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**Religious Determinism: Unlocking the Ideology of Muslim Brothers**

*Abstract*
Institutional politics caused the Muslim Brotherhood's dramatic fall from power in Egypt. But ideology determined its performance in this struggle. *Religious determinism*, Islamism's central concept, produced motivated, yet politically inept ideological subjects. This article examines the practices involved in this ideological production process: how members are recruited and socialized; how networks are constructed and sustained; how ideas structure action. Whereas past accounts considered how Brothers engaged with society, this article draws on years of participant observation, extensive interviews, focus groups, previously inaccessible organizational documents, and dozens of memoirs to present the first in-depth study of the relationship between the Brotherhood and its members.

INTRODUCTION

The downfall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood was unsettling on many levels—not least, the

scholarly one. Social scientists had furnished for years vivid accounts of how most Egyptians

supported the mother of all Islamist movements, which, they hastened to add, was largely

moderate and pragmatic. Why then did so many Egyptians turn so suddenly against Brothers,

and why did Brothers turn a political conflict into a religious clash? Doubtless, Brothers were

outmaneuvered in a ruthless power game. But ideology, I argue, hampered the movement's

capacity to rule—something scholars scarcely expected.

Partial access to Islamist movements had limited research to interactions between

Islamists and their environment, rather than intra-movement dynamics. Discourse analysts

poured over published texts and other public utterances (Asad 2003; Eickelman and Piscatori

2004; Lahoud 2005; Ismail 2006).[1] Social movement theorists examined how Islamist provided

welfare, campaigned during elections, framed and disseminated ideas (Wiktorowicz 2004; Bayat

2007; Hefner 2011; Wickham 2013). The politically inclined evaluated Islamist strategies

towards the state and the economy (Zubaida 2009; Zahid 2012; Hallaq 2013; Pargeter 2013).

Even anthropological studies centered on Islamism's constituencies, not members (Gaffney

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[1] The same applied to intellectual historians (Ghalioun 1993; Mitchell 1993; Baker 2003; Esposito 2013).

1994; Starrett 1998; White 2002; Mahmood 2005). This article broadens the analytical gaze beyond what Islamists say and do to who they really are as ideological subjects.[2] Applying this new paradigm to Egypt, the article provides the first in-depth study of the Brotherhood from the inside: how members are recruited and socialized; how networks are constructed and sustained; how ideas structure action—thus accounting for the three necessary components of any ideology: ideas, organization, and practices.[3]

Although this research draws on ethnographic fieldwork (plus interviews, focus groups, personal archives, organizational documents, memoirs), the aim is not to understand the Brotherhood on its own terms, as a conventional ethnography would do, but to explain how the movement's ideology contributed to its overthrow. Despite the ballot box rhetoric spawned at democrats inside and outside Egypt, the battle to defend Brotherhood rule in the summer of 2013 was presented to members as the climax in a century-long saga to reclaim Islamic glory. That this battle coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, which witnessed Islam's early victories, was fairly suggestive. During the forty-day-long sit-in around Cairo's Raba'a al-'Adawiya mosque, political rivals were religiously condemned; images of Prophet Muhammad's epic battles were conjured; biblical stories, from David and Moses to Armageddon, were invoked; claims that Archangel Gabriel prayed at the Islamist campsite were flaunted; and the sacred visions of holy men and virgin girls were relayed in anticipation of the upcoming victory. In truth, the jihad rhetoric and the symbolic acts of violence that accompanied it were ritualistic. Brothers never intended to launch an insurgency. They meant to spark a fight that God Himself will finish. Divine intervention, they believed, was imminent. Obviously, the only intervention

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[2] Not in terms of social background (as in Ayubi 1991; Barakat 1993; Ibrahim 1996; Tammam 2012).

[3] Macro-sociologists come closest to micro-sociology in their treatment of ideology. Mann famously opened *Fascists* (2004) by stating: "This book seeks to explain fascism by understanding fascists—who they were, where they came from, what their motivations were."

that occurred during that summer was that of Egypt's security forces. Those who saw their campsite laid to waste were desperately confused: Why would God abandon His soldiers?

This article investigates the type of community Brothers believed they constituted, and the sort of relationship they thought they had with the divine. The aim is to analyze how these beliefs shaped their attitude to power. Of course sociological interest in the culture-power nexus has never abated (Swartz 1998; Collins 2009; Alexander 2011), and a number of recent works have focused particularly on the religious side of culture (Brubaker 2012; Gorski et al. 2012). Following Mann (1986), Thompson (1990), Skocpol (1994), and Therborn (1999), I am chiefly interested in how organizations employ ideas in macro-level power struggles. But while most institutional sociologists highlight how ideology empowers actors, I am also interested in how it constrains them. For even if ideology is little more than a weapon in the arsenal of various power actors, the type of weapon certainly restricts strategy. And even if ideology is socially determined in the first instance, it soon comes to constitute reality, and, as such, directs behavior.[4] To fully appreciate the structuring role of ideology, I turn to Bourdieu (1990a) and Foucault (2000), who study power relations within organizations by recasting them as structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions.

In contrast to studies of the diffuse and fragmented operation of Islamist discourse, this article presents Islamism as a substantial—though surprisingly understudied—ideology. Far from being an expression of repressed religiosity in societies with a history of forced secularization, Islamism is based on an unorthodox interpretation of Islamic history. So unorthodox that it amounts to an inversion of the traditional understanding of sharia. I refer to the central

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[4] This is because ideology constitutes new social relations (Thompson 1990: 58); inspires new patterns of social behavior (Therborn 1999: 15); determines new social interests (Eagleton 2007: 223); and creates new social organizations that later socialize and constrain members (Mann 2006: 346). This is probably why Collins hazarded that "Social constructivism is sociological realism" (2000: 858).

organizing principle of this ideology as *religious determinism*, and reveal the processes that sustain it, particularly historical construction, movement reification, and disciplining techniques. I then show how ideology determined the movement's strategy during the 2013 showdown.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Discourse has featured more frequently than ideology in recent sociological works. This partly has to do with the ironic fact that the earliest students of ideology were materialists who reduced it to mystification (Eagleton 2007: 33). It is true that Gramsci pioneered the shift from the ideational to the material manifestations of ideology, heralding Bourdieu's logic of practice with his notion of common sense. And it was structural Marxists, beginning with Althusser, who reinvented ideology as lived relations. Yet Marxists continued to downplay the ideational content of ideology, shifting only from the classic concern with how ideology distorts material relations to a newfound fascination with how ideology generates material relations. To reconnect ideational and material aspects, post-structural analysts, following Foucault, substituted discourse for ideology. But they coupled this move with a reinterpretation of ideological power as diffuse. And while the claim that power is everywhere is quite sensible, one still needs to "discriminate between more or less central instances of it" (Eagleton 2007: 8). So in contrast to the all-encompassing nature of discourse, ideology is still a more helpful concept in instances where movements employ ideas in political struggles (Thompson 1990: 8; Mann 2006: 345). In those instances, taking movements as objects of inquiry best captures ideology's ideational and material elements. This is where Bourdieu, Foucault, and Therborn are particularly useful.

Bourdieu grounds ideas and practices in specific fields of power where actors defend or enhance their ideal and material interests.[5] If movements are conceived as fields of power, one could investigate how they regulate members' behavior without explicit rules—something Bourdieu playfully compares to "conductorless orchestration." This occurs through endowing members with the self-evident beliefs (*doxa*) and practical dispositions (*habitus*) that reproduce the field (1990a: 59). Foucault regards this disciplining process as *objectification*, and notes that generating and governing new subjectivities cannot be achieved "without knowing the inside of people's mind, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets"—what he refers to at one point as "pastoral power" (2000: 333). Therborn transcends Foucault by insisting that movements both produce subjects and qualify them to perform new roles, including the role of agents of change (1999: 17, 46). Taken together, Bourdieu illustrates how movements operate as autonomous, self-reproducing fields of power; Foucault underlines how they produce new social types through knowledge-based disciplining techniques; and Therborn adds, quite crucially, that these new ideological subjects are also qualified to carry out political change.

So in a sense this article is not concerned with what ideology is, but rather with what it does and how. It treats ideology as a subject-producing process that structures the thoughts and temperaments of movement members through a matrix of discursive and non-discursive practices. But this article also introduces the concept of an ideology's 'central organizing principle'. As incoherent as they are, and as malleable as they can be, each ideology possesses a center of gravity, an umbilical chord that holds its adherents together. If severed, the ideology

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[5] Although the practical logic of Bourdieu's actors is pre-reflective, unlike Mann's (1986: 3) purposive actions, he maintains an important distinction between the practical logic of actors, and the theoretical logic—available to scholars––which discerns the drives and consequences of practices (Bourdieu 1977: 9).

loses its claim to logical and moral superiority and devolves into a network of interests.[6] Examining the role of ideology in power struggles therefore requires understanding how this basic core structures the thought and action of leaders and followers. I refer to Islamism's key concept as religious determinism, and examine the movement that invented, embodied, and exported it since 1928: the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. To fully grasp how religious determinism functions, I adopt a method designed to gage ideas, organization, and practices in equal measure.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

My method builds on Foucault's insight that institutional power relations only reveal themselves in action—when domination counters resistance. In his words, resistance is the "chemical catalyst [that] bring[s] to light power relations" (2000: 329). Even though Foucault generally advocates that power is invisible to its subjects, he does concede that individuals can recognize and resist those instances of power closest to them. In these immediate "struggles against subjection," individuals defend their individuality and links to others by questioning the "knowledge, competence, and qualification" of those who seek to classify and separate them through (Foucault 2000: 330-31). Dominant actors, in turn, cannot simply purge troublemakers. A power relation, Foucault reminds us, is a partnership, "an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from one another" (2000: 337). So instead of confronting resistance, the forces of order govern it by structuring its field of action (Foucault 2000: 341). Therborn (1999: 82-83) similarly describes resistance is encountered through affirmations and sanctions, whether discursive (indoctrination, censorship, excommunication), or non-discursive (rituals, promotion, marginalization). I show how Brothers secure internal order using techniques of the Foucauldian

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[6] A religious ideology cannot renounce divinity and hope to maintain the loyalty of its supporters. Fascists might postpone war, but cannot embrace pacifism. Capitalist might accept regulation, but cannot relinquish private property.

stock, such as hierarchical observation, normalizing judgments, and even formal examinations, as well as those listed by Therborn.

Bourdieu, who also believes that hierarchies are preserved through shaping the cognitive, moral, and corporal dispositions of subjects, traces how power strategies contend within the field of power—or "battlefield," as originally conceived (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 17). He identifies three such strategies: conservation strategies that maintain dominant positions; succession strategies that make these positions available to others; and subversion strategies that challenge the order of domination (Bourdieu 1991: 98-99). I explore all three: how Brotherhood leaders reproduce domination; how loyal members toe the line to ascend the organizational ladder; and how dissidents question the foundations of this order.

But how can an outsider become sufficiently familiar with a closed society like the Brotherhood to uncover practical dispositions, subtle disciplining techniques, and resistance to them? One of the challenges of participant-observation is that subjects could hardly forget that the participant is also an observer. And with a movement that conceals many of its ideas, a straightforward ethnography is simply impossible. I was therefore forced to devise an innovative way to combine the merits of ethnomethodology with the requirements of knowledge. The solution was to use field notes as the basis for interviews, rather than as a direct source. Without assuring my informants that I would not quote anything from my field notes, they would not have been completely at ease. But without my notes, I would not have known which questions to pose whenever I decided to wrap up the project.

The research began in 2006 with interviews with leading Islamist figures, and a revisiting of Islamist literature, including some thirty memoirs and published writings, as well as secondary sources. This was supplemented by a regular six-years attendance at a Brotherhood mosque in

California, and hours of audio/video indoctrination materials. This was useful, but insufficient. The breakthrough occurred when I was informally asked to lecture on ideology to a group of inquisitive Brothers in the summer of 2008. Weekly lectures were organized at the house of a Brother during the months I spent in Cairo, with thirty attendants on average. This bonding period allowed me to study them closely over the next five years in their 'natural habitat' (amongst themselves and their families), rather than 'in action' (teaching, providing welfare, campaigning). As the 2011 revolt unfolded, I saw members of my study group resign from the Brotherhood in disillusionment; rise to fame as independent activists; or assume posts in the Brotherhood's first political party. It was also during this time that tell-all memoirs began to trickle. In spring 2013, I returned to Egypt to conduct over forty interviews with members of my original crowd, and others they knew.[7] I initially began with a purposive sample to capture diversity in terms of age, gender, background, and organizational functions, before moving to snowball sampling. Cross-referencing minimized bias and untypical positions. Informal data gathering from people who came across Brothers in various personal and professional capacities was also helpful. Equally informative were three focus group sessions, during the Brotherhood's time in power; on the eve of the rebellion against them; and after the violent clearing of the sit-ins.

My informants were also kind enough to supply documents from their personal archives: training manuals, questionnaires, the all-important cultivation curriculum, internal memos, resignation and prison letters, and daily correspondence. This was complemented by a review of voting records and opinion polls. Finally, I had the opportunity to witness Brotherhood exchanges first-hand, on the street, through social media, and in private meetings, during the turbulent summer of 2013. This all allowed me to capture the multi-faceted process that sustains

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[7] Some allowed me to use their full names, and others preferred their first, middle, last, or nicknames.

the Brotherhood's core concept: religious determinism. Let me start, however, with an overview of intra-movement dynamics.

THE BROTHERHOOD: A SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW

One cannot choose to join the Brotherhood; one has to be chosen. Brothers constantly vet relatives, neighbors, colleagues, and mosque worshipers, for potential recruits. Candidates pass through an average three-year probation period after which they are invited to Brotherhood daytrips for inspection by more experienced eyes. Upon receiving the stamp of approval, one becomes a devotee (*muhib*) and attends apprentice group meetings to test his diligence and familiarize him with the organization. Successful devotees are next enrolled in a grueling three-month elevation course (*dawrat tas'id*), which provides a brief introduction to the history of Islam and Islamism, followed by qualifying exams. If all goes well, devotees are asked to swear an oath of allegiance (*bai'a*) to the General Guide *(al-Murshid al-'Am)*—an oath historically reserved for caliphs, but appropriated by Brothers as the provisional leaders of the Muslim *umma* until a new caliphate is established. This intensely ritualized oath transforms a devotee into a Brother.

Still, elevation to entry-level membership is only the first step in another long journey through five ranks of membership. Promotion is subject to a complicated set of monitoring mechanisms centered on the process referred to as cultivation (*tarbiya*). It is no coincidence that the Brotherhood's first and second founders, Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), were primary schoolteachers. In their writings, cultivation is treated more meticulously than anything else. For while this process might strike the casual observer as simple indoctrination with a religious flavor, it is actually an elaborate activity that borrows from at least four different schools: it instills a transformative worldview in the minds of members, as

communists do; it claims that converting to this worldview is contingent upon a spiritual conversion, as in mystic orders; it presents this worldview as simple, uncorrupted religion, as in puritan movements; and it insists that this worldview cannot be readily communicated to society because it is not yet ready to handle the truth of the human condition, as in masonic lodges. The ultimate aim, therefore, is not to win over more believers, but to produce a new kind of person: the Muslim Brother.

Practically speaking, cultivation requires frequent group meetings in which a prefect (*naqib*) guides members through a detailed cultivation curriculum (*manhaj tarbiya*) under the careful gaze of the cultivation committee. Brothers meet on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, and biannual basis.[8] The nuclear group, the family (*usra*), is composed of five to ten Brothers who meet every week. With the prefect moderating, Brothers share personal and professional concerns, worship and dine together, recite and comment on devotional readings, and discuss the writings of the movement's founders. At the end of the meeting, leadership instructions are circulated and organizational tasks allotted. Every few meetings, the prefect administers a questionnaire designed to measure the spiritual elevation of members, with questions varying from how many times a Brother missed dawn prayers, to how he negotiated his way through various moral dilemmas.

A cluster of families (forty on average) forms a branch (*shu'ba*). Once a month, branch members participate in a battalion training (*katiba*), which involves fasting until sunset; breaking fast over a communal banquet; attending lectures by movement doctrinaires throughout the evening; praying together until daybreak, before heading home. Every quarter, several branches come together in a weeklong camp (*mu'askar*) where they combine lectures and worship with

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[8] As Collins (2009: 193) notes, "high-intensity ideologies…are found where people are continually together physically," especially if face-to-face interaction is designed to transmit emotional energy through "interaction ritual chains"—which is precisely the case here.

quasi-military exercises. Finally, there is a recreational biannual fieldtrip (*rihla*) where Brothers are asked to bring along their wives and children to socialize (*Turuq, Vol. 1* 2002: 472). Rida (2013), a seasoned cultivator summarized the value of these multilayered meetings as follows: the family deepens personal bonds; the battalion elevates spirituality; the camp fosters a martial attitude; and the fieldtrip creates a sense of community.

The guiding light for these meetings emanates from the cultivating curriculum, which is composed of several edited volumes with lessons tailored to weekly meetings. A typical lesson comprises extracts from al-Qur'an and the Prophet's life, followed by comments by movement authors. This deliberate pairing of revelation and movement literature conflates the divine and the temporal in the minds of members. To aid prefects, each lesson begins with pedagogical goals and concludes with a short exercise. Prefects also undergo a training course (*dawrit nuqaba*) to learn how to iron out differences between Brothers. More important, prefects develop the talent of matching the fixed curriculum lessons to the movement's changing positions. The masters of this art are the heads of the cultivation committee who are selected from amongst those staunch loyalists that could contain spirited Brothers in a paternalistic attitude. And because cultivation requires constant vigilance, senior cultivators are often retired professionals, absentee landlords, or shopkeepers. The central cultivation committee receives reports from branch-level committees, and *en mission* cultivators roam through group meetings to offer advice and met out reprimands. Successful cultivation, as defined in article 3(b) of the Brotherhood's General Order (*al-Nizam al-'Am*), is one which endows Brothers with a unified view. The fact that the Brotherhood suffered no major dissent in its eight-and-a-half decade existence speaks volumes to the effectives of this process. And the essence of this unified worldview is religious determinism.

RELIGIOUS DETERMINISM

In his first major speech in parliament, President Muhammad Morsi repeatedly invoked Qur'an verse (9: 76): 'And if only the townsfolk believed and feared God, We would have poured upon them blessings from heaven and earth'. His audience did not quite understand why their president kept returning to this verse. Only Brothers deciphered the message. Materialist-minded citizens expected tangible solutions to the country's problems, unaware of the fact that by returning to God, economic resources would be discovered, political factionalism and social tensions would disappear, and geopolitical rivals would collapse under the weight of their own problems.

Islamism is based on a simple idea, summarized in the Brotherhood's interpretation of the verse: 'If you support God, He will support you' (Qur'an 47: 7). Traditional Muslim scholars understood this verse to mean that if one undertakes a task with the intention of supporting God, He endows him with confidence and composure.[9] Islamism is based on a subtle reversal of this standard interpretation. It holds that by becoming pious, God guarantees one's victory in various worldly endeavors. This amounts to no less than an inversion of the conventional understanding of sharia. For mainstream jurists, the reward for religiosity is heaven. Otherwise, Muslim rulers and ruled had to muddle through this world relying on the material means of success: building effective polities, efficient economies, and formidable armies. This is because the world operates according to empirically discoverable laws of causality (*qawanin al-sababiya*), while sharia regulates religious life—even if it sometimes touches on worldly matters. Implementing sharia is an expression of faith, not a strategy to get ahead in this world. Severing hands is not necessarily better in preventing theft than imprisonment; usury does not cause economic failure; and

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[9] Check standard exegeses by al-Tabari (d. 923), al-Qurtubi (d. 1273), and Ibn Kathir (d. 1373).

submitting warfare to ethical guidelines does not bring victory. Indeed, abiding by Islamic law often makes one's life rather difficult—and this is precisely what he is being rewarded for. Even modern-day fundamentalists (*salafis*) subscribe to this view (Khalid 2013). Brothers turn this traditional conception on its head. Abiding by sharia is no longer just a reflection of religiosity; it is also a way to solicit God's help in advancing in this world.

Brothers were naturally reluctant to share this claim with outsiders, whether foreigners or Muslims corrupted by decades of Westernization. Despite their superficial religiosity, average Muslims are supposedly incapable of the leap of faith necessary to rely on divine intervention. They demand concrete solutions to their everyday problems, and they vote for Brothers because they think they could provide some. So while voters took the Brotherhood's success in serving local communities as an indicator that they had grand plans for national progress, Brothers indulged them to garner enough political clout to implement the cultural transformation necessary to trigger divine support. With single-minded devotion to this concept, Brothers spared little effort to develop a practical project that could secure a sustainable majority—thus, depriving themselves of a valuable asset in their struggle with old regime rivals. As soon as it became clear that Brothers had little to offer beyond appeals to patience, mobilizing millions against them was relatively easy. Using Mann's vocabulary, the Brotherhood commanded 'immanent' not 'transcendent' ideological power: it shaped the minds of its members, but failed to win universal allegiance for its ideology. So although Brothers were overthrown because they lost the political power game, their poor performance in this game was largely determined by the central organizing principles of their ideology—what I refer to as *religious determinism*.

In Hegelian and Marxian thought, when certain historical conditions materialize, change inevitably follows. Islamism maintains, quite similarly, that realizing certain religious conditions

prompt historical change.[10] Specifically, that producing a godly community whose members are 'knights in the morning, and saints at night' (as their famous motto goes) causes a divinely ordained transformation in this community's material situation. They are therefore less concerned with changing the world than changing themselves. Summarized best by former deputy general guide, Muhammad Habib, Brothers consider themselves "a veil for divine power" (2012: 123). This is why Banna preached that Islam must become the hegemonic public spirit, and—in a typical Hegelian move—saw the state as the repository of virtue ([1949] 1993: 170). Religious determinism stands on three pillars: its laws are derived from a theological reading of history; its conclusions lead to the reification of the Brotherhood as an organization; and its endurance rests on a methodical censuring of intellectual challenges. Let us consider the discursive and non-discursive aspects of each.

*Theological History*

History stamps Brothers' predictions with the certitude of reality. So while liberals, for instance, could claim that the future should turn out a certain way because the past points towards that direction, Islamists use history to prove that their promised future has in fact occurred before. Religious determinism is not a theory of historical progression, but of a recurring historical pattern whereby men conquer as a reward for their piety, and falter when they scorn their divine provider. Revelation certainly buffets this historical logic, but as Banna proclaimed: "it is from the pages of history that we derive the certainty that [if we] cultivate spiritual strength and moral righteousness, the material instruments of power will hail to [us] from all directions" ([1949] 1993: 50).

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[10] This is not fatalism because it requires adherents to act (albeit on themselves), not passively accept their fate.

Sacred history became the bread-and-butter of cultivators. When the Brotherhood decided to contest the 2005 parliamentary elections with full force, members received a crash course on how Muslims won their early battles through devoting time and money to the cause (Hani 2013). The elections were presented as a form of jihad, and lukewarm supporters were compared to those who deserted the Prophet during bitterly fought battles ('Eid 2013: 35). Participation in Mubarak's corrupt system was justified by reference to how Joseph sought a cabinet post under the Pharaoh (Mikkawi 2013). When some complained of the absence of a clear economic agenda, they were reminded of the reign of the Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph whose morality all but obliterated poverty (Malik 2013). When members questioned the decision to nominate the uncharismatic Morsi for president, the reprimand of the Israelites who rejected Saul's kingship was evoked (Farghali 2013). When some became frustrated with the movement's post-2011 appeasement of old regime forces, they were reminded of Prophet Muhammad forgiveness of his enemies after conquering Mecca (Sami 2013). Brothers indignant with their leaders for abandoning revolutionaries to their fate during the brutal Mohamed Mahmoud Battle, in November 2011, in return for a foothold in the new parliament were placated with a quite original interpretation of the story of Moses. Like the Brothers, Moses had a comprehensive spiritual reform plan. Alas, his great plan had to be shelved for an entire decade because of his hot-bloodedness. For when Moses saw an Egyptian assaulting his kinsman, he rallied to his aid, killing the aggressor, and fleeing to escape punishment. Mindful of this story, the Guidance Bureau refused to be dragged into a battle to defend a few hundred revolutionaries at the cost of delaying their plan to save millions (Tariq 2013).

Successful employment of sacred history encouraged Brothers to construct more elaborate narratives. If their claims about history are to be convincingly elevated to general laws,

the evidence must apply to Islamic history in general. But who could play the role of historian? As members were frequently told, only Islamists could be trusted, since professional historians were blinded by Western traditions (Mikkawi 2013). So by the 1990s, an emerging coterie of Islamist historians had neatly divided Islamic history into a few cycles. The bestsellers, obviously, were the action-packed Ayyubid defeat of the Crusades in the twelfth century, and the Mamluk defeat of the Mongols in the following one. The more thoughtful spared a bit of extra time to master the eight-centuries-long Muslim reign in Andalusia, or the slightly briefer six centuries of Ottoman rule.

Sa'ad Tag-al Din (2013), an engineer who joined this new wave, produced a rough trajectory to demonstrate how periods of material weakness coincided with those of moral degeneration. Yet the most prolific of this new breed of historians was Raghib al-Sirgany, an urologist by training, who devoted little over a decade to interpret fourteen centuries of Islamic history, from the birth of the Prophet to the 2011 Arab revolts—mostly in his spare time, since he also practiced medicine and taught urology. His work was first publicized on his website in the form of audio lectures (an average of twelve hours per historical cycle), subsequently transcribed into over fifty downloadable volumes. Such a fast-track research by a part-time amateur could only provide historical snapshots. So despite references to politics and society, the overwhelming focus is on the Muslim community's oscillation between virtue and decadence. The lesson—unsurprisingly—is that the virtuous succeed, and the corrupt fail. A case-in-point is the 'tragedy of Zeriab', which Sirgani recounted in a one-hour lecture. This debauched folksinger singlehandedly lured the otherwise somber and godly community of eleventh century Cordoba, leading to their defeat in battle. In contrast, Almoravid saintly brotherhood isolated themselves from their decedent North African society, and led an austere life modeled after the

first Muslim generation. They were rewarded with successive conquests in Africa, crowned by a resounding victory against the Franks of Andalusia.[11]

In a lecture delivered two months after the 2011 uprising, Sirgani shared with a huge crowd how the revolt demonstrated Islamism's special historical law.[12] Although Islamists had not triggered the revolt they should not be ashamed of owning it because Mubarak's overthrow was their reward for decades of worship. In fact, the revolt vindicated religious determinism in the face of increasing in-house criticism. Since 2006, young, urban Brothers pressed their leaders for a more aggressive confrontational strategy, since spiritual struggle seemed insufficient. Their leaders counseled patience. Then came the revolt where a bunch of secular activists supported by millions of desperate citizens forced Mubarak to hand authority to the generals who, in turn, decided to transfer power to an elected authority, which turned out to be the Brotherhood— divine intervention indeed (Jamal 2013).

None of this was new. Brotherhood historians merely substantiated long-held Islamist beliefs. The second general guide, Hassan al-Houdeibi, remarked, in a 1953 lecture commemorating Islam's first military victory, that the Prophet's greatest worry before battle was that his soldiers would rely on their numbers and weapons, and forget that they would only win if they did not sin while their enemies did. He backed this up with a story from the 1940s. A Brother once attempted to blow up a British ammunition depot on the Suez Canal, but it was heavily guarded and surrounded by barbed wires. So he fled. That night he pondered his failure, and blamed his past sins. He repented, preformed the ritual wash, prayed for forgiveness, and returned to the British camp the following night. And lo and behold, he found the wires torn and the guards staring blankly at him without seeing him—as if blinded by God. He accomplished

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[11] http://islamstory.com/ar (accessed on September 21, 2013).
[12] *Al-Thawra al-Masriya* (The Egyptian Revolution), March 7, 2011, El-Sawy Cultural Wheel, Cairo.

his mission and returned safely home (Houdeibi 1973: 117, 130-31). Houdeibi concluded dramatically, "We are like the shepherd who was asked why he was not guarding his sheep [from the wolf], and replied: 'I have mended my relation with God, and so God mended the relation between my sheep and the wolf'" (Houdeibi 1973: 265). A Brother based in al-Azhar stuck the same chord with a 2013 article published on the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) website. According to Muhammad 'al-Khateeb, the Zionists panicked when they first confronted the martyrdom-seeking Brotherhood militia in 1948. Whenever they heard their distinctive hymn ('Rise Scent of Paradise, Rise'), they would simply drop their weapons and flee.[13]

The cultivation curriculum is designed to hammer in this concept. Prefects are instructed to leave no doubt that victory is "a divine reward in which material causes are suspended and miracles and wonders appear." The curriculum then adds that material theories about causality are defunct because secular historians see only the "apparent causes and superficial circumstances" rather than God's handiwork (*Turuq, Vol. 1* 2002: 118, 141). When a group of Brothers attended a lesson by a professional historian on the causes of Saladin's victories, they were torn between their sympathy for this deluded historian, and their tendency to humor outsiders. After much debate, they decided that the best way to enlighten this well-meaning historian without subjecting themselves to scrutiny was to present him with a book on the 'true' causes of Saladin's victory. The 500-page book dwelled, in a painfully repetitive prose, on the great warrior's piety: how he led his court in prayer; how he humbled himself to clerics; how he chose his generals from among the devout; how he supplicated before battle (Alfy 2013).

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[13] Al-Khtateeb posted "*Ja' al-Haq wa Zahaq al-Batil* (Right has Prevailed and Wrong has been Vanquished)" on April 17, 2013 on http://www.fj-p.com/article.php?id=56271 (accessed on October 22, 2013).

How Islamism's unique historical law influences Brothers' everyday practice cannot be overstated. For one thing, it allows leaders to shift the onus of failure to members. As Hani (2013) pointed out:

> **For years, we were told that the reason why victory has been withheld for so long was because of the irreverence of handful of members… Each of us was repeatedly warned that he might be delaying victory because he was not striving hard enough on the path of piety: he was missing dawn prayers, or not fasting two days a week, or not performing enough complementary acts of worship. We therefore constantly interrogated ourselves**.

In fact, an anxious Hani once queried Sirgany on this question, and the Islamist historian responded unflinchingly that according to his calculations the Brotherhood's empowerment was overdue, and that it must be Brothers' moral deficiencies that is holding it back. Ibrahim al-Houdeibi (2013) further elaborated:

> **During battalion trainings, prefects would administer questionnaires recording how many times we performed prayers at the mosque, and how often we did this or that act of devotion… When our performance was found lacking, we would be castigated for allowing Muslims to suffer in Palestine and elsewhere because we are too lazy to worship. Even a minor slipup in organizational activities, such as putting together a freshmen reception at college, would be immediately blamed on the organizer's lax moral standards**.

With such a mindset, any setback is presented as a divine test of Brothers' steadfastness. One could therefore make sense of Brother Hassan al-'Ashmawi's (1985: 82) oxymoron that: "Brothers are revolutionary in their capacity to patiently weather injustice rather than confront it"—a theme later expounded in the much-publicized piece 'Revenge of the Muslim Brothers' (*Intiqam al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*), published on the movement's website in 2008 after dozens of members were imprisoned. The author begins by threatening that Brothers will avenge themselves against Egypt's rulers—but how?

> **[Our] revenge is to exert more patience… Every young man who heads early [to the mosque] for dawn prayers, and fixes his foot on the frontline, represents a slap on the**

**neck of every State Security officer… Imagine, my dear Brother, when you raise your hands to begin prayer that you are slapping [every corrupt] judge… The revenge of the Muslim Brothers is to embrace their sacred constitution [al-Qur'an]…to recite it and study its meanings and memorize it… The revenge of the Muslims Brothers is to control themselves, obey their leaders, trust their movement, and endure harm** ('Abbas 2008).

Tag al-Din compared the battle over Brotherhood rule in 2013 to the one between Saul and Goliath, which ended with the defeat of the tyrant and the establishment of David's Kingdom. Morsi here is cast as Saul, who was crowned by God despite his people's reluctance. Saul knew he was destined to fight an epic battle against Goliath, and those who have become attached to his corrupt ways—an allusion to old regime loyalists in Egypt. Saul orders his soldiers not to drink from a river they come across to test their obedience, just as Morsi asked his followers to reject the coup. The few believers who passed the test were rewarded with a miraculous victory––a single slingshot that knocked the enemy down (reported by Tariq 2013). A small litmus test of the popularity of these analogies comes from Shatla (2013), who tried to reason with a key minister under Morsi that Brothers were doomed, only to hear him bark back: "Are you going to drink from the river!"

*Movement: From Means to End*

One of the most striking things about the Brotherhood is its name. Ideological movements usually carry the name of the order they seek to establish: one hears of liberal, communist, or nationalist movements. The Brotherhood, oddly, carries the name of an already existing society. It is as if the movement itself is the ultimate goal. To dispel doubts of organizational narcissism, members are told that the movement is sacred because what it represents is sacred (Shatla 2013). Without the movement, there can be no return to Islamic rule. In time, means and ends become confused. As Ibrahim al-Houdeibi (2013) succinctly put it: "The organization has become its

own cause of being." This remarkable feature is grounded in a particular interpretation of Islamic social ties, and reinforced by interlocking networks of family, friends, and business partners.

To begin with, the Qur'an (49: 10) decrees that: 'The believers are but brothers'. Brothers use this principle to sanctify their membership. When one joins an ideological movement, one voluntarily commits to a cause and a community. Not so with the Brotherhood. As an ordinary Muslim, you are in fact tied to other believers in a God-ordained brotherhood. Not assuming your brotherly obligations makes you a sinner. So by becoming a Brother, you are not making a new commitment—one that you could later rescind—you are merely activating a so far dormant bond you had tacitly accepted when you first embraced Islam. By the same token, leaving the Brotherhood amounts to nothing less than renegading on your religious duties. "Here you are renouncing faith not an ideology; you are abandoning God not Hassan al-Banna" (Fayez 2013: 18). The Brotherhood, in other words, does not consider itself an ideological movement, but an island of awakened Muslims amidst an oblivious community.

The brilliance of this formulation is that it does not appear to be promoting any new ideas; it simply asks Muslims to reexamine their religiosity for a possible discrepancy between what they believe themselves to be (devout) and what they actually are (negligent). To overcome this dissonance, one must join. Naturally, the message of Islam and that of the Brotherhood become conflated in the mind of members, so that defending the movement amounts to defending Islam (Fayez 2013: 29). And how could it be otherwise when the founder has proclaimed: "We openly declare that every Muslim that does not believe in this approach and work towards fulfilling it, has no share in Islam, and should find another idea to believe in" (Banna [1949] 1993: 101).

This new membership paradigm is only the half of it. Becoming conscious of the fact that as a Muslim you are already a Brother is the 'passive' aspect of your membership. The 'active' part is to serve Islam. Now, what does Islam want? According to Sami (2013), secular-minded Muslims think Islam is all about rituals. But in truth, Muslims must form a godly community to become eligible for divine grace. This *umma* is past gone because the caliphate, which symbolizes its unity, had collapsed. As a result, 'the duty of the time' (*wajib al-waqt*)—a jurisprudential-sounding term coined by the Brotherhood to refer to the duty that must be prioritized—is to restore the caliphate. This brings us to one of the Brotherhood's most effective recruitment and retention strategies, originally framed by Banna as the 'collective work obligation' (*fardiat al-'amal al-jama'i*). Every Brother has engaged in this logical exercise at one point in his organizational career. And it usually runs like a Socratic dialogue:[14]

**- Do you agree that Islam must exist in a united community under the caliphate?**
**- Yes.**
**- Does this community presently exist?**
**- No.**
**- So would you agree that resurrecting the caliphate is essential to Islam?**
**- Yes.**
**- Can you resurrect the caliphate by yourself?**
**- No.**
**- So would you agree that you are obliged to work with others?**
**- Yes.**
**- Now, regardless of the Brotherhood's faults, do you see a better-equipped group?**
**- No.**
**- So do you agree that it is your religious duty to join (or remain in) the Brotherhood?**
**- Yes.**

Brothers also appeal to the mystic concept of companionship (*suhba*) to further highlight the importance of community: that for a Muslim to attain piety, he must constantly associate himself with those who radiate spiritual energy. Along the same lines, potential drifters are reminded of revelations that forbid Muslims from turning away from the community of believers, such as the

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[14] The following script is patched from slightly different versions recorded in the interviews.

Prophet's warning that wolves prey on stray sheep. This brings members to the last question in the Brotherhood's Socratic ruse: if one must join a community of believers, who is better to join than the Brotherhood? As Yasser (2013) explained, when you complain about the movement, older Brothers concede: "Yes, you are absolutely right, the Brotherhood makes terrible mistakes, but who are you going to join: militant Islamists who go around killing innocent people, or secular Muslims who have no understanding of Islam?" Once a member accepts the collective work obligation, "their logic becomes irrefutable."

Sanctifying group membership to 'pull' members together is supplemented by allegations against Islam's enemies to 'push' members away from others. Indeed, as Bourdieu (1991) tells us, all symbolic systems divide groups into opposing classes. And Foucault notes how producing new subjectivities involves "dividing practices" (2000: 326). Still, one could hardly overstress the role of conspiratorial thinking in cementing Brotherhood unity. The worldwide conspiracy against Islam's faithful brigades includes everyone and stretches over Islam's fourteen centuries.[15] The first time Brothers are formally introduced to it occurs during the elevation course through a lecture brazenly entitled 'The Conspiracy'. Here the magnitude of the Western-Zionist-Free Mason plot is exposed, and Brothers are warned that Islam's soldiers are in a state of permanent siege and could only survive by sticking together, obeying their leaders, and distrusting everyone else (Radwan 2013). The outline of the global conspiracy against Islam is then unpacked in the cultivation curriculum, which identifies the enemy as "secular Crusaders and Zionists, as well as Muslims devoted to worldly interests," an unholy alliance led at the moment by Americans. Even as the United States was pressuring Mubarak to allow Brothers in the 2005 parliament, the movement prefaced its 2004 reform initiative by defining the primary

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[15] Of course conspiracy theories abound in the Muslim world—and some are not unfounded—but the Brotherhood's version is broader and more systematic.

threat to Muslims as the U.S. plot to impose Western-Zionist domination (*Mubadarat,* 2004). Brothers, the curriculum concludes, are part of the perennial battle against evil: "In every age and in every community, the devil recruits allies…and forms them into an army to attack believers using his [twisted] means" (*Mabadi', Vol. 3* 2003: 225-43). So while a high-profile dissenter once compared the Brotherhood to the Free Masons, in terms of secrecy and rituals (Khirbawi 2102: 26), he overlooked a crucial difference: Masons conspired against the world, while Brothers believed that the world conspired against them. Naturally, some Brothers became skeptical about this worldwide conspiracy when they saw the length to which Western capitals went to defend the Brotherhood's rule in 2013. If they had the slightest doubt that Brothers might threaten their future interests, why not welcome Morsi's overthrow? The response, from the always-prepared group leaders, was: "God blinded Westerners, forcing them to work against their own good. They were unwitting tools in the hands of the divine" (Shatla 2013).

For such a besieged mentality, unity becomes the only way to beat the odds. And unity cannot be achieved without a trusted leadership. As General Guide Mustafa Mashhur put it, in his pertinently titled *Between Leaders and Soldiers*, failures should not be blamed on leaders because it is God's way of weeding out the weak (quoted in Abu-Khalil 2012: 28). The cultivation curriculum cites revelation to stress the obligation to give leaders the benefit of the doubt, considering criticism a form of backbiting (*ghiba*) and gossip (*namima*), both religiously prohibited (*Madkhal* 1997: 186). Brothers, accordingly, dismiss any critical thoughts or negative feelings against their leaders as "satanic whispers" ('Eid 2013: 33).

In fact, placing leaders on a religious pedestal is justified by an unorthodox religious philosophy, which regards the general guide as a "deputy (*na'ib*) of the currently nonexistent caliph, who in turn is supposed to be representing the Prophet," and as such, the Brotherhood's

supreme leader is the de facto religious leader (*Imam*) of the *umma*, and must be obeyed until the position of the de jure leader (the caliph) returns (Tariq 2013). As a man whose great talent was to synthesize disparate philosophies, Banna's conception of the general guide as the deputy of a missing caliph combines the Shi'ite tradition of considering jurists as deputies of the Awaited for Mahdi, and the Sufi concept of the saint (*wali*), who receives instructions directly from God. But then Banna went further in his oft-quoted prescription on leadership rights: "The leader in the Brotherhood has the same rights as the father in terms of emotional bonds; the professor in terms of scientific respect; the [mystic] sheikh in terms of spiritual nurture; and the [political and military] leader in terms of general policy" ([1949] 1993: 313-14)—a typical case of symbolic violence, using Bourdieu's (1991: 9) vocabulary, where possessors of superior forms of cultural capital are granted a legitimate claim to unquestionable authority.

To express the Brotherhood's unity behind a single leadership, Mikkawi (2013) compared it to a train: "You could stay on or get off, but you cannot drive it as you wish." The metaphor most commonly used, however, is that of Noah's Ark—a metaphor infused with religious connotations. At a time of chaos, Sarah Lotfi (2013) explained, the Brotherhood was conceived as a ship to carry the pious through the storms that followed the caliphate's collapse. "In a stormy sea," Tag al-Din (2013) added, "if someone jumps off the ship, we are justified to assume he might drown…we must all huddle together onboard." The metaphor is also used to preach patience: it took Noah 950 years to build his ark (Qaradawi 1999: 297). It finally demystifies the Brotherhood's general course:

> **In the middle of a mighty flood, the skipper struggles to keep the ship afloat, rather than navigate it towards shore. Noah did not know his final destination. He was ordered to build an ark on sand—which bewildered his faithless contemporaries—and urge believers to get onboard. Those who refused, like Noah's own son, drowned. It was up to God to decide when and where the ark should land. I recall senior Brothers always reciting this verse in our meetings: 'O Son, come aboard with us'—referring to Noah's**

**invitation to his son to join the believers and not rely on worldly means for protection** (Shatla 2013).

A discourse urging cohesion and obedience cements the movement, but people, after all, are the Brotherhood's building blocks. This is why discourse is firmly grounded in dense personal networks. Real friendship (as opposed to simple camaraderie), marriage and kinship ties, as well as business partnerships strengthen Brotherhood bonds considerably. "It is a social rather than an intellectual contract that binds us" (Shatla 2013). Hani (2013) described how the Brotherhood's carefully woven personal support networks, worship groups, organizational sections, athletic teams, social gatherings, and professional associations envelop members. "You read Brotherhood books, written by Brothers on Brothers. You pray in Brotherhood mosques… You marry a Sister nurtured in a family according to Brotherhood guidelines. Even on recreational trips, you meet Brothers, ride buses owned by Brothers, to stay at a place administered by Brothers" (Fayez 2013: 15).

So if a member loses interest in the ideology, he would still be reluctant to leave. He would immediately be reminded of the fact that: "These are my friends, my wife's friends, my children's playmates, and, in some cases, my parents, in-laws, uncles or cousins, sometimes even my employers or business partners. How could I leave? My life will be devastated, or at least it will never be the same" (Hani 2013) When Hani resigned, he felt estranged, especially that his wife was a Sister. "I felt like a fish out of the water." When Fayez left, even his original recruiter, who had been a friend and teacher for twenty years, would turn away if he saw him coming down the street (2013: 17). Ahmad al-Bialy (2011), a Brother who became governor under Morsi, threatened: "Whoever deserts the group will find nothing but estrangement…he will no longer be recognized by his family and friends."

What applies to friends, applies even more to families. The Brotherhood had for long sought to complement its ideological families with biological ones. The Muslim Sisterhood was partly created to provide spouses. Whenever a Brother is ready for betrothal, he must inform his prefect, who then transfers his request to Sisterhood matrons to select a match. If a Brother objects, he is scolded, "Do you think you are marrying for yourself? You are marrying for God" ('Eid 2013: 162). Mahmoud (2013) remembered that before his elevation course, his recruiter advised that if anyone asks whether you are ready to marry a Sister, you must answer in the affirmative or else you will be deselected. "One of my colleagues panicked and said he was planning to marry his cousin. The recruiter seemed distressed, and asked him not to mention this to anyone."

This strictly private practice was publicized when an insider posted on YouTube a video of Subhi Salih, a movement spokesman, deriding Brothers who marry from outside the Sisterhood. He scorned those "sissies" (*faluta*) who claim to have found religious partners who are not Sisters, quipping: "What about those girls we have produced [for you], should we hand them out [to others] for free?" Fallen Brothers who prefer "street girls" to respectable Sisters betray failure in cultivation, Salih concluded. What the Brotherhood wants is for a Brother to marry a Sister to conceive Islamists "by birth," and for all these families to come together in an godly community that would deserve divine grace.[16] But the Brotherhood has another incentive to press intermarriages. Wives keep an eye on Brothers, regularly reporting any secret vice.[17] They also represented pressure cards. An investigative committee once warned a troublesome Brother that if he did not behave, God would punish him in the hereafter. Then the head of the

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[16] The video was uploaded on May 23, 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm5dL5SQE4E (accessed on September 12, 2013).

[17] Veteran cultivator 'Abd al-Bar refers to wives reporting on their husbands for illicitly communicating with females through chat rooms and mobile phones, or even watching pornography (*Taqrir* 2007).

committee got carried away, turning red and banging his knees: "And we will also punish you right here. Remember that your wife and kids are with us" ('Eid 2013: 42). In a sense, the Brotherhood is not merely a movement; it is a tribe.

Organizing the Brotherhood as a cluster of families opened the door to nepotism. Family and business frequently intersected. For a movement that cuts across class barriers, social solidarity is essential. The curriculum instructs Brothers to form business partnerships (*Madkhal* 1997: 243). The Brotherhood's bylaws decree: "Members of each family confront the burdens of life in solidarity, so that if one of them faced setbacks or reversals in his life…they are required to cover his expenses" (*Madkhal* 1997: 242). Members are also obliged by article 10 of the Brotherhood's General Order to provide mutual aid. Upper class members purify their souls by helping out those in need, whereas the latter live contently under the paternalistic care of their social betters. To balance the potentially divisive drives of the upper and lower classes, middle class members, an organizational majority, manage the whole (Tariq 2013). Hence everyone happy: spiritual salvation for the wealthy; immediate relief for the poor; and political power for the aspiring middle class. Farghali (2013) remembered how, during her father's extended prison stretches, Brothers took care of her schooling, and eventually her marriage expenses. Ahmad (2013) appreciated how Brothers financed his career shift from engineering to marketing. Hani (2013) described how Brothers showered members with everyday favors: paying off debts, furnishing start-up costs, even fixing your car after a bad accident. In short, the Brotherhood served as a bank and an insurance company.

With overlapping networks of families, friends, and finance, the Brotherhood evolved from an ironclad organization into an entirely independent community, living alongside—rather than with—Egyptians. This parallel existence made it quite costly for members to withdraw,

even when they disagreed with Brotherhood policies. The godly community required by religious determinism is thus maintained. Yet it would be a mistake to overemphasize organization, and forget the process that sustains ideological unity: the Brotherhood's methodical anti-intellectualism.

*Anti-Intellectualism*

Gramsci insisted that no organization could exist without intellectuals as "organizers" (1971: 334). But beyond these organic intellectuals, ideological movements also require those who could articulate their platform. And although the definition of intellectuals is historically contingent, in today's specialized world, advocates of a comprehensive political project could hardly dispense with social scientists (Bourdieu 1990b). This is precisely the group missing from the Brotherhood. Although the movement celebrates its 20,000 doctorate holders, and 3,000 professors, these are overwhelmingly natural scientists. Conspicuously absent are students of politics, sociology, history, and economics. And this omission is most obvious in the leadership structure.

The general guide in 2013 is a veterinarian; his top three associates are an engineer, a geologist, and a medic; the head of the Brotherhood's International Organization is an agronomist; the president of the Brotherhood's first political party and speaker of the lower house is also an agronomist, his deputy is a medic, and the speaker of the upper house is a pharmacist; the Brotherhood's first and second choices for the presidency were engineers; and the president's chief policy advisor was a pathologist. This is not a new phenomenon. The six founding members of the Brotherhood were a carpenter, a barber, a gardener, an ironer, a mechanic, and a cycle repairer, led by a primary schoolteacher. The first man to assume the position of deputy general guide was a carpenter. And the six general guides between Banna and

today's veterinarian included two judges, a landowner, a criminal lawyer, a meteorologist, and a physical education instructor. In fact, article 13 (c) of the Brotherhood's General Order states that Islamic jurisprudence is the only type of scientific knowledge required for a member to be elected general guide. The 40,00 university activists who joined the Brotherhood in the 1970s were almost exclusively medics and engineers. Continuity is also evident when comparing the first and last guidance bureaus. The former, elected in 1931, included a registrar, a merchant, four government clerks, a primary schoolteacher, a mosque preacher, and two clerics. And the present Bureau, elected in 2009, includes a biologist, a geologist, a public worker, six medics, three engineers, two agronomists, and one cleric. Social scientists are almost nonexistent.[18] In an organization with complete control over recruitment, this lapse could only be deliberate.

There are, of course, exceptions. Ibrahim al-Houdeibi (2013) and Sarah Lotfi (2013) are two of the very few people who studied political science. These two young members were probably admitted because of their family backgrounds. Ibrahim's grandfather and great grandfather were general guides, and Sarah's father was a longtime member. They soon charted separate paths: the former deserted to become an independent activist, and the other joined a political research unit attached to the presidency. This divergence could partly by explained by their assessment of the organization's motives for excluding social scientists. Ibrahim believed the Brotherhood favored obedience over analytical thinking, while Sarah thought Brothers were averse to Western-inspired disciplines.

These are the two most common explanations among Brothers. Samir (2013) believed that discounting social scientists circumvented dissent: "In social science…questioning received

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[18] The Brotherhood does not have a database with the educational backgrounds of its members for security reasons. An interviewee, who had been a Brother since the 1970s, confirms that they have just circulated forms to compile such a database (Sharif 2013). All interviewees agreed (citing personal knowledge) that the percentage of social scientists in the Brotherhood is negligible.

wisdom is welcomed. In the natural sciences, there are only facts. This type of matter-of-fact mentality is more susceptible to accepting the Brotherhood's formulas." So, for instance, when 'Eid opposed outlawing private sins, an Islamist lecturer snapped: "You political scientists come up with bizarre ideas you do not fully comprehend." When 'Eid objected that he was a mathematician, the lecturer responded nonchalantly: "So stick to 1+1=2" (2013: 200).

Religious ideologues naturally suspect "experimentation and tinkering, and discourage such activities in others" (Poggi 2001: 99). As Gorski (2012: 9) explains, "social sciences can even function as a 'negative theology' of sorts." Sociologists, since Weber (1946: 350), highlight the tension that arises whenever "rational, empirical knowledge [is suspected of] the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism." Religion is presented as intuitive and straightforward, while social scientists indulge in "complicating the simple and obscuring the obvious" (Collini 2006: 37). Many Brothers, in fact, relish this aversion to "complicated stuff" (Mikkawi 2013). "Thinking in Islam," as one veteran Sister put it, "is meant to intensify belief through contemplating divine wisdom, not provoke skepticism" (Farghali 2013). Banna himself criticized those who abandon the natural sciences and waste their time with "abstract philosophies and unproductive, fanciful sciences" ([1949] 1993: 156). Well-bred Brothers are taught that Western social sciences were founded on secular materialist philosophies that do not apply to Muslims (Tariq 2013). General Guide 'Umar al-Telmesani described how his religiosity shielded him from sophistic discussions: "I remember that whenever someone inquired about the Brotherhood's philosophy in politics, economics, or society, I would shrink away. I have learned from a few students of philosophy that, in one of its definitions, philosophy is no more than the accumulation of human follies across history. Islam

has no philosophy because it is brighter than the sun, and does not require the complications of philosophy…philosophers bring us nothing but headache" (2008: 198).

Disqualifying social scientists is supplemented by recent structural controls to minimize the size of the 'chattering class' within the organization. The Brotherhood had always included members from all social strata, but the leadership had been historically confined to urbanites. During the last decade, however, steady ruralization (*tarief*) helped shrink this urban stratum, with its infatuation with debate, in favor of countryside members, who are much more attuned to unquestioning obedience (Tammam 2012: 77). Recruitment rates in provincial universities trumped those in major cities, reshaping the organizational base, with reverberations at the top ('Eid 2013: 5). Amendments to the Brotherhood's bylaws adjusted the electoral weights of the provinces regardless of objective factors, such as size or population. Moreover, on the eve of the 2008 elections of the General *Shura* Council, the Brotherhood's highest legislative body, many provincial candidates were asked to move to Cairo or Alexandria to crowd out urban elements. Cairo and Alexandria, which include almost half of Egypt's population, let alone the best educated, were allocated 11 out of 105 seats. In addition, the restriction that nine out of the Guidance Bureau's sixteen members must come from Cairo was revoked (Abu-Khalil 2012: 76). As a result, the 2009 Bureau—the first to be elected since 1995—contained ten members from the provinces (notably, the General Guide Badei', future president Morsi, and future head of the Brotherhood's political party Sa'ad al-Katatni), as well as four city dwellers with strong rural ties. Most of the newly elected provincials became Morsi's governors and ministers.

Besides structural controls against students of the argumentative sciences and restive urbanites, the Brotherhood developed an arsenal of disciplining techniques that generally fell in two categories: privileging sentiments and practice over inquiry; and the methodical censuring of

arguments. To start with, those nominated to join the Brotherhood are typically youth with a kindling passion and a humble knowledge of history, politics, and religion. It helps that many are either born into Brotherhood families, or recruited as children. Their modest knowledge is presented as an asset. As Mikkawi (2013) explained, "It is better to come with an empty glass. You learn faster. This is why Banna frequented coffee houses and popular neighborhoods not mosques and intellectual salons." Even more striking is the fact that those invited to join are not terribly familiar with the Brotherhood literature. Shatla (2013) and Tariq (2013) were surprised to discover during their elevation course that none of their comrades read Banna or Qutb. What attracted them was crude passion.

This emphasis on sentiments is central to the Brotherhood's pedagogy. Banna once wrote: "Our primary concern is to arouse the spirit, the life of the heart, to awaken the imagination and sentiments. We place less emphasis on concrete ideas…than on touching the souls of those we encounter" ([1949] 1993: 135). Mahmoud 'Ezzat, the acting general guide since 2013, pressed the hands of his listeners so hard so his words would "travel through their veins, into their hearts" (Mahmoud 2013). As Tag al-Din boasted, management sciences have just caught up with Banna's appreciation of 'psychological capital', which links performance to emotional satisfaction (2013: 80).

As with everything else in the Brotherhood, this general philosophy was translated into mundane cultivation tasks. Prefects would regularly fill out forms ranking their apprentices in terms of emotional presence. Malik (2013) described how group meetings "recharged one's religious batteries," and backed his claim with a personal story. On a short trip to Seattle, Malik felt emotionally drained. He inquired frantically if there were any family meetings being held around. He was directed through a Brotherhood mosque to one such meeting headed by a

Pakistani, with an Egyptian, a Sudanese, and an American convert onboard. Malik recounted fondly how those Brothers, whom he had just met, greeted him as warmly as those he had known all his life. Malik's experience is quite common. Emotions play a major role in retaining members' loyalty. As Mikkawi (2013) admitted:

> **It is personal affection not ideas that attract you. I was quite ignorant about Islam when I began attending mosque activities. 'Love in God' was the essence. You meet pure and devout Muslims; people you would like to hang out with, and for your wife and children to spend time with. They accept you with all your flaws. Unlike fundamentalists or traditional clerics, they do not ask you to read books… But being around pious people eventually rubs off on you. After a few years they tell you: do you see all those good people you've been mingling with, they are Muslim Brothers. So you naturally say: count me in. I am sure this is what happened to ninety percent of Brothers.**

Of course sentiments and practice go hand-in-hand. The curriculum provides Brothers with a list of procedural goals to help them become true believers. Prefects then divide each procedural goal into measurable tasks that could be evaluated, and assign Brothers one or two tasks a week (*Turuq, Vol. 1* 2002: 27-28). For example, the principle of devotion to God requires Brothers to frequently attend ritual corpse washes (*ghusl*) to witness man's helplessness after death (*Madkhal* 1997: 36). To nourish compassion, the curriculum instructs a Brother to smile when he meets other Brothers; initiate greeting; "squeeze their hands in a way that transmits love;" tell them how much he misses them; and call them by their favorite nicknames. A Brother is also required to think about the plight Muslims in warzones until he is moved to tears—and if his eyes remained dry, he should resort to audio and visual aids (*Mabadi', Vol. 3* 2003: 213-14, 244).

A Brother's frustration with the movement is always a reflection of his own spiritual shortcomings, most commonly: vanity. Its main symptom, according to the curriculum, is the belief that one surpasses others in "intelligence, experience, analysis, and knowledge of the art of politics and its means…and therefore looks down on his Brothers…despite their [religious]

preeminence. These [afflicted Brothers] think they could better serve the cause through their [intellectual] ability and downplay divine grace" (*Turuq, Vol. 1* 2002: 451-55). And the worst form of vanity is the conviction that you need to raise others to your standards, rather than humble yourself to theirs. For example, when Sharif (2013), a Brotherhood university professor, submitted a proposal in the 1980s offering to design a political crash course to help alleviate his Brothers' ignorance, "I was advised to teach children Qur'an at my local mosque or do something useful, since I obviously had too much time on my hands." When Jamal (2013) asked for permission to take religious courses, he was instructed to devote his time to practical tasks. "Instead of immersing yourself in complicated interpretations of the Qur'an, teach beginners how to read it; instead of reading several volumes on the life of the Prophet, read the prescribed portions [in the curriculum] and relay it to others; instead of studying theology, raise funds or distribute charity. Action is more rewarding in Islam." Shatla (2013) was likewise directed to "living Islam, rather than learning about it." To reinforce the message, Ahmad al-Bialy, the head of the movement's office in the Nile Delta province of Damietta, and future governor under Morsi, stated in a widely circulated article that: "The Brotherhood's house is one of worship and toil…not a house of arguing philosophers" (Bialy 2011).

To keep Brothers' hands full, they are obliged to monitor their actions. Newcomers learn to begin their day with 'condition making' (*musharata*), which takes place right after dawn prayers, and involves a self-imposed contract to devote one's day to Islam. The second step is 'surveillance' (*muraqaba*), which continues through the day to ensure fulfillment of that contract. Finally, there is 'accountability (*muhasaba*), which occurs after nighttime prayers, when each Brother holds himself accountable "as a merchant would question his partner, or an employer would query his workers." A Brother is then expected to punish himself to rectify any

deviation. At the end of the month, the results are recorded in questionnaires and handed back to prefects (*Madkhal* 1997: 58-61). Needless to say, this whole process provides group leaders with a regular stream of information about the actions and innermost feelings of every Brother.

But censuring extra-curricular readings could only go so far in placating inquisitive minds. Brothers steeped in the art of cultivation must creatively stifle critical attitudes before they spread. Their tool kit is quite diverse; and the first tool is preemption. Even before joining, argumentative devotees, like Sameh (2013), find their probation period extended from the usual three years to ten. On the eve of the elevation course, devotees are warned that quarrelsome individuals would be summarily dismissed. At the end of the course, those invited to take the oath of allegiance are again reminded of the supreme importance of compliance. Hani (2013) remembered how he welled up when his recruiter, 'Amr Khalid, the celebrated televangelist, emphasized how blessed he should feel that God has selected him from among millions of believers to join the chosen few. Sowing discord among the godly was a poor repayment. All are finally reminded that through this pledge they have "sold themselves" to God and that one who sells himself "could only march on the designated path, without turning, or choosing, or debating, or arguing, or doing anything else other than obeying, exerting effort, and submiting" (*Turuq, Vol. 1* 2002: 359).

After being elevated to entry-level membership, family prefects take over from recruiters. Their task is much more daunting: to dispel critique, or, better yet, to anticipate and deflate it before it arises. A most curious example is when a prefect warned his Brothers that: "If I ever leave the Brotherhood, do not believe any critique I make, because I would have been tempted by the devil" (Mahmoud 2013). During battalion trainings, moderators take over from family prefects. A moderator is required, as the curriculum states, to flank lecturers, vet queries, and

dismiss critical ones (*Turuq, Vol. 2* 2002: 343). So when Rida (2013), for example, questioned a lecturer on the Brotherhood's jurisprudential position on violence, the moderator asked him to refrain from intellectual hairsplitting. And when Yasser (2013) tried to open a debate with a Guidance Bureau member on the need to divide the political and religious wings of the Brotherhood, he was asked to return to his seat with a dismissive gesture. Sometimes would-be dissenters are entrapped, as when a lecturer told his battalion members that the Guidance Bureau was reconsidering its old stance on the indivisibility of religion and politics. Attendants were urged to express their views freely to help leaders decide. All looked confused and slightly irritated, except for Shatla (2013), who welcomed the revision. After everyone had a chance to speak their mind, the lecturer revealed—while staring at the culprit with fiery eyes—that this was a test to expose those afflicted with skepticism.

Intimidation is also a common disciplining tool. Argumentative Brothers are threatened with investigative committees. Youssef (2013), for example, protested when his group leader excommunicated the Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, Egypt's foremost novelist, despite the Brotherhood's public stance against excommunication (*takfir*). The following morning, a hearing was scheduled, and Youssef had to defend himself against the charge of abusing a Brother because of his inferior social class. Such a horrid accusation, he understood, was meant to tame his opposition in the future. When 'Eid criticized his direct superiors, his Brotherhood roommates were asked to report on his relationship with God. They submitted an incriminating report based on such trivia as the fact that he sometimes missed prayers at the mosque (2013: 55). Samir (2013) pressed senior Brothers to clarify their views on controversial issues. When ignored, he began to post his views on Facebook. After several hearing sessions, in which he was reprimanded for excessive thirst for the limelight, he had to resign. Brothers take pride in their

ability to turn every critique against the critic—like Moses turned the magic against the magicians, they would add—by shifting focus from what is wrong with the movement to what is wrong with the person to suspect that there might be something wrong with the movement (Abu-Khalil 2012: 28).

If all else fails, troublemakers suffer marginalization, and a few are eventually cut off. To deter Brothers from ever visiting him, 'Eid's apartment was compared to *Masjid al-Diar*, the mosque built by hypocrites to lure Muslims away from the right path, and eventually burned by the Prophet (2013: 75). Sharif (2013) recounted how he tried to make himself useful to the movement by pointing out that the term 'civil state', which Brothers adopted to appease seculars, was meaningless, and advising them to stick to their Islamic state model. Despite his four-decade membership, Sharif was ignored. "I knocked on all doors only to discover that even when you criticize them to make them better, they condemn you to isolation. Instead of seeing their problems, you become their problem." Radwan (2013) drew on his religious studies at al-Azhar University to object to prefects' resort to reprimands (*ta'zir*) to discipline Brothers. Since prefects were not ordained judges, they could not decree fines or corporal punishments. Officials in the central cultivation committee asked Radwan not to waste his time and theirs on trivial matters. When he persisted, he was banned from lecturing, and thereafter completely sidelined. Finally, there is the case of Ahmad (2013), who married into one of the wealthiest Brotherhood families; fell out with his in-laws because of what they perceived as intolerable independence; and had his membership frozen. What is remarkable about his story was how he was severed from the organization without anyone really addressing his grievances.

> **I was first relieved of attending any group activities other than the weekly family meetings. Then they tailored a dormant family of old men especially for me… We would discuss a few mundane issues for a brief time before dispersing. A year later, one of them confessed that he was moved by my predicament and stoic acceptance, and**

**promised to intervene on my behalf and reactivate my membership. He asked me to stop attending this weekly meeting and wait for his call. I never heard from him again.**

The Brotherhood's position towards intellectuals and intellectualism might have fortified religious determinism from scrutiny, but it threw out the baby with the bathwater. Islamism had become, oddly, an ideology without intellectuals. And while any ideologue could spew dogma, only intellectuals could make "the universal concrete" (Alexander 2011: 203). Without those capable of formulating convincing political alternatives, Brothers came to power with little more than lofty rhetoric and erratic reform proposals, thus lending credence to accusations of political bankruptcy. Their aim was to bide time until their hoped-for cultural transformation could bear fruit. But without a tangible platform, time was short.

DISCUSSION

After examining the cultivation of Brothers, the building of their society, and the structuring of their ideas and practices, it is now possible to define the phenomenon at hand. Islamism is an ideology that attributes worldly success to religious devotion—a claim supported by an unorthodox interpretation of Islamic revelation and history. And because this idea discourages adherents from developing concrete solutions to real-life problems, Islamism presents a perfect example of ideology—in Mannheim's (1936) sense—as a set of abstract propositions incongruous with reality. Islamists strive primarily for spiritual renewal. They integrate themselves in local communities, run for elections, and develop their wealth in order to bring about this religious transformation—a project they aim to achieve gradually, almost by stealth, rather than share with their materialist-minded compatriots. And this helps explain why they quickly lost popular support in Egypt.

While ideologies represent powerful embodiments of collective meanings, they only provide the background for "Real living people…[who] move about in practical situations." At

the political level, people expect more than unifying symbols; they expect workable solutions (Alexander 2011: 3, 203). This is why the effectiveness of ideas as a power strategy rests, according to Collins, on their ability to make "plausible arguments" (2009: 191); or as Mann asserts: "powerful ideologies are those who give plausible meaning to people's lives" (2006: 346). Here Therborn's (1999: 119) differentiation between mobilizing and governing in revolutions is instructive:

> **The key figures in processes of ideological mobilization are not theoreticians and writers of books, but orators [and] preachers… however, an important distinction must be made between, on the one hand, ideological mass mobilization for political change and, on the other, the problems of successfully defending and consolidating a victorious revolution. In the process of breaking up a regime in crisis, the weight of immediate action and single-minded devotion is paramount. But after a revolution, the degree of articulation, autonomy, and strength of…theories and programmes crucially determines the fate of the exploited classes that have been mobilized—for these are their only assets…during the construction of a new society.**

Counter-revolution, Therborn concludes, becomes possible when old regime members win over large sections of the population by proving that the new rulers cannot deliver (1999: 121). The absence of plausible alternatives to Egypt's problems had weighed heavily on the minds of some Brothers. Especially worrying was the lack of socioeconomic solutions. When Ibrahim al-Houdeibi (2013) pressed Morsi during a 2007 battalion training to present precise proposals, the future president delivered a long speech on the importance of producing the godly community first. Yasser (2013) had a similar run-up with Morsi, this time on the eve of his presidency in 2012. A meeting was set up between the presidential candidate and sixty affluent urbanites in a posh resort on Cairo's outskirts. Morsi's goal was to convince these potential backers that he had clear economic plans. "Instead, he embarked on what could only be described as a religious sermon. It was like he was trying to convert them to Islam." Ahmad Deif (2013), an engineer

whose two-decade membership secured him a seat on the seven-member steering committee of the Brotherhood's much-flaunted Renaissance Project, explained:

> **Our underlying philosophy is to produce a new kind of individual, an individual confident in divine favor. In economics we hope to create new kind of businessmen, one less concerned with profit… We want selfless businessmen who understand that Islam obliges them to appropriate resources to benefit others.**

Alfy (2013) was more candid. Imprecision only marked the official line. For Brothers, there was no ambiguity. "What was al-Saud's economic plan," he grinned, "They brought people back to God, and suddenly found themselves floating on oil."

Religious determinism has dictated the Brotherhood's line of business, which is to produce a godly community that will bend the laws of nature to its favor. This solves the paradox of how an ideological movement with the size and experience of the Brotherhood had no clear platform. The Brotherhood is simply a womb. Its mission is to produce the men and women whose very existence will bring about success in every field (Rida 2013). Brothers' chief concern, therefore, is to "transform the entire society into Brothers and Sisters; this is their plan," concluded Mahmoud (2013). On the eve of the Second World War, Banna advised Egypt's embattled prime minister in a letter that: "choosing the men to entrust with formulating and implementing reform measures is more important than the content of the reforms themselves." He then proposed hiring Brothers because those "who have strengthened their relationship with God have been guaranteed divine support" ([1948] 1990: 354-55). Little had changed by 2013, when the Brotherhood spent its year in power packing the bureaucracy with members, rather than focusing on how to go forward. The end goal, as 'Essam al-'Erian (2006), deputy head of the Brotherhood's political party, confessed, is to propagate a certain human model. Moreover, producing the believers who will refashion society in their image does not occur through preaching, but rather through moral influence. We do not preach ideas, Mikkawi (2013) clarified,

"We put on an attractive lifestyle for all to see." Shatla (2013) was a bit more sarcastic: "We do not interact with society, we infect it. We do not persuade, we contaminate. We are like good viruses prepared in incubators, then set off to find new hosts." The engineer, Tag al-Din, preferred a mechanical metaphor. The Brotherhood is like "a workshop for putting out human products." It recycles inferior materials to produce a superior metal. Banna's Teachings are the manufacturing standards used to measure products and correct deviations (2013: 76).

To the extent that the Brotherhood has a plan, it is the seven-step process that Banna envisaged: creating the Muslim individual, whose thinking, emotions, and values exemplify Islam; then the Muslim family that lives according to Islam; then the Muslim society, composed of numerous Muslims families; then the Muslim government that reflects the perfect Muslim society and revives Islamic glory; then uniting all Muslim governments; then reconquering the lost lands of Islam; and finally assuming 'tutorship of the world' (*ustaziat al-'alam*) ([1949] 1993: 99-101). The incredible continuity in the Brotherhood's ideology is evident in the fact that when the Guidance Bureau came under pressure to produce a new vision for the twenty-first century, it reproduced Banna's seven stages—almost verbatim—in its 2004 reform initiative (*Mubadarat* 2004).

At bottom, therefore, Islamism is an ideology that obliterates the boundaries between this life and the next. In the summer of 2013, Brothers found themselves face-to-face with the iron curtain that separates the two. Some became convinced they had to knock it down by force. Others believed they still needed to attain the level of piety necessary to cross it effortlessly. But to understand where Brothers stood before this fateful summer is essential to any discussion about their future prospects.

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