowledge that goes beyond knowing. It is the disposition that enables one to experience the effects of knowledge and be transformed by its animation in the self."[51] Adab also means "literature," the actual body of texts, the *belles lettres* that discursively outline the parameters of the ethical self. New kinds of Islamic adab have helped cultivate an Islamic sensibility for the modern age, a sensibility that entails certain liberal understandings of gendered rights and duties. This literature has been critical as well to outlining the role of love, desire, intimacy, and sexuality in the cultivation of a sacred self. Since this literature largely focuses on the family as the site of production of gendered Islamic identities and subjectivities, this self is always bound into a community of believers, over which the mother (the *umm*) stands as the sign of the Islamic community (the umma).

Even as Islamic thought challenges the secularist opposition between private and public, personal faith and politics, religion and state, the private realm provided religious discourse with a refuge from the predations of the secular state, a safe haven for opposition discourse.[52] This is what the Freedom and Justice Party calls the "oasis of the family" in the "Social Issues" section of *IkhwanOnline*.[53] This privacy has provided religious discourse with a place *within* the secular state and the logic of secularism that confines religion to the private sphere. The family, gendered identities, women's bodies, the sexual division of labor, and the domestic sphere have become sacrosanct, partly because they are conceptually outside the secular state's sphere of influence. As debates over "private" issues played out in the Islamic public sphere,

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[51] Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 210.

[52] Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Norton, 1995); Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values," 159–61; Raouf Ezzat, *al-Marʾa wa-l-ʿAmal al-Siyasi*, 173–81. See chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of the family as a haven and an oasis in Raouf Ezzat's writings.

[53] See, for example, an article on Manal Abu al-Hassan, the Freedom and Justice Party's "minister of women." Ahmad Jamal, "Manal Abu al-Hassan: The Security of Woman in the Freedom and Justice Party Focuses on All Groups of Women," *IkhwanOnline*, accessed October 12, 2012, http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=123235&SecID=323.

they helped to define the intimate domain in religious terms. But they also infused public discourse with discussions of religion. The private sphere (of family relations, gendered identities, and women's roles) has been a critical "extrapolitical" space in which religion has a sacred place—a space in which Islamic politics has become inordinately invested. In Egypt the world of Islamic letters "was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority," a process described by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Islamic intellectuals drew on a world of letters already well equipped with forums for discussion, public institutions, "intellectual technologies," and epistemologies.[54] The religious authority of the ʿulamaʾ (religious scholars) continued to be critical to these epistemologies, but religious writings by intellectuals outside the formal institutions of the Islamic public sphere brought new, experimental hermeneutics to the interpretation of traditional texts. The appropriation of religious discourse by "lay" writers was part of the process of decentralization of religious knowledge so important to the rise of modern "Muslim publics" in Egypt. These writers adapted genres, disciplines, and narrative styles associated with secular modernity to the Islamic intellectual tradition.[55] These representatives—and purveyors—of public opinion battled with political power over regulation of the social. Their political task was the regulation of civil society. "With the background experience of a private sphere"—interpreted as "humanity's genuine site"—they "challenged the established authority of the monarch," aided by the "illusion of freedom evoked by human intimacy." This is how "the experiential complex of audience-oriented privacy made its way into the political realm's public sphere."[56]

Scholarly characterizations of the ṣaḥwa in Egypt emphasize the dissemination of religious knowledge among the general populace, leading to what some have understood as a "democratization of religious

[54] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 51–52.

[55] Charles D. Smith, "The Crisis of Orientation: The Shift of Egyptian Intellectual to Islamic Subjects in the 1930s," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 4 (1973): 382–410; Charles D. Smith, "'Cultural Construct' and Other Fantasies: Imagined Narratives in Imagined Communities," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31 (1999): 95–102; Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, "Print Culture, Social Change, and the Process of Redefining Imagined Communities in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31 (1999): 81–94; Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* (London: Saqi Books, 2001); Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[56] Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 52.

authority."[57] Recent scholarship on Muslim publics discusses the "fragmentation of religious and political authority" facilitated by the development of mass education, spread of literacy, and expansion of print capitalism and other media.[58]

> These transformations increase the range of participants in discussions about Islamic values and practice. Women and minorities find their way into arenas of political and religious discourse. . . . Educated people who are not religious scholars increasingly contribute to the discussion of legal issues and create alternative sites for religious discourse and representation. Many of them claim legitimacy on the basis of simplified, systematized, and down-market interpretations of basic texts. . . . The new media engage wider and more public communities with claims to interpret and to provide additional techniques of interpretation.[59]

A new kind of intellectual Islam, presented in a vernacular readily accessible to wider publics, enjoyed immense popularity, circulating widely in multiple editions, reprints, and translations. Revivalist writings have developed a popular intellectual Islam for the masses by opening up Islamic scholarship to a wide swath of the population. Groups previously marginalized from religious scholarship—by training, access, and gender—have burst to the fore of public debate, among them, women. Women writers emphasize the importance of religious knowledge, training, and education to the formation of the pious self. But they also shift emphasis to other kinds of intuitive knowledge, training, and education (like that of childrearing) that they suggest are more "natural" to women—an intuition of affect rooted in the biological experience of motherhood. (And these writings are careful to identify motherhood as a kind of training and "preparation.") More secular feminists criticize this as trapping women in a biological essentialism and condemning them to family life. Nonetheless, the identification with family and motherhood is one revivalist writers clearly revel in developing, cultivating, and expanding. It is a way of not only legitimizing their cultural production that deals with these issues but also infusing other aspects

[57] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 105.

[58] Eickelman and Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," 1; Armando Salvatore and Mark LeVine, "Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies," in *Religion, Social Practice, and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in Muslim Majority Societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 15.

[59] Eickelman and Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," 11.

of their life work with value and cultural capital, along with religious significance.

Scholars of the revival interpret the ṣaḥwa through tropes of political center and periphery. In political theory, women are often seen as marginalized from political power, along with home, family, and informal networks.[60] In a brilliant metaphor, Charles Hirschkind interprets the revival as a "vast centrifugal countermovement" decentralizing—and democratizing—religious authority and knowledge.

> The centripetal consolidation of religious authority and knowledge by the Egyptian state from the 1950s onward occurred simultaneously with a vast centrifugal countermovement, what both observers and participants often refer to as the Islamic Revival movement, *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*. The revival has had the net effect of dispersing the loci of religious authority across a variety of new locations, media, and associational forms. Because the protagonists of this movement have adopted modes of organization, communication, and technology ushered in by political modernization, they hastened those processes of transformation promoted by the state that aimed at developing a modern public sphere.[61]

Revivalist cultural and intellectual production has aimed more at transforming the social life of the populace than the state. And women, family, home, and informal networks are powerful forces driving this centripetal movement. The revival succeeded in entrenching its aims of social transformation at a grassroots level—in bodily subjectivities and affect—something that political revolution would not be able to achieve. A "civil Islam" rooted in the institutions of civil society (such as private mosques, Islamic voluntary associations, welfare societies, cultural organizations, schools, and commercial enterprises like Islamic banks and publishing houses) has been key to this mobiliza-

[60] In the introduction to *Avenues of Participation*, Diane Singerman launches a searing and eloquent critique of political theory that locates political power only in state institutions. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, 94, defines the periphery as "encompassing all other potential arenas for collective action, including religious institutions, local community and youth centers, schools, and even private households."

[61] Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 55. Other scholars contest this view of a division between al-Azhar as religious center and Islamic activists as a periphery, arguing more for a continuum and fluidity. See Ebrahim Moosa, "The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics. By Charles Hirschkind," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 252–54; and Muhammad ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Dawud, *al-Jamʿiyyat al-Islamiyya fi Misr wa-Dawruha fi Nashr al-Daʿwa al-Islamiyya* (Cairo: al-Zahraʾ li-l-Iʿlam al-ʿArabi, 1992).

tion.[62] One of the most important parts of this civil Islam was an Islamic public sphere that emerged in tandem with a flourishing of Islamic bookstores, presses, and literature, helping form a new kind of imagined community not necessarily rooted in secular rationality. Yet the revival still employed critical tools of the semiliberal secular state to rally for political participation through grassroots democratic mobilization on the margins of the state. On this periphery are households, families, and community networks that become reoriented in revivalist discourse as a "center" of religious inculcation and education. For women largely marginalized from the formalized political structures of the state, the civic domains of social life become sites for the cultivation of new modes of religious authority.[63]

Soft Force examines specifically how a gendered vision of a free and equal family imbued with reciprocal rights and duties became a cornerstone, or a pillar, of Islamic politics in the modern age. Through their central importance to the Islamic family, women have been at the crux of the tense relationship between secular and religious law, secular and religious government(alities), secular and religious forms of political citizenship. This relationship has been consistently framed through recourse to a language of religious rights, freedoms, and liberties that will free an Islamic politics from secular tyrannies. Islam's place in modern governance has been constantly negotiated in modern Egyptian history through the laws of personal status and through contestations over the nature of gendered relations, family, and marriage.[64] Operating within and against a regime of secular authoritarianism, Islamic intellectual production and political mobilization took "the family" as one of the most important sites in which the issue of liberty was "problematized and technologized." The family was celebrated as the essential basis of an Islamic politics but was also a key counterweight to the tyranny of

[62] Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam*, 97; Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 33; Gonzalez-Quijano, *Les gens du livre*, 171–98.

[63] The political power of these private (and peripheral) places has been at the center of feminist critiques of the public sphere. Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109–42; Joan B. Landes, "The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration," in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

[64] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 205–56; Frances Susan Hasso, *Consuming Desires: Family Crisis and the State in the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 24–60; Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 101–20.

the secular state.[65] Women, so closely connected to the family, became critical to the expression of this religious freedom, to embodying its ethics, and to inculcating its disciplines.

Awakening, Revival, Revolution

In her vlog, Mahfouz articulately deploys a language of rights and freedoms to critique government corruption and tyranny. "To live like humans, to live like *banī Ādam* (children of Adam)," she says, "we've got to go down and protest on January 25th, go down to protest to demand our right as children of Adam. . . . Go down and demand your right, my right, your people's right, and the right of us all." Her images of the dehumanizing effects of authoritarian rule—of the self-immolation of Muhammad Bouʿazizi in Tunisia and the four Egyptians who set themselves on fire in front of Parliament—suggest the bare life of living without rights, the extinction of self in subjection to oppression.[66] But her words also evoke rights as the threshold of the human, and the exercise of those rights in a community as a condition of both political and personal sovereignty.[67] Mahfouz is known as one of the founding members of the April 6th movement that helped start the revolution, but she is also a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party. Easily slipping between religious and secular registers of political rationality, she says, "Don't fear the government, fear God," drawing on a classic argument from Islamic political thought equating submission to an earthly (secular) political authority as a form of tyranny, as the subjugation of man by man, and of subjection to God as a form of freedom. She then quotes verse 13:11 of the Qurʾan: "And among God's commands are that he will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves," a verse that ends with "And there is no other leader for them except Him."

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[65] Rose describes the importance of moral agency in constructing subjects capable of governing themselves; they are free only by subjecting themselves to certain disciplines. The family, he asserts, was one of the most important sites "in which the issue of liberty was problematized and technologized . . . celebrated as the essential basis and counterweight to government." Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 72–74.

[66] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), 128–52.

[67] Analyzing Hannah Arendt's writings, Linda Zerilli stresses that humans do not have rights because they are human, but only through their membership in political community. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 298, 300; Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 173.

A discourse of a free and equal Islam emerged out of—and in re-sponse to—a history of secular authoritarianisms in the region, under first colonialism, then the Ottoman monarchy, and finally successive military dictatorships. At the heart of this discourse has been a rights language calling for women's freedom and equality, drawing on the terminology and ideology of women's liberation, and calling for wom-en's participation in public life, even while asserting their critical im-portance to the family. This paradox at the heart of liberalism—its freedoms and coercions, rights and duties, public and private spheres—structures revivalist writings on gender and religion. Women simulta-neously signify the limits of secular political citizenship, the productiv-ity of cultural reproduction, and the sacred realm of family relations. *Soft Force* chronicles a series of key Islamic writers, thinkers, and activ-ists who employ what Talal Asad calls "new discursive grammars" to reinterpret the Islamic intellectual tradition for a modern Islamic poli-tics. These writers aim to produce "a theological vocabulary . . . about how a contemporary state of affairs should be configured."[68] They do so by drawing deeply on the Islamic discursive tradition, on its language, texts, thinkers, laws, and hermeneutics, reviving and reinterpreting these sources for new contexts, social problems, and forms of govern-ment and governmentalities.

New lexicons are created for new political imaginaries, even as they draw on older vocabularies, Asad observes. The concept of naḥḍa is a case in point, a word that refers to the older "awakening" but has been revived for the more recent awakening, as well as the aftermath of the 2011 revolutions in the Arab world. After the uprisings in Egypt, the Is-lamist presidential candidate Muhammad Morsi elaborated an Islamic platform for instating "true democracy . . . with Islam as a reference" known as the Nahda Project. The document protests "despotism, op-pression, and injustice" and calls for the restoration of a framework of rights and liberties and for peace and security (*amn*) in the face of a "brutal state, corrupt regime, or foreign power." One of the most important ways of safeguarding democracy, the document says, is by protecting the autonomy of (civil) society and the private sphere, the Egyptian family and "freedom of speech guided by genuine Egyptian values," to check state power.[69] The Islamic liberalism suggested in the platform of the Nahda Project (and by the language of the Freedom and Justice Party) draws on a history of Islamic criticism of secular-ism's undemocratic nature, both at home and abroad. Bending liberal

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[68] Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 220.
[69] Hizb al-ʿAdala wa-l-Hurriyya, "General Features of the Nahda (Renaissance) Proj-ect," *IkhwanWeb*, April 28, 2012, http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=29932.

ideology toward its own ends, Islamic thought in Egypt has claimed, among other rights, self-determination (and self-rule), political autonomy, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression as the foundations of an Islamic polity.

Part of this rhetoric has involved calls for women's equality and participation in public life, in conjunction with repeated acknowledgments of women's central and critical importance to the family. The Nahda Project calls for the "empowerment (*tamkīn*) of the Egyptian woman to facilitate her fruitful participation in every aspect of life, what helps the woman realize a balance between her contribution to her home and to her society."[70] The promotion of work/life balance for women has been a part of Egyptian state discourse since the 1952 revolution, with successive constitutions calling for the coordination of "women's duties toward the family" with "her work in society and her equality with men in the fields of social, political, cultural, and economic life, without infringing on the dictates of the Islamic sharicᵃ."[71] The Nahda Project diverges from earlier state language that suggested that women's "work in society and equality with men" were somehow at odds with the sharicᵃ. In contrast, the Nahda Project asserts women as "totally equal to men in position and status, in work and importance"—an assertion of gender equality that became one of the core principles of the 2012 constitution.

The Nahda Project's understanding of women's equality was critical to its vision of not only political democratization but also economic development. The document signals the Muslim Brotherhood's commitment to a free market economy and to economic, social, and political liberalization through language that advocates and supports privatization and private property. One section, entitled "A Comprehensive Human Development Program," echoes earlier state (and developmentalist) initiatives that conceived of women as the "entryway to total development" in the region.[72] This section of the Nahda Project calls for "protecting woman from discrimination in her work, whether pri-

[70] Hizb al-cAdala wa-l-Hurriyya, "Ihtimam Khass bi-l-Marʾa fi Mashrucᵃ al-Nahda," *IkhwanOnline*, April 28, 2012, http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/president/Article.aspx?ArtID=107305&SecID=470.

[71] Ellen McLarney, "Women's Rights in the Egyptian Constitution: (Neo)Liberalism's Family Values," May 22, 2013, http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11852/womens-rights-in-the-egyptian-constitution_(neo)li.

[72] League of Arab States, UNICEF, and Markaz al-Dawli li-l-Tacᵃlim al-Wazifi li-l-Kitab fi al-cAlam al-cArabi, *al-Marʾa al-cArabiyya wa-l-Tanmiya al-Qawmiyya: Halqa Dirasiyya* (Cairo: UNICEF, 1972); Lajnat al-Khidmat, *Tanmiyat al-Marʾa ka-Madkhal li-l-Tanmiya al-Shamila*, Silsilat Taqarir Majlis al-Shura (Cairo: Matbucᵃat al-Shacᵇb, 1984); *Nadwat al-Marʾa wa-l-Tanmiya al-Qawmiyya: Cairo, 10–11 Nufimbir 1984.* (Cairo: UNESCO: al-Markaz al-Iqlimi al-cArabi li-l-Buhuth wa-l-Tawthiq fi al-cUlum al-Ijtimacᵃiyya, 1984).

vate or public," but also for supporting "women's participation in economic work beginning from micro-enterprise of women in the family and extending to free private enterprise for pioneering women."[73] The document ends with an assertion of the importance of private property, a clear signal to Western governments about where an Islamic democracy would stand in a transnational neoliberal economy. From the outset, Morsi signaled his receptivity to loans from the International Monetary Fund through clear declarations of commitment to economic liberalization, structural adjustment, privatization, and free market exchange. This neoliberal economy depends on both liberal understandings of economic and political rights and freedoms and on the value—economic and otherwise—of women's work in the family.[74] The family is a critical engine of the national economy, and its organization becomes central to the management of that economy. Women are thus envisioned in leadership roles, roles for which they must be cultivated and groomed, fostering the development of an Islamic moral economy rooted in the "political unit" of the family.

Scholars of the gendered politics of the revival observe the close relationship between liberal secularism and the revival. Saba Mahmood describes this relationship as one of "proximity and coimbrication." *Soft Force* closely analyzes the gendered dimensions of what Mahmood calls "the historically shifting, ambiguous, and unpredictable encounters that this proximity has generated."[75] Through a textual ethnography of some of the revival's most important thinkers, I trace a rhizomelike lineage of this shifting, ambiguous, and unpredictable relationship. Intellectuals associated with the revival advocate freedom as an Islamic political ideal, calling for resistance against the encroachment of Western political and cultural domination. Yet Mahmood understands the revival as a "nonliberal" movement, even as she acknowledges the

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[73] Hizb al-ʿAdala wa-l-Hurriyya, "Ihtimam Khass bi-l-Marʾa"; Hizb al-ʿAdala wa-l-Hurriyya, "Nahda Project."

[74] Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (2006): 690–714. Brown's distinction between political liberalism and economic neoliberalism is curious, especially in light of her broader work more generally, which links the rise of political and personal rights to the importance of property and to the development of a capitalist economy. The connection of "rights" discourses to neoliberal expansion has been a central feature of both rights theory and feminist critiques of developmentalism. See, for example, Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); and Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012). See chapter 5 on women's work for a fuller discussion of neoliberal capitalism's family values.

[75] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 5.

interplay between classical Islamic concepts and pervasive liberal—and neoliberal—political ideologies.[76] Critiques of Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* observe how the Islamic revival emerged out of economic and political liberalization in Egypt.[77] Other scholars have analyzed how Islamic thinkers deploy liberal political ideals in their call for Islamic self-determination, self-rule, and liberation from secular forms of authoritarianism, ideals that also shape their conceptions of gender relationships, the family, and the couple.[78] Revivalist literature draws on liberal concepts of freedom as a political ideal, freedom as a discipline that entails gendered duties as much as gendered political rights. Yet understandings of how Islamic thinkers have adapted, adopted, and transformed liberal concepts have been tainted by neoimperial prescriptions for politics in the Muslim world and the Middle East.[79] Imperial and neoimperial projects have used the language of democracy, freedom, and women's rights in inflammatory, hypocritical, and dishonest ways—what theorists understand as a racialized authoritarian governmentality at the heart of liberalism.[80] Moreover, classic scholarship on Islamic liberalism has assumed that it is secular and antithetical to a religious ("scripturalist") politics, an assumption that this project dismantles.[81]

The tensions and dichotomies between a private Islam cultivating submission and piety and a public Islam of political mobilization (for freedoms and rights) are what political theorists understand as the

[76] Ibid.

[77] Samah Selim, "Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject," *Jadaliyya* (October 13, 2010), http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/235/politics-of-piety_the-islamic-revival-and-the-femi.

[78] Haddad, "Case of the Feminist Movement"; Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender"; Lila Abu-Lughod, "Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Badran, *Feminism in Islam*; Hafez, *Islam of Her Own*.

[79] Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 323–47.

[80] Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (New York: Sage Publications, 1999), 131–48; Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 46–76; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2014).

[81] Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Binder sees liberalism as indicative of an "open society" predicated on the separation of religion and state, and fundamentalism and scripturalism as markers of a "closed society." These are dichotomies coded into liberalism's own division of spheres.

paradoxes, or "constitutive dualisms," of liberalism. This creates a "division of labor" between the private as a feminized realm of difference and relationality and the public domain as the sphere of political autonomy, rights, and freedoms. The intimate domain is structured by a sexual contract in which an ethics of care and self-sacrifice serve as an essential counterweight to a public discourse of individual rights and freedoms.[82] This paradox has been explored not only in feminist theory[83] but also in Middle Eastern scholarship on the gendered discourses of the revival.[84] I draw specifically on this particular body of literature that probes liberalism's gendered contradictions, ones epitomized by the dichotomization between the private and the public domains, the personal and the political, feminine and masculine spheres. *Soft Force* explores the sexual contract at the heart of a new, Islamic social contract, one that has been elucidated through a discourse of intimacy articulated in the Islamic public sphere. This social contract has called for citizenship rights, freedom of expression and conviction, freedom of press, freedom of congregation, freedom of political participation, and freedom of democratic self-rule under successive military dictatorships that have sought to manage and control religion and religious expression. The public sphere of Islamic letters has tried to wrest itself free of excessive control over these religious discourses. The sexual contract, sanctioned by Islamic law, becomes an expression of a "free" domain outside state control, considered a repository of Islamic politics, and the "natural" domain of religion. Women become signifiers of this sexual contract but also of the power of this sacrosanct domain as a bastion against—and within—the secular state, an inviolable domain of Islamic politics and an Islamic religious citizenship. In the writings

[82] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Seyla Benhabib, "Autonomy, Modernity, and Community: Communitarianism and Critical Social Theory in Dialogue," in *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World*.

[83] For some of the feminist theory on the subject, see Carole Pateman, "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy," in *Public and Private in Social Life*, ed. S. I. Benn and G. F. Gaus (London: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values"; Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Joan Wallach Scott, *Parite!: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[84] A wide body of scholarship on gender in Islamic discourses notes the "convergence" between the language of liberal secularism and contemporary Islamic ideology. See, for example, Haddad, "Case of the Feminist Movement"; Stowasser, "Religious Ideology"; Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender"; Abu-Lughod, "Marriage of Feminism and Islamism"; Jouili and Amir-Moazami, "Knowlege, Empowerment, and Religious Authority"; Badran, *Feminism in Islam*; Hafez, *Islam of Her Own*.

analyzed here, the sexual contract, the sphere of intimate relations, family, home, motherhood, and marital sexuality are invested with an extraordinary power to transform both community and politics. Revivalist women focus inward on self, home, family, and the intimate domain, calling for the cultivation of this natural unit of the Islamic umma. This inward focus might be interpreted as one of the effects of the Islamic movement's coimbrication with liberalism in Egypt, as the production of a privatized religion that has become the outpost of religious sensibilities within the secular state. These religious sensibilities are cultivated within an idealized family form that has been the site for the expression of women's piety.

Soft Force explores the roots of "assertive women's subjectivities" through a deep history of the writings of "alternative Islamic feminist voices" that have worked to "re-politicize a politics of piety" during the last half of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century.[85] "Egypt," political scientist Paul Amar writes, "is not and never has been simply an end-point for vectors of the 'dissemination' of internationalist feminism; to the contrary, Egypt has been an originator, center, and disseminator of modern internationalist feminism, of both the 'maternal' and radical varieties."[86] Is there a paradox between the Nahda Project's assertion of women's fundamental political equality with men and revivalist emphasis on the primacy of women's roles as mothers and preoccupation with the family? This "paradox" at the heart of liberalism is the subject of this book—paradoxes of sovereignty and submission, equality and difference, rights and duties, freedom and coercion that have structured Islamic politics in Egypt. This is not merely a "derivative discourse"[87] but a conscious use of the master's tools to dismantle the master's house[88] through an Islamici-

[85] Amar, "Turning the Gendered Politics of the Security State Inside Out?" 320, 321.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Partha Chatterjee, *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 8. "Fortunately for history, modern power and the scientific practices of the disciplines spilled over their colonial embankments to proliferate in the native quarters. Energized by the desires and strategies of entirely different political agencies, the intellectual project of modernity found new sustenance in those densely populated parts; and in the process, it took on entirely new forms. . . . we will find that it was not as though the 'pure fluid' of European enlightenment was merely mingled with a few drops of the 'muddy but holy Ganges water'; the 'claims of conscience,' as indeed the strategies of power, opened to question some of the very procedures of the practice of modernity."

[88] Using the tools of racist patriarchy means that "only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable." Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1984), 111.

zation of the ideological tools of modern governmentalities. Yet the question remains: if these thinkers are caught in the contradictions of liberalism, can this ever truly lead to a genuine emancipatory politics? The writers discussed in this book all probe the contradictions at the heart of liberalism. They understand its "tyranny" and "coercions" (its racial, gendered, and imperial hypocrisies).[89] For them, this contradiction is epitomized by the emancipating power of submission to God. Islam is the chain, they argue, that makes an Islamic polity truly free.

Islam is not an "unchanging essence" with an ossified lexicon but a tradition that carries within it the mechanisms for its own renewal, reform, and reinterpretation according to changing political and historical circumstances.[90] Islamic thinkers of the past decades have employed new terminologies—and technologies—to engineer the revival of Islamic thought and practice, as well as to ensure the social and political survival of Islam within successive secular authoritarianisms. Partly because of their disenfranchisement from state politics, revivalist thinkers adopted and adapted the language of democratic mobilization, language that goes back to the naḥḍa, the Arab awakening of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. An Islamic language of rights and freedoms has served as a powerful tool for critiquing various forms of secular authoritarianism in the region—colonial, monarchical, dictatorial, and military—regimes that have systematically, and sometimes brutally, repressed Islamic groups, movements, and writings.[91]

[89] Brown writes about "contradictions," while Scott talks about "paradoxes" in the gendered politics of liberalism. See Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values"; Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*. Similarly, Rose writes about the "despotism . . . at the heart of liberalism"; Dean, about liberalism's authoritarianism. See Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 43; Dean, *Governmentality*, 131–48. Mehta and Losurdo write about the liberalism's hypocrisy with regard to colonialism and slavery. See Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*; Losurdo, *Liberalism*.

[90] John O. Voll, "Renewal and Reform in Islamic History: Tajdid and Islah," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play"; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 222; Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*.

[91] To name just a few of the most important critiques: ʿAbd al-Rahman Kawakibi, *Tabaʾiʿ al-Istibdad wa-Masariʿ al-Istiʿbad*, ed. Muhammad ʿImara (Cairo: Matabiʿ Ruz al-Yusuf, 2011); ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Jawish, *al-Islam Din al-Fitra wa-l-Hurriyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1968); ʿAbd al-ʿAziz Jawish, *Athar al-Qurʾan fi Tahrir al-Fikr al-Bashari*, ed. Muhammad ʿImara (Cairo: Majallat al-Azhar, 2012); Muhammad al-Khidr Husayn, *al-Hurriyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Iʿtisam, 1982); Sayyid Qutb, *al-ʿAdala al-Ijtimaʿiyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1949); ʿAli ʿAbd al-Wahid Wafi, *Huquq al-Insan fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat Nahdat Misr, 1957); Jamal al-Banna, *Qadiyyat al-Hurriyya fi al-Islam* (Cairo: al-Ittihad al-Islami al-Dawli li-l-ʿAmal, 1985); Jamal al-Banna, *al-Hurriyya fi al-Islam* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Intishar al-ʿArabi, 2011); Hasan Hanafi, *al-Din wa-l-Thawra fi Misr* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1988). For the ripple effect of this Islamic discourse throughout the Islamic world, see, e.g., Asgharali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology: Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam* (New Delhi: New Delhi Sterling Publishers,

Infringements on the free practice of religion, free expression, the freedom to congregate, freedom of the press, freedom of conviction, freedom to form a family, and so forth have become an intrinsic part of how Islamic thinkers have come to express their moral and ethical indignation at excessive restraints on rights.

Islamist writers of the past decades have revived key thinkers from the nahḍa to legitimize an Islamist liberalism that has been critical to political mobilization. This resuscitation has been performed through multiple republications of older material, new redactions and interpretations, and reinjections of nahḍa thought into the landscape of popular Islamic scholarship. This scholarly production constructs an intellectual genealogy that connects the nahḍa to the ṣaḥwa. It also imparts an a priori legitimacy to more recent conceptualizations of Islamic liberalism—a liberalism that includes notions of individual liberty, democratic and representative institutions, guarantees of individual rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of conviction. It is a liberalism that has been formulated in indigenous terms, not only against foreign colonial tyrannies but also in response to local ones, used to articulate protest against unjust rule.

Islamic language of democratic mobilization challenges the very foundations of liberalism's home in secularism and in the West. These writings wrest liberalism from its own imperial xenophobia, expose liberalism's hypocrisy about its own grounding in religion, and question liberalism's disavowal of the political power of the private sphere. But they also reinscribe certain assumptions about the masculine nature of political power, about the role of private property in securing rights, and about women and mothers as presiding over social reproduction in the private sphere.[92] *Soft Force* explores the intimate link between the language of citizenship rights and freedoms, gendered roles (and re-

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1990); and Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008). These are but a small sliver of a vast literature. These discourses have been tools of political change precisely at revolutionary moments—at the turn of the century (as protest against colonialism), after the 1921 revolution, prior to and just after the 1952 revolution, during the revival in the 1980s and 1990s, and during and after the revolution in 2011. Muhammad ʿImara, so essential to the discursive production of the revival in the 1970s and 1980s, reemerged right after the 2011 revolution with a set of republications on the liberating nature of Islam. This body of literature on Islamic "freedom" is the subject of a second book project intimately connected to the present one. It traces a genealogy of Islamic liberalism from the nahḍa to the ṣaḥwa.

[92] Haddad, "Case of the Feminist Movement"; Stowasser, "Religious Ideology"; Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender"; Hatem, "Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity"; Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values"; Abu-Lughod, "Marriage of Feminism and Islamism"; Abugideiri, "On Gender and the Family"; Badran, *Feminism in Islam*; Hafez, *Islam of Her Own*.

sponsibilities) in the family, and a neoliberal vision of women's special role in cultivating the family as a critical unit of the global economy.[93] This is what Mona El-Naggar of the *New York Times* calls "family values according to the Muslim Brotherhood." These values emphasize a woman's "authentic role as wife, mother, and purveyor of generations," a political platform that has—however paradoxically—"gained followers by extolling subservience."[94] Asmaʾ Mahfouz tweeted El-Naggar's article "Family Life According to the Muslim Brotherhood" to her nearly 350,000 followers, receiving responses like this one written in colloquial Egyptian: "The Brothers are hearing us—the sweetest peace for the woman is the house of her husband and her family."[95]

Conclusion: Liberalism's Contradictions

Islamic thinkers constantly interrogate the terms and premises of liberalism—that it is the exclusive monopoly of the West; that it is inherently secular rather than rooted in religion; that it is relentlessly individualistic rather than promoting a kind of political (and economic) community. These thinkers subject "liberal notions of justice, autonomy, tolerance, and individual rights" to critical scrutiny "from the standpoint of Islamic traditions."[96] They reinscribe certain liberal assumptions about the masculine nature of the state, the role of the private sphere in safeguarding personal freedom, and women and mothers as providing a haven in a heartless world. They do this while drawing deeply on Islamic sources—Qurʾan and hadith, *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and shariʿa, interpretations old and new—to interpret the role of women in a new Islamic politics. As many theorists have noted, liberalism is an ideological system that carries within it its own antitheses, making it difficult to rupture with its own internal logic[97]—antitheses like the West versus Islam, freedom versus subjection, state versus religion, individual versus community, political versus personal, public versus private, male versus female.

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[93] Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation*, 100–144. Mies calls this the "housewifization of the global economy."

[94] El-Naggar, "Family Life According to the Brotherhood."

[95] khaled a elnaser to Asmaʾ Mahfouz, https://twitter.com/khalidaelnaser/status /245175159349182465.

[96] Saba Mahmood calls for this in her article "Questioning Liberalism, Too: A Response to 'Islam and the Challenge of Democracy,'" *Boston Review* (May 2003).

[97] Slavoj Zizek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (New York: Verso, 2001), 3, 5; Jodi Dean, *Zizek's Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 104.

Revivalist interpretations of gender and the family worked within the terms set by a dominant state secularism but deployed a liberal discourse of the modern family as a site from which to critique the increasing secularization of society. This discourse of domesticity and the family has functioned as a platform for women's participation in the project of Islamic nationalism, as they have inhabited a space within discourses of modernity to perform a modern ideal of Islamic womanhood. Islamist women highlight the centrality of home and family, reorienting Islam within a sphere newly designated as the realm of women's authority. In these Islamic writings, women's sphere of influence becomes integral to the shaping of Islamic subjects and, accordingly, an Islamic society. Their vision of the family has been used as a strategic tool to challenge both local and neoimperial forms of political tyranny and injustice and to generate an indigenous politics at a grass-roots level, in the sphere of the most intimate relations of community. "Like we have said a thousand times," the Islamic thinker Muhammad Jalal Kishk writes, "liberalism does not grow under the wing of colonialism but begins in the clash with it, the struggle against it, and demanding freedom from it."[98]

[98] Muhammad Jalal Kishk, *Jahalat ʿAsr al-Tanwir: Qiraʾa fi Fikr Qasim Amin wa-ʿAli ʿAbd al-Raziq* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 1990), 78. See chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of Kishk's ideas.