

The Muslim Brotherhood's Generational Gap: Politics in the Post-Revolutionary Era⁽¹⁾

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Abstract

This paper examines the internal dynamics of the Muslim Brotherhood. It uses a sociological approach that focuses on the interactions between different generational sections within the movement. Generation, however, is conceived through different currents of intellectual thought and not strictly by age. This is justified by an examination of the views and opinions of the Muslim Brotherhood's youngest generation in the wake of the January 25, 2011 revolution, which are diverse. The positions of this group are explored across a number of issues: the organizational structure, the decision-making process, the culture of obedience, proselytizing (daawa) and politics, political party life, and reform. It relies on focused or semi-structured interviews with current and former members of the movement as well as selected biographies, Facebook groups, and video recordings made and published by the movement's members. The sample of members taken into account for the study was based on two criteria. The first is the position occupied by a Muslim Brotherhood member and the experience they have in or outside the movement. The second is their position in the revolutionary-conservative binary, or the degree to which he/she accepts or rejects the discourse of the movement and its leadership. The latter factor indicates diversity among Muslim Brotherhood youth in terms of vision, cultural makeup, and political experience.

Arab Spring

Egypt

Generational Gap

Muslim Brotherhood

Political Islam

Introduction

The continuity of any social group requires the transmission of ideas and goals from one generation to the next. Transmission is often subject to intellectual and theoretical modification, at times leading to the group's demise or transformation within a new organizational framework. The Muslim Brotherhood is no different in this regard,⁽³⁾ especially in light of the momentous historical circumstances it has faced - from taking political power directly, to its ouster from the political scene soon after.

The Muslim Brotherhood is considered to be one of the most important political Islam movements in the Arab world. Despite the abundance and variety of writings about the organization there is a dearth of studies that focus on its internal dynamics. Little is thus known about its network of ideas and schools of thought, as well as the multiplicity of positions taken by its members on numerous issues, especially how to deal with the political system and ruling authorities. This absence of research might be explained by the restrictions on the freedom of the Muslim Brotherhood in many Arab countries, rendering its internal interactions secretive and therefore opaque. The recent

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3 Nancy Whittier, "Political Generations, Micro-Cohorts, and the Transformation of Social Movements," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 62, no. 5 (October 1997).

security crackdown also impedes serious research efforts because of the difficulty of communicating with members and leaders, obtaining the minutes of internal meetings, or messages between the leaders of the movement and the leaders of the international organizations - to name only a few of the obstacles.

Given these restrictions and the simultaneous imperative to learn more about the movement, the paper adopts a sociological approach which focuses on the study of the internal dynamics of the movement by exploring a basic variable: generational interaction within the movement. Specifically, the study will examine the youngest generation's views and opinions following the events of January 25, 2011. These views are broken down along a number of issues, including: the organizational structure, the decision-making process, the culture of obedience, the issue of proselytizing (daawa) and politics, positions on political parties, and the issue of revolution and reform.

This study defines the youngest generation of the Muslim Brotherhood as those in their 20s and 30s. As will become clear, the young people of the movement do not represent a homogeneous generational unit, but rather hold highly diverse intellectual orientations. This can initially be traced back to the political context of the late 1990s that the youngest generation of members came of age within. Their participation in the revolution of 2011 and other political initiatives saw their views shift from the earlier generations of Muslim Brotherhood members, in particular in terms of their ideological constitutions and political positions.

The twelve oral testimonies on which the findings of this study are primarily based were collected via personal interview. Those interviewed included both former and current members. The interviewees were selected based on two criteria. The first is the position an interviewee occupied/occupies within the movement and the experience they have in or outside the movement. The second

is their position in the revolutionary-conservative binary; which means the degree to which he/she accepts or rejects the discourse of the movement and its leadership. The diversity along this scale points to a parallel diversity and the differences that exist among Muslim Brotherhood youth in terms of their vision, cultural makeup, and political experience. The study differentiates between two kinds of interviews. The first are categorized as elite interviews; that is, interviews conducted with people with previous media experience, known political engagement, and clear party participation. The names of these experienced party members and the positions they occupy within the party are publicly known and listed. The second category consists of interviews with regular (non-elite) members of the group whose names are kept anonymous here in accordance with the principles of protection and confidentiality of the interviewees' data.

In addition to these face-to-face interviews, the study relies on a number of written biographies of Muslim Brotherhood members, published resignation letters, blog content written by a number of young Brotherhood bloggers, daily visits to the website ikhwanonline.com, and some of the group's unofficial pages on social media sites such as Shabakat Nabd Ikhwan (شبكة نبض إخوان) and Enta Aysel Ikhwani (إنت عيل إخواني), both on Facebook, which were visited for three consecutive years between 2011-2013. Beyond this, it looks at the statements and views of a number of young Muslim Brotherhood cadres that have found their way to the media through newspapers and blogs. These views are not part of the mainstream—either in the party or in the Egyptian public sphere—but cannot be considered entirely marginal either. They are worth considering, especially given the little academic or analytical attention they have been given. They are examined here to help understand the reality of the Muslim Brotherhood and evaluate the political experiences of the movements of political Islam in general.

Conceptual Framework

This study presents the concept of “generation” as an analytical framework. It adopts a stance that differs from the strict definitions of generation, which deal with the concept of generation as a temporal unit or a specific age group reflecting a sort of chronological succession. This was used, for example, by Khalil al-Anani in his analysis of the generational structure of the Muslim Brotherhood. Anani divided the members of the organization into four generations. The veteran generation sometimes referred to as the old guard, consisting of the major leadership that joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. The second generation was identified as the pragmatists, and includes members who joined the group in the 1970s. The third generation is the neo-traditionalists who preserved the Brotherhood's organizational structure during the security crackdown under Hosni Mubarak's presidency. The fourth generation consists of the youth in their twenties and thirties.⁽⁴⁾

Anani's outline is a good introduction to the generational variations within the Muslim Brotherhood, but it does not help in understanding the dynamics of intellectual and activist interactions between these different age groups. The theory of generations posed by Karl Mannheim, on the other hand, and the theoretical developments it has undergone is more appropriate for understanding these interactions. Mannheim's

theory avoids the rigid categorizations, which use the age group as a basis for this categorization.

According to Mannheim's vision, a generation represents an intellectual unit in which individuals share historical, activist, and affective experiences as well as ideological and intellectual orientations. As such, rigid characterizations used to describe young people, such as open-mindedness (as opposed to the closed-mindedness or intellectual stagnation that is often used to describe the older generation), become inaccurate and unfaithful to a reality that is more complex. After all there is cross-generational interaction between different age groups, between the old and the young in what is known as generational accumulation. Mannheim points out that every age group consists of a number of interactive generational units and each generational unit is determined by an intellectual framework, activist, and affective experience shared by members of the same unit.⁽⁵⁾ It is not surprising for some young members of the Muslim Brotherhood to reclaim and reproduce some of the intellectual theses of many late brotherhood elders (the most common being Hassan al-Hudaybi, the second general guide after the death of Hassan al-Banna or Omar al-Telmissany). There is also an intellectual agreement between reformist visions proposed by the youth and a number of the intermediate leaders who joined the group during the 1970s,

4 For more details see , Khalil Al-Anani, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Old Age Fighting Time?* Introduction by Mohamed Selim al-Awa and Diaa Rashwan. Cairo: al-Shorouk International Library, 2007; Al-Anani, Khalil. “The Young Brotherhood in Search of a New Path,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9, October 2009. Accessed July 24 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/research/9900-the-young-brotherhood-in-search-of-a-new-path> ; Al-Anani, Khalil. “Brotherhood Bloggers a New Generation Voices Dissent,” *Islamists Today*, 2007. Accessed July 24 2018, <http://islamists2day-e.blogspot.com/2008/01/brotherhood-bloggers-new-generation.html#!2008/01/brotherhood-bloggers-new-generation.html>

5 For details of the concept of generations and its theoretical development, see: Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia; an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and co; New York: Harcourt, Brace and company, 1936), p. 282-310; David Kertzer, “Generation as a Sociological Problem,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, no. 1 (1983): p. 127-143; Richard Braungart, “Life-Course and Generational Politics,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 12, no. 1 (1986); Richard G. Braungart, “Historical Generations and Youth Movements: A Theoretical Perspective,” in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, eds. Richard E. Radcliff and Louis Kriesberg (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1984), p. 104; Alan B. Spitzer, “The Historical Problem of Generations,” *American Historical Review* 78, no. 5 (December 1973), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1854096>; Marvin Rintala, “A Generation in Politics: A Definition”, *Review of Politics* 25, No. 4 (25th Anniversary Issue October 1963), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1405847> ; Jane Pilcher, “Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy”, *The British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 3 (1994); https://www.jstor.org/stable/591659?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents; Carl H. A. Dassbach, “Long Waves and Historical Generation: A World-System Approach”, (September 1995), available at: http://www.longwavepress.com/longwave_social_cycles/oladcha.htm; Lillian E. Troll, “Issues in the Study of Generations”, *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1970); and Marvin Rintala, “Generations: political generations “ in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* ed. David L. Sills, (New York: Macmillan and Free Press. 1968).

such as Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, Ibrahim al-Zaafarani and others.

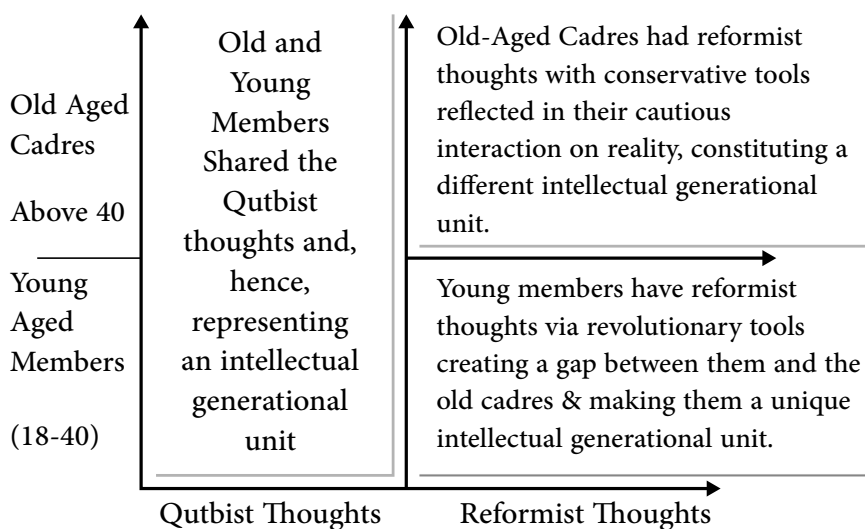
At the same time, there are generational units among Muslim Brotherhood youth who adopt the discourse of certain leaders and clerics, which put them in a position of conflict with other young members who are categorized as open-minded. This is known as “Disputing Generational Units” within the same age group. These differences can be traced back to variations in the intellectual

formation of each generational unit or differences in experiences and sources of knowledge.

The present study will demonstrate the diversity and openness of the political and intellectual experiences of many active young cadres in opposition to the Salafist discourse, Qutb-esque views, and anemic political experience of other young members (see Figure 1).⁽⁶⁾

Figure 1

Different generational units within the Muslim Brotherhood



The Main Intellectual Currents within the Muslim Brotherhood

In light of this conceptual framework, it is important to outline the main intellectual currents within the Muslim Brotherhood movement and how interactions between them shaped the different generational units. The schools of thought that shaped the movement since its

inception can be generalized as: the Hassan al-Banna school, the Qutb-ist school, the Salafi school, and the Azhari school. These schools have cross-fertilized, creating two main currents: the reformist, and the organizational or Qutb-ist currents.

The Hassan al-Banna School

An activist school, the Hassan al-Banna school is based on the general conferences held by the movement and the letters that Banna wrote in addition to his activist positions. These reflected an intellectual inclination towards the creation

of wide areas of agreement and the avoidance of disagreements and disunity between the various political and intellectual currents in the movement. This school reflected a ‘middle-way’ Islamic methodology that sought to rid the Muslim

⁶ In reference to Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the Egyptian author, educator, Islamic theorist, poet, and leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who was executed by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966. Qutb was executed based on being accused of plotting with the Muslim Brotherhood to assassinate Nasser. He was also known for influencing the more hawkish wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.

belief system of impurities based on the tenets of Sunni Islam and the early reformist Salafist movement that emerged at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Banna's reconciliatory attempts may have contributed to the ambiguity of his views, such as his position on revolution and his opposition to political parties, which he saw as a means for dividing and fragmenting the Muslim community. He accepted, however, political activism and the necessity of engaging in it.

The holistic functional vision that Banna gave the Muslim Brotherhood, as a "Salafist message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political institution, an athletic community, an educational and cultural association, an economic organization and a

social idea," created confusion. The various functions of the movement overlapped and the borders separating its political, social, and proselytizing roles were erased. This became a point of contention among different generations within the Muslim Brotherhood, as the paper will demonstrate later.

Banna's reformist school adopted a gradual strategy that emphasized the necessity of reforming the individual (Muslim self), then the Muslim family, then society, before moving on to build the Muslim state through the tools of education and learning - without resorting to violence or hastening the outcome of said reforms.⁽⁷⁾

The Azharist School

This school does not differ from the Banna school in terms of its overall view of Islam, including an enlightened interpretation of Islamic law. It was built by members of the movement with an institutional affiliation and an educational background from al-Azhar University. The founders included Sayyid Sabiq, Muhammad al-Ghazali, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. These founders helped develop an enlightened Islamist trend within the Muslim Brotherhood. Subscribers to this school of thought were not restricted to those with an institutional affiliation

with al-Azhar University; they also included figures close to Banna who adopted al-Azhar's approach to religious outreach both intellectually and in practice, such as Omar el-Telmissany, Abdulqader Odeh, Hassan al-Hudaybi and others. This school of thought helped preserve the open and enlightened image of the group, especially in terms of religious outreach and the educational curriculum common among Muslim Brotherhood members at the educational sessions held by Brotherhood families.⁽⁸⁾

The Qutb-ist School

This school is associated with Sayyid Qutb, whose intellectual contribution took shape during his imprisonment under Gamal Abdel Nasser. Qutb's writings reflected the state of oppression and abuse the group endured under Nasser, producing a discourse based on the idea of emotional isolation and affective detachment

from society, which Qutb described as ignorant (*jahili*). Contrary to the Banna School, which believed in the necessity of societal engagement and gradual reform, Qutb's position alludes to an intellectual and affective differentiation among members of the Muslim Brotherhood or those called the Islamic vanguard or the unique Quranic

7 On Hassan al-Banna's school of political thought, see Tariq al-Bishri, *The General Features of Contemporary Islamic Political Thought*, Second Edition, (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2005), p. 23-24; Ibrahim al-Bayoumi Ghanem, *The Political Thought of Hassan al-Banna*, (Cairo: Dar al-Tawzi wa al-Nashr al-Islamiyah, 1992), p. 327-230; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Seventy Years of Religious Outreach, Education and Struggle*, (Cairo: Wehbeh Library, 1999) p. 119; Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, Middle Eastern Monographs; 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 17.

8 Raymond William Baker, *Islam without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 10.

generation in charge of the reform process.⁽⁹⁾ These central ideas shaped the intellectual and activist consciousness of the 1965 subgroup, whose members Qutb mentored psychologically and spiritually.

This group came to represent a set of ideas different from Banna's and a sense of hostility towards society, which they saw as immature and incapable of reforming itself given the ills

of the authorities and other political ideologies. Some members of the 1965 subgroup never met Banna or associated with him so their political consciousness developed differently from the Azharist group, which was close to Banna. A large number of the 1965 group hold key leadership positions in the Muslim Brotherhood today, such as acting general guide Mahmoud Ezzat, former general guide Mohammed Badie, and Mahmoud Hussein.

The Wahhabi School

The Nasser period witnessed not only the rise of Qutb's ideology but also the marked period when members of the Muslim Brotherhood came in close contact with the Salafist Wahhabi ideology. This was principally because many fled to Saudi Arabia under the period of oppression they endured under the Egyptian authorities. The Kingdom hosted additional Brotherhood members who were released from prison in the 1970s. These members absorbed many of the Wahhabi ideas, finding that the actions of some Azharist circles around Banna were an abandonment of the fundamentals of Islam.⁽¹⁰⁾ It is important to note the difference between the cultural and intellectual climate in which this school emerged and the climate in which the circles close to Banna had existed during the 1930s and 1940s. Intellectual and political life in Egypt at that time was rich and diverse and al-Azhar was an independent institution.

By the 1970s, Egypt began to feel the repercussions of the restrictions on cultural life imposed by the Nasser regime, such as nationalizing religious

endowments, theaters and cultural centers, and imposing state control over al-Azhar. Regime domination created an impoverished cultural climate that enabled Wahhabi ideas to take over with the help of capital from the Gulf countries.⁽¹¹⁾

The infiltration and spread of Wahhabi ideas was not restricted to the educational curricula and the internal discourse within the movement; it also shaped the intellectual and cultural consciousness among many sectors of Egyptian society. It was not surprising—given its origins—that the movement adopted a discourse that included the categorization of *dhimma* (non-Muslims living in a Muslim state), imposing a tax on non-Muslims (*jizya*), obligating the *niqab* (a face-covering veil), and banning music. This is in marked contrast to the social actions of Banna, who established the Brotherhood, and used to smoke cigarettes and play music. Some of the women in the movement did not even wear the headscarf (*hijab*) and wearing the *niqab* was hardly widespread among the rank and file of female members.⁽¹²⁾ The dominance of Wahhabi

⁹ For more details on the political thought of Sayyid Qutb, see: Joseph D. Bozek, "Sayyid Qutb: An Historical and Contextual Analysis of Jihadist Theory," (MA Thesis, Grand Valley State University, 2008), p. 68-69; Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2006), p. 151, and Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*, Routledge Studies in Political Islam (London ; New York : Routledge, 2009), p. 54-60. For information on the emergence of the 1965 organization and its members, see: Barbara Zollner, "Prison Talk: The Muslim Brotherhood's Internal Struggle during Gamal Abdel Nasser's Persecution, 1954-1971," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3 (1998), p. 419-421.

¹⁰ Husam Tammam, *The Salafization of Muslim Brothers: The Erosion of the Fundamental Hypothesis and the Rising of Salafism within the Muslim Brotherhood: the Paths and the Repercussions of change*, Marased. A Scholarly Peer-Reviewed Pamphlet, 1 (Alexandria: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2011).

¹¹ Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic societies and Cultures (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 80-81.

¹² Tammam, *The Salafization of Muslim Brothers*.

ideology affected the positions of the Muslim Brotherhood on a number of major issues in the 1990s, such as the rights of Copts and women, democracy, and the Islamic Caliphate.

Supporters of the Qutb-ist school within the movement were influenced by these Salafist ideas, which created a mixture of Qutb's ideas about emotional isolation and the ignorant (*jahili*) nature of society and a conservative/formalistic outlook focused on cultural and social behavior and even on the religious interpretations dominant in society. As such, the Brotherhood and its members seemed like an entity distinct from the rest of Egyptian society, viewing this society through the prism of a savior who is going to rescue it from wrongdoing. This feeling gave rise to a belief among members about the priority of preserving the organizational structure, turning the survival of the organization into a precondition for the survival of the Muslim Brotherhood itself.

Interweaving intellectual currents and activist experiences helped shape the generational units in the movement. Historical circumstances and the concurrence of two intellectual currents saw a convergence between the Azharist school and Hassan al-Banna's activist school, on one hand, and between Qutb-ist ideas within the 1965 subgroup, and Wahhabi ideology on the other. The first pairing represented the reformist current (doves) while the second represented the Qutb-ists (hawks).

Many of the young members and leaders adopted a rigid religious discourse and a vision focused on preserving the organization. This included commitment to secrecy and suspicion of all political and social forces. However, at the same time there were a number of young members active within the student movement on university

campuses. They established contacts with members of newly formed social movements such as Kifaya (Enough) and the April 6 Movement, and exhibited an openness towards reading Islamist thinkers such as al-Raisuni, Rachid al-Ghannouchi, Tariq al-Bishri, Abdel Wahab al-Messiri and others known for their open and critical writings. This was the first of many rifts. Despite its diverse functional goals from religious outreach to the social and the political, the Muslim Brotherhood no longer felt like home for many would-be reformers. They found an outlet through working with civil society organizations, student activities, and social movements. For this group, there was now an abundance of sources for spiritual fulfillment provided through satellite religious channels and the new preachers.

The split between members showed itself in the blogs of young Brotherhood members who began to talk about personal and social matters and general political criticism of the status quo. The content reflected the many problems afflicting the movement's administration, their decision-making style, and the philosophy presented in the public sphere on politics and women's participation.⁽¹³⁾ The youth critique of the leadership reflected the generational and intellectual exchange between the young members and the intermediate leaders that joined the group in the 1970s. These leaders themselves had been excluded from the decision-making process, as evidenced by the suspension of Aboul Fotouh's membership, following his decision to run in the 2012 presidential election.⁽¹⁴⁾

Before proceeding, it seems worth reiterating that generational groups do not represent isolated islands. Some of the members that joined in the 1970s, such as Aboul Fotouh, al-Zaafarani, Abu al-Ola Madi and other older cadres were a source of inspiration for some young members.

¹³ For analysis and content of Brotherhood blogs, see: Khalil Al-Anani, "Brotherhood Bloggers a New Generation Voices Dissent," *Islamists Today*, (2007). Accessed July 24, 2018, <http://islamists2day-e.blogspot.com/2008/01/brotherhood-bloggers-new-generation.html#!/2008/01/brotherhood-bloggers-new-generation.html>; Marc Lynch, "Young Brothers in Cyberspace," (Middle East Research and Information Project, 2011). Accessed July 24, 2018, <https://www.merip.org/mer/mer245/young-brothers-cyberspace> and Joseph Mayton, "Young Egyptian Bloggers Seek a More Democratic Muslim Brotherhood," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 8 (November 2009), Accessed July 24, 2018 <https://www.wrmea.org/009-november/young-egyptian-bloggers-seek-a-more-democratic-muslim-brotherhood.html>

¹⁴ An interview with Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, Cairo, 6 February 2012.

Any historical classification of the generational reality within the movement must not undermine the continuity that exists between the successive

generational waves and the role that the intellectual and cultural schools play in shaping this continuity.

The First Brotherhood Youth Conference

The political context that young members of the Muslim Brotherhood came of age in had a huge impact on their points of view and their experiences were uneven. Some were influenced primarily by the changing politics of the 1990s and participation in the revolution (25 January 2011) while others were influenced by the Salafist discourse that emerged in Egypt.

The events of January 25 represented a turning point in terms of pushing the limits of public criticism within the movement in an effort to get rid of the culture of secrecy that had surrounded the administrative process and destroyed mechanisms of accountability and internal oversight. The Brotherhood youth's first conference in February 2011 was an attempt to create a space for communication about the political future of the movement on one hand, and to bring the young people's vision and proposals to the attention of the senior leadership on the other.

The conference produced a number of recommendations based on workshops that discussed issues including: the group's administrative structure, decision-making mechanisms, and the position regarding the Brotherhood's party and political participation. According to testimonies from Mohammad Shams, Mosab al-Gamal, and Mohammad al-Qassas, the conference was supposed to be held under the supervision of the Guidance Office but ended up receiving no support from the leadership out of concern over some of the proposals entailed in the pre-conference workshops.⁽¹⁵⁾

The conference presented 12 recommendations. The most important of these were

- Allowing members of the Muslim Brotherhood the freedom to join political parties other than the movement's Freedom and Justice Party;
- Codifying the work done by the Muslim Brotherhood in accordance with available Egyptian laws, either as a civil society organization or other classifications suitable for its functional roles;
- Providing channels for communication and dialogue between members of the Brotherhood in different governorates;
- Creating a committee to monitor and evaluate the performance of the Brotherhood in all governorates;
- Creating a youth committee tasked with raising political awareness among members of the group—holding meetings, seminars and conferences;
- Revisiting the group's educational resolutions and ensuring their consistency with the movement's actual practices on the political level.

In addition to these recommendations, the conference discussed several detailed papers including one on the youth's position on establishing a Muslim Brotherhood political party and developing the movement's organizational structure and decision-making process. These issues will be addressed later in this paper. The conference's content and recommendations

¹⁵ Iman Abdel Moneim, "The Secrets of the Struggle between the Guidance Office and the Brotherhood Youth: Fear of the Third Constituent Wave," *el-Dostor al-Asly*, January 4, 2011, two interviews conducted with Mohammad Shams (one of the sponsors and participants in preparing the Muslim Youth's first conference, a former member of the group and a co-founder of the Egyptian Current Party) and Mohammad al-Qassas (one of the former leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood's student group and a co-founder of the Egyptian Current Party), Cairo, February 1, 2012, a phone call with Mosab al-Gamal (one of the former members of the group and a co-founder of the Egyptian Current Party), Cairo, March 17, 2012.

expressed very clearly the ideas held by the youth, which are quite different from the older leadership's discourse and political practices.

The conference received a lot of attention from the public, but the Guidance Office refused to sponsor it. This put the leadership in an awkward position because the move was seen as a sign of internal division and proof of the leadership's failure to accommodate the young members' criticisms and aspirations. In response, the administrative office in the 6 October (the city) called for another

youth conference. This conference was partly organized by some of the same young members who organized the first conference and its recommendations were similar to those of the previous one. The second conference, however, stressed the need to distinguish between two kinds of decisions: critical decisions, which require the participation of all members based on referendums conducted to poll their opinions, and technical and procedural decisions that could be delegated to lower administrative levels in order to grant them more independence and discretion.

Organizational Structure and Decision-Making Process

Internal democracy within the movement was among the most important issues raised toward the end of the Hosni Mubarak era. This issue pushed the group to hold its first election for senior leadership positions in 2005. However, the question of internal democracy is not about holding elections periodically, but rather about other issues like steering the election results in a certain direction, the criteria for promotion to higher positions, and the rules of internal oversight and accountability. Many of the Muslim Brothers' blogs, like those of Mosab Ragab, Mostafa al-Najjar and Magdi Saad, include detailed references to these problems.⁽¹⁶⁾

Criticism of the group's internal democracy and decision-making mechanisms was not restricted to young members. Many of the biographies of the middle generation (i.e., the cadres who joined the group during the 1970s and 1980s) pointed this out as well. Abdel Sattar al-Miligi, for example, writes in his book about his experience within the Muslim Brotherhood that the movement's organizational structure is hierarchical and highly centralized. The Guidance Office, which acts like a supreme executive body, sits at the

very top, parallel to the elected Shura Council. In principle, the Shura Council is supposed to oversee and monitor the work of the Guidance Office, but this has not been the case. The Shura Council's meetings and elections were suspended in 1995 because of the security crackdown under Mubarak while the Guidance Office's authority remained unrestricted, lacking mechanisms for review and accountability until elections for the Shura Council were finally held in 2008.⁽¹⁷⁾

A resignation letter by a young member talks about indirect elections in the movement. He wrote about their effect on average members who feel they are unable to influence the internal decision-making process:

The elections of the Guidance Office and the Shura Council are conducted indirectly, meaning that the group's rank and file do not participate directly in choosing their representatives in these bodies. Each member chooses the official in the next level of the administrative hierarchy, who in turn participates with him in choosing the higher officials and so on until the heads of the senior administrative offices in the governorates are able to choose the members of the Shura Council and the Guidance Office.⁽¹⁸⁾

¹⁶ See of Mosab Ragab, kobbayat Shayi, <https://kobbaya.blogspot.com/>; Mostafa al-Najjar, freedom, <http://anam3ahom.blogspot.com/>; and Magdi Saad, yalla mesh mohem, <http://yallameshmohem.blogspot.com/>.

¹⁷ Sayyid Abdel Sattar al-Miligi, *My Experience with the Brotherhood: From Religious Outreach to the Secret Organization* (Cairo: al-Zahraa Arab Media, 2009), p. 314-316.

¹⁸ See the text of the resignation of a Muslim Brotherhood member: Anas Sultan, "The letter of My Reasoned Resignation from Working in the Muslim Brotherhood Organization," (available on his personal Facebook page, date: February 9, 2012). He has since removed his profile from facebook.

As average members felt that their participation in the decision-making process was limited, it was not surprising that some saw a widening gap between their ideas and preferences and the actual decisions taken by the top leadership. The movement never thought of having a general referendum to gauge the cadres' opinions regarding the central decisions it was taking, like the decision to participate in the presidential election. This led some members to establish new political parties, such as the Altayyar Almasry Party,⁽¹⁹⁾ which was co-founded by a group of former Muslim Brotherhood members who had been leaders of the movement's student group. They also represented the Muslim Brotherhood in the Revolutionary Youth Coalition, which managed revolutionary activities in the early months of the Egyptian revolution. Others joined the presidential campaign of Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh. The campaign eventually became the Strong Egypt Party.

Blogger (and former Muslim Brotherhood member and co-founder of the Justice Party), Mostafa al-Najjar, echoed the sentiments of many members interviewed:

The criteria for promotion in the Muslim Brotherhood are: seniority, religiosity, and loyalty to the leadership irrespective of qualifications and merit. The leadership's role in recommending certain members against others is quite obvious. These recommendations allow certain members to be more visible during meetings and conferences by authorizing them to take on more tasks, thus appearing to be more active and influential. They are therefore more likely to be chosen than other members who are indirectly marginalized by not getting invited to meetings. Those not put forward have curtailed media appearances and less contact with the movement's grassroots base. For others, they are pushed aside by spreading rumors about their ideas and views, thus creating a negative

image about them. This is why we don't find competitive elections or a candidate for a certain position rolling out his program. The general rule in the Brotherhood is 'everyone is a candidate and everyone is elected,' meaning a person does not decide to run for office because he finds himself qualified to hold a certain position; rather someone is chosen from the entire body of membership, as everyone is a potential candidate to occupy a position regardless of their qualifications. The Muslim Brotherhood has given a religious justification for this mechanism, arguing that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said not to ask for a position of authority.⁽²⁰⁾

Mohammad Shams explains this further:

The problem of steering the voting outcome in a certain direction appeared clearly in the 2006 Shura Council election. Issam al-Arian lost the election by 40%, raising concerns about the dominance of the Qutb-ist current and its refusal to accommodate more reformist figures like al-Arian at the time. Following this tumult, there was an implicit agreement to transcend the issue and not disqualify a figure like al-Arian from the Council. The complimentary elections were then held and he won by 96%. The Guidance Office elections before the revolution resulted in excluding Mohammad Habib, who remained a Council member for 24 years because of his rejection of the political direction and decisions taken by the Office. In the same vein, the vote for choosing Mohammed Morsi as the Muslim Brotherhood's presidential candidate took place three times and the result each time was a rejection. Yet, voting was repeated a third time - for no apparent reason - so that a simple majority approved their candidate.⁽²¹⁾

Shams says:

The rigid gradation and stratification of the movement's hierarchical structure kills the margin

19 "A party under development" means that it has not received the number of authorizations needed to become an officially registered party, given the restrictions imposed on establishing political parties.

20 The transcribed phone conversation with Mostafa al-Najjar, Cairo, March 18, 2012.

21 Interview with Mohammad Shams, Cairo, February 7, 2012.

of deliberation and creativity inside the group. The result is a difficulty in accommodating varied ideas and proposals that members of the rank and file may introduce. Things like hierarchy, bureaucracy, and a long administrative path from the lower units (Muslim Brotherhood families) all the way to the Guidance Office (the supreme body) means new suggestions or ideas sink into oblivion. Perhaps that is what the Brotherhood youth conference tried to change, by creating

space for free thinking and a direct exchange of ideas, especially with the increased membership in the group, which makes the organizational structures limp and slow moving.⁽²²⁾ Hassan al-Banna adopted the idea of holding public conferences but the Brotherhood stopped holding conferences to set out different visions and deliberate, which “amounts to a retreat from the history of internal deliberation in the movement.”⁽²³⁾

The Culture of Obedience and Self-critique

Loyalty to the top leadership and to the movement's organizational framework is the foundation upon which the process of accommodation and exclusion in the Muslim Brotherhood is based. While this culture has guaranteed the movement's organizational survival in light of the harassment and security crackdowns it has endured, it has also buried any margin of evaluation and self-critique.

Claims about the necessity of obeying leaders were always justified by a historical discourse of adversity and a sense of grievance and injustice. The constant struggle with political authorities and the persecution of the group and its leaders created a persecution complex among most members. This shaped the way they view top leaders; thinking about the many sacrifices those in power had had to make throughout their lives. Most believe that these leaders have the necessary experience to make better decisions, even if the wisdom of said decisions is not obvious to regular members at the time.

According to Mohammad al-Qasas and Magdy Saad, the Muslim Brotherhood employs the discourse of adversity and perpetual battle to justify its culture of secrecy and obedience. Fear of an external enemy or an external conspiracy seeking to destroy the group is ever present to justify certain decisions. According to Saad:

The Muslim Brotherhood benefited from political openness after the revolution, nevertheless, the leadership perceived it as a threat to its internal cohesion and solidarity. The revolution threatened the concepts of obedience, blind trust, and soldiery. For example, the leadership deemed voting in the parliamentary elections for a member outside of the Muslim Brotherhood candidates tantamount to treason. Muslim Brotherhood members who had joined the Revolutionary Youth Coalition were dismissed in May 2011. Others were dismissed simply for clicking “like” on a Facebook group that called for a protest that the Brotherhood did not participate in.⁽²⁴⁾

One of the female interviewees concurred with these positions, adding:

I was blamed and reprimanded by my mentor for writing critical opinions on my Facebook page about some of the decisions that were being taken. Because of my views, I feel that I was marginalized inside the Brotherhood family. For example, they no longer assigned me certain tasks. I feel as though I was blacklisted ... before the revolution, the margin of freedom was wider. For example, we were allowed to participate in the campaign to support Mohammad al-Baradei and the protests of the April 6 and *Kefaya* movements,

22 An interview with Mohammad Shams, Cairo, February 7, 2012.

23 Tawfiq al-Shawi et al, *The Islamic Movement, A Future Vision: Notes in Self-Critique*, edited by Abdallah Fahd al-Nafisi (Kuwait: 1989), p. 18.

24 An interview with Magdy Saad, Cairo, January 18, 2012

whereas now we are not allowed to join any party other than the Freedom and Justice Party.⁽²⁵⁾

Other young female leaders further exposed the leadership's fear that young members might adopt revolutionary ideas that could affect the movement's organizational cohesion. One female interviewee stressed that: "young people are by nature impulsive and might gravitate towards radical ideas that could affect their relationship with their leadership. As such, there is a need to protect them from these ideas."⁽²⁶⁾ In another interview, a woman who works in the movement insisted that organizational commitment to the Brotherhood's position and to internal election results is the only guarantee to avoid disputes, adding that some members should give up their personal views, even if they are convinced of their validity, in favor of election results and majority opinion.⁽²⁷⁾

These testimonies allude to differences between generational units regarding the same issue. While some members reject the authority that the leadership exercises over those with critical views, others stress the importance of avoiding disputes and committing to the majority opinion, even if it contradicts personal convictions. As such, priority is given to the organization rather than the individual, and attention shifts from building the individual and his/her convictions to maintaining periodic elections and organizational hierarchy. The organization is viewed as the only means to ensure continuity and a top priority for the group's survival, while internal differences and pluralism are viewed as a threat that should be stifled.

The culture of obedience within the Muslim Brotherhood however, ought to be viewed objectively. It is not as though decisions by the top leadership are always imposed on members

without receiving the internal support needed, not only to pass these decisions but also to justify them if they are approved. Many do not object to the group's decisions, and rather find them close to their personal convictions. The reasons for this have to do with the role the movement's educational curriculum plays in legitimizing a certain discourse or expressing a certain vision sympathetic to the position of the leadership. In addition, many members use religious discourse, pointing out examples from Islamic history or episodes from the prophetic biography, to justify a political position. This sort of justification allows for widespread acceptance of certain decisions and produces a sense of agreement between Brotherhood positions and Muslim teachings.⁽²⁸⁾

In understanding the differential positions of members, it is also critical to understand that many members derive their cultural compass and a great deal of information from the movement's educational curricula, public statements, and media outlets. It is not uncommon to find a large number of people within the movement repeating the same ideas and using the same catchphrases and keywords at forums, in public groups and on social media.⁽²⁹⁾ This kind of socialization is part of a process of cultural framing based on a number of key expressions common inside the group, such as, "a brother should be in the hands of his mentor like a corpse that is flipped around by the diener as he pleases," or "the Brotherhood expels out its impurities" (in reference to dismissed members), or "preserving the Brotherhood is preserving Islam itself" - and other statements that ingrain the idea of obedience and link the movement to the very existence of Islam. This turns the Muslim Brotherhood into the religion's only voice and the guarantor of its continuity.⁽³⁰⁾

25 Interview with a female member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Cairo, February 13, 2012.

26 Answers of a Muslim Brotherhood female member contacted via email, Cairo, February 28, 2012.

27 Interview with a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Freedom and Justice Party, Cairo, February 20, 2011.

28 Abdallah al-Nafisi, *The Islamic Movement: Gaps Along the Way* (Kuwait: Dar al-Rabian, 1986), p. 38.

29 This observation is based on the daily perusing of the content of many Muslim Brotherhood social media pages such as Enta Ayel Ikhwan and Shabakat Nabd Ikhwan, in addition to major articles and statements published on the website Ikhwanonline and the comments written about them. It was also based on reading and following the writings (posts) of many young friends who belong to the Brotherhood.

30 al-Nafisi, *The Islamic Movement*, p. 20-40.

The Problem of Politics and Proselytizing (Da'wa) and Position on Party Life

The functional diversity that Banna ascribed to the Muslim Brotherhood set no dividing lines between the proselytizing, political, social and ethical functions of the movement. This lack of -division is not unusual in Islamic thought and heritage, especially the period witnessing the birth of the Brotherhood. The movement was seen as a step towards reclaiming the Islamic Caliphate and an expression of the holistic nature of Islam. Christina Harris argues that Banna deliberately sought this kind of ambiguity and functional overlapping and astutely used it in politics vis-a-vis the successive governments that emerged under the king. When there was a strong government, Banna stressed the proselytizing function of the movement to ensure its survival, while he took on a more politically active role under weak governments.⁽³¹⁾ While this ambiguity was at times an advantage, Bishri points out that this functional conflict is one of the movement's biggest disadvantages because a lack of clear vision and goals leads to weak standards of accountability and institutional oversight.⁽³²⁾ Regardless of whether Banna sought this functional conflict for opportunistic reasons or out of intellectual conviction, he certainly realized the negative impact of political involvement on the movement's task of religious teachings before his death. After the political assassinations carried out by the Special Apparatus in the late 1940s, he had expressed his desire to take the Brotherhood back to its proselytizing past.⁽³³⁾

As the prospects for political participation opened up in 2011, the need arose to reexamine the goals of the Muslim Brotherhood, its *raison d'être*, and its position on political and party life. The first youth conference posed the central question: what

is the main purpose of the Muslim Brotherhood and what is the framework through which the group is going to engage in politics? Mohammad Shams presented four possible scenarios to outline the position of the group on political and party life:

The first scenario is commitment to the group's religious task of preaching and refraining from establishing a political party whereby members will have the freedom to choose their political values and party affiliation. This scenario avoids the contradictions between the movement's proselytizing goals and political practices. The second scenario is for the Muslim Brotherhood to commit to its religious task of preaching. At the same time it would support a political party that shares its political views, thus guaranteeing a political role without interfering directly, which tends to affect its popularity. This scenario provides the Brotherhood with the freedom to shift its support from one political party to another based on what fits its goals and values. The third scenario is for the Muslim Brotherhood to establish a political party while maintaining administrative and financial separation from it, thus allowing the party to act independently according to different needs and political variables. The fourth and final scenario is for the Muslim Brotherhood to transform into a political party, a suggestion made by Maamoun al-Hudaibi, the movement's former general guide. The problem with this scenario is the difficulty of convincing many of the members of the legitimacy of this transformation and thereby relinquishing the main task of proselytizing. What is problematic in this scenario, is that the Brotherhood would act based on pragmatic and political considerations,

31 Christina Phelps Harris, *Nationalism and Revolution in Egypt: The Role of the Muslim Brotherhood*, Hoover Institution Publications (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), p. 151

32 Tariq al-Bishri, *The General Features of Contemporary Islamic Political Thought*, p.129.

33 See Mitchell, p. 36-45

which could affect its popularity and the size of its support base.⁽³⁴⁾

Mohammad Othman, member and coordinator of Aboul Fotouh's presidential campaign, suggested establishing a political party in which 30 percent of the party founders should not be Brotherhood members. He also believed that there should be a special quota for the representation of women in the constituent committee, that the representation of Copts should be at least 10 percent, and the representation of youth should exceed 30 percent.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood did not officially adopt any of these ideas, financial and administrative fusion between the Freedom and Justice Party - the movement's political arm - and the Brotherhood meant unofficially adopting the fourth scenario.⁽³⁵⁾ All the human and financial resources were allocated to political work, meaning the Muslim Brotherhood turned, in actuality, into a political party. One young member stated that there were clear instructions to all members about the need to join the Freedom and Justice Party and abstain from joining any other political parties. He added:

The leadership had no problem accepting inactive membership in the party. They pushed the movement's members to join the party even if they did not actively participate in party activities, just to prove that the Freedom and Justice Party is the biggest political party in the country in terms of grassroots support. Besides, the political work affected the leadership's mentality, prompting them to give priority to quantity instead of quality because it is the means by which electoral battles are decided.⁽³⁶⁾

Dispute over the status of the political party in relation to the Brotherhood and the manner in which it was established represented a major point of contention between the leadership and the young cadres. This dispute hit a pinnacle when the Shura Council chose members of the party's Supreme Body (rather than by the founders).⁽³⁷⁾

The problem of having full administrative, political, and financial integration between the Freedom and Justice Party and the Muslim Brotherhood movement lies not only in the potential contradiction between the proselytizing and educational curricula on one hand, and political accommodation on the other, but also in the potential ramifications for the Brotherhood and its popularity in case of political failure. This conflict came to light during the June 30, 2013 protests. There was a popular rejection of the Muslim Brotherhood, without drawing a distinction between the movement's proselytizing and political roles. Islamist thinker Khales Jalabi observed the negative impact of the partisan mentality, pointing out its narrowness, and the rigidity that tends to be ascribed to one vision of the truth. This is based on the idea of strict party commitment: of never leaving the party even if it is at odds with members' views and individual convictions. Jalabi argues that accepting this mentality has created a state of intellectual stagnation and an inability to communicate with different ideologies, preventing Islamist movements in particular from developing their intellectual and social programs in a serious manner.⁽³⁸⁾

34 An interview with Mohammad Shams, Cairo, February 1, 2012.

35 Hanan Solayman, "Muslim Brotherhood's Young Members Dismayed at New Leadership Appointments," Daily News Egypt, 4th May 2011. Accessed July 23, 2018. <https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2011/05/04/muslim-brotherhoods-young-members-dismayed-at-new-leadership-appointments/>

36 An interview with a young member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Cairo, November 20, 2011.

37 Mohammed Samika and Hani Alwaziri, "Ikhwani crisis as a result of the Ikhwan shura's interference in the selection of Freedom and Justice Party members," Almasry Alyoum. May 1, 2011: <https://bit.ly/2vMlaHP>.

38 Khales Jalabi in: Al-Shawi Tawfiq et al. 1989. *The Islamic Movement, A Future Vision: Notes in Self-Critique*, edited by Abdallah Fahd al-Nafisi. Kuwait, P.25.

The Problem of Revolution and Reform

After the revolution, the gap between some Muslim Brotherhood members and their leaders grew bigger. While young members organized protests and pressured Hosni Mubarak to step down, the leaders did not believe that real political change was going to come. They agreed to meet Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's vice president. They did not believe that more pressure would push Lieutenant General Ahmed Shafik out of the cabinet. The Muslim Brotherhood refused to participate in many protests while their members were in the streets having daily and face-to-face interaction with other political partners.

Mohamed al-Qasas, a former Muslim Brotherhood representative in the Revolutionary Youth Coalition, recounted:

From day one, the Brotherhood did not want to participate in the revolution, but when the regime accused it of inciting violence it declared its participation in the 'day of rage' on Friday January 28 [2011]. However, the leadership was not aware of the developments on the ground and was unable to understand that there is a real revolution happening in the streets. That is why they delegated the task of managing the activities on the ground to their representatives in the Revolutionary Youth Coalition... this lasted until April 2011. In the meantime, the Brotherhood did not officially participate in the ongoing protests but there was a tacit agreement between their leadership and the Coalition that the Brotherhood should not officially make its non-participation public so as not to undermine the popular protests.⁽³⁹⁾

Commenting on the effect that this reality had on the structure of the party Qasas added:

Disagreement between the Brotherhood's views and the popular protests called for by the Coalition began to surface on May 27, 2011 when

the Coalition called for a day 'against corruption'. Other revolutionary forces wanted to call the Friday protests 'the constitution first.' Even though the Coalition announced in a separate press conference its rejection of this call, the Brotherhood officially declined to participate and said that its members in the Coalition do not represent it. They complained that this protest drives a wedge between the army and the people, calling the Friday protests the 'day of the wedge.'⁽⁴⁰⁾

Since that moment, a rift emerged between the revolutionary sentiment among the youth who were in the streets and the Brotherhood's political decisions. The leadership always insisted that the Brotherhood was a reformist movement that believes in gradual measures, and that the revolution is against this ideology. According to one member, during 2011, unexpected changes took place in the Brotherhood, but he stressed nonetheless that the movement was not revolutionary. The interviewee claimed that revolutionary changes do not suit the nature of the Egyptian people, and that the Brotherhood prefers maneuvering and exerting gradual pressure on the regime.⁽⁴¹⁾ However, Banna's writings are not clear in this regard. The founder described revolutions as sedition (*fitna*) but he wrote in another diary that the greatest struggle (*jihad*) is against the ruler if he does not carry out needed reforms. Banna's views on revolution are ambiguous and it is not clear how the regime is going to carry out the radical reforms that the Muslim Brotherhood calls for without a revolution or major pressure. The question is whether the Brotherhood will support the revolution if it fulfills its demands.⁽⁴²⁾

Many Muslim Brotherhood members and leaders use a linear gradual approach (that begins with the individual and ends with the Islamic Caliphate) to express the Brotherhood's skeptical position

39 An interview with Mohamed al-Qasas, Cairo, February 1, 2012.

40 Ibid.

41 Interview with a Brotherhood member, Cairo, February 13, 2012.

42 Tariq al-Bishri, *The Political Movement in Egypt 1945 - 1953*, second edition (Cairo, Dar al-Shorouk, 2002) p. 124-125.

towards revolutionary change. In other words, the stage set for reforming society is not yet ready, and the Muslim Brotherhood is in no hurry to reform the state. According to Magdi Saad, the leadership's excuse for appeasing political authorities and state institutions cites the need to avoid rushing or submitting to radical calls and instead to commit to the linear gradual approach towards reform. After all, the phase of reforming society has not been achieved yet, so the party cannot yet move on to reforming the state and its institutions.⁽⁴³⁾ This was reflected in the calm language that the Muslim Brotherhood adopted when it addressed the violations carried out by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces during the events of the Council of Ministers (government building), on Mohamed Mahmoud Street, at Maspero, and the virginity tests. The Muslim Brotherhood refused to take part in the popular protests against any of these events.

Concluding Remarks

Relying on the age variable to understand the intellectual differences among members of the Muslim Brotherhood is not the most effective tool for understanding splits within the movement. A look at common intellectual spaces such as cultural sources, class, urban vs. rural affiliation, experience and political participation prove to be much more useful in understanding current trends. A look at the different groups within the movement as seen from within the youth cadres seems to verify what Hossam Tammam argues, that rural affiliation in what he calls the ruralization of the Muslim Brotherhood, infiltration of Salafist discourse into the Brotherhood's religious discourse (the Salafization of the Muslim Brotherhood) and the

There has been a feeling that the Muslim Brotherhood is able to exercise control and mobilize support to confront challenges. One young member, who was close to Khairat al-Shater, reiterated this position:

The Muslim Brotherhood is the most organized, strongest, and most internally democratic. Therefore it is best equipped to deal with the problems of the country. There is no political faction with this high degree of organization and popularity to cooperate with to run the affairs of the country.⁽⁴⁴⁾

However, this view was not borne out by the events on the ground. Massive protests came out against the Muslim Brotherhood on June 30, 2013 and popular sympathy towards the group and its leaders declined despite the human losses the organization and those opposed to the military coup suffered (during the massacres committed by the Supreme Council and the police in the Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda Squares).

security restrictions imposed by the state are some of the most important factors determining the shape of the movement today. Tamam explains that rural culture is conservative by nature, so mobilizing from the rural base contributed to supporting the leadership's main ideas and accepting its patronizing discourse, explaining what many have perceived as a generational gap⁽⁴⁵⁾.

While this seems attractive, there is no data to verify the existence of such rural expansion. The more likely scenario is that Muslim Brotherhood has relied, especially in its recruitment of young members since the 1980s, on marginalized university students who moved from the

43 Interview with Magdi Saad, Cairo, January 18, 2012.

44 An interview with an executive administrator for al-Nahda Project (the electoral program of the Brotherhood's presidential candidate Mohamed Morsi), Cairo, February 20, 2011.

45 On ruralization, see Hossam Tammam, *The Ruralization of the Brotherhood* (Cairo: Library of Alexandria, Futuristic Studies Unit, 2011), p. 1-12 and Khalil al-Anani, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: Old Age Fighting Time?* Introduction by Mohamed Selim al-Awa and Diaa Rashwan (Cairo: al-Shorouk International Library, 2007), p.304.

countryside to the city to complete their studies. These members were appointed to middle and lower leadership positions within a paradigm fashioned by Mustafa Mashhour and Maamoun al-Hudaibi that relies on standards of loyalty and obedience. The rural-urban binary does not, by itself, explain the Brotherhood's institutional structure. Its organizational framework is, indeed, based on the centrality of the leadership and obedience to it, and was set up by leaders who grew up in the city and often had bourgeois family roots.

The dominance of the Salafist discourse within the Muslim Brotherhood motivated the group's aversion to religious and educational discourse among many young people who crossed into other intellectual and religious spaces. As a letter of resignation by an Azhar cleric and former Muslim Brotherhood member indicates, the group's educational and religious curricula have suffered as they have relied on a set of shallow readings. The official complained that many of the young members' educational attainment in the study of the prophetic biography and Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) had been negligible.⁽⁴⁶⁾ On religious awareness and teaching, the movement presented itself as an alternative to religious institutions, including al-Azhar, but did not carry out its educational mission correctly. The discourse presented by the Muslim Brotherhood's curricula did not differ from that of the Wahhabi school in emphasizing religious formalities and did not steer clear of the populist religious discourse that dominated the Arab media scene.

The dominance of the Salafist discourse meant a lot of young people were more likely to adopt a political vision and edicts (*fatwa*) laid out by some of the figures within the Salafist movement in Egypt. This became evident in the content of unofficial social media pages that reflect common trends among the Brotherhood's youth such as

Shabakat Nabd Ikhwani and *Inta Ayel Ikhwani* and in the discussions and figures that were in charge of the media platform at the Rabaa al-Adawiya sit-in.

It is impossible to make any generalizations about whether class (i.e., belonging to the Islamic bourgeoisie, the middle class or lower social class), or geography (the rural-urban binary) can explain the trend among some Muslim Brotherhood members towards Salafism. Despite the relevance of these factors and their explanatory capacity, the lack of data (about the Brotherhood's membership, their sources of recruitment, and geographical affiliation, among other demographic data) render generalizations difficult. According to preliminary socio-economic maps consisting of some of the most important young figures (such as Mohamed al-Qasas, Islam Lotfi, Mohamed Aboul Ghait, Ibrahim al-Hudaibi, Mosab al-Gamal, Maher Aqel and Mostafa al-Najjar, who were dismissed from the Brotherhood), the urban, middle-class or upper middle-class opposed the dominant Brotherhood position. Nevertheless, the socio-economic reality of this limited cross-section cannot be extrapolated to cover the rest of the Brotherhood youth. This is particularly because stronger explanatory factors include the group's political experience, cultural consciousness, and engagement in the public sphere (factors that could be available for many young Islamists from the countryside and Upper Egypt).

At a time when Muslim Brotherhood youth groups were engaged in politics through the movement's election campaigns and student activities on campus, the top leadership was either in prison, fleeing the security crackdown, or negotiating with the regime about the permissible level of political participation. This created a gap between the two sides in the quality of their respective experiences and their political leanings.⁽⁴⁷⁾ There

46 For the text of Sheikh Mohamed Said's resignation, see: Mohamed Abdel Ber al-Azhari, "My Reasoned Resignation from the Muslim Brotherhood," (available on his Facebook page, March 9, 2012). His facebook account has since been deactivated. .

47 Hossam Tamam, *Transformations of the Muslim Brotherhood: Dissolution of Ideology and the End of the Organization* (Cairo, Maktabat Madbuli, 2010), p. 6-52 and Khalil al-Anani, "The Young Brotherhood in Search of a New Path," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 9 (October 2009), <https://www.hudson.org/research/9900-the-young-brotherhood-in-search-of-a-new-path>

were other youth groups that looked strictly at their educational courses and whose culture depended on the populist Salafist ideology in and outside the Muslim Brotherhood. These groups were committed to all of the movement's decisions; the boundaries of their social communication did not go beyond the Muslim Brotherhood families in addition to some acquaintances and relatives who also belonged to the movement. As such, a contradiction emerged between the values of isolationism vs. openness; skepticism and polarization vs. trust and cooperation; and pragmatism and appeasement vs. revolution and decisiveness. The marginalization of the intermediate leaders who engaged the public sphere and in union activism and could have played a role in overcoming the generational crisis between the leadership and the youth.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The Muslim Brotherhood's culture of secrecy and its rigid organizational structure helped create an emotional rift between the top, intermediate, and young members who were more active and engaged in the public sphere. The movement's centralized hierarchical structure and indirect elections destroyed the margins of deliberation and creativity, and meant it was unable to accommodate the individual skills of some young members. Lack of transparency was a normal reaction to the security assault on the movement, but the culture of secrecy consolidated the values of loyalty and obedience to the top leadership, which was justified by stressing the need to respect the pledge of allegiance (*al-biaa*) to the general guide and not deviate from it.

The latest political developments in Egypt revealed the internal problems that led the Muslim Brotherhood to the condition it is in today. They also showed that idolizing the organization at the

expense of the Islamic vision and the principles on whose behalf the movement was born - principal among them is the task of moral and religious revival of Muslim society - led to the downfall of the organization and the Islamic vision itself. As such, there must be a genuine internal evaluation process that resists the Brotherhood's intellectual and activist legacy over the course of the last 80 years and determines the purpose of the Muslim Brotherhood. This includes a determination of the best organizational framework through which to operate, and its position on political engagement and how to manage it.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Despite the generational diversity inside the Muslim Brotherhood (sometimes seen as clashing), the movement has not seen the kind of cracks and fissures that could destroy its cohesion or end its organizational existence. Hudaibi outlines the reasons behind this cohesion over the course of the Brotherhood's history as follows:

- 1) Its commitment to a non-violent approach;
- 2) The ongoing persecution and repression by successive governments creating an unbreakable bond and a sense of solidarity among the members of the group in order to avoid collapsing before the regime;
- 3) The abstract nature of the general principles of the movement and Bana's teachings creating the ability to accommodate many intellectual schools and avoid differences and conflicts.⁽⁵⁰⁾

After the military coup in Egypt, the relevance Hudaibi described is at stake. This calls for further contemplation and careful examination to figure out the movement's future organizational framework, the limits of its political engagement, and its ability to maintain its image and place at the popular level.

48 Such as Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, Ibrahim al-Zaafarani, Gamal Hishmat, Mokhtar Nouh and Aboul Ola Madi, beside the attempts to contain others within the Brotherhood discourse through integrating them in the party or the Guidance Office membership, as was the case with Issam al-Arian. An interview with Ismail al-Iskandarani, Cairo, November 20, 2011.

49 Khalil al-Anani, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt* p. 259-310. For the same ideas, see: Khalil al-Anani, "The Debacle of Orthodox Islamism," *al-Hayat*, March 19, 2014.

50 An unpublished lecture by Ibrahim al-Hudaibi at the American University of Cairo.

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