DEVELOPMENT THROUGH FAITH:
THE MA’ADI LIFE MAKERS AND THE ISLAMIC ENTREPRENEURIAL SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT

The Life Makers (Ṣunā’ al-Hayāḥ) are an Islamic youth organization inspired by the Egyptian preacher Amr Khaled and dedicated to social change and development based on Islamic principles. This group provides a morally-sanctioned social forum for youth interaction in the context of an increased emphasis on “Islamic values.” It also, through its vision of social change as emerging from individual transformation, functions to construct a new model for Muslim selves. The Life Makers' ideal self, inspired by Amr Khaled and the American self-improvement genre, is characterized by personal responsibility, individual initiative, and a focus on projects and goals. This vision of the Muslim self—and the repertoire of social claims-making that it implies—reflect both global trends in the practice of Islamic piety and the changing dynamics of the Egyptian "social contract" in an era of neoliberal economic reform.
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have generally followed the transliteration guidelines of the *International Journal for Middle East Studies*. With certain names and terms that have become relatively familiar in English (e.g., Amr Khaled), I have retained the more common transliteration.
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Across the street from the metro station, just over the tracks from the local McDonald’s, on the edge of Cairo’s upscale Ma’ādī suburb, is a six-story concrete building with a small mosque at the base; atop the building, a sign bears the words Ǧunā’ al-Ḥayāh—Life Makers. Dodging the pick-up soccer game in the street and the stray cats that scatter on approach, the visitor passes a sign with the telephone and government registration numbers of the Life Makers organization, before reaching the open doorway to a winding concrete stairway. The building is hot and humid in the August afternoon. On the fifth floor there is a mercifully air-conditioned reception area, and beyond that, a meeting room adorned with posters bearing the Life Makers logo, handmade collages showcasing photos from service projects, and flyers calling for participation in a computer education program. At the end of a long table, around which sit a small handful of young men and women, another woman delivers a presentation, with the assistance of a laptop and PowerPoint. The subject is “group work,” and the talk, peppered with anecdotes, humor, and statistics, ranges from Stephen R. Covey’s self-improvement manual The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People to the communal nature of God’s Qur’anic injunctions.
Life Makers is an Islamic nongovernmental organization composed primarily of youth, inspired by the preacher Amr Khaled and his series of television broadcasts calling for individual and social reform. The Ma’ādī group is one of many local and national Life Makers organizations throughout the Middle East and the world. While some of these groups are part of larger networks or national organizations, others, like the Ma’ādī Life Makers, are autonomous. The Life Makers’ mission is one of social change and development along Islamic lines; to this end the group engages not only in charitable activity and community service, but also in a project of reforming selves to become “Life Makers”—positive, successful, goal-driven agents who will contribute to society’s development. They scrupulously avoid political activity. While Amr Khaled himself has attracted attention in the Anglophone world for some years now, the Life Makers groups he has inspired remain essentially unstudied. Life Makers is not the only face of contemporary Islamic activism in Egypt, and it would be reductive to suggest that it—or any other—is the “typical” example of such activism, which encompasses a wide variety of organizations, philosophies, goals, and tactics. The organization, however, has high visibility because of its connection to the celebrity phenomenon of Amr Khaled.

1 In referring to the Life Makers as an Islamic organization, I emphasize the group’s religious character. The Life Makers frame the processes of social and individual change, as well as their eventual goal of a “renaissance,” in explicitly Islamic terms, and members see “Islam” as a prime motivating factor for their work. As will be shown, members see the group’s activities as an integrated part of the practice of Islamic piety.

Moreover, it represents an important dimension of the dynamic terrain of Islamic activism in Egypt today, in the context of both what has been called the “re-Islamisation”3 of Egyptian society and the deep-seated structural reforms pursued by the Egyptian state in recent years.

This paper first describes the Ma’ādī Life Makers organization and its roots in the preaching of Amr Khaled. The organizational structure, demographics, and activities of the group are addressed. I also describe the ways in which the Life Makers group serves as a site of morally-sanctioned social interaction that offers young people a sense of morality and purpose in the context of societal re-Islamisation. I will then discuss the philosophy and practice of self-formation as articulated by the Ma’ādī Life Makers, both with regard to their own key points of reference—Amr Khaled himself, Islamic ethics and exemplary role models, and the American self-improvement genre—and to the analytical insights of social scientific work on projects of subject formation. After describing the importance of this philosophy to the Life Makers group, I turn to an analysis of just what the ideal subject—the Life Maker—looks like. I argue that this subject represents an “entrepreneurial” type that reflects both broad global trends in the dynamics of Islamic activism and the changing relationship between Egyptian state and society in the context of liberalizing economic reforms that change not only the field in which actors operate and the targets of social claims-making, but also the very meanings of citizenship, success, and positive action. While the Life Makers accommodate the

3 I use “re-Islamisation” here in the broad sense offered by Salwa Ismail, as “the process whereby various domains of social life are invested with signs and symbols associated with Islamic cultural traditions.” See Salwa Ismail, Rethinking Islamist Politics: Culture, the State and Islamism. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.
realities of this new context and the state’s vision of the new citizen, they apply to the concept of the good citizen and the successful subject their own particular meanings and motivations, creating in the process a new vision of the pious individual.
Chapter 2. The “Amr Khaled Phenomenon”

The Life Makers organizations trace their origins (and their name) to a wildly popular 2004-2005 series of television broadcasts by the Egyptian dā’īya4 Amr Khaled. This Life Makers5 series is the foundation for the groups’ vision and mission, and for many of their specific activities. The groups owe their initial popularity and broad circulation to Khaled’s broadcasts and its audience, while Khaled himself is looked to by the Life Makers as an inspiration and role model. It would thus be difficult to understand the Life Makers groups without also considering the so-called “Amr Khaled phenomenon” and the emotions and energies generated by the man that The Independent has described as “Islam’s Billy Graham.”6

It should be noted from the outset, given the numerous debates surrounding Khaled and his legions of fans and followers, that this is neither a broad study of Amr Khaled and his programs, nor an analysis of his audiences in general. Rather, it is a study of a specific nongovernmental organization: the Ma’ādī Life Makers group. Since, however, Khaled’s preaching features prominently in the Life Makers philosophy, and since the members of the Ma’ādī Life Makers represent a subset of the audiences he has attracted, some background on the man, the “phenomenon,” and the television program is required.

4 A dā’īya is literally “one who calls,” in this sense a practitioner of da’wa, or the call to Islam. Da’wa has different meanings, but in the case of Amr Khaled, it refers to calling Muslims to a better and more active engagement with their faith. See also: Carrie R. Wickham, Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. pp. 126-128.
5 Throughout this paper, references to the Life Makers television program will be italicized; references to the Life Makers organization will be in standard type.
Originally an accountant by profession, with no formal religious training at the outset of his ministry, Amr Khaled began preaching (or “giving lessons”) at the mosque of the elite Egyptian Shooting Club in the 1990s, where he quickly gained a following. By 2000, he was preaching to audiences of thousands, and in 2001, he broadcast his first satellite television program, establishing him as a truly global phenomenon. Khaled’s Life Makers program featured participants from every corner of the Arabic-speaking world, and beyond. A researcher on Muslim youth in Sweden noted Amr Khaled’s popularity among this demographic. Life Makers organizations, as discussed below, appeared not only across the Middle East, but as far afield as Canada. Khaled became a household name throughout the region, and eventually in Europe and America as well, where the media response has been almost universally enthusiastic. Today, propelled by cassettes, books, and especially television, Khaled is one of the most familiar faces (and voices) in the Arab world. His emotional, vernacular, and youth-oriented style of preaching has gained him a worldwide audience and, while this now-famous style has antecedents (such as the Azhar-trained Khaled el-Guindy), it is Khaled who has made the most powerful

impression and who has become the touchstone for a “new genre of da’wa”\(^\text{13}\) with a strong appeal especially to upper- and middle-class youth.

**Amr Khaled’s Style, Audience, and Message**

Amr Khaled’s early rise was noted in an article by Hadia Mostafa in the September 2000 edition of *Egypt Today*, from the days when Khaled was giving lessons not to worldwide audiences via satellite, but in front of overflowing crowds (the author estimated over 5,000) at al-Hossari mosque in the well-to-do Cairo neighborhood of Mohandiseen.\(^\text{14}\) Even at this early stage, many of the issues and controversies at the heart of the “Amr Khaled phenomenon” can be discerned. The key (and interrelated) features of the “phenomenon” were and continue to be: the charisma and unique style of the figure at the center and his ability to inspire powerful reactions in his audience; the demographic nature of this audience; the varying interpretations of Khaled’s style and message; and the supposed threat or promise Khaled poses, whether as a gateway to radical Islamism, as a challenge to official narratives about Islamic engagement, as a vehicle for misinterpretations of Islam and its message, or, conversely, as a messenger of pluralism and tolerance, a builder of civil society, and a pioneer able to inspire the hopes and consciences of young Muslims. These characteristics continue to shape perceptions of Khaled’s activities and followers, and are relevant to an understanding of the appeal of the Life Makers groups to their constituents and their place in society at large.

\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

Perhaps the most salient point in Mostafa’s observation is Amr Khaled’s charismatic appeal to his audience. Despite her own reservations, Mostafa admits to having been “captivated” by the sermon delivered that evening, and noted that many of the young women around her had been moved to tears. It is difficult to overstate the role that Khaled’s ability to create a bond with his audience—whether in person or by way of technological media—plays in his success. While attending a filming of an episode of his series al-Jinna fī Buyūtnā (Paradise in Our Homes), I saw firsthand the emotional connection Khaled is able to make with those he speaks to. This episode had to do with the dangers of drug addiction, and Khaled, eyes shining, repeated his anguished firsthand experiences, naming the streets and quarters known to Cairene youth for being dealer hangouts. He concluded with leading the small studio audience in an emotional prayer for all those struggling with addiction. The atmosphere was that of the evangelical church services I had experienced as a youth. The interruptions of the director, the retakes, and Khaled’s sometimes irritated fussing over the camera angles were quickly eclipsed by the preacher’s ability to reestablish the proper mood.

Khaled’s unique style has been frequently noted, and often parodied—most Egyptians I know are able to instantly conjure a version of the falsetto that overpowers the preacher’s voice in his frequent moments of high emotion. But beyond the pitch range of his voice, Khaled is also notable for the language he uses. Unlike the majority of sermons given in Egyptian mosques or circulated by cassette tape and via satellite, Khaled speaks in his casual, Cairene vernacular (‘āmiyya), rather than the more formal classical Arabic with which religious matters are often discussed and in which sermons
are traditionally delivered. In addition to this choice of dialect, Khaled’s idiosyncratic way of framing his talks and messages resonates with the experiences of his audience. He is emotional and excited. He punctuates his lessons with jokes and homespun interjections; he knows the neighborhoods and vacation destinations of Cairo’s wealthy and middle classes, and often mentions them. In his explanations, he deploys accessible analogies from sports, history, and popular culture. He has been known to end his lessons early for the sake of an upcoming soccer match. Nearly everyone I spoke to—from Khaled’s devoted followers to his sharpest critics—noted this ability of the preacher to “speak the language” of the youth in his audience in more ways than one.

The members of this audience—including middle and upper class, “Westernized” young men and women, formerly secular housewives, and pop singers—have been the subject of much comment on the Amr Khaled phenomenon, not least because they have been seen as marking Khaled’s ability to make inroads among groups that were previously assumed to be largely uninterested in participation in either political Islamism or projects of social re-Islamisation. While hard demographic data on Khaled’s viewership is difficult to come by, the sense that Amr Khaled has reached a different constituency is widespread. His appeal to women in particular is frequently noted (and, as

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16 I had never heard the word mulūkhīyya (a humble Egyptian meal of soupy greens) used in a religious broadcast before Khaled.

It is a commonly-heard sentiment that Amr Khaled has been the inspiration for the increased adoption of the hijāb (Islamic headscarf) among female students at the exclusive American University in Cairo, generally considered a haven for “Western” modes of dress and socialization. I was likewise told in informal discussions that Khaled was remarkable among Islamic reformers for his willingness to go to clubs, beach resorts, and other presumably irreligious (and largely upper-class) spots to seek out youth “converts.” Amr Khaled is also identified with the increased visibility of “Islamically-oriented” celebrities in the film and music industries. Sami Yusuf, a British singer of Azeri descent, described as the “Islamic Bono” for his socially- and religiously-conscientious songs and his pop star status, is closely associated with Amr Khaled, and has appeared on his shows, even composing an “anthem” for the Life Makers program. He was a favorite of the Ma’ādī Life Makers, who were eager for me to hear tracks from his albums downloaded onto their office computer.

The fact that Khaled has been able to reach these constituencies has sparked concern and anxiety among some observers, due to a sense that these are not the people who are “supposed” to be amenable to the messages of Islamic revivalism. Lindsay Wise

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18 A survey conducted at the American University in Cairo found that over three times as many women as men were fans of the *Life Makers* television show. See: Guy Taylor, “In Middle East, Muslim Women Ask: to Veil or Not to Veil.” *World Politics Review*, September 6, 2006.
19 Whereas Khaled el-Guindy is famous for his work with actresses who have repudiated their former “licentious” lifestyles as symbolized by their adoption of hijab, Khaled in 2002 claimed that he had never called on actresses to take such a step; Khaled is more associated with performers who have made their careers on promoting an Islamic or “moral” vision. (see “Preaching with a Passion,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 614 (November 38 – December 4, 2002)).
20 *Life Makers*, episode 17.
suggests that Khaled’s “upscale” audience is a challenge to the regime’s official explanation of Islamism (or the Islamisation of society, here interpreted as interchangeable): that it is the result of poverty, dislocation, and socioeconomic frustration, to be solved through increased education, economic reform, and social inclusion. This explanation, and this prescription, seem insufficient upon examination of Khaled’s audiences, composed largely of people who are neither economically desperate, nor the dislocated lower-middle class new urbanites who, in many analyses of late 20th-century Islamism, were seen as the key constituents of Islamist groups. They seem to be turning to engagement with Islam not due to their own dashed ambitions or desperation, but rather for reasons similar to what Ronald Inglehart described as “post-materialist” values, like a desire for personal growth and identification with a community, as well as out of a perceived call to societal engagement—reasons unaccounted for by the above official diagnosis. Government concern over Khaled’s skyrocketing popularity led to an alleged ban on his preaching, and a hasty flight from Egypt to the United Kingdom in 2002, where he continued to reach audiences through

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25 When speaking of the active Life Makers, specifically, Inglehart’s “post-materialist” framework is incomplete, since the group’s focus is very much on material development, but from the perspective of bourgeois reformers rather than those seeking material needs for themselves; more will be said on this subject below.
satellite broadcasts and booming cassette sales. Khaled was able to return to Egypt by 2005, though he continued to spend much of his time in the England pursuing a PhD at the University of Wales (his thesis is titled, tellingly, “Islam and Coexisting with Others”).

Some have suggested that Amr Khaled’s jovial demeanor and relaxed, informal tone are really a slick cover for an extremist agenda. Hala Mustafa, a prominent liberal thinker, was quoted in The Independent as saying that Khaled “is just like the other Islamic theocrats, but he says it with a smiling face.” The argument is that Khaled represents a special danger because he manages to present a conservative reading of Islam in such a way as to make it attractive to constituencies—namely the most “Westernized” elements of the Egyptian upper and upper-middle classes—that have heretofore been seen as largely absent from the Islamist sphere of influence. At best, Khaled is seen as unwittingly laying the groundwork for radical or violent Islamists to prey on his enthusiastic supporters; at worst, he is seen as steering impressionable youth right to the doors of extremism. One young man I talked with at a Maʿādī streetside café just across the Metro tracks from the Life Makers building argued that Khaled was a “gateway drug,” a first step into radicalism. “People who attended his lectures ten years ago are different now,” he said, though he did not give a specific example. While a broadly-based and longitudinal study would be needed to chart the political and ideological trajectories of Khaled’s audiences, claims of a great drift toward radicalism

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27 “Amr Khaled: A Preacher’s Puzzle.” Al-Ahram Weekly, 20-26 Oct. 2005 (Issue No. 765); it was widely speculated that his return was conditional on the cessation of his preaching activities (though not the filming of his television shows or his “lectures” on development) in Egypt.  
seem a reflection more of paranoia than of evidence. What is more likely is that the “Amr Khaled phenomenon” has helped to expand what Wickham calls a “supportive public,” which, while itself politically unaffiliated, is inclined to be sympathetic to political Islamists (who, it should be pointed out, are not necessarily “radical” themselves).\(^{29}\)

Certainly I saw no evidence of a radical or extremist turn among the Ma’ādī Life Makers.

Asef Bayat, in a less alarmist but similarly critical tone, argues\(^{30}\) that Khaled’s innovation is purely stylistic, and that he offers almost nothing in the way of theological depth, critical thinking, or reinterpretation. The result is that Khaled’s message is an ossified and conservative one, and, worse, by playing down the role of exegesis and critique, he (unwittingly or no) helps to enforce a narrow-minded approach to religion and obedience to religious authority, and works against progressive, reformist, or intellectually engaged approaches to religion. Many members of the intelligentsia I spoke with expressed similar sentiments. One acquaintance, a PhD candidate at the American University in Cairo, commented to me that she found his simple-minded approach both dangerous and insulting to the youth to whom it appealed. Another, a university professor, agreed with Bayat’s feeling that the Amr Khaled phenomenon was a manifestation of closed-mindedness and a young population bereft of critical thought. More will be said about these critiques in particular as they relate to the political implications of the Life Makers organization in the context of the “new social contract” of 21\(^{st}\)-century Egypt.

\(^{29}\) Carrie R. Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt.* New York: Columbia UP, 2002, p. 165; the Life Makers were hesitant to discuss their own political opinions.

Another criticism of Amr Khaled comes from traditionally-educated clergy who echo Bayat’s charge that Khaled is a lightweight. While he is at times dismissed as harmless, he has also been accused of promoting, on the basis of his inadequate knowledge and training, a naïve or incorrect interpretation of Islam and the role Islam should play in society. Simmering tension between Khaled and Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradāwī—one of the most prominent voices in Sunni Islam—was brought into the open and attracted media attention when Qaradāwī sharply critiqued Khaled’s decision to organize a conference promoting dialogue between Danish and Muslim youth following the 2006 outcry over cartoons published in Danish and other European newspapers featuring demeaning images of the Prophet Muḥammad. Khaled chose to seize the opportunity for dialogue (a key theme of his programs and message), while Qaradāwī argued that it was a time to close ranks and assert Muslim dignity, not to seek rapprochement. He saw Khaled’s conference as a damaging compromise at a time when no compromise was called for.31 Such tensions represent, at least in part, a contest for religious authority and the fundamental question of “who speaks for Muslims.”32

Khaled’s preaching is also sometimes denounced as a moneymaking scheme; in 2002, the preacher defended himself by claiming that his income was solely derived from his accounting business and the satellite television channels on which he appears, and that

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the proceeds from sales of recordings of his sermons were donated to his mosque.\textsuperscript{33} However, Forbes magazine recently listed Khaled as the Muslim world’s wealthiest preacher, with an income of 2.5 million dollars in 2007, from sources including the sale of books and recordings, and especially the revenue from his television programs.\textsuperscript{34}

These critiques notwithstanding, Khaled’s huge audiences are testament to his ability to connect with and inspire millions of people.\textsuperscript{35} The preacher’s success cannot be dismissed as mere accident or a celebrity fad. Rather, it should be understood as a remarkable convergence of factors: First, a unique individual (Khaled) who is both a powerful, charismatic speaker and a driven, inspired worker. Second, a message that resonates with and seeks to empower young men and women in a region with an enormous youth population, a message that also gives special attention to the concerns of women. Third, a societal context where great importance is being placed on a grounding in Islamic identity and morality, while young people look for a way to reconcile these values with the realities of twenty-first century Cairo (as noted, Khaled’s message has resonated particularly well with more wealthy and “Westernized” youth). Fourth, a message of development in the context of a society that keenly feels a sense of “underdevelopment.” And fifth, a profusion of media forms ranging from cassettes to satellite television to the internet, in all of which media Khaled has been remarkably adept. To ignore or dismiss the fact that many young people have indeed found in

\textsuperscript{33} “Preaching with a Passion,” \textit{Al-Ahram Weekly}, No. 614. (November 38 – December 4, 2002).
\textsuperscript{34} See \textit{Al-Arabiya.net}. “Amr Khaled richest Islamic preacher,” February 28, 2008. \texttt{<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/02/28/46255.html>}.  
\textsuperscript{35} Khaled is fond of pointing out that his website during the \textit{Life Makers} program was receiving more hits than Oprah Winfrey’s. (See: “Life Makers No Longer Utopian,” \textit{Islam Online}. \texttt{<http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2006-01/14/article04.shtml>}).
Khaled’s message a means of engagement with faith, society, and self is to misunderstand Khaled’s influence, of which the Ma’ādī Life Makers organization is one reflection.

The Life Makers Television Show

The Life Makers program from which the Life Makers organizations were born was originally aired in 2004 and 2005 on the Saudi-based Iqraa satellite channel and watched by an enormous audience throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Khaled described its purpose in an introductory episode thus: “This is not a television program; it’s a project, to revitalize our countries and save our youth.” [Ahyā’ bilādnā wa inqādh shabābnā]. In interviews, he spoke of the need to move beyond a purely spiritual focus in his lessons toward a project of societal reform, development, and renewal, and declared his goal nothing short of a renaissance (nahḍa). The show promoted an ethos of personal responsibility and self-improvement grounded in faith. This self-improvement, Khaled urged his viewers, was both a religious responsibility and the key to critically needed societal development.

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36 Iqraa, founded in 1998, is an example of a wave of religiously oriented satellite television stations that have become common in the Arabic mediascape. Tellingly, its mission statement declares that it aims to present programs “from an Islamic perspective” and “with a modern vision.” See: <http://www.iqraa-tv.net/Channel.asp>.

37 Khaled has cited 1.4 million active “participants” in the televised Life Makers program. See: “Amr Khaled: A Preacher’s Puzzle.” Al-Ahram Weely, No. 765 (October 20-26, 2005).

38 Khaled frequently contrasted a birnāmaj (program) with the project (mashrū’a) that was Life Makers; see, e.g., Life Makers, Episode 20.

39 Cited frequently throughout the series; see, e.g., Life Makers, Episode 2.

40 “Amr Khaled: A Preacher’s Puzzle.” Al-Ahram Weely, No. 765 (October 20-26, 2005).
One of the salient features of the program was the call for active participation on the part of viewers in projects suggested by Khaled (or by viewers who submitted their suggestions via telephone, mail, and the internet). Each week, Khaled called for his audience to take part in some activity—ranging from writing down one’s dreams on a sheet of paper to assembling bags of clothing for needy families during Ramadan to making a habit of positive interactions with one’s family, neighbors, and friends. These projects frequently drew an explicit link between improving society and improving selves—participation in charitable work was seen as personally transformative, for example, and cultivating a sense of personal responsibility was seen as fundamental to the betterment of society. Crucially, Khaled encouraged his viewers to report on their progress - offering them telephone and fax numbers, and—possibly most importantly—a web address, where his audience could give voice to the projects in which they were participating, find like-minded people in their area, and offer their comments and suggestions with regard to the Life Makers program as a whole.

This highly interactive, project-driven formula was part of Life Makers’ recipe for success, and it inspired over a million participants from across the Arab world and beyond.\footnote{Ibid.} Khaled made a point of reading their letters and emails on the air, of sending video crews to interview participants with particularly engaging stories or to chronicle projects inspired by (or inspiring to) the preacher. He invited representatives of successful programs to filmings of the show, asking them questions and praising their efforts; soon, many if not most of the episodes of Life Makers came to feature...
“testimonials” of this sort. This approach resulted in a feeling on the part of his audience of being part of a movement, of contributing to a larger effort, in which their own contributions were marked and applauded.

As the show progressed, independently organized Life Makers groups sprang up across the Arab world. Like the individual participants, these Life Makers groups sent in progress reports and were featured on the television show. The online forums at amrkhaled.net were filled with posts from people seeking Life Makers groups to join in their area; when a group in one area could not be found, a new one was started. In this regard, Life Makers, though rooted in television, spawned what Gary Bunt has called a Cyber Islamic Environment, an online space for interaction, discussion, message distribution, and opinion-seeking.42 Khaled’s website was used as a networking tool for the organization and coordination of local groups; it featured transcripts and video of Khaled’s shows along with supplementary articles and materials; it also offered discussion forums where any number of topics could be discussed, and gave the opportunity for visitors to ask questions to and receive advice from other users and from Amr Khaled himself.43

42 Gary Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: e-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. London: Pluto Press, 2003. The nature of the community formed on amrkhaled.net is beyond the scope of this paper, but deserves attention as part of a general trend toward the adoption of new media among Islamic groups and social movements more broadly.

43 This advice does not have the status of a fatwa; as Khaled insists, he is not qualified to issue religious opinions.
Throughout the *Life Makers* series, the phrase “Development Through Faith” (*at-tanmiya bil-īmān*)\(^{44}\) was used as a sort of mission statement for the program. The phrase appears on the “Life Makers” logo, and encapsulates both the project’s goals and the means of reaching them. The Ma’ādī Life Makers, too, adopted it as their motto, and to a considerable extent this paper is a reflection on the meanings of “Development Through Faith”—what development means for the Life Makers, the mechanisms by which one develops one’s self and one’s society, and how faith is interpreted as an engine for development on both the individual and collective level. Before turning to the content of the Life Makers’ philosophy and activities, however, it will be necessary to review the history and structure of the Ma’ādī Life Makers organization.

\(^{44}\) The phrase has also been rendered “faith-based development”; the other motto of the program, “Together, We Make Life,” will be touched on below.
Chapter 3. The Life Makers Organization

The Life Makers branch in Ma’ādī was begun in 2004 with the support of a local businessman. According to the director of human development for the branch, while a number of ad hoc groups had sprung into existence while the television program was being broadcast, upon its disappearance in 2005, interest waned and the groups began to fade. The Ma’ādī Life Makers and their sponsor were concerned by this development and sought state registration for their own group. In Egypt, registration as a formal NGO confers official legitimacy on the organization, but also makes the organization subject to considerable oversight from the government, which reserves the right to revoke the organization’s status for nearly any reason.\(^{45}\) In practice, I was aware of no direct intrusion into the day-to-day functioning of the organization on the part of the state, but the group was extremely sensitive to any potential political implications of its activities and was at considerable pains to avoid controversy in this regard.

The Ma’ādī Life Makers’ businessman sponsor provides them with the space for their meetings and funds for operating costs, which appear to be kept fairly low, as the organization operates entirely on a volunteer basis, and the office is “open” only when members are present (generally in the afternoons and evenings). In the summer, money was used, for example, to print posters and flyers advertising a campaign to assemble and distribute bags of food for needy families during Ramadan; the campaign relied on

donations for the Ramadan bags themselves. Some funds are also acquired from sales of crafts made by one of the Life Makers’ projects.

The Life Makers Ma’ādī branch is not part of any wider, formal organizational structure. According to members interviewed, there are perhaps 30 officially-registered Life Makers organizations in Egypt, in addition to considerable numbers of informal groups committed to the same principles—these might be groups of university students, friends, or family members who had been inspired by the programs. The Ma’ādī branch has no institutional affiliation with Amr Khaled himself; he is looked to as a role model, but has no relationship to the group.

Khaled does have an NGO of his own, the Right Start Foundation, with headquarters in London and Cairo; this foundation maintains a number of programs drawn from the Life Makers portfolio, including the health, rooftop agriculture, and anti-drug campaigns. The relationship between the Right Start foundation and the various Life Makers groups is, however, somewhat vague. An executive with the Right Start Foundation told me that his organization shares training and expertise with individual Life Makers groups, but he had no familiarity with the Ma’ādī branch.

The lack of broader coordination among Egyptian Life Makers groups stands in contrast to the Life Makers organizations in some other countries, such as Jordan46 or Great Britain,47 where there are national Life Makers structures or at least networks that coordinate the efforts of the various groups at a central level; to my knowledge there is at

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present no academic study of any of these national Life Makers organizations. There also exists an international Life Makers Union, inaugurated at a conference in Sana’a, Yemen in July 2007. The project aims to coordinate the various Life Makers groups, and while groups from Egypt were present at the meeting, the Ma’ādī Life Makers did not participate.

In any event, the Ma’ādī Life Makers group operates with relative autonomy. There are relationships with other Life Makers organizations; in their annual program to collect bags of food for distribution to the poor during Ramadan, for example, the Ma’ādī group worked with another Life Makers branch in the neighborhood of Helwān. At one point a representative from a branch located in Cairo’s Shubra neighborhood attended a meeting of the Ma’ādī Life Makers executive committee and the idea of establishing a closer partnership was floated. On another occasion a member of a branch from Giza came to discuss partnership and an expansion of the Life Makers academy program. Nonetheless, these partnerships remained generally informal and infrequent, without central coordination or organizational integration.

The primary reason for the lack of a central organization in Egypt, according to at least one member of the Ma’ādī Life Makers, is security; “I don’t want to talk about it,” he said, “but this is the case.” Indeed, most members were hesitant to discuss the issue, but the experience of other Islamic groups in Egypt points to considerable mutual suspicion between such groups and the state, even when, as in the case of Life Makers,

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49 Ibid.
the movements have no direct political involvement. The Ma’ādī Life Makers, as mentioned, were able to acquire official registration as a nongovernmental organization, but a large, centralized national organization might have met with more concern from the government and been seen as a greater risk from the perspective of participants. While some members were willing to see a positive side to the lack of formal organization (such as flexibility and the group’s ability to set its own agenda), a commonly heard sentiment within the group was that without increased organization, the Life Makers were severely hampered in their efforts to impact—or, as they hope, to transform—society, and that the small group format was ultimately insufficient.

Indeed, some anxiety over the group’s future was apparent. Members would often ask me whether I thought that a small group like theirs could really achieve the lofty goal they had set for themselves—that is, the renaissance of Islamic society, within the next 20 years. Although, in keeping with the Life Makers ethos, members made a concerted effort to accentuate the positive aspects of their program, there were real concerns over the difficulty of attracting new members, the departure of old ones, and the loftiness of the goal they had set for themselves. It would seem that the Ma’ādī branch as of summer 2007 was not poised for major expansion in the near term. Its reliance on an individual sponsor indicated some fragility (though this sponsor was personally committed to the program); nonetheless, the group had reached a sufficient threshold of institutional structure to allow for its continuity for at least the immediate future and endure the

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circulation of membership, and the continued presence and mobilization of Life Makers groups worldwide suggests a durable movement that will likely exist for some time to come.

Membership, Structure, Organization, and Activities

The Ma’ādī Life Makers organization has in the neighborhood of twenty regular core members; other volunteers participated in short-term projects. A “new members” meeting held in the summer of 2007 attracted nineteen newcomers (thirteen women and six men), though how many would stay active in the group was uncertain. Women make up over half of the group, and the majority of committee directors and course instructors were women. All were pursuing or had completed university-level education, mostly at public universities. Most were middle or upper-middle class, though there was some degree of variance, and I am unable to provide precise data on family income. A few members had traveled internationally, both within the Middle East and to Europe; two members owned their own cars. Residence varied widely, and interestingly, many members did not live in Ma’ādī—at least one came from as far away as Imbaba, far across the city. I estimate the median age to be in the early to mid-twenties. The director of human development was twenty-nine, while several members were university students as young as eighteen; there was also at least one older woman involved. The majority of members thus belonged to a baby-boom generation or “youth bulge” whose social significance in Egyptian society (and the Middle East more broadly) has been much
commented-upon. Many of the members were unmarried; one young married couple I came to know had met through the group, and both the husband and wife were involved in the organization during my time with them. I was told of at least one other couple who had married through the group as well.

One concern raised by members was that, because the membership was predominantly youth, the transition to marriage and employment often meant the loss of members, or at least a reduction in activity. Membership could involve a relatively large time investment, and for some members, a lengthy commute. As noted above, there was some concern about the group’s future and its ability to expand membership and increase its impact in society; with regard to marriage, the time and energy required by the Life Makers would seem to make it difficult to integrate with the work of starting a family.

The Ma’ādī branch is divided into four subcommittees or departments and led by an executive committee. The subcommittees oversee the various aspects of the organization’s mission and programs, and are as follows: the projects department; the development group; the health forum; and the arts and culture group. The projects department has, as one might guess, many projects: recycling is a major one, and includes paper recycling, as well as a program of recycling jeans and old clothing—denim wallets and cell phone holders made out of recycled jeans are sold by the group as a fundraising

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52 Explanations of the organization’s structure varied; at times, the “projects” group was described as a subsidiary of the development group, and at times the “human development” group was seen as a separate entity from the “development” group. The following represents my best understanding of the organizational structure based on my interviews and my own time with the organization.
activity. Several members owned and used such accessories. The projects group also makes ceramics and holds candle-making classes.

The development group is likewise responsible for a wide range of activities. Important among these are charity efforts. In my time with the Life Makers, as Ramadan drew near, the “Ramadan bags” project was taking up much of the group’s time and energy. The Life Makers, in keeping with a common form of charity during the holy month, assemble bags of food to distribute to needy families. This project was undertaken with the support of local supermarkets and other businesses, as well as individuals outside the Life Makers organization, who donated food items or money or helped to identify needy families. There are also winter and summer clothing drives, where appropriate seasonal clothes are given to those in need.

Another project of the development group, one of the few activities at the Ma’ādī branch not based on suggestions in the Life Makers television program, is the “psychological forum.” Headed by a professional psychologist, the forum is a place to discuss and deal with mental health issues ranging from stress and tension to depression. One member pointed out to me with pride that the psychological forum, which originated in the Ma’ādī branch, had been recognized by Amr Khaled himself.

The development group is also responsible for the Ḥimāyat al-Mustaqbal (Guarding the Future) program, which is designed to combat the use of drugs, especially in schools. Ḥimāyat al-Mustaqbal is drawn directly from the Life Makers television
show,\textsuperscript{53} and Amr Khaled’s Right Start Foundation maintains its own Himāyat al-Mustaqbal organization.\textsuperscript{54} The director of Right Start’s Himāyat al-Mustaqbal told me that his group shared advice with the individual Himāyat al-Mustaqbal groups at times, but he was unaware of the Ma’ādī group, and the Ma’ādī group, in turn, had developed its own strategies for the implementation of the goals of the program. In the summer of 2007, a major project, in conjunction with the health forum, was an attempt to convince owners of the ubiquitous street kiosks in Cairo to stop selling cigarettes and to place a small (Life Makers-produced) sign in their shop explaining why, in terms of both religious duty (the Life Makers view smoking cigarettes as ĥarām, or unlawful) and health. This initiative had met with considerable success in some areas. According to one member’s report to the committee, one neighborhood in which the program had been active was completely devoid of kiosks stocking cigarettes.

Human development, a subsection of the development group, is a key aspect of the holistic development program advocated by Life Makers. The human development section was, during the summer months that I spent with the organization, most involved with the “Life Makers Academy,” which teaches a series of courses on a variety of subjects, ranging from Qur’anic recitation to “character” to first aid to history. At first, the Academy was held for the heads of departments within the organization. After they graduated, the courses were offered to all participants in the Ma’ādī Life Makers programs. In the future, I was told, the hope is to offer these classes as a general public

\textsuperscript{53} Life Makers, Episodes 9, 10, 11.

\textsuperscript{54} In fact, beginning in 2008, Khaled launched a coordinated effort through both the Right Start Foundation and the amrkhaled.net website to make Himāyat al-Mustaqbal a global priority. See: \textless http://www.amrkhaled.net\textgreater and \textless http://www.rightstart.org.uk\textgreater.
service, to individuals with no connection to the Life Makers organization. This “Life Makers Academy” will be given particular attention below, as it exemplifies the Life Makers’ project of self-formation and the relationship of this project to the goal of “development through faith.”

The arts and culture department has worked on short films concerning issues of social concern; the woman who heads the department has published online a cartoon series similar to Anni Matsick’s *Goofus and Gallant* strips in the American children’s magazine *Highlights*, in which two boys confront the same situation, one with a selfish and boorish attitude (and predictably bad results), the other with an ethical outlook and polite manner. A small magazine was also published by the Life Makers; copies were not circulated, but a reading copy was available at the Ma’ādī public library.

The health forum was an especially active group during the time I spent with the organization. Several of the members possessed or were completing degrees in dentistry or other health fields. Currently, the health forum focuses every six months on a different disease or health problem—avian influenza, for example, or cancer—and works to educate people on that issue and the preventative steps that might be taken. In the summer of 2007, the health forum was working on the problem of cancer, and a special focus in this regard was smoking, given its link to lung cancer and its prevalence in Egyptian society. In this campaign, the roles of the health forum and the *Himāyat al-Mustaqbal* project overlapped.

Additionally, members of the health forum were working to distribute leaflets in the Cairo metro concerning the link between cancer and smoking. They also set up a
booth at a trade expo in August, with much the same message. According to one member, the group had also gone into low-income neighborhoods to educate residents about such health issues, as well as speaking in churches and mosques. Amr Khaled’s health campaigns through the Life Makers program had been recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO), and some of the educational materials offered by the Ma’ādī health forum were derived from the WHO.

There were various other projects, as well. One program discussed at the new members meeting was geared toward urban agriculture. In the televised Life Makers program, the key feature was “rooftop gardens,” but I was told that the Ma’ādī branch’s program would find patches of land in the city used as makeshift dumps, remove the litter, and set up small gardens or plantings there. I did not see this program in action; at least during the summer months, it was on hiatus. The coordinator admitted that the agriculture project had seen a drop-off in interest after some initial enthusiasm. The group also shared office space with a computer technology training program, but I saw no direct involvement of the Life Makers in this program.

The day-to-day business of the Ma’ādī Life Makers would vary depending on the projects being worked on. During my time with them in July and August of 2007, a key activity was the Life Makers Academy, which usually met twice a week. The executive committee and the health forum also met weekly. As the Ramadan bags project increased in intensity, members working on this project met regularly to discuss progress and assign tasks. There were also semi-regular joint meetings with the members of the Ḥelwān Life Makers branch dealing with the anti-smoking campaign and Ramadan bags.
I was told repeatedly that summer was a “slow” period, as many members joined other middle-class Cairenes in trips to the resort towns of the north coast of Egypt.

In addition to the daily and regular meetings of the members, projects necessitated a number of ad hoc or extraordinary activities. These ranged from assembling at the Ma’ādī Grand Mall to hand out flyers asking for participation in, donations to, or recommendations for recipients of the Ramadan bags program, to individual members’ attendance at international youth and development conferences.\(^{55}\)

The Ma’ādī Life Makers organization makes use of new communications media. Much of the organization for the group is done via SMS (text messaging) on mobile telephones, and members are in frequent contact with each other via mobile phone. This enables last-minute scheduling changes to be disseminated, and allows for coordination of some of the group’s field projects, like the distribution of pamphlets for the Ramadan bags project at different sites in Ma’ādī.

There is a computer in the Life Makers office (in addition to an entire computer lab for the training program with which Life Makers shares its space). As noted above, the amrkhaled.net website was a crucial means of locating and organizing local groups; several of the Ma’ādī members had found the group by way of this forum. In general, however, day-to-day coordination of the group was done via mobile phone calls or text, rather than via email or any other online medium. The computer was used more for informal communication; many members had profiles on the social networking site Facebook. One member had set up an album on his Facebook site to display pictures

\(^{55}\) One member had just returned from a youth conference in Sweden focused on civilizational dialogue.
from an international youth conference he had attended in Switzerland (members enjoyed viewing the album together in the office). Life Makers also used the computer to download and listen to songs—religious pop sensation Sami Yusuf was a favorite, though in summer 2007 the pop star Sherine was also frequently played. Video and media files, often but not always featuring religious content, were stored on the hard drive and discussed both with me (as a visitor) and among the members themselves. Some examples of these multimedia files include a lecture on the foreshadowing of the Prophet Muḥammad in the Christian Bible and a montage of prominent Western thinkers’ positive statements about Mohammad and Islam. The computer was also used in some of the group’s presentations to the academy, with Microsoft PowerPoint the preferred medium.

The image of Life Makers members gathered around the computer looking at photos or listening to music highlights a key dimension of the group—that is, its role as a place for socialization and interaction. The members of the Maʾādī Life Makers were not only coworkers in the organization; they were friends and peers. It is to this social dimension of the group that I will turn in the following chapter.
Chapter 4. Life Makers as a Social Space

An important function of the Ma’ādī Life Makers group is to provide a space for its members to interact socially. This space is marked as ethical and overtly “Islamic” while offering, by virtue of its relatively autonomous direction at the hands of members themselves, a high degree of informality and a chance for socialization and friendship. The physical space of the Life Makers office and the social space derived from the Life Makers group’s occupancy of and interaction in this space stand apart from the private space of the family, the supervised and structured spaces of school, workplace and mosque, and the uncontrollable public spaces that can at times carry problematic moral implications due to this lack of control. At the same time, the group offers a means of engagement with, rather than withdrawal from, society, in the sense both of encouraging reform through participation and of accommodating the “normal” socialization of middle- and upper-class youth.

In the context of re-Islamisation (the efforts to imbue the institutions, spaces, and ethical outlook of society with Islamic symbols and values56), society becomes terrain for critique, and many public and semi-public spaces in contemporary Cairo carry with them some moral ambiguity from the perspective of devout youth. Problems can range from the use of tobacco in cafes (the Life Makers see smoking as both a public health and an ethical-religious problem) to the “unrestricted” mingling of genders at clubs or parties. Public spaces can pose particular problems for women, since, despite the normative

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position that women should be respected, in actual practice they can be subject to verbal harassment and unwanted attention. Arlene Macleod, in her work on lower middle-class women and the “new veiling” in Cairo, notes some of the difficulties that women face in navigating public spaces, and argues that this is in large part due to the relative positioning of women inside and outside the family: “Women in one’s family are due respect, appreciation, and a measure of dignity; women outside the family are fair game.” One result of this dichotomy is that women in Cairene public spaces can be the objects of disrespect and harassment from non-family men, and can feel degraded by the attention they receive. Factors such as these combine to make public space feel potentially morally suspect.

At the same time, especially as youth enter their college years, the boundaries of family space, perceived as morally safe, can begin to feel constraining. One young woman of the Ma’ādī group told me that “In Egypt, families are close,” but that Life Makers was her opportunity “to see what was outside the family.” Youth are interested in socialization with peers, including members of the opposite sex, but, especially in the context of an increasing societal emphasis on Islamic values, are uncomfortable with the negative moral valuation placed on many forms of potential interaction. The situation of youth caught between their values and the stigma attached to many of their opportunities for socializing recalls the troubling “double existence” Roxanne Varzi has described in

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reference to youth in the rather different context of post-revolutionary Iran.\textsuperscript{58} Following Varzi, Diane Singerman\textsuperscript{59} has discussed the angst and shame felt by Egyptian youth who want to live a moral life, but find themselves tempted by illicit relationships due to the economic obstacles to marriage. Cases need not be so extreme in order to point out the difficulties of navigating the conflicting demands and realities of contemporary Egyptian society and the young people seeking to respond to both the imperatives of pious and ethical behavior and their desire for social interaction.

\textbf{Youth Socialization in an “Islamized Space”}

Socialization between young men and women is a case in point. One male member of the Ma’ādī group emphasized to me the difficulties of such interaction. In Egypt, he said, if men and women are to mix, it is often a choice between mixing in circumstances that are \textit{harām} (forbidden), like nightclubs or unsupervised private places, and not mixing at all. In contrast, Life Makers, he said, was a “clean place,” where men and women could be together “without anything \textit{harām}.” That Life Makers could be designated a “clean” social space may be attributed to several factors, including the explicitly Islamic nature of the group, the character of the members, and the group nature of interaction, providing a kind of peer supervision. To a certain extent the Ma’ādī Life

Makers can be seen as an example of what Olivier Roy\(^\text{60}\) has described as “Islamized spaces”—spaces both physical and social where the moral vision of those seeking a reformation of society along Islamic lines can find expression in the daily life of Muslims. Unlike formally religious spaces such as mosques, the Life Makers group offers a more relaxed environment, where supervision is by peers rather than authorities, and where strict gender segregation is replaced by interaction and socialization.

Men and women are free to interact at Life Makers, based on a shared assumption of respect for appropriate limits: individual men and women are not alone together; physical contact is not permitted; when members are at the office at prayer time, men and women pray separately, the women in the meeting room, the men in the mosque attached to the building. Within these limits, Life Makers represents a space where members (and, presumably, their families) can feel comfortable that they will be able to interact with members of the opposite sex “without anything *harām*” in a respectful and Islamic setting, immersed in moral and pious activity, and supervised by like-minded peers. The Life Makers’ understanding of appropriate gender roles and the implications of women’s leadership in the organization will be discussed further below.

It is important to note here a crucial distinction. Some religious movements, like the Egyptian *Takfīr wa-l Hijra (Excommunication and Holy Flight)*, interpret society as fundamentally corrupt and so disdain any interaction with said society, demanding instead a complete withdrawal or separation. The Maʿādī Life Makers are not at all of this rejectionist school. Not only do they emphasize social engagement as the key to bringing

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about positive change, they also are quite willing to accommodate the lives and activities of youth. As discussed above, Amr Khaled has made a point of emphasizing that being a good Muslim does not mean forgoing normal socialization. To the contrary, one of his principal messages is that a good Muslim should be integrated into society, and he has more than once been criticized for being too accommodating of youth culture or fashion. Although many Life Makers see contemporary Cairene society as having a number of shameful elements (‘uyūb), this does not equate to a rationale for disengagement.

Members go to the gym and to downtown restaurants; they walk together in mixed-gender groups. They listen to popular as well as religious music—Pink Floyd and the Beatles, as well as Arabic pop stars, were mentioned as favorites of some members. There is nothing contradictory, from their perspective, in pursuing these “normal” youth activities and also seeking a space for socialization that is perceived to resonate with their values. Life Makers offers such a space.

Participation in Life Makers can also serve as a means of presenting oneself as a pious individual, which, as Ismail has noted, is an important dimension of the phenomenon of re-Islamisation; the increased permeation of society with Islamic symbols makes the public display of piety important. In this sense Life Makers can be seen, in part, as a means of emphasizing and reflecting Muslim identity. The Life Makers broadcasts often played on viewers’ pride as Muslims—Khaled would frequently note an example of moral strength or innovation on the part of a non-Muslim country and ask,

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61 Life Makers, Episode 16.
rhetorically, whether Islam was as potent a force as that motivating this other country.\textsuperscript{63} One young Egyptian man (not a Life Maker), was especially struck by a video from Amr Khaled’s “reality Hajj,” in which participants chanted exuberantly: “We are Muslims! Mighty, mighty Muslims!” I did not find this self-presentation to be a major concern of the Maʿādī Life Makers themselves, but in the course of circulating their message of development through faith to the wider society, the group presented its goals and visions—and by extension its members—as Islamic.\textsuperscript{64}

More importantly than demonstrating one’s pious credentials to others, participation in Life Makers helps individuals to feel that their own activities conform to perceptions of pious activity and ethical behavior that have become increasingly established as norms. As noted above, some aspects of youth socialization can lead young people to feel they are living a disjunctive “double existence,” with their conduct unable to measure up to the ethical standards set for them, and in which they themselves believe. Participation in Life Makers helps members to feel that their actions are in line with the values that they feel should be represented in their lives. Additionally, as psychologist Robert Coles has pointed out,\textsuperscript{65} it is often the case that volunteerism, service, and philanthropic activities increasingly reinforce a sense of the value of such activities in those who participate in them; members were very clear that they derived personal satisfaction and a sense of using their time well by virtue of being members of the Maʿādī

\textsuperscript{63} e.g., \textit{Life Makers}, Episode 16.
\textsuperscript{64} As, for example in their anti-smoking campaign, in which members distributed flyers arguing that smoking was \textit{ḥaram} from an Islamic perspective.
group. Participation in the organization helped reinforce a feeling of “living out” their faith.

The point that should not be lost in the discussion of the social role of the Ma’ādī Life Makers is the extent to which the group was a place for friendships. My introduction to the Life Makers was a birthday celebration for two of the members, an occasion marked by laughter, camaraderie, and a few happy tears. Before and after meetings, members would share developments in their school and work lives, chat, and joke. To a greater extent than in most of the service and charitable organizations I have observed in the United States, the Life Makers were close friends. The relationships formed within the organization were often deep and lasting (at least insofar as could be determined from the relatively short time that the group has been operative). As noted above, two couples have met and married through this small group alone.
Chapter 5. The Entrepreneurial Pious Subject

A central feature of the Ma‘ādī branch’s agenda in the summer of 2007 was the Life Makers Academy, in which members of the various committees and projects were brought together for a series of lectures and class activities on subjects felt to be important to the Life Makers mission. A few of these courses were traditionally “academic” in orientation—a lecture by one of the senior members on Islamic history, for example—and a few were aimed at practical skill acquisition, such as a course on first aid given by members of the health forum. But many of the courses were straightforwardly aimed at “building character” (or, as it was often phrased by the Life Makers, “human development,” tanmīya bashāriya). Lessons like “group work,” “character,” and “love and coexistence”66 were explicit in their focus on creating a certain type of individual possessed of certain traits and habits. The Life Makers Academy is the site of the most explicit articulation of this project of “human development,” but it is representative of the ethos of the organization as a whole. The Life Makers, as I was frequently reminded by the members themselves, are not merely a charity or a development NGO. The group’s mission is transformational. It aims at the reorientation of Muslim individuals and, through them, their societies.

Put another way, the Ma‘ādī Life Makers are concerned with the formation of subjects, defined here as the purposive development and cultivation of certain positively valued habits, traits, and dispositions within an individual human being, such that this

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individual is seen to be transformed over time. For the Life Makers, the new subject is the foundation for a renaissance of Islamic society as a whole (seen as a gestalt community of these new subjects); this renaissance, conversely, is impossible without the new subject.\(^67\)

As I have noted, the process of subject-formation was usually parsed by the Life Makers themselves as “human development” (\textit{tanmīya basharīya}), which all members agreed was a major component of their group’s mission. Along the same lines, I came to understand the Life Makers’ motto “development through faith” (\textit{at- tanmīya bil-īmān}) as a prescription for both individual human development and development of the society as a whole through the formation of new successful, pious, moral subjects. The meanings of development, success, piety, and morality, the precise nature of the ideal subject, and the technologies of achieving this subject will be the subject of this and the following section.

The ethos of subject formation, personal transformation, and human development has been a major feature of Amr Khaled’s message since before \textit{Life Makers}. The program \textit{Until They Change Themselves} (broadcast, not incidentally, during the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq) was explicitly oriented toward this kind of project of self-transformation.\(^68\) Khaled’s \textit{Life Makers} broadcasts, along with the programs they

\(^67\) This conceptualization is articulated repeatedly in the \textit{Life Makers} television program, and, moreover, was a central facet of the Ma’ādī Life Makers’ explanations to me of their vision and mission.

\(^68\) The phrase comes from the Qur’anic statement: “Verily Allah will never change the condition of a people until they change themselves” (Qur’an 13:11) a favorite of the late 19\textsuperscript{th}- and early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century reformer Jamāl ad-dīn al-Afghānī, as well.
inspired, are aimed at creating a renaissance in Muslim societies, but the core of this effort is a renaissance of Muslim selves.69

Many Islamic activists and movements in Egypt over the past century have shared this understanding of societal change as emanating from personal change. The Muslim Brotherhood’s interpretation of da’wa—which calls Muslims to a fuller, truer, and more active understanding of, identification with, and participation in their faith—as a path to social reform is a notable example. Hasan al Banna, founder of the Brotherhood, described his group’s transformative mission thus: “Our duty as Muslim Brothers is to work for the reform of selves [nufūs], of hearts and souls by joining them to God the all-high; then to organize our society to be fit for the virtuous community which commands the good and forbids evil-doing.”70 Earlier, Islamic modernists like Jamāl ad-dīn al-Afghānī had similarly emphasized the role of personal transformation and return to faith as the key to social development;71 and more recently, Carrie Christiansen has noted the “strong interdependence of a transformation of the person and a transformation of society”72 in contemporary women’s Islamic activism.73

69 The concept of an “Islamic renaissance,” or (a different but related understanding) a “renaissance of Muslim society” has had wide currency in the Islamic world for over a century.
73 It is not only religious movements that see individual subjects as the prime terrain for reform and the key to social change. Secular groups like the “Future Generation Foundation,” in Egypt or “Najah” in Jordan, aim to develop the country’s labor force by developing individuals; while many such organizations are focused on skill development rather than wholesale transformation of character, at least in some cases, these groups are as explicit as the Islamic movements mentioned above in their articulation of a philosophy of social transformation through transformed individuals.
The first seventeen episodes of the *Life Makers* program (collectively entitled “Breaking the Chains”) were structured around an image or parable to which Khaled returned time and again, of a young man in a dark room, chained by his bad habits, lethargy, and purposelessness. I cite one of the versions of this parable at length, because it captures—both stylistically and substantively—the ethos of the *Life Makers* program as a whole, and the Ma’ādī Life Makers organization with it:

Look at that sad, depressed young man. He is sitting in a dark, dreary-looking room with cobwebs lacing the walls. On a small couch, there is a praying mat that has been laid aside. There is a Qur’an on the desk, covered with dust. Outside the room there is light and brightness. We went to this young man and asked him to get up and come with us to sit outside the room in the light. He said that it is impossible. We told him that indeed it is possible. Then his body started to move, indicating his wish to get up but he couldn’t. He realized that his body was chained to the ground. A chain binding his left hand, it is labeled, ‘passivity.’ Another one bound his right hand; it is labeled, ‘lack of seriousness.’ A chain around his neck, it is labeled, ‘ignorance and lack of knowledge.’ Finally, a chain around his foot, it is labeled, ‘no goal in life.’

We told him, “Get up and get rid of these chains. We will help you to achieve this.” We provided him with the first three episodes of the program so he became convinced with the idea. One step at a time he started learning. He started learning how to develop his willpower, how to formulate a goal, how to increase his knowledge, and he started applying this on his life again and again. He got up and unchained himself. That is the first stage.

We taught him to be positive, to be serious, and to exert effort. Until the day came that we opened the door of the room. He tried to get up from his place and leave, but before leaving we told him, “Let us provide you with the resources that you need to be able to succeed.” This is the second stage. We provided him with initiative and willpower; we taught him how to uncover his talents, and to plan for his future. Then he wanted to leave and was able to do so very smoothly. However, when leaving he grasped two things: the Qur’an in his right hand and the gear of success in his left hand. Then he came out to the light. This is the third stage: to work within a group with other young men and women similar to him, leaving their dark rooms. Hold hands together and you will succeed in life.

Our motto, “Together we make life.”

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The image proved to be important not just in Khaled’s presentation, but also in viewers’ and participants’ understanding of the program and its goals. One Life Makers audience member made a short computer-animated film depicting the process of “breaking the chains,” which was shown on a later episode. One of the Ma’ādī Life Makers told me that the story of “breaking the chains” was key to his understanding of the Life Makers project and his own narrative of the effects of the program; after asking me whether I remembered the image, he said, “That’s exactly what happened.”

“Breaking the chains” provides a visual example of the notion that both individual success and the renaissance of the Islamic community depend on the reconstitution of the individual. There is another dimension that will prove important as we examine the Life Makers’ philosophy in detail, and this is the focus on habits and dispositions as the primary determinants of success or failure and thus the primary site of positive change. In particular, the application of habits of success “again and again,” and the dismissal of bad habits (“passivity,” “lack of seriousness”) through practice, together form the cornerstone of the Life Makers’ philosophy of subject formation.

The Life Makers’ sense of how the ideal subject is cultivated can be broadly understood within the framework of virtue ethics, a strain of philosophy concerned with the cultivation of a virtuous subject possessed of moral traits and emphasizing character and disposition as a main element of moral valuation, generally identified in Western literature with the Aristotelian tradition. A major component of virtue ethics in the

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75 Life Makers, Episode 17.
Aristotelian tradition is the sense that moral virtue, as Aristotle himself writes, is “acquired by habit,” which is to say, by the practice of virtue itself.

Social scientists in recent years have turned to examining the implications of habituated virtue and the habit-based construction of subjects more broadly. Following this trend, Saba Mahmood’s anthropological investigation of Cairene women’s mosque movements provides theoretical insights worthy of consideration as well as an ethnographic example with considerable similarities to the Ma’ādī Life Makers. The women’s mosque movements she describes in Politics of Piety and elsewhere are concerned, like Life Makers, with the formation of pious subjects. Mahmood sees what she calls “positive ethics” as central to these women’s project. As Mahmood puts it, “Ethics in this formulation is founded upon particular forms of discursive practice, instantiated through specific sets of procedures, techniques, and exercises, through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed.” “Positive ethics,” then, can be seen as a sort of virtue ethics, oriented explicitly and directly toward personal transformation. The Life Makers are likewise concerned with the formation of subjects through practice, and, though a number of resemblances to the mosque movements as described by Mahmood will become apparent, there are also significant differences, including the immediate sources of their respective philosophies.

The roots of the Life Makers’ philosophy of subject formation and habituated virtue can be seen, like that of the mosque movements, as extending deep into the Greco-

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78 Ibid., p. 120.
Islamic philosophical tradition, but the most direct and relevant source for the Life Makers’ particular articulation of the concept is the self-improvement philosophy emerging from the American (and often Christian) motivational tradition in the works of Norman Vincent Peale, Stephen R. Covey, Dale Carnegie, and others. Covey’s *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, usually in its Arabic translation, was frequently present and referred to at Life Makers meetings. Recently, a “human development” section has appeared on Amr Khaled’s website, titled “A Better You” (*Anta Afdal*), a clear derivation from Joel Osteen’s American publishing phenomenon of the same name. I will argue that this genre can be usefully seen as epitomizing a specific mode of habituated virtue, though one which challenges some of the distinctions made by Mahmood.

Khaled and the Life Makers are not alone in the Islamic world in their admiration for Covey and the genre with which he is associated. The Indonesian televangelist Abdullah Gymnastiar (“Aa Gym”), who drew enormous crowds before his decision to take another wife led to something of a fall from grace, offers a doctrine of “Manajemen Qolbu” (Managing the Heart) that echoed many of the same themes.79 Patrick Haenni has identified what he calls “market Islam,” with roots in the adoption of the thought of Covey, Carnegie, and others beginning in the 1980s.80 More will be said on the implications of this broad phenomenon below.

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was the most commonly cited text of the genre (and indeed, second only to the Qur’an in its frequency of citation during Life

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Makers meetings), and, when analyzed through the lens of recent work on subject formation and habituated virtue, the text proves quite helpful in illuminating the Life Makers’ understanding of their project. A key point is the distinction that Covey draws between the so-called “Character Ethic” and the “Personality Ethic.”

Where the “personality ethic,” which Covey sees as pervasive in post-World War One America, is an ethic based on technique—how to speak eloquently, say, or how to do the right things at the right moment, the “character ethic” is about the cultivation of a specific type of character through the adoption of “habits.” That is, success is not so much a matter of learning how to do as it is a question of learning how to be. Here we might compare Mahmood’s discussion of Aristotelian habituated virtue among women’s mosque movement participants.

Mahmood draws a distinction between what she calls a “Kantian” and an “Aristotelian” ethic, with the latter being representative of the philosophy of habituated virtue described earlier. Following Minson, she suggests that in the Kantian understanding of ethics, “a moral act could be moral only to the extent that it was not a result of habituated virtue but a product of the critical faculty of reason. The latter requires that one act morally in spite of one’s inclinations, habits, and disposition.” In Aristotelian ethics, by contrast, the goal is to alter the inclinations themselves, to make

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83 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 2005. p. 27. Mahmood’s assumption that this is the dominant Western interpretation of the moral self is questionable; one need look no further than Covey to see that at least some version of habituated ethic is also prevalent in force in the American context.
right (or pious) action spontaneous, the organic response of a properly developed self. Al-Ghazālī’s philosophy of the inculcation of “traits of character” deploys a similar logic. As he writes in his *Disciplining the Soul* “A trait of character, then, is a firmly established condition of the soul, from which actions proceed easily without any need for thinking or forethought.”84 The contrast is between an eternally rebellious self being made moral in each instance of decision making by a conscious act of reason and the triumph of judgment over instinct, on the one hand (“Kantian ethics”), and the taming of the rebellious self and the refashioning of the instincts to accord with moral principle, so that moral action arises organically “without any need for thinking,” on the other (“Aristotelian ethics”).85

The distinction between these two ethical frameworks has been perhaps overstated, but it is useful for purposes of painting in broad strokes the philosophical outlook of the Ma’āḍī Life Makers organization, which could be said to be generally Aristotelian (by way of Covey) in its conception of the formation of the ethical—and here, pious—subject. Their emphasis is on the cultivation of pious and ethical dispositions, rather than on the application of critical judgment to specific situations—the Academy course on love and coexistence, for example, drew attention to the importance of cultivating attitudes of self-acceptance and love of others as the key to becoming a person who effectively coexists. A course on “group work” stressed cultivating habits of open-mindedness, purposefulness, responsibility, and so on. One of the Life Makers’

promotional materials is a day planner (a medium that is a message in itself, to be sure) which, along with inspirational quotations both secular and sacred, offers a step-by-step plan for adopting habits to “change your life.”

Because Mahmood’s interpretation of Aristotelian ethics in the women’s mosque movement sees bodily practice, particularly in the forms of *hijāb* and ritual prayer, as the cornerstone of the mosque movement’s idea of subject-formation, the question of specific bodily practices deserves some attention. For the Life Makers, specific bodily practices are less important than dispositions and attitudes, and these dispositions and attitudes are not seen as primarily acquired through bodily practice. This is not to say that specific “Islamic” corporeal practices were not seen as part of pious comportment. The women of Life Makers universally wore *hijāb*, and prayer was of course seen as an obligation. After I left Cairo, Amr Khaled’s website began posting a series of cartoons depicting common errors made by Muslims when they pray, revealing at least a measure of interest in specific bodily practice. However, bodily practices were not usually discussed within the framework of subject-formation, which was seen as a process of applying attitudinal or relational habits of virtue rather than bodily ones.

Mahmood argues that a relative lack of concern with the specific forms that pious comportment takes “accords with various aspects of the Kantian model of ethics…however, from an Aristotelian point of view, the difference” between, for example, claims that the *hijāb* is a broad term that enjoins modesty, on the one hand, and

86 I witnessed only one exception, a potential participant at a “new members” meeting.
87 See: <http://www.amrkhaled.net/gallery/gallery697.html>.
the highly particular way of expressing modesty demanded by the mosque movement, on
the other, “is immense.” While Mahmood makes a strong argument for the importance
of the specifics of ethical performance, there is nevertheless a strain of ethical thought
that partakes of the “Aristotelian” conception of habituated virtue while emphasizing
attitudes and dispositions over specific performative gestures. (Khaled, for example, has
critiqued an overwhelming focus on “small details” as a hindrance to coexistence). It is
from such a perspective that the Life Makers understand the process of developing their
ideal moral subject.

What is a Life Maker?

It remains to describe just what the “Life Maker” looks like. I will use the term
“entrepreneurial” as a shorthand for the kind of subject envisioned by the Ma’ādī Life
Makers, but due to the varied connotations of the term, I present a limited definition.
Entrepreneurship in this sense is used in reference to a palette of traits including an
emphasis on personal responsibility, a belief in the individual as the agent and driver of
change, an orientation toward defined projects and goals, and a focus on “success”
broadly construed. The “entrepreneurial subject” as I am here describing it, can be seen
as generally analogous to that encouraged by the subset of American self-improvement
literature discussed above, as exemplified by the books of Stephen Covey and Dale
Carnegie. As distinct from the common sense of “entrepreneurship,” the entrepreneurial

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89 A Call to Coexistence television series, Introduction.
subject is not necessarily concerned with business endeavors or capital formation, but as will be seen, it is at home in the context of the market economy and neoliberal economic reform. Indeed, I suggest that this entrepreneurial subject should be seen in relation to what the Egyptian state is promoting as a “new social contract”\(^{90}\) in which the rights and obligations, and indeed the very nature, of the ideal citizen are redefined. As will be seen, this prospective new citizen has much in common with the ideal Life Maker, whose characteristics are analyzed below.

A discussion of an “entrepreneurial spirit” will surely bring to mind Weber’s Protestant Ethic, and certain aspects of Weber’s thought may prove useful here in terms of describing elements of the Life Makers’ sense of the ethical self and its role in society. In particular, the Life Makers’ ideal subject shares with Weber’s archetype a sense of “calling” (though the specific articulation of the concept differs) and a moral sense of the value of rational, purposive labor.\(^{91}\) Particularly telling is the insistence of the Life Makers that, as Khaled puts it, “working is a form of worshiping Allah.”\(^{92}\) There is not, of course, a perfect correspondence between the two archetypes, especially in terms of the motives Weber attributes to Calvinist worldly asceticism.\(^{93}\) It is also important, given Weber’s own comments on Islam,\(^{94}\) to note that I am not arguing that “Islam” as such is


the force determining the character of the Life Maker. Talal Asad has effectively critiqued this desire to position an undifferentiated Islam as an agentive force. Rather, I am speaking of a specific moral vision framed in Islamic terms. This vision may be authentically Islamic without by any means exhausting the possibilities of Islamic ethics or Islamic subjects.

Additionally, while Weber saw the Protestant Ethic as generally constitutive of—rather than a product of—a society of rational capitalism, I will argue that the Life Makers stand in a more complex relationship with the Egyptian socioeconomic order; to a considerable extent, the ideal Life Maker as envisioned by the group can be seen as a result of the changing social landscape, driven by economic reforms imposed by the state and the demands of the international economy and its institutions. However, this does not mean that the Life Makers’ vision is a mere mechanical reaction to material circumstances. Rather, I suggest that it implies a localization and reinterpretation of the values that constitute the neoliberal citizen. If Weber’s “iron cage” is consolidating its global reach, the Life Makers are affixing their own meaning to its terms.

This “entrepreneurial” Islamic subject, or some variation of it, has been noted elsewhere. Observers of the Gülen movement in Turkey have noted a “do-it-yourself” ethic and “Puritan” attitudes toward work among followers, and Olivier Roy writes of the Muslim world more broadly: “Conservative in faith and beliefs, but modern in terms of business, a middle class of Islamic puritans with a Weberian work ethic can be seen to

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be emerging.\textsuperscript{97} Bjorn Utvik has seen such a “Protestant ethic” as a characteristic common to (political) Islamist groups, arguing that Islamists in the Muslim world can be seen as playing a modernizing role in some ways analogous to that of Protestants and puritans in early modern Europe, not least in their promotion of virtues such as a sense of “work as calling.”\textsuperscript{98} The Life Makers organizations represent part of this general trend of fusing individual Islamic religiosity with the realities of middle- and upper-class life in a world increasingly governed by the logic of neoliberal capitalism.

Although the predominant immediate source for the Life Makers’ entrepreneurial subject is the American self-improvement genre, and its immediate context a society in the midst of structural change, this subject is framed and interpreted, crucially, not as import or innovation, but as a core component of Islamic behavior with strong links to a shared religious heritage. Khaled says that, in preparation for the \textit{Life Makers} program, he read many works of Western social science, psychology, and inspirational literature. But what he found, he said, was that all that they had to say was already evident in the Islamic tradition.\textsuperscript{99} In this regard, Khaled, and the Mâ’adî Life Makers, frequently cite exemplary models from Islamic history and heritage as models to learn from and pattern one’s own habits of virtue on.\textsuperscript{100} The life and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad as described in the \textit{hadith} literature were the most important source for this interpretation;

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Life Makers}, Episode 5.
the Prophet’s companions (the *sahāba*) and wives, and other figures from Islamic history, ranging from the Imam Shāfi‘ī to Mehmet the Conqueror to Shaykh ʿAḥmad Yassīn, were also frequently discussed both in Khaled’s broadcasts\(^\text{101}\) and by the Life Makers. Through this “localizing” of the self-improvement genre and the subject it implies within the Islamic tradition, the Life Makers depict the traits and virtues of their ideal subject as fundamental components of the pious Muslim.

The precise nature of the Life Makers’ ideal subject will begin to become clearer with attention to the particular values emphasized by the group. First, the ideal Life Maker is goal-oriented; the principle may be drawn both from Amr Khaled himself and from the American self-improvement genre that has come to occupy such a central place in the Life Makers vision. Stephen Covey writes, in formulating his “second habit,” to “begin with the end in mind,”\(^\text{102}\) and calls on his readers to formulate “mission statements” to help them reach their goals.\(^\text{103}\) Norman Vincent Peale’s *Power of Positive Thinking* asks readers to “picturize” their success.\(^\text{104}\) This is precisely the ethos at work in both Life Makers meetings and the Academy. In one Academy course, on “group work,” participants were assigned the task of coming up with a project—any project—to further the goals of “development through faith.” The students had to identify their project, the steps that would have to be taken to make it achievable, and the results that they anticipated their project would achieve. The exercise was very much in the *7 Habits*

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101 Practically every virtue that Khaled discussed was illustrated with examples from Islamic history; some specific cases will be discussed below.
103 Ibid., pp. 128, 136.
mode, and similar—except for the broader spiritual-developmental goal—to the project proposals of American corporate culture.

Amr Khaled, likewise, urges Life Makers in the course of his broadcasts to fix their goals in mind as the first step to turning dreams into achievable projects. He tells his viewers that the ability to set goals and make plans is a fundamental human characteristic; he chides the audience members for having reached 18 or 25 years of age without having written down their goal in life; he implores them to “prove that [they] are human, by having a goal!” “What is your goal in life? Do you know your goal? Have you got it written down?” He sees a goal as the key to all the other steps in his program. He says “in this world, thousands…millions of Muslims live, eat, marry, have children, and die” without a goal. “You’re a human being!...Do you know what the difference is between you and all other creatures? All other creatures live day-to-day, to eat and drink,” without ever looking to a greater purpose. “The basic difference between you as a human being and other creatures” is an ability to plan and set goals. One of Khaled’s exemplary models in this regard is Mehmet the Conqueror, who allegedly set himself the goal of conquering Constantinople at the age of ten.

The idea of establishing goals—including one’s “goal in life”—and working purposively and rationally toward them strongly recalls Weber’s idea of calling, where Weber sees the notion of calling as having arisen from Luther’s reinterpretation of scripture, Khaled and the Life Makers frame their quite similar notion in terms of Islam.

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105 *Life Makers*, Episode 14.
106 *Life Makers*, Episode 7.
Khaled argues that, of all the great world philosophies, only Islam provides a true answer to the question of why Man was created: to worship God. And this worship, Khaled points out, is not through perpetual prayer, but through the active improvement and development of self and society. This Islamic framing is combined with and refracted through the lay philosophy of the self-improvement genre—its, perhaps, a distant descendent of strains of Reformation thought.

A “goal-focused” mentality is not merely a trait possessed by the successful pious subject; it is also constitutive of that subject. Stephen Covey situates his project of “becoming your own creator” under the chapter on formulating goals and beginning with the end in mind.” Likewise, Amr Khaled, in an episode entitled Determination, talks about the transformative nature of an individual’s determination to reach a goal. This determination, he says, “grows inside of you and changes you into a different person.” The director of human development at the Ma’ādī Life Makers also spoke of how working together for a common goal transforms individuals and draws them closer together.

Complementing this goal-centered ethos is the Life Makers emphasis on action and more specifically projects. The “project” format is central to both the Life Makers television program and the Ma’ādī branch’s activities. Virtually every episode of the television program concluded with a call to participation in a shared project that exemplified the episode’s theme—posting signs to discourage smoking, collecting

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108 Life Makers, Episode 14. The exact correspondences with and divergences from Luther’s concept of “calling” are beyond the scope of this paper, but the surface similarities are intriguing.
110 Life Makers, Episode 19.
clothes for needy families, walking or running the length of a marathon over the course of a week—and, as noted above, the “project” formula was an important factor in driving the participatory ethic and success of the show. Again, as in a model corporation, individuals were given a goal, a deadline, and a means of reporting on and evaluating their successes and shortcomings. These reports were analyzed and the results broadcast to all the participants in the program (in this case, during Khaled’s broadcasts, which almost invariably began with a report on the results of the previous project; often these were gleeful accounts of astounding success; at other times, Khaled admitted that he had hoped for more or better participation).  

The Ma’ādī Life Makers, likewise, operate very much in the “project” model. I have already noted the example of the Academy’s “group work” lesson, and the principle extends throughout the organization. The Health Forum in the summer of 2007 was in the middle of a five-year plan during each six-month period of which focus would be devoted to educating the public about a specific disease or public health issues—cancer, smoking, heart disease, avian influenza. The project, like the “test projects” of the Academy, was articulated with explicitly formulated final and intermediate goals, deadlines, benchmarks, and delegation of responsibilities. Regular meetings were scheduled to keep members coordinated and updated. The same was true of other activities of the Ma’ādī branch. I have already devoted some attention to the annual Ramadan bags project. Other projects—like the Academy itself, or the urban agriculture group (which was on hiatus at

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111 e.g., *Life Makers*, Episode 5.
least during the summer months that I observed)—were undertaken in much the same way.

The emphasis on projects and goals relates to another aspect of the ideal Life Maker: the power of thought and ideas. In the televised Life Makers episodes, Amr Khaled repeats time and again a mantra that would certainly not be out of place in Peale’s The Power of Positive Thinking: “if a person lives for an idea and toils hard, giving all his best efforts for this idea, then he will definitely achieve it.” In one of his frequent allusions to an exemplary model in the Islamic past, Khaled here refers to Marwān al-Hammār, an Andalusian donkey driver who (according to Khaled) achieved through focus and effort his goal of becoming ruler of Andalusia.

Perhaps nowhere was the centrality of thought and positive thinking more apparent than in the Ma’ādī Life Makers group’s articulation of their mission, as it has been described above: to change society by changing individuals mindsets. The centrality of this focus on the power of thought was brought home to me by the director of human development for the organization, who asked me one day:

“Do you think a group like ours can succeed in changing society?”
I answered that I wasn’t sure how societies change, and she responded simply by pointing to her head. Changing society, she explained, was a matter of changing people’s mindsets.

Another important dimension of the “entrepreneurial” character of the Life Makers’ pious subject is what is parsed as “personal responsibility.” Amr Khaled places

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112 Life Makers, Episode 1.
113 Life Makers, Episode 14.
“taking responsibility” (*Haml al-Mas‘ūlīya*) as a first step in the *Life Makers* project.\(^\text{114}\) At the 2007 international Life Makers conference in Yemen, it was agreed to help support a project that emphasized personal responsibility over “*tawakkul*”, seen as a fatalistic dependence on God’s will. A spirit of resignation or fatalism was seen as both pervasive in Arab societies and absolutely deleterious to the project of a societal renaissance.\(^\text{115}\) At the Ma‘dī branch, personal responsibility was a regularly preached virtue in the Life Makers academy, but beyond this I found myself impressed by the extent to which it had been internalized. In a planning meeting for the anti-smoking campaign, participants were extremely quick to volunteer their services, to offer ideas, and to ask if there was anything they could do. Conversely, in one of the infrequent disputes that I witnessed between members (on the failure to coordinate some practical aspects of the anti-smoking campaign), the argument quickly settled around the moral point of the necessity of taking responsibility. The necessity of such an attitude was framed both in practical and ethical terms—on the one hand, it was seen as a necessity for the proper functioning of the group; on the other, it was seen as a moral obligation and part of being a true Life Maker.

Finally, for the Muslims involved in the Life Makers project, piety, self-development, and success go hand in hand. There was an overwhelming sense of the importance of making an impact on their societies. As has been noted, success was seen to be the logical, natural, and at times almost foreordained outcome of the adoption of the

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\(^{114}\) *Life Makers*, Episode 4.

\(^{115}\) See esp. *Life Makers*, Episodes 4-7.
virtues of the Life Maker. This emphasis on success does not mean (though it does not preclude) personal material success; rather, what is sought is a successful society. While Amr Khaled’s message has at times been interpreted—and frequently been critiqued—as representative of a comforting and self-centered message reminiscent of American “Prosperity Gospel” teaching, it is important to note that relatively little time is spent in Amr Khaled’s broadcasts—and almost none in the classes, projects, or informal conversations of the Ma’ādī Life Makers—on the role faith plays in personal material success. Khaled, in fact, devotes an episode of Life Makers to critiquing the excesses and selfishness of Western capitalism.\footnote{Life Makers, Episode 12.} Success is defined in part in material terms, it is true, but these material conditions of success are defined in terms of societal development rather than individual wealth. Although the Life Makers are not necessarily opposed to worldly success, and although the entrepreneurial traits of the ideal Life Maker can be seen as meshing well with the acquisition of wealth, personal material success cannot fairly be seen to be the goal of either the Life Makers television program or the Ma’ādī Life Makers group. Rather, success is consistently defined as the reorientation and resurrection of the Islamic community.

It is worth remarking that this community focus complements rather than contradicts its ethic of individual self-cultivation and the prominent place of the individual agent. A member of the health forum, for example, cited Amr Khaled’s statement that a successful society needs healthy individuals on which to build its success. More than once, it was emphasized to me that one of the mottoes of the Life
Makers program (“Together, We Make Life”) was an affirmation that the goals of the program were unachievable by any one person, but only by dedicated individuals working in concert. This view echoes Covey’s emphasis on moving beyond “independence” toward “interdependence.”

Other Aspects of the Ideal Life Maker: Dialogue and Gender Roles

The “entrepreneurial” spirit is fundamental to the Life Makers’ project of subject formation, but it is not the only dimension of that project. Another dimension that is worth commenting on is the commitment to dialogue in the framework of “coexistence.” I have already noted the youth conference Khaled organized in response to the Danish cartoon controversy. The Ma’ādī Life Makers, too, were concerned with coexistence, as exemplified by the Academy class on the subject, introduced following the airing of a series of broadcasts on the subject by Amr Khaled himself. One member commented to me that the emphasis on dialogue—and the Denmark conference specifically—was what had drawn him to the Life Makers organization. With the launch of his program A Call for Coexistence in 2007, Khaled associated himself strongly with this theme. Needless to say, this dimension of Khaled’s message is welcomed especially by non-Muslim commentators; its long-term impact remains to be seen.

One other aspect of the Life Makers project of self formation worthy of attention is the place of gender, especially given the critiques of Amr Khaled’s treatment of this subject. Liberal commentators have criticized the preacher for encouraging a regressive

understanding of gender relations and the role of women. Khaled’s emphasis on the *hijāb* (which he does regard as a religious requirement) and his sermons on purity have the effect, they argue, of putting the onus of sexual morality exclusively on women, framing them as potential corruptors, with little of the same moral burden placed on men.\(^{118}\)

In light of this critique, which is not baseless, it is worth drawing attention not only to Khaled’s frequent discussion of the importance of a positive role of women in the development of society, but also to the prominent place of women in the Life Makers organization. As noted above, Khaled in his broadcasts makes frequent use of exemplary models of behavior from the Islamic tradition; when describing such models, Khaled very often includes women. Sumāyya bint Khayyāt, Islam’s first martyr, and the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad, are referenced as examples of women’s piety and leadership among the faithful, and standards against which to measure one’s own behavior. On a practical level, in the Ma’ādī branch, women formed the majority of membership, occupied key leadership roles, and interacted with their male counterparts as equals. At least part of the accomplishment of the Life Makers program has been the provision of an “Islamic space” where the capacity of women to manage mixed-gender groups is recognized, where women’s work in the public sphere of social change is positively valuated, and where, as described above, women can interact with men on terms of friendship and equality.

While Khaled’s apparent lack of interest in reassessing women’s position in Islamic society has been much discussed by his critics, relatively little attention has been paid to his concern in the *Life Makers* program with confronting what he argues is a false

image of masculinity, characterized by machismo and aggressiveness as well as drug use—Khaled alleges that this image has been promoted by cigarette and alcohol companies and popular media. In place of this understanding, Khaled valorizes a different masculine subject, some of the distinct dimensions of which are the refusal of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, social concern and pious behavior, and interaction with members of the opposite sex on the basis of mutual respect. Khaled makes an effort to frame this image of masculinity within the bounds of “normal” youth socialization - young men can and should engage with society, spend time with friends, play sports, listen to music, and take vacations. At the same time, the male Life Maker should bring his cultivated virtues into his daily life, transforming quotidian activities such as work, study, or interaction with friends and family into opportunities for demonstrating pious behavior.

While neither of these formulations of gender roles represents a radical break with the status quo (nor do they, perhaps, conform to the hopes of progressive and liberal reformers), they do show some important efforts to reconcile the practice of Islamic piety with the realities of upper and upper-middle class Cairene youth. It must be admitted that, whatever else may be said about the visions of male and female Life Makers, they are certainly seen to be active agents of personal and societal transformation. I turn now to an examination of the latter part of this project of transformation and the place of this pious subject in contemporary Egyptian society.

119 Life Makers, Episodes 8, 9, 10.
Chapter 6. The Life Makers and Societal Change

The above discussion has sought to explain the individual dimensions of the motto “development through faith.” Yet this individual project of self-fashioning should be seen as a fully integrated part of the Ma’âdî Life Makers’ vision of social change. This is, after all, their mission and *raison d’être*—to bring about a renaissance in their society through individual and collective “development.” As will be shown, the Life Makers see social change as emerging from a process of making claims on individuals and on society, rather than, as in many “classic” Islamist movements or organizations, on the state. This societal focus is both part of a trend in late 20\textsuperscript{th}- and early 21\textsuperscript{st}-century Islamic activism\textsuperscript{120} and a consequence of the Life Makers’ specific philosophy of the subject. I will argue in the following section that this subject—the Life Maker—is a response and an accommodation to the Egyptian state’s efforts to define a “new social contract” and to redefine the relationship between citizen and state. This accommodation is not, however, in perfect conformity with the state’s vision; instead, the Life Makers have affixed their own meanings to the new citizen. Before turning to the question of the “new social contract” and the Life Makers’ place in it, I will examine how the Life Makers themselves view the mechanisms of societal reform.

In analyzing the Life Makers’ philosophy of social change, it will be useful to draw on the insights of social movement theory, which has over the past decade especially begun to deal with religiously inspired movements in general and Islamic

movements in particular. The broad definition of a social movement is a community of individuals united by a common grievance who deploy a variety of techniques (this “repertoire” of techniques is sometimes narrowly defined) to “make claims” on a targeted authority in an effort to bring about change. Some of the assumptions of classical social movement theory must be modified or discarded in discussing the Ma’ādī Life Makers, but many of its observations remain useful.

One of the most useful concepts from social movement theory is that of “framing” collective action. The process of framing is the articulation of problems, goals, and means of redress such that they resonate with a movement’s audience and participants—explaining these problems, mechanisms, and solutions in terms that make them both comprehensible and important. It is, as Benford and Snow put it, a matter of “the production and maintenance of meaning.” For my purposes I will focus on two kinds of framing: “diagnostic framing” (the articulation of the problem or grievance), and “prescriptive framing” (the articulation of how the problem is to be addressed). Again, the motto “development through faith” serves as a useful point of departure for a discussion of the Life Makers’ frames of action in both of these dimensions.

From the diagnostic perspective, the concept of “development” must be understood in the context of a sense of present “underdevelopment” as compared with the world at large (“the West” is the most common, but not the only, basis for comparison) as

124 Ibid.
well as the past achievements of Muslim communities and the potential to which their
religion calls them. Amr Khaled’s *Life Makers* broadcasts deal frequently with this sense
of “underdevelopment.” In particular, Khaled perceives a crisis in Arab Muslim countries
that manifests in both spiritual malaise and lack of achievement in education, innovation,
and economic development.\(^{125}\) Muslim countries (and, for our purposes, Egypt in
particular) are seen as faced with a “double crisis,” whose two facets—material and
moral—are intrinsically linked. He admonishes his viewers, for example, that people in
Western countries “say that we Muslims aren’t good workers.” He chidingly offers
stories and statistics showcasing both the low economic development of the Middle East
in general and the lack of virtues (such as proactiveness and pride in one’s work) that are
framed as the cause for this underdevelopment.\(^{126}\)

The perception of a material crisis with moral roots is not unique to Khaled. It has
its place in the frames of a considerable number of reform movements in Egypt over
more than a century. The early reformer Jamāl ad-dīn al-Afghānī articulated his message
in similar terms, as did Ḥasan al-Banā of the Muslim Brotherhood. While the details of
the crises (and the formulations for repairing them) vary considerably, it is important to
note the continuity of the idea that Egyptian material underdevelopment in both the
colonial and contemporary post-colonial periods is linked to some sort of moral or
religious shortcoming, and that the solution will be at least partially drawn from a
religious and moral awakening.

\(^{125}\) *Life Makers*, Episode 15.
\(^{126}\) *Life Makers*, Episode 6.
The Ma’ādī Life Makers, like the Life Makers program, see their mission in terms of developing a society that is lagging behind, though it is worth noting here that the members at the Ma’ādī branch do not tend to perceive themselves individually as victims of underdevelopment. This is at variance with what has been observed of many other Islamic movements, whose membership is often at least partially motivated by a personal feeling of dashed expectations. Instead, the Life Makers’ attitude toward Egyptian underdevelopment is more similar to that of reformers seeking to ameliorate the plight of the less fortunate. For themselves, the key benefit of the Life Makers groups was not the expectation of a material change of circumstances, but a sense of spiritual growth and active participation. This might be a reflection of what Inglehart has described in his work on “post-materialist values,” where he argues that people for whom immediate material needs are comfortably met are likely to see more intangible (or post-materialist) principles as worthy of time and attention. On the other hand, it should be remembered that material development of the society as a whole is without doubt a key goal of the Life Makers, suggesting that Inglehart’s analysis on a “societal” or “civilizational” level might overlook the attitudes and values of the relatively well-off who nevertheless are living in a society where, on the whole, material security is elusive.

At any rate, the Life Makers have succeeded in creating and articulating a powerful diagnostic frame that resonates with both members’ experience of their society

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and their desire to be actively engaged in the practice of successful pious development, while linking the project to the strong cultural vocabulary of Islam and a tradition of self and societal reform. As for the Life Makers’ prescriptive framing, I have already begun to discuss the primary mechanism through which social change is to be effected according to the group’s vision—that is, through the transformation of individuals. This focus on individuals and on society has ramifications for the way that the Life Makers prescribe and seek social change; it also has implications for the political consequences of the Life Makers organization, a subject that will be dealt with in the following section.

Social movement theory, in keeping with its vision of social movements as representing a subset of contentious politics, emphasizes that movements “make claims.” That is, they deliver their calls for redress or reform to a given target. Traditionally, social movements have been seen as vehicles of making claims primarily against states, or, at times, international institutions usually composed also of state actors. This model, constructed as it was for the European liberal-democratic state as it emerged at the end of the 18th century and developed through the end of the 20th, has been critiqued and modified in recent years as construing social movements too narrowly. But the assumption that movements—for civil rights or against foreign war, for union rights or against free trade—target states (or, again, international governmental institutions) is a common one, and the belief that it is pressure on states that will bring about the desired social change is as applicable to Nassirist Egypt as it is to mid-century America. It is an

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assumption that is shared by “traditional” Islamism, as described by Olivier Roy. Classical political Islamism as Roy describes it calls for state reforms, most often by way of a call for state implementation of Shariah. This is not to say that Islamist groups do not make claims on society—the Muslim Brothers, for example, were founded on a principle of “bottom-up” reform as the precursor to political change. But the goal and target of political Islamism is finally the state. Society-focused Islamic organizations have in this sense often been seen to be engaged in a Gramscian war of position, engaged in a project, as Gramsci puts it, to conquer “non-decisive” positions—those without direct political relevance (such as professional syndicates and sites of opinion production)—in order to eventually engage in “siege warfare” to gain control of the state apparatus.

The claims that the Life Makers make, by contrast, are not on the state, nor is the state apparatus their eventual goal; they are instead focused—both in the short term and as a final goal—on society at large, and on the individuals of which society is composed. Rather than demanding state action in repairing roads or attending to healthcare needs, the Life Makers philosophy encourages young people to take it upon themselves to repair potholes or to educate the poor about the symptoms of and treatments for diseases. While a number of Islamic organizations have cast themselves as providers of services that the state has failed to provide, the Life Makers generally take the position that it is the individual’s and society’s responsibility, and not the state’s, to provide for oneself and

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the community. As I will argue, the group is uninterested in the state for reasons that are in some part due to the constraints of circumstance, but that are more generally the product of their specific philosophy of the mechanisms of achieving the ideal society, that is, through individuals, not policy reform or change of government.

This attitude is broadly consistent with Olivier Roy’s understanding of “post-Islamism,” which Roy primarily identifies with the “privatization” of religion and a reaffirmation of the distinction between religion and politics, and which implies a society-centered approach and a focus on spiritual and social development rather than political change. “The aim,” Roy says, “is to reconstruct a true Muslim community by starting from the individual. It is based on an individual reappropriation of Islamic symbols, arguments, rhetoric, and norms.”

It might be argued that the apolitical nature of the Life Makers is simply the result of the pressures an authoritarian state imposes on a civil society organization, particularly one that, like the Ma’ādī Life Makers, has sought official registration and a nonconfrontational posture toward the regime. It is true that there is limited opportunity on the Egyptian scene for civil society to make claims on the state without entering into a risky and confrontational political sphere. As social movement theorists like Quintan Wiktorowicz have noted, “opportunity structure”—the possibilities and limitations on collective action imposed by context—plays an important role in the formulation of a

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135 I agree with Bayat in that “the advent of post-Islamism does not necessarily mean the historical end of Islamism;” Rather than a historical successor to Islamism, post-Islamism represents a qualitatively different way of viewing the relationship between Islam, state, and society (See: Asef Bayat, “What Is Post-Islamism?” ISIM Review 16, Autumn 2005).

group’s repertoire of contention. With regard to the Ma’ādī Life Makers, these limits were made quite apparent to me during one of the health forum’s discussion on their anti-smoking and cancer prevention project. One member suggested that, as Ramadan was drawing near, it might be a good idea to focus on the religious dimensions of the anti-smoking campaign. The leadership of the group quickly pointed out that employing this sort of framework might jeopardize the valuable permission they had been given by metro officials to hand out fliers and talk with people at metro stations. Having accepted official registration and having made the decision to proceed in an accommodationist rather than confrontational model vis-à-vis the regime, the Life Makers were extremely cautious about the government’s sensitivity toward religious activism.

Nevertheless, as Wiktorowicz argues, opportunity structure alone is insufficient for determining the ways in which a movement or organization will seek to make claims and interact with society and the state. I am asserting that the Life Makers’ decision to focus its claims on society rather than on the state has deep roots in the group’s philosophy and its understanding of the nature of pious behavior and “development through faith.” The “entrepreneurial” Life Maker, with his or her traits of personal responsibility, individual initiative, and transformative thought is not meant to rely on a reform of the mechanisms of state for the provision of services or the realization of the successful society—for the Life Makers, as for Roy’s post-Islamists, this society emerges from the practices of individuals, not from the creation of a “good state.” I also argue that

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this entrepreneurial subject should be seen in the context of the major reconfigurations of
the Egyptian socioeconomic landscape in the context of neoliberal reform since 1991,
and especially since 2004, the year Life Makers was first aired.

A New Social Contract: The Entrepreneurial Subject in Context

Egypt—along with many states in the Middle East—is undergoing deep-seated
structural change as the economy transfers from public- to private-sector dominance. The Arab Socialist state, as it emerged in the wake of the 1952 revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, positioned itself as the guarantor of the Egyptian citizen’s economic security. The constitution ratified in 1971 declares that “work is a right, a duty and an honour ensured by the State,” and guarantees the provision of healthcare, social security, and education. This Nasserist patron-state was eventually subject to what Carrie Wickham describes as “overextension” and “dilution” as its promises (especially the promise of public-sector employment to university graduates) proved unsustainable, particularly in the context of a long recession beginning in the early 1980s with the drop in world oil prices.

The reform process, which had begun to a limited extent in 1973 with Anwar Sadat’s economic open-door policy known as Infitāḥ, intensified beginning in 1991,

when the Egyptian government, beset by a spiral of debt and inflation, entered into an economic stabilization program with the International Monetary Fund and a structural adjustment program with the World Bank.¹⁴² Former Finance Minister Dr. Medhat Hassanein identified a “second wave of reforms” beginning in 1998.¹⁴³ These reforms, including deregulation of the service sectors, a new investment law, antitrust legislation, bank restructuring, and tax and customs reforms, are all in line with a Washington Consensus-inspired vision of the importance of free markets and economic liberalization.

Neoliberal reform efforts have increased in recent years, particularly with the installation of the reform-minded cabinet of Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif in 2004. A 2005 labor law increased the freedom of employers to hire and fire at their discretion. Supporters of these reforms note the remarkable stabilization and expansion of the Egyptian economy over the past decade, with strong growth rates, rising exports, and curbing of the deficit; critics point to the failure of the reforms to address problems of poverty and inequality and argue that external factors as much as internal reform have driven the growth of recent years.

While the process has been at times slow and uneven, hampered by both corruption and cronyism, on the one hand, and popular resistance to the reduction of employment guarantees and other benefits on the other, it is nevertheless a major force reshaping contemporary Egyptian society. Observers have described the death of the old

Nasserist social contract, in which the state served as the guarantor of employment and citizens’ well-being, and its replacement with a social contract that emphasizes the individual citizen’s responsibility for his or her livelihood and success. This logic of a changing social contract was made explicit in the 2005 *Egyptian Development Report*, a joint project of the United Nations Development Program and the Egyptian government’s Ministry of Planning and Local Development. The Report, subtitled *Toward a New Social Contract*, calls on Egypt to develop a new understanding of state-society relations. The framework of the report is at once a recognition of the important place of the welfare state in the Egyptian political context and a commitment to ensuring the ideals of justice and equality promised by this state (especially through the mechanisms of quality universal education, healthcare, and other social services), and an argument for decentralization, privatization, and individual entrepreneurship as the best way to achieve the goals originally envisioned in the welfare state’s philosophy. The report claims to seek to “reinforce…the legitimacy of the welfare state,” and does include considerable attention to issues of equity and social justice, including a commitment to universal healthcare, education, and social security. For our purposes, however the key issue here is the report’s call for a shift away from government provision of employment, subsidies, and unsustainable services while encouraging citizen “participation” or responsibility as the key driver to development.

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145 Ibid., p. 24.
As the “social contract” formulation suggests, these economic reforms have effects that run far beyond the economic sphere. Because of the deep interrelationships between employment, education, marriage, family formation, and the creation and understanding of the social self, the terms of this “social contract” are a matter of immediate urgency, especially for the youth who make up the majority of the Life Makers demographic. It is not merely a question of what set of skills one must have to succeed in an increasingly market-driven economy (though of course a skill set is an important consideration). From a political perspective, the new social contract implies an alteration of the expectations and legitimate demands that can be placed on the government. From an individual and cultural standpoint, these economic reforms require one to ask what sort of person one should be—what one’s values are and how one is to live them; what one’s goals are and how one is to achieve them; what it means to be a good citizen.

It is in this context that the “entrepreneurial” self that is the goal of the Life Makers’ project of subject formation must be seen. In this period of neoliberal logic, as the government and society try to work out a new social contract to define what citizens are entitled to, from whom they may demand what, and even what they should be, the circumstances no longer favor the claims-making on the state that has been the hallmark of political Islamism (as the state is making the argument that it is not the provider that it was seen to be in the mid-century days of Arab Socialism and Nasserist statism). The

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Life Makers’ attitude of personal responsibility and individual initiative is very much in keeping with the nascent social contract that sees citizens, rather than the state, as primarily responsible for themselves and their community.

The Life Makers’ entrepreneurial subject can thus be seen as an accommodation to the state’s efforts to define the nature of the citizen, and to the circumstances that have made this redefinition attractive. Indeed, many of the critiques of Amr Khaled and his followers offered by liberal or progressive commentators, both Muslim and secular, can be seen in this context. Journalist Hossam Tamam has called Amr Khaled’s bourgeois religiosity “diet Islam” an Islam that is devoid of political implication, in which the commands of jihad are forgotten, and in which Islam cheerfully accommodates soccer games and fashionable clothes while being stripped of its liberatory potential and its message of resistance to injustice. Writing in Al-Quds al-‘Arabi, Tamam denounces the “phenomenon of the new dāʿīyas” as part of the “culture of consumption” that constitutes a “crisis” in the Arab world today. Tamam is correct in identifying the existence of a relationship between new forms of religiosity and an emergent neoliberal subject. However he overlooks the strong concern among a “new daʿwa”-inspired group like the Maʿādī Life Makers for social change and development. Moreover, while the Life Makers accommodate the state’s new “social contract” to a considerable extent they also reconfigure it in meaningful ways.

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The notion of a “renegotiation” of a “social contract” implies a degree of participation and consultation that is absent in the Egyptian case. While public demonstrations or connections to the regime make it possible for certain segments of society to make their wishes known to the government at different times and in different ways, the mechanisms for a free and open negotiation of the relationship between society and state are lacking. In this context, we might expect negotiations over the nature of the citizen under the “new social contract” to take place outside the formal political sphere, in areas such as the Life Makers’ project of self-formation.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

Salwa Ismail\textsuperscript{149} writes that “in Muslim-majority countries, the construction of Muslim public selves interrogates the project of modernity modeled after the western experience, while proposing alternative visions of the public sphere.” Mahmood similarly argues that the women’s mosque movement’s project of self-formation amounts to a challenge to western conceptions of self and agency. However not all such projects represent a radical contestation. Often, as Arlene Macleod writes, there is an ambiguous mixture of accommodation and protest involved in the articulation of public selves.\textsuperscript{150}

The Life Makers’ entrepreneurial subject accommodates the “new social contract” view of citizenship in its encouragement of individual initiative, personal responsibility, and the achievement of development through the activity of citizens rather than state-led efforts. However, its fundamental view of “development through faith” adds another dimension to the development narrative. As described above, the Ma’ādí Life Makers see faith and development as inextricably linked, and the subject they aim to create is piously disposed, with values grounded in a reading of Islamic duties and obligations to self and society. Their vision of the “developed” society largely coincides in material terms with the vision of the Egyptian state—it is healthy, self-reliant, innovative, and prosperous—but the Life Makers have added to this vision a complex of moral, religious, and

\textsuperscript{149} Salwa Ismail, "Islamism, Re-Islamization and the Fashioning of Muslim Selves: Refiguring the Public Sphere," \textit{Muslim World Journal of Human Rights}. Vol. 4, No. 1. 2007.

\textsuperscript{150} Arlene E. Macleod, \textit{Accommodating Protest: Working Women, the New Veiling, and Change in Cairo}. New York: Columbia UP, 1991
symbolic aspects that, while not conflicting with the state-led reform and development effort, nevertheless reconfigure its meaning in the minds and lives of Muslims.

The Life Makers’ entrepreneurial subject is in many ways a response to the changes contemporary Egyptian society is facing as the state attempts to define a new social contract and as society works to interpret and deal with the major shifts that a wave of neoliberal reform has brought to their daily lives. At the same time, their localizing and reinterpretation of the traditions of the self-improvement genre and the “Protestant ethic” have helped to ease some of the contradictions that might be implicit in these societal changes. This context-dependent articulation of the Islamic self should be taken into account in efforts to describe the phenomenon of post-Islamism, as part of the process by which society-focused Islamic groups and movements formulate their concepts of pious action in ways that both accommodate and reconfigure neoliberal images of the ideal subject. What the Ma’ādī Life Makers have done is to propose an alternative conceptualization of the Egyptian citizen, one that largely conforms to the ideal citizen being proposed by the state, but that is framed in Islamic terms and that offers a sense of agency and empowerment in confronting the “new social contract” and the new social reality. They have provided a social space and a model for a pious subject that accommodate the expectations, limitations, life situations, and ethical desires of their members, and that offer a means of interpreting the changing dynamics of Egyptian society and of giving meaning to their efforts on behalf of personal and societal development.
Bibliography


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