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From the Mosque to the Polls: The Emergence of the Al Nour Party in Post-Arab Spring Egypt

LAURENCE DESCHAMPS-LAPORTE*

Abstract In this paper, I examine the rise of the Al Nour Salafi party that won 27 percent of the vote in the 2011 Egyptian parliamentary elections. I present a new explanation for their popularity based on the analysis of ethnographic data collected in Alexandria. I question the prevalent explanation that Al Nour's rise is mainly due to the party's active response to the socioeconomic grievances of the marginalized poor, who are more susceptible to indoctrination by radical religious parties. I demonstrate its limitations by highlighting the scarce evidence that Al Nour carries out significant charity work. Also, while some of its supporters express socioeconomic grievances, Al Nour voters represent different social classes. I present an alternative explanation based on social movement theory paired with Bourdieu's theory of habitus and argue that the Al Nour politicians disseminate and promote a discourse of Salafi social justice and leverage it to rally supporters. Already exposed to the Salafi habitus, Muslims who attend mosques controlled by the Da'wa Salafiyya are encouraged to extend their religious practices into actions in support of the party. To nuance this analysis, I also briefly discuss the motives of Salafi subgroups that are not necessarily active within Al Nour, such as Salafi women. While they are embedded in a similar Salafi habitus, they usually embrace different discursive practices and choose to remain outside of politics.

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Introduction

The Egyptian revolution that brought down Hosni Mubarak's regime on 25 January 2011 has taken many unpredictable turns over the past three years. Arguably the most surprising of these was the military coup of July 2013 in which President Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader who had been elected in June of 2012, was forced from power. But while at the start of the revolution the return of military rule was completely unimaginable, it is easy to forget how most observers were also taken aback by the early electoral success of Islamist parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Da'wa Salafiyya (it translates as 'Call to Salafism', i.e. call for new believers). In fact, most commentators expected that the Arab Spring revolutions would bring new secular political parties to power.¹ Instead, the results of the

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Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2011-2012 showed that Islamist parties have much stronger support than their secular counterparts in contemporary Egypt. It should be noted that the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt deemed the election results unconstitutional in a controversial judgement which dissolved the parliament. However, this does not undermine the fact that the electoral performance of Al Nour, the party of the Da'wa Salafiyya whose name means 'the light',² is a testament to its popularity across Egypt. The Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, topped the poll with 36 percent of the votes, while Al Nour came second with 27 percent. This was, arguably, the most astonishing result of the election.³ While much scholarly attention has been paid to the Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in Egypt 80 years ago,⁴ the Salafis and Al Nour have been understudied in academia thus far.⁵ Also, the limited media reporting on Al Nour and its members has often failed to provide in-depth analysis of the party's organization and political goals. In this paper, I explore the party's appeal in Egypt and, more specifically, why individuals affiliate with the party and how it mobilized its supporters. I analyze ethnographic data collected in Alexandria, the stronghold of Al Nour.⁶

Although many observers were surprised by the success of Al Nour, the party's electoral performance could have been anticipated by mosque-goers in Alexandria's neighborhoods given the history of Da'wa Salafiyya, which has been active in Alexandria since the 1970s. Scholars such as Revkin⁷ and journalists such as Fadel⁸ have advanced the hypothesis that Salafi mobilization is driven by rampant poverty and marginalization in Egypt. This proposition has also been used to explain the popularity of Salafi parties in other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries.⁹ These authors argue that communities that are excluded from the elite and

Oxford, Magdalen College. The author would like to thank Dr Masooda Bano for her tremendous support and guidance, Stéphane Lacroix for his advice, as well as the Rhodes Trust and Queen Elizabeth House for their financial support.

¹ Journalists focused on slogans such as "our revolution is civil; neither violent, nor religious" heard in Tahrir Square as Asef Bayat "Egypt, and the post-Islamist Middle East". *Open Democracy*, February 8, 2011. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/asef-bayat/egypt-and-post-islamist-middle-east>.

² The Da'wa Salafiyya is the most influential Salafi religious organization in Alexandria.

³ I present data sourced from the Egyptian Electoral Commission published on "Islamist Vote". *Egypt Data Blog*. Accessed May 23, 2012. <http://www.ducoht.org/>. Note that the newspapers *Al Ahram* and *Misr Al-Youm* cited by Stéphane Lacroix. "Sheikhs and Politicians: Inside the New Egyptian Salafism." *Brookings Doha Center Publications, Policy Briefing*, (June 2012) published slightly different results: 37.5 percent for the FJP and 27.8 percent for Al Nour.

⁴ Such as A. M. S. Aly and M. W. Wenner. "Modern Islamic Reform Movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt." *The Middle East Journal* 36, no. 3 (1982), pp. 336–361; N. S. Fahmy. "The Performance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian Syndicates: An Alternative Formula for Reform?" *The Middle East Journal* 52, no. 4 (1998), pp. 551–562.; Mohammed Zahid. *The Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt's Succession Crisis: the Politics of Liberalisation and Reform in the Middle East*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

⁵ Key recent studies concerning Egyptian Salafism include Richard Gauvain. *Salafi Ritual Purity: In the Presence of God*. (London: Routledge, 2013). and J. Hoigilt and F. Nome. "Egyptian Salafism in Revolution." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, no.1 (2014), pp. 33–54.

⁶ It is worth mentioning that since the winter of 2012, Al Nour has gone through further transformations, splitting with the creation of a Salafi party off shoot called Al Watan (the Homeland) party which then lost most of its support only six months later.

⁷ Mara Revkin. "Anatomy of Egypt's Salafi Surge." *Atlantic Council*, 14 December 2010. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/egyptsource/anatomy-of-egypts-salafi-surge>.

⁸ Leila Fadel. "Salafis in Egypt," *National Public Radio*. January 29, 2013. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/islamists/article/npr-salafis-egypt>.

⁹ For example by Saad Eddin Ibrahim. "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12 (1980), pp. 423–453.

industrialist networks in Egypt and have acute socioeconomic grievances are motivated to support the Salafis. This is often based on the assumption that Al Nour has a network of charities utilized by the party to convert beneficiaries into voters. This argument often holds that the uneducated and dispossessed are more easily indoctrinated by radical religious movements such as Salafism, which is an assumption also promulgated by many journalists.¹⁰ However, my research has identified the serious limitations of this ‘poverty hypothesis’. While Al Nour’s supporters usually have socioeconomic grievances, there is little evidence that absolute poverty is the main factor that motivates individuals to support the party. Al Nour or the Da’wa Salafiyya do not carry out significant charity work.¹¹ Moreover, the party does not attract only poor and socially excluded individuals. On the contrary, Al Nour supporters, like the subset that I have interviewed, come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

More broadly, I present an alternative explanation for the party’s popularity. Al Nour politicians have developed a discourse of Salafi social justice that resonates with a wide range of Islamicized Egyptians and have leveraged this discourse to rally support. This targeted discourse appeals to a shared feeling of discrimination among Salafis. The loci of mobilization are mosques controlled by the Da’wa Salafiyya where worshippers are encouraged to embrace new discursive practices that benefit the party and translate into political support. Many Al Nour politicians have also been involved in the Da’wa Salafiyya, often as preachers, and this has put them in a position to encourage worshippers at their mosques to extend their Salafi religious praxis into these more overtly political discursive practices. The supporters I interviewed were exposed to the Salafi habitus during their lives in Alexandria and in attending Da’wa Salafiyya mosques. The concept of habitus denotes beliefs or behaviors that are so engrained in a society or environment that they seem natural.¹² The political discursive practices promoted by the leaders of Al Nour have gradually become embedded in the existing Salafi religious practices of Da’wa Salafiyya followers, i.e. their pre-existing habitus. Activities like voting for Al Nour, participating in Islamist protests, or promoting Salafism and the Al Nour party represent the next step of an intensely puritanical religious practice. Thus, Al Nour is the political expression of a well-established Salafi religious and social movement with a wide following.

Situating the Da’wa Salafiyya and Al Nour

The emergence and rise of the Da’wa Salafiyya and Al Nour is rooted in the global upsurge of Islamism in Alexandria which began over 80 years ago. The rise of Islamism and Salafism in Egypt in the late 1960s and early 1970s is due to an array of factors. One of these factors is the

¹⁰ This argument regarding Salafism in Egypt is popular in media reports. See *The Economist*, “Dogma and Purity v Worldly Politics.” 20 October 2012, or Ursula Lindsey, “Ultraconservative Islamist Party Reshapes Egypt’s Politics.” *The Daily Beast*, 8 December 2011. It is also employed in academia to explain the rise of Islamism and Salafism in the Middle-East more generally. See Alan Richards. “Explaining the Appeal of Islamic Radicals.” *Working Papers - Center for Global, International and Regional Studies University of California Santa Cruz*, (2002) or Omayma Abdel-Latif. “Trends in Salafism” in *Islamist Radicalisation: The Challenge for Euro-Mediterranean Relations*, ed. by Emerson, Michael, Kristina Kausch, and Richard Youngs. (Centre for European Policy Studies, 2009), pp. 69–86.

¹¹ I will elaborate on the evidence for this claim later, but informants and discussions with different doctoral researchers in Egypt and with Stéphane Lacroix (Sciences Po) provide corroboration.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, ed. by Jack Goody, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

disenchantment with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalist modernization agenda.¹³ Islamists, including Salafis, became particularly active following Egypt's defeat in the Six Day War in 1967.¹⁴ The failure of Arab nationalism in Egypt provided space for the emergence of religious ideologies that offered new solutions to Egypt's recurring crises.

Another factor in the rise of these movements is the change in Anwar Sadat's attitude towards such groups. In the early 1970s, Sadat lifted some of the restrictions against the formation of student organizations in universities, which Nasser had imposed.¹⁵ As soon as they were allowed to operate within universities, organizations like the Gama'a Islamiyya and the Da'wa Salafiyya experienced a surge in popularity.¹⁶ Wickham even claims that Sadat *encouraged* the formation of Islamic student groups, hoping they would counterbalance far-left political forces, such as the more radical Nasserist groups.¹⁷

A last explanation for the emergence of these new religious movements is their response to students' relative deprivation. They offered a novel "Islamic solution" to the growing social distress in Egyptian universities.¹⁸ The student body had more than doubled in the 1970s, while the infrastructure of universities saw no improvement. Young adults, most of whom were first-generation university students, faced a significant discrepancy between their professional aspirations and the opportunities for social advancement available upon graduation. According to Toth, the growing popularity of Salafi ideas in the Nasser era can also be attributed to a widely-perceived disregard for 'real merit' in Egyptian society.¹⁹ University graduates of rural origins felt deep moral outrage against a system in which "family connections [...] took precedence over merit", giving wealthy westernized elites access to better opportunities.²⁰

The Da'wa Salafiyya had carried out its proselytization work for approximately forty years before its leaders decided to establish the Al Nour political party after Mubarak was ousted in the winter of 2011. Originally, the Da'wa Salafiyya's primary mission was to proselytize and spread the Salafi brand of Islam. The transition from a Salafi religious organization to the formation of a political wing stirred controversy amongst the followers of the Da'wa Salafiyya. Some sheikhs had previously warned against either defying the ruler in place or general political involvement. At times, Al Nour has also assumed an unexpected stance towards other Egyptian political parties. Although the Salafis might have been expected to collaborate with the Muslim Brotherhood in post-Mubarak Egypt, for example, Al Nour has often publically opposed the FJP, instead aligning itself with liberal parties. More specifically, after Al Nour's candidate for president in 2012 (Abu Ismail) was disqualified, the Salafis chose to endorse the more liberal candidate Abol Fotouh over FJP's Morsi. Al Nour's message has not been consistent throughout the party's existence, as it has adjusted its strategy according to its audience and its changing objectives.

After the revolution, Al Nour quickly became a major political force across Egypt and particularly in Alexandria. In the 2011 parliamentary elections, it won over 30 percent of the vote in the Alexandria governorate, the second strongest performance for the party in the

¹³ James Toth. "Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (2003), pp. 547-572.

¹⁴ Gilles Kepel. *The Prophet and Pharaoh: Muslim Extremism in Egypt*. Vol. 1985. (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985).

¹⁵ Rachel M. Scott. *The Challenge of Political Islam*.

¹⁶ Rachel M. Scott. *The Challenge of Political Islam*.

¹⁷ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham. *Mobilizing Islam*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Gilles Kepel. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006), p.81.

¹⁹ Toth, James. "Islamism in Southern Egypt," p. 554.

²⁰ Toth, James. "Islamism in Southern Egypt," p. 554.

country, and its best showing in major urban centers.²¹ This makes the country's second largest metropolis arguably the most appropriate setting to carry out a study of the rise of Al Nour.

Notes on Fieldwork

This paper relies primarily on ethnographic research to trace and explain the process of affiliation to Al Nour. The primary sub-method of this approach consisted in interviewing, but I also used other sub-methods, such as participant observation. I conducted open-ended interviews, which became more specific and structured as my fieldwork advanced. I first interviewed politicians at their offices or other work places, but often followed up on these interactions by phone or online. Meetings often developed from talking to supporters of Al Nour in the streets or online to gradually gaining access to a larger sample. Initially, I met rank-and-file members of the party in places such as street cafés (*Ahwas*) or by the Alexandrian *Corniche* (boardwalk). I also interviewed academics, fellow researchers, journalists, liberal activists, and Salafis involved in other groups.

These interviews provided me with an array of perspectives, helped me develop a better understanding of Egyptian society, gave me a sense of the data available, and facilitated my access to other research resources. All these interactions became part of the ethnographic experience. The participant observation, contextual data, and Egyptian media also helped to enrich, corroborate or challenge my interview data. I used social media as an instrument for both observing interactions among Al Nour's supporters and contacting potential informants. I created an authentic, but distinct Facebook account solely for the purposes of this project, in order to communicate with Salafis. I joined numerous Salafi Facebook groups, where I often established my first contact with my informants. Similarly, listening to Friday sermons from the Da'wa Salafiyya posted online, reading the Da'wa Salafiyya websites and posts of Alexandrian Salafis on Facebook and Twitter all informed my work.

Salafi Social Justice, Poverty and Habitus

While socioeconomic grievances can impact individuals' desire to join the Da'wa Salafiyya or Al Nour, the main mobilization technique Al Nour politicians use is leveraging a discourse of Salafi social justice and promoting parallel discursive practices that are not necessarily directed solely at deprived individuals. This discourse is a "multi-faceted public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved"²² and Salafi leaders engage in it by disseminating discursive practices.

Foucault asserts that analyzing discursive practices contributes to developing a better understanding of systems of thought. These systems of thought can be expressed as cultures or

²¹ Al Nour won 31.3 percent of the votes in Alexandria, but in the governorate of Damietta (another northern coastal governorate) it won 38.6 percent of the vote. (Egypt Electoral Commission data published by "Islamist Vote". *Egypt Data Blog*. Accessed May 23, 2012. <http://www.ducoht.org/>). Yet Alexandria is a more important urban center, as well as the strategic base of the party. Also note that the results of the 2011 parliamentary elections are a more accurate depiction of Al Nour's influence than the 2012 presidential contest, when the party's candidate was disqualified.

²² B. Davies and R. Harré. "Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20 (2007), pp. 43–63.

doctrines. He recognizes that discursive practices are not limited to the realms of logic and linguistics, and to comprehend systems of thought, one must also consider norms, authority, choices and constraints. Indeed, norms or conceptual frameworks craft dynamic discursive practices.²³ Al Nour politicians, in their ‘activism of the word,’²⁴ aim to bring a group of Salafis to power so as to serve as role models in terms of religious practice and behavior for the rest of Egyptian society. According to their vision, once in power, Salafis would be respected by all for their piety and the purity of their practices, reversing what they perceive as past discrimination and oppression. In interviews, Al Nour’s leaders claim that Salafis can only rely on their own politicians, as history has shown that other non-Salafi groups tend to disregard and oppress Salafis. This is the foundation of the discourse of Salafi social justice: past grievances can be redeemed through political power. To them, the state of perfect social justice would be to the benefit of Salafis as opposed to the *Kufar*, i.e. the disbelievers. This proposition demonstrates that Salafi social justice is exclusionist in nature and entrenched in a belief of Salafi moral superiority.

Supporters of Al Nour have internalized stories of Salafi oppression, fueling mobilization for the party. Al Nour Salafis express a desire to defend the “rights of the Salafis in the face of discrimination.”²⁵ Such discourses are not created in a vacuum, and can be traced back to one of the most influential Islamists ideologues in Egyptian history: Sayyid Qutb. Qutb tackled the topic of Islamist social justice some sixty years ago. As a founding member of the Muslim Brotherhood when the movement was more radical and less mainstream, he has influenced virtually all Islamist revivalist movements in Egypt. Qutb’s writings were passed around in Egyptian universities at the time when most Al Nour politicians were studying at the University in Alexandria. His popular book, *Social Justice in Islam*,²⁶ is one of the likely origins of the Al Nour politicians’ ideology.

Studying Qutb’s work can contribute to developing a better understanding of the ideological roots of Al Nour’s discourse of social justice. Still, the extent to which contemporary Salafi ideology emanates from his ideas is a point of contention among scholars of Salafism. Some consider 1970s Salafi jihadists in Egypt and Syria as Qutbists, while others claim that Egyptian Salafis are an early outgrowth from the Muslim Brotherhood. A third group of scholars argues that Salafis embrace a mixture of philosophies that includes Qutbist ideas.²⁷

Intellectual discussions of social justice, inside or outside the Islamic context, tend to address socioeconomic issues. Such concerns often appear in Al Nour’s policy proposals and in its leaders’ speeches in which they advocate wealth redistribution and disapprove of the accumulation of financial capital. In the minds of many observers, the prevalence of socioeconomic issues in these proposals has been taken as proof that the ‘poverty hypothesis’ accounts for Salafis’ concern with social justice. Although it is true that the Salafi discourse of social justice does not deny the socioeconomic aspects of social justice, it does not rest on them. The Al Nour politicians are more focused on spreading Salafism and ending the broader

²³ Michel Foucault. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).

²⁴ James Toth examines the types of Jihad that shape Islamist movements in his article “Islamism in Southern Egypt.” He argues that Jihad is a ‘holy struggle’ but it also includes all activities and attitudes that pertain to activism. Toth proposes three forms of Jihad (551): (1) Jihad *bi al-Qalb*: activism of the heart, (2) Jihad *bi al-Kalima*: activism of the word, (3) Jihad *bi al-Haraka*: jihad of action, which could include violence and militancy.

²⁵ Personal email exchange, July 23 2012.

²⁶ Sayyid Qutb. *Social Justice in Islam*. (London: Islamic Publications International, 1999).

²⁷ Roel Meijer, ed. *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

discrimination towards their community than on securing access to economic resources. This is also true of Qutb's conception of Islamic social justice which incorporates socioeconomic issues without giving them primacy.

The process of affiliation to Al Nour cannot be explained only by the discourse of Salafi social justice. In fact, it takes roots because of an existing 'habitus' – "a deep structure generative of all thought and behavior [...] that orients practice without producing it".²⁸ Mauss was the first to introduce this concept,²⁹ but Bourdieu popularized it. Mauss considered that the term 'habit' inadequately described the process of the construction of the self. Instead, he used *habitus*, a concept meant to account both for the work of the individual and that of the community. For Mauss, habits as well as acquired abilities make up the habitus.³⁰

Recently, scholars like Mahmood and Schielke have reinterpreted Bourdieu's conception of habitus in the Egyptian context. Mahmood pushed the conceptual boundaries of the term and looked at the habitus as an active process of shaping of the self through bodily practices such as rituals, attitudes, or acts such as veiling, for example.³¹ Mahmood's application of the concept is useful, yet to transform a habitus into political affiliation, it needs to be further impacted by a specific discourse. Schielke emphasizes that "different understandings of the different configurations of the relationship between habitus, subject, and community can (and, in the case of modern Egypt, do) coexist".³² This is true in my research where the habituation is not uniform for all individuals and the assimilation of Al Nour's discursive practices is not homogenous, even if there are prevailing trends. More broadly, like Schielke, I consider that the habitus is the interaction between social beings and institutions, and it is a sort of embodied history.³³ This habitus is a second nature to the believers or the ones who embrace a specific practice.

In this Islamic context, the habitus operates as the layer of ideas and beliefs that allows for the development of discursive practices. It is ever-present and constructed, continually invigorated by Salafi TV channels, public prayers, sermons broadcast on loudspeakers from Salafi mosques, and the public presence of the call to prayer. Egyptian Salafis neither invented the prayer and the practice of ablution (*wu'du*), nor did they create Salafi dress. However, the Da'wa Salafiyya and Al Nour oriented and amplified these practices. As Bourdieu explains, these schemes are so engrained that they are subconscious and appear natural.³⁴ Although he later adopted a more open-ended understanding of agency within habitus, Bourdieu generally predicts that social actors are governed by 'generative schemes' or the cultures they inhabit. For him, the early encounters with these structures of habitus, such as domestic tasks, morality, tastes, and the sexual division of labor, are structures that children are exposed to and become the basis of that habitus.³⁵ One politician told me that all Egyptians are Salafis, because "it is in our

²⁸ Gabrielle M. Spiegel. *Practicing History: New Directions In Historical Writing After The Linguistic Turn*. (London: Psychology Press, 2005), p. 177.

²⁹ Marcel Mauss. *Sociologie et Anthropologie*. 12th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, 2010).

³⁰ Ian Burkitt. "Technologies of the Self: Habitus and Capacities." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 32, no. 2 (2002), p. 225.

³¹ Saba Mahmood. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³² Samuli Schielke. "Policing Ambiguity: Muslim Saints-day Festivals and the Moral Geography of Public Space in Egypt." *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4 (2008), pp. 539–552.

³³ Samuli Schielke. "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009), pp. 24–40.

³⁴ Gabrielle M. Spiegel. *Practicing History*.

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

genes”.³⁶ This claim exemplifies some Salafis’ perception of their habitus: religious practices are never or at least very rarely questioned because they are seen as ‘genetic’, as if they were passed down for generations.

This complex interaction of the Salafi discourse of social justice, believers’ habitus and discursive practices encouraged by politicians makes for a holistic theory of affiliation. This theory goes beyond an “overly simplistic formulation of an inexorable linkage between structural strains and movement contention”.³⁷ As Bayat has argued, “the dispossessed show no more natural propensity toward extremism or Islamism than Islamists (notwithstanding their populist rhetoric) show strategic interest in the dispossessed as political player or moral target”.³⁸ Instead, Salafis have been embedded in a pious environment where they have developed the Salafi religious habitus and have come to gradually support Al Nour.

Politicians

While Salafis’ identity and practices are rooted in a shared habitus, supporters of the Da’wa Salafiyya and Al Nour turn to influential politicians for orientation and guidance. Most of Al Nour’s leaders proselytized on behalf the Da’wa Salafiyya prior to creating or joining the party. They justify their work for the party mainly through a discourse of Salafi social justice. My research demonstrates that their involvement in the party stems from their desire to extend the reach of the Da’wa Salafiyya into the political realm. They often claim that founding and working for a political party is the most proactive approach to reestablishing a respected image for Salafis, which, according to them, has been tarnished during the decades-long rule of corrupt secular regimes. Their pursuit of social justice is a response to what they describe as grievances and discrimination under previous governments. Al Nour politicians are strategic actors, rather than dogmatic charismatic leaders. They are referred to as politicians because, unlike Al Nour’s other supporters and voters, they hold official positions in the party and represent the entity publically. Most are university-educated and display an acute awareness of their society. They use discursive devices to mobilize supporters and act strategically according to the opportunities and constraints they face,³⁹ thus analyzing their discourse allows for an evaluation of their broader strategy. Wickham has argued that Islamist politicians and the party’s rank-and-file supporters have different motives for getting involved with politics as is also the case with Al Nour.⁴⁰ This section presents the profiles of four Salafi politicians and illustrates the range of pathways into the Al Nour party structures.

Emad Ghafour: The Global Charismatic Leader

Until early January 2013, Emad Ghafour was Al Nour’s leader. My informants referred to him as "the charismatic face of Al Nour"⁴¹ or "Al Nour’s open door"⁴², and other analysts even called

³⁶ In person interview, Alexandria September 1 2012.

³⁷ Quintan Wiktorowicz. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 8.

³⁸ Asef Bayat. “Radical Religion and the Habitus of the Dispossessed: Does Islamic Militancy Have an Urban Ecology?” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31, no. 3 (2007), p. 588.

³⁹ Quintan Wiktorowicz. *Islamic Activism*.

⁴⁰ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham. *Mobilizing Islam*.

⁴¹ In person interviews, Alexandria July 12, August 12, August 21 2012.

⁴² Skype interview, December 18 2012.

him the Salafi liberal. It is probably due to his keen sense for politics and his charismatic public persona that he was selected to be the only Salafi adviser to Morsi. As one of the founders of the Da'wa Salafiyya in the 1970s, he was a major proponent of starting a political party forty years later. After the revolution, Emad Ghafour met with party secretary Yosri Hassan Hamad and discussed whether they wanted to support the Muslim Brotherhood, work separately as a pressure group or start their own party.⁴³ Under Ghafour's insistence, they rejected the first two propositions and chose the latter option, establishing Al Nour after the fall of the Mubarak regime in the spring of 2011.

Ghafour's charismatic nature and somewhat liberal ways have been documented by Lacroix, supporting the notion that he stands out from other Al Nour Salafis.⁴⁴ Generally speaking, Salafi leaders are not considered as convivial or willing to have conversations with journalists and researchers. Ghafour is an exception to this trend. Ghafour's time abroad, especially in Turkey, is also seen as a marker of ideological openness. After multiple trips to Turkey, he came back to Egypt only a few months before the revolution. Most Salafis have travelled to the more conservative Gulf countries, rather than to Turkey, which is perceived as a more liberal Muslim-majority country. Even though all of his colleagues, as individuals, are hybrids of multiple cultural and religious influences, Ghafour has arguably been exposed to a broader spectrum of Islamist thought than his colleagues because of his travels across the Middle East. He symbolizes the complex and hybrid identity of the movement. He is also a prominent voice promoting the discourse of Salafi social justice. At Al Nour's first party conference, he declared that he "aimed to achieve social justice in all its dimensions".⁴⁵ He has also stressed that the negative portrayal of Al Nour in the media actually helps the party win votes and support, as its activists depend on this public victimization to fuel the idea of Salafi social justice.⁴⁶

Yosri Hassan Hamad: The Bureaucrat

Hamad, Al Nour's spokesperson who co-founded the party with Ghafour, was the first politician I met in Alexandria. Unlike his close ally Ghafour, he is not a charismatic leader, but rather a mild-mannered Salafi in charge of the inner workings of the party. Educated at the University of Alexandria medical school, he subsequently studied and practiced medicine in Kuwait. He later became a high-level active member of the Da'wa Salafiyya, though not reaching the position of a sheikh. Hamad showed his involvement in the promotion of Salafi social justice by talking at length about the oppression of Salafis and repeatedly expressing his belief that Al Nour is the most effective means for Salafis to spread their message.

In January 2013, Ghafour and Hamad officially announced that they were leaving Al Nour to create a new party, Al Watan ('the nation'). There are indications that they split off from Al Nour in an attempt to avoid the growing control of the Da'wa Salafiyya over their political activities, revealing an internal power struggle between the religious and the political organization. Despite this recent separation, Al Watan so far appears to have assumed political positions and embraced an ideology similar to Al Nour's. Because Ghafour and Hamad were central to Al Nour's parliamentary election campaign in 2011, I use the analysis of their profiles to interpret the dynamics of Salafi political affiliation after the fall of the Mubarak regime.

⁴³ In person interview, Alexandria July 25 2012.

⁴⁴ Stéphane Lacroix. "Sheikhs and Politicians."

⁴⁵ "Al-Nour Party". *Islamopedia Online*. n.d. <http://www.islamopediaonline.org/country-profile/egypt/muslim-political-parties/al-nour-party>.

⁴⁶ Bayoumi, Alaa. "Q&A: Salafist Politician Emad Abdel Ghafour - Features - Al Jazeera English". *Al Jazeera Online*, December 21, 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/12/201112201177306217.html>.

Tareek Shalaan: The Salafi Pragmatist

When I first contacted Tareek Shalaan, he surprisingly suggested that we meet at Starbucks Coffee at the San Stefano Hilton Hotel in Alexandria, possibly the most ‘westernized’ and expensive establishment in the city. I expected, perhaps naively, to recognize him immediately by his beard (typical for most Salafis) and even a *Galabiya* (a traditional Egyptian garment). Yet, when he arrived, I saw a man with a shaved head, no beard and wearing a polo shirt. This moment shook all my preconceptions about Al Nour politicians.

Shalaan has substantial international experience, dual citizenship - Egyptian and Canadian - and an engineering degree from the University of Florida. He came back to Alexandria after the revolution and now teaches at the American University in Cairo. Hamad told me that Al Nour is “looking for people with business skills, with knowledge of finance”.⁴⁷ It appears that Shalaan joined the party at a time when it was trying to gain credibility. What are Shalaan’s motivations? Is he driven by pure political opportunism or does he represent a new type of Salafism? When I asked him about his appearance, pointing out that he does not fit the typical description of Salafis, he replied: “I aim to become a better Salafi every day; it is a life-long challenge [...] the other members of the party accept my gradual embracing of all features of Salafism”.⁴⁸ It is unlikely that Shalaan represents a new trend in Salafism, as he is the only such Al Nour politician that both I and other researchers in the field have encountered.⁴⁹ All of this creates the impression that Al Nour was well aware of how it was perceived and concerned by its lack of political experience, to the point of accepting newcomers with questionable historical links to Salafism to the party.

Examining Shalaan’s profile allows me to draw a distinction between political figures that embody the historical development of Salafism in Alexandria (such as Ghafour and Hamad), and politicians who have emerged more recently as the face of a new political opportunity structure.⁵⁰ The opening of the Egyptian political system after the Revolution has offered the latter group new prospects for political involvement, without the costs imposed by the Mubarak’s regime. Shalaan, like the traditional leaders of Al Nour, shared the story of Salafis’ oppression and called for a new Salafi social order. However, he did not discuss personal experiences of injustice.

Mohammad Mohammad: The Young Ideologue

Mohammad Mohammad⁵¹ is a fascinating case of a younger politician active within Al Nour’s party apparatus yet open to discussing his personal path and involvement in detail. He is unlike Ghafour, Hamad and Shaalan who are professional politicians always careful not to breach the party line, thus making it more challenging to collect new information from them and, in particular, to learn about their personal stories. In contrast, Mohammad is a junior party member who allows himself to discuss his experiences openly.

⁴⁷ In person interview, Alexandria July 25 2012.

⁴⁸ In person interview, Alexandria August 29 2012.

⁴⁹ In person discussion on fieldwork with Salafi politicians, Alexandria August 28 2012, Alanna Van Antwerp (George Washington University), and in person discussion with Abdel-Fattah Mady (University of Alexandria) Alexandria August 30th 2012.

⁵⁰ Quintan Wiktorowicz. *Islamic Activism*.

⁵¹ Aside from Ghafour, Hamad and Shalaan who are public figures, the names of the other interviewees are pseudonyms, to protect informants.

Mohammad has a rich and diverse educational background, having studied commerce, computer engineering, and theater in Egypt. He then received two diplomas in filmmaking from an institute in Los Angeles and is currently pursuing for a PhD in Media Studies at the University of Alexandria. While he embraces Salafi values, he highlights that he is not isolated and has travelled widely. He explains he first came to Salafism in the US where, starting in 2004, he attended lectures and studied Salafi creed, jurisprudence, and philology in mosques. By 2008, he said that the science of Shari'ah strengthened his faith.⁵²

The influences that shaped his Salafi identity are global, but they were crystalized through his personal relationships and activities in mosques in Alexandria. Now he is a member of Al Nour's ethics and media committee, and works to secure positive publicity for the Salafi identity in the media. To that end, he regularly contributes to films and TV shows about Salafis. Mohammad repeatedly congratulated me and thanked me for doing research on the subject because he was very concerned about the "negative image of Salafis". He claimed that it is now the time to show respect for Salafis, hinting at the past repression of his community. To him, his *Da'wa* takes shape through his media projects and political involvement in the party.

Even though Al Nour politicians have had different life paths, they share the desire to establish a better public image of the Salafi community and promote Salafi social justice. The emphasis they put on their community's repression under earlier regimes resembles the grievances expressed by liberal groups that protested in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring. Yet while Salafis were probably profiled before the revolution, it is difficult to ascertain the true extent of the oppression they experienced. In fact, both Lacroix's research and the testimonies of some of my non-Salafi informants, suggest that Salafis might have actually been protected by the authoritarian state "which trie[d] to use Salafis to undermine the Muslim Brotherhood's influence".⁵³ Whether the discrimination against Salafis is actual or just perceived, Al Nour's politicians still use this narrative as a foundation for their social justice discourse.

Furthermore, analyzing the profiles of these Salafi politicians makes the popular framing of Salafis as ideological implants from the Gulf seem slightly one-dimensional.⁵⁴ In terms of funding for the party more specifically, many scholars also add that Al Nour's leaders have financial ties to the Gulf region, and that they are under the influence of organizations outside of Egypt.⁵⁵ Al Nour's apparent fund-raising prowess has given further credibility to these claims. Politicians have declared both in my interviews and to the media that most of their funding during the elections came from the Egyptian *Da'wa* Salafiyya, leading some to wonder how the party managed, financially speaking, to field parliamentary candidates in all electoral districts of Egypt. According to Lacroix, a worker in a printing press in Alexandria said that half a million Al Nour posters were printed in the run-up to the 2011 elections.⁵⁶ Regarding the provenance of the ideology of the Salafis, Dr. Abdel Fattah Mady, a professor of political science in Alexandria, commented that "it is hard to know the geographical links of Salafism in Egypt, of course all the famous sheikhs come from the Gulf, but we do not have data specifically on

⁵² Personal email exchange, July 23 2012.

⁵³ Stéphane Lacroix. "Sheikhs and Politicians."

⁵⁴ It is a popular argument, namely emphasized by Olivier Roy. *L'Islam mondialisé*. (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

who sees neo-fundamentalism (another way to refer broadly to Salafism) as a force of 'deculturation' or more generally Gulf Islam as taking over Egyptian mosques.

⁵⁵ For example see Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio. "After Mubarak, before Transition : The Challenges for Egypt's Democratic Opposition." *Interface : A Journal for and about Social Movements* 4, no. 1 (2012), p.107 or William McCants. "The Lesser of Two Evils: The Salafi Turn to Party Politics in Egypt." *The Brookings Institution, Middle East Memo*, no. 23 (May 2012).

⁵⁶ Stéphane Lacroix. "Sheikhs and Politicians", p. 3.

[Egyptian] Salafis".⁵⁷ The sheikhs he refers to are likely the ones on the Salafi TV channels. However, Lacroix is confident that the Gulf migration argument is overplayed when it comes to Al Nour's ideological roots. Having researched Salafism in Saudi Arabia as well as in Egypt, he argues that, while 'the Gulf factor' exists, it is more subtle than one might expect. Lacroix acknowledges that some of the Al Nour politicians have ties to the Gulf, but challenges the popular argument that these individuals were migrants who were indoctrinated abroad and brought a foreign ideology back to Egypt. Instead, Salafis were probably attracted to travelling to the Gulf because of their pre-existing homegrown Salafi identity. As such, although it is still not clear how Al Nour is funded, the party is likely influenced by and partly financed from the Gulf. It is important to note, however, that the Da'wa Salafiyya is an emphatically Egyptian organization which is a product of both recent Egyptian history and global Islamic trends, constructing local discourses that have the potential to mobilize Egyptian communities.

Supporters and their Spaces of Affiliation

While most Alexandrians are exposed to the Islamic habitus through prayers, fasting, modest dress, almsgiving and other public religious practices, Al Nour's supporters are exposed to its more intense and puritanical form - the *Salafi habitus*. When this conservative habitus meets the discourse of Salafi social justice disseminated and fostered by the Da'wa Salafiyya and Al Nour, it leads to political affiliation. The discourse of Salafi social justice acts as an empowering force, as it infuses the supporters of Al Nour with renewed pride and self-confidence. The encounter between habitus and discourse takes place in the mosque, in a socially comforting and hermetic space. However, it is important to recognize that the transformation of the Da'wa Salafiyya - a religious social movement - into Al Nour - a more discernible social and political movement - would have hardly been possible without the opportune environment of political change in post-Arab Spring Egypt.

The mosque appears to be the principal setting for affiliation to Al Nour, even though the discourse of Salafi social justice is also disseminated in other venues. Wiktorowicz's resource mobilization theory,⁵⁸ which focuses on the resources required for social movement formation, identifies mosques as central to Islamist mobilization. According to this theory, the emphasis on resources circumvents the monolithic focus on the socio-psychological strains (such as marginalization), which usually leads to depicting the members of movements as irrational actors who only rely on coping mechanisms. Wiktorowicz also suggests that the mosque has become important as a response to the repression by previous governments. Deemed illegal under the Mubarak regime and often targeted by police raids, Salafi organizations were forced to gather and organize in places of worship that ensured relative safety.

The mosque is a space of praxis, where the Salafi identity is formed and solidified. Al Nour's discursive practices are then taken from mosques into public spaces, and translated into political acts such as voting, protesting, hanging Al Nour posters, convincing others to vote for the party or participating in meetings. These practices become habitual and remain grounded in the original locus of the mosque. The stories of Mahmoud, Mustafa and Amr illustrate how ordinary Salafis adopt discursive practices which then lead to support for Al Nour.

⁵⁷ In person interview, Alexandria July 15 2012.

⁵⁸ Quintan Wiktorowicz. *Islamic Activism*.

Mahmoud

My mother wore niqab, but she died when I was thirteen. My dad was the main model in my life. My dad raised me. He wanted me to be a Salafi and instilled the principles in me. We lived in Kuwait for a while when I was young and then he was a practicing Salafi, but now we are back in Alexandria and *mosh mohtam* (he does not care).

Mahmoud explained what he meant by his father not caring by saying that “he does not pray, he does not have the practice of a Salafi himself anymore”, even though his father’s expectations of him and his siblings have not changed. He comes from Bacchus - a neighborhood in the outskirts of Alexandria derided for its widespread illiteracy and poverty. The mosque adjacent to Mahmoud’s apartment building was run by Da’wa Salafiyya sheikhs. They offered lessons for children and taught them Salafi *Manhaj* (methodology), but also kept them off the streets.⁵⁹ These lessons represented Mahmoud’s first exposure to the movement. As a result, both he and his friends grew to admire the sheikhs who spoke at the mosque, such as the famous sheikh Yasser Bohrami. Mahmoud’s description of the mosque’s interior alludes to an all-encompassing sensory experience and reflects his respect for the movement: “I love the long hours spent sitting in the mosque all together. Sitting all together, our shoulders almost touching. Squeezed together. The prayer room was small, used to get very warm and we would spend all day there.”⁶⁰

Mustafa

Like Mahmoud, Mustafa is in his mid-twenties. He became a committed Salafi when he was 15 years old, but he felt his faith “arise in him” during *Ramadan* when he was eight. He recalled that “I was staying in the mosque in Ibrahimiya for the last 10 days of *Ramadan*, barely leaving the mosque, praying all the time.”⁶¹

The time he spent in the mosque over the years “changed his identity” which gave him greater self-confidence: “I truly liked the atmosphere of the mosque. I stayed for *dhikr* [remembrance sessions for the prophet Muhammad]. The *shuyuk* [religious leaders] were impressed by the intensity of my worship, they kept encouraging me”. He gradually started making longer visits to the mosque and even attended an institute in a Da’wa Salafiyya mosque for lessons on the *Salaf*, Qur’an recitation and *Da’wa*. As a result, he genuinely impressed the religious leaders with his *Manhaj*.

Amr

Amr grew up in a single-parent household in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Alexandria, working from a young age to help his mother feed the family. He does not appreciate the term ‘Salafi’ because he sees it as a way of distinguishing him from other Muslims, who “are all one *Umma* [global community of Muslims]”.

His story about becoming Salafi resembles a colorful religious epiphany. While working on a boat with German tourists off the Red Sea coast near the resort Sharm El-Sheikh, a violent storm gushed. The situation was so chaotic that he thought the boat would sink and they would

⁵⁹ The activities take place in the mosque, and are religious in nature. These activities are unlike traditional charity work that provides services such as healthcare, financial support or food products. Perhaps these lessons could be considered closer to the work of a Madrassa.

⁶⁰ In person interview, Alexandria August 25 2012.

⁶¹ In person interview, Alexandria August 29 2012.

all die. According to his story, the tourists unexpectedly came up to the deck, bowed down to pray and started reciting the Qur'an. Realizing that only *Allah* could save them, Amr followed suit. He claims that the storm suddenly receded and all passengers survived. This is when he decided to become a Salafi and transform his way of life. He even claims that the German tourists also became Salafis and he remains in touch with some of them.

My research shows that many Al Nour supporters active in the Da'wa Salafiyya are specifically trained at *Da'wa* and often share similar stories of religious revelation and conversion. They also often describe their lives before converting as sinful, perhaps in an attempt to relate with their interlocutors. Amr is actively involved in *Da'wa*, and specifically converting foreigners – something that his proficiency in English and insistence to teach me about Islamic practice indicates. While I cannot judge the veracity of Amr's story, he sometimes struggled to elaborate on the dramatic events on the boat beyond his well-rehearsed short narrative. He was also unable to discuss the story's significance to his religious and political identity. Similar to Mahmoud and Mustafa, Amr avoided talking about his own identity and instead described the religious customs of his neighborhood or his experience in the mosque.

Amr was gradually exposed to the Da'wa Salafiyya and Al Nour's discourse, and adopted the party's discursive practices. Amr started reciting the Qu'ran in a mosque in his mother's neighborhood, and at first he did not feel confident going out to do *Da'wa*, but then noted that if "you try inviting someone to Islam and it works, you will never stop". When he does *Da'wa*, he emphasizes the messages of the sheikhs, such as Yasser Bohrami, who are also political leaders for Al Nour. He finds the act of *Da'wa* challenging and also very exciting. Amr differed from Mahmoud, Mustafa and other interviewees in that he was more intensely involved in *Da'wa*. He also admired members of the Da'wa Salafiyya who were known for their *Da'wa* expertise. He spoke with admiration about a sheikh in Alexandria, who has allegedly converted "more than 120,000 individuals" to Salafism, and the important influence this religious leader has had on him. Amr now also walks through Alexandria with books on Islam in different foreign languages in case he encounters someone to whom he could preach.⁶²

Profiles like these give a window into practices that shape Salafi identity and affiliation. To be specific, proselytizing is an important responsibility for members of Da'wa Salafiyya, as the name of the organization indicates. The primary aim of the act of *Da'wa* is spreading the Salafi identity. However, the purpose of this discursive practice has been enhanced, as it is also used to mobilize other Salafis in support of Al Nour, which makes it an important part of the affiliation puzzle. This *Da'wa* consists of distributing flyers and books about Islam, correcting individuals' prayers in the mosque, shaming men who do not wear beards and women who do not wear a *hijab*, or who are not modest enough in their veiling. The Da'wa Salafiyya has framed practices like voting, gluing Al Nour posters, passing flyers, encouraging others to support the party as Da'wa, justifying them with the expectation that they would contribute to the establishment of a Salafi social justice.

The term *Manhaj*, which translates as 'method' or 'methodology' and is frequently used by Salafis to denote what they perceive as a coherent body of ritualistic practices, encompasses the discursive practices promoted by Al Nour. Gauvain interprets it as an overall 'educational curriculum' designed to enhance uniformity of the community.⁶³ The *Manhaj* promoted by Da'wa Salafiyya is not just one discursive practice, but a set of practices that includes very

⁶² In person interview, Alexandria July 16 2012.

⁶³ Richard Gauvain. *Salafi Ritual Purity*.

intense prayer, strict dress code or disciplined study of Qur'an recitation, as well as support of Al Nour. Its deeply normative nature serves to reinforce Salafis' sense of superiority over people who belong to other religious and social groups.⁶⁴ In the words of Gauvain's informants, *Manhaj* separates the "saved sect" from the others and makes the individual "ritually and morally purer."⁶⁵ The central role of *Manhaj* in the creation of a Salafi identity helps Al Nour encourage believers to affiliate with the party. For example, sheikhs tend to praise mosque-goers for their *Manhaj* and suggest that supporting Al Nour is a way to further improve it. This concurs with the argument that support for the party is due to more than solely the financial poverty or social marginalization of Alexandrians.

While my observations suggest that the practice of *Manhaj* is promoted by politicians and sheikhs, ordinary Salafis often claim that they have embraced their *Manhaj* because they perceive it as embedded in individual agency. This independence goes beyond the enactment of correct *Manhaj*: "We are the motor of social change. Unlike the Brotherhood, Salafis do not come from powerful *ikhwan* [brothers] families. We are often 'self-made Salafis'", as one informant put it.⁶⁶ Some supporters emphasize the fact that Al Nour does not have an official *murshid* (religious guide) or *mufti* (legal cleric), to indicate that Da'wa Salafiyya Salafis are more autonomous. This perceived agency was very important in their decision to remain Salafis; as one explained, "you manage your religion according to Islamic rules, no need for a guide, you have your mind, *Allah* gave it to you so that you can manage yourself and your learning".⁶⁷ Different Imams and sheikhs speak in the name of the Da'wa Salafiyya, but none claims to be 'the one Al Nour sheikh'.⁶⁸ This absence of a single, leading religious figure within Al Nour, and this perception of the Da'wa Salafiyya as an accessible community, which is less hierarchical than the Muslim Brotherhood, is likely empowering to many Salafis and appears to be an additional motivation for Salafis to support the party.⁶⁹

In his study of Islamist revivalism and its appeal to the Egyptian youth, Schielke argues that Islamist movements manage to mobilize large segments of society because of their promise of clarity and happiness embedded in agency. He concludes his research with a crucial statement: "what makes the Salafi revivalist piety so peculiar, and so successful—and in practice so troubling—is that it excludes the possibility of discussing its success".⁷⁰ The fault or eventual failure of the ideology falls on the believer, who is culpable for not correctly emulating the *salaf* and for enacting a weak *Manhaj*. As such, the structure and promise of Salafism in fact emphasizes personal responsibility perhaps freeing the Salafi movement from 'accountability' to its members.

The two sets of rituals—*Da'wa* and *Manhaj*—are discursive practices constructed through the daily routine. Al Nour Salafis believe that by doing *Da'wa* and having *Manhaj* they 'change society' (*takhyir almughtama*). This allows them to attach the ideology of Salafi social justice to the regular practices that have grown out of an accepted habitus. The process of mobilization of Al Nour's supporters generally agrees with Bourdieu's theory about group formation in the context of political struggle. On the basis of his ethnographic study of the

⁶⁴ Adis Duderija. "Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-traditional Salafi Manhaj." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (2010), pp. 75–93.

⁶⁵ Richard Gauvain. *Salafi Ritual Purity*.

⁶⁶ In person interview, Alexandria July 25 2012.

⁶⁷ In person interview, Alexandria July 19 2012.

⁶⁸ Stéphane Lacroix. "Sheikhs and Politicians."

⁶⁹ Yasser Bohrami is arguably a dominant figure within both the Da'wa Salafiyya and Al Nour thought not officially.

⁷⁰ Samuli Schielke. "Being Good in Ramadan."

Kabylia in North Africa, Bourdieu argues that the naming of dormant identities takes place in response to “people’s malaise, anxiety, disquiet, expectations”.⁷¹ In the case of Al Nour, these collective grievances are caused by the perceived or real instances of marginalization and discrimination against Salafis.

Female Salafis

Female Salafis are the most complex category to address and possibly the area where the most pressing need for extensive ethnographic research lies. Women have been largely absent from my analysis in this paper so far. I had the opportunity to talk to only a few women in a formal interview setting, yet a common finding at this stage is that most Salafi women who I encountered call themselves ‘non-political’, declaring that they are not involved with political activities and cannot speak on behalf of Al Nour.

Salafi women are not embedded in the same milieu, or mosques, as the Salafi men and have developed different discursive practices. Da’wa Salafiyya mosques do not usually have a prayer section or bathrooms for women, thus women tend to pray at home. I can hypothesize that Salafi women have a more private Salafi habitus. Also, somewhat surprisingly, some of the Salafi women I interviewed talk of their niqab as one of the first descriptive elements of their ‘Salafiness’. One said: “I am Salafi. Yes, I wear a black niqab, I pray and I am trying to bring up my kids in an Islamic atmosphere.”⁷² It is difficult to say why they emphasize their clothing. Is it that the externally developed stereotypes of Salafi women have been internalized, or that my interactions with female informants were too limited for them to open up and reveal more complex understandings of their religious and social identity? When asked about their Salafi identity, males, unlike females, usually make statements about the origins of Salafism and explain the relationship between their religious and political identities. They also discuss the *Umma*, denoting a global perspective on Salafism.

These women’s claims about their identity do not substantiate some of the scholarly debates occurring within the realm of Islamic feminism literature. For example, many Muslim feminists criticize all too common political and academic debates that reduce Muslim women to their physical appearance or dress,⁷³ and label arguments based solely on garments as essentializing.⁷⁴ Historically, ethnographers have often assumed that in MENA “there are dual and separate worlds of men and women in which the former world is public and the latter is private”.⁷⁵ Even if men and women experience a different Salafi habitus, I am wary of perpetuating the representation of the women’s world in Muslim-majority societies as unescapably “domestic, narrow, and restricted” in opposition to men’s world which is “political, broad, expansive”.⁷⁶ How female Salafis adopt or adapt the prescribed discursive practices of the

⁷¹ Pierre Bourdieu. “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups.” *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6 (1985), p.729.

⁷² In person interview, Alexandria July 22 2012.

⁷³ Saba Mahmood. *Politics of Piety*.

⁷⁴ For the complex discussion on the representation of Muslim women see (amongst others) Lila Abu-Lughod. “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others.” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002), pp. 783–90, and Myra Macdonald. “Muslim Women and the Veil.” *Feminist Media Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006), pp. 7–23.

⁷⁵ Nelson, Cynthia. “Public and Private Politics: Women in the Middle Eastern World.” *American Ethnologist* 1, no. 3 (1974), pp. 551.

⁷⁶ Cynthia Nelson criticized the literature which had been perpetuating this simplistic dichotomy in “Public and Private Politics,” p. 552.

Al Nour might be unique and complex. Gauvain's research indicates that it is the potential to challenge male hierarchies that attracts many women to Salafism,⁷⁷ yet this might not necessarily apply to my informants. My fieldwork at this point is not sufficient to decipher the potential complexity of female Salafi affiliation, or the areas of negotiated gender roles within Salafi political parties.

Salafi women may act in a 'non-political' manner in relation to Al Nour because they are actually following the party's recommendations. The Al Nour politicians describe appropriate female conduct as staying away from the political process (aside from simply voting) and embracing their traditional role in the household. Al Nour's original platform claimed that women, children and men are all equal in front of God. However, the politicians I interviewed generally avoided addressing the issue of women's rights or of women's role in any real depth. For example, when I prompted Hamad about the role of women in the party, he delivered a diatribe about the hypersexualisation of young women in Europe and North America, but made no comments about the status of women in his party or in Egypt more generally.

For most Salafis, the discursive practice of *Da'wa* was central to their personal mission, yet the limited number of Salafi women I interviewed generally understood *Da'wa* to be enacted, rather than spoken. According to Toth's concept of "the three Jihads", Al Nour politicians embrace an activism of the word - Jihad *bi al-Kalima*. Salafi women, however, arguably enact an activism of the heart - Jihad *bi al-Qalb*, through which "their own personal practices, beliefs, and identity are subjectively re-oriented to conform to the movement's definition of what is correct".⁷⁸ Fatima, speaking to me on the phone from a town on the Red Sea, reflected on being surrounded with Egyptians and tourists of different religions and argued that her responsibilities as a Salafi (*Da'wa*) do not include proselytizing. Fatima's *Da'wa* is contained in her actions, and she says she sets an example of proper Salafi behavior.

In the future, as Al Nour expands and attempts to mobilize more Salafis, it will be interesting to see if the party will change its discourse to try to actively reach out to women. Will it encourage them to become involved in more public types of discursive practices? For now, Salafi politicians have been inconsistent in their prescriptions and actions. They had to put female names on their electoral lists to comply with electoral law, yet more generally they did not express the desire to see them involved in the political process. Badran confirms that Islamists and Salafis have a contradictory and mixed legacy of sanctioning women's participation in politics. Islamists tend to support women's right to vote, but oppose women's potential election to all political positions.⁷⁹ As Roald points out, in countries where women voters can also be elected, such as Kuwait or Egypt for example, this presents a constitutional problem for Salafis.⁸⁰ Generally speaking, Salafi women appear to have a different habitus which implies distinctive responsibilities. Al Nour has been ambiguous towards their involvement in politics but has usually excluded women from its discursive practices, with female political participation generally restricted to voting. Salafi women's discursive practices include *Da'wa* and *Manhaj*, yet they are aimed at reinforcing their own faith, rather than supporting Al Nour as a political party.

⁷⁷ Richard Gauvain. *Salafi Ritual Purity*.

⁷⁸ James Toth. "Islamism in Southern Egypt," p. 551.

⁷⁹ Margot Badran. "Gender, Islam, and the State: Kuwaiti Women in Struggle, Pre-Invasion to Postliberation." In *Islam, Gender, and Social Change*. ed. by John L. Esposito and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 190–208.

⁸⁰ Anne Sofie Roald. "Islam, Gender, and Social Change: Book Review." *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 17, no. 1 (2000), pp. 130–135.

Conclusion

By using ethnographic methods and analyzing the narratives of my informants to study Salafi affiliation, I have been forced to mostly deviate from existing social movement theories and instead consider through different anthropological concepts the complex dynamics of Salafi affiliation in Alexandria. Using Bourdieu's seminal concept 'habitus', I argued that the Da'wa Salafiyya social movement, whose political expression is Al Nour, has not mobilized Alexandrians merely because they are poor or marginalized. While Salafis who support Al Nour often have socioeconomic grievances, the main driver of Al Nour's popular appeal is the discourse of Salafi social justice leveraged by Al Nour politicians, who are also leaders in the Da'wa Salafiyya. Politicians tend to be educated in Egyptian universities and live comfortable lives as professionals, which is common across political parties in general. Yet as far as supporters are concerned, none of the ones I have interviewed for this research were part of the Egyptian bourgeoisie.⁸¹ Instead, they usually came from different backgrounds that ranged from the urban poor all the way to the upper middle class. Their shared characteristics revolved around their relation to and respect for Salafi sheikhs, their affiliation to specific mosques, and their embracing of certain discourses, more so than solely their 'social class'. A rigorous household survey of neighborhoods where support for Al Nour is estimated to be high could serve to answer this question clearly in quantitative terms, yet it goes without saying that, in the current political context, securing the necessary permissions for such a study would be almost unimaginable.

The supporters I interviewed who were mobilized in the mosques controlled by the movement became attracted to the party by its empowering discourse of Salafi social justice. These supporters have gradually extended their Salafi religious practices, such as their emphasis on *Da'wa* or the enactment of holistic *Manhaj*, to include political elements in support of Al Nour. Their actions are aimed at religious self-improvement as Salafis, but also at reestablishing Salafi social justice by supporting Al Nour. This transition from religious praxis to political affiliation is not reproduced identically for all Salafis, as many refuse to support Al Nour while others assert themselves as non-political Salafis, including Salafi women who have adopted distinctive discursive practices.

Even though the results from Egypt's parliamentary elections are contested, Salafis are now manifestly influential players in local and national politics, as well as in civic and religious life. Lacroix attests to this: "reproducing the pre-Arab Spring policy of ignoring the Islamists—including Egypt's Salafis—can only be counter-productive".⁸² Yet recognizing the reality of Salafis' political influence does not imply endorsing their values and practices, which are seen as oppressive by many groups in Egyptian society.

Further research on Salafism in Egypt could benefit from a detailed analysis of socioeconomic data on Al Nour supporters and voters. Another research opportunity in the area would be to conduct more extensive ethnographic studies of Salafism in rural communities, or focusing on migrant workers who have returned from the Gulf. Additional research on Salafi

⁸¹ Here I consider the bourgeoisie as the social class of land-owning and industrialist families that might control enterprises inside and outside Egypt. The upper middle class would instead broadly encompass professionals such as engineers and physicians who enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without necessarily controlling substantial wealth. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

⁸² Stéphane Lacroix. "Sheikhs and Politicians," p. 9.

women would also address the current scarcity of ethnographic data on this group. Given that the relationship between the Da'wa Salafiyya and Al Nour is constantly reshaped in this new political context to ensure survival and avoid repression, there is a need for research on both the tensions and the continuing links between the two organizations.

Almost three years after the Revolution, the self-professed purity of the Al Nour politicians has become tarnished. This is especially due to the media's focus on several Al Nour scandals⁸³ which have caused the ranks of pious Salafis to become ambivalent about the democratic process. Is the discourse of the Al Nour politicians sustainable if they continue to lose personal credibility? How will supporters react in an election after Al Nour has denounced the Brotherhood vehemently and supported the army during the protests in the summer of 2013? One thing is certain: the extension of Salafi religious practices to include political actions has abruptly propelled the movement into a new realm where religious meaning is adapted on a daily basis to justify a political project. This transformative process is likely to continue in the future.

⁸³ Amongst many, one popular news story in 2012 was about a Salafi politician caught with a female university student by police on the highway in an "indecent act." See "Egyptian Islamist MP Caught in 'indecent Act' with Teenage Girl," *Al Arabiya*, June 8, 2012. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/06/08/219475.html>. Another famous story involved the elected Al Nour MP Anwar Al-Balkimy undergoing rhinoplasty surgery. When this story became public, Al-Balkimy pretended to have been beaten up. The Egyptian media wrote extensively about the affair, ultimately compelling Al-Balkimy to resign. "Anwar Al-Balkimy, Egyptian Lawmaker, Resigns Following Nose Job Scandal." *Huffington Post*, March 6, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/06/egyptian-lawmaker-resigns-nose-job-anwar-al-balkimy_n_1323819.html.

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