

The Production of a “True Muslim” by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: Loyalty and Dissent

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring young people is one of the core activities of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, since they view political reform as the result of individual religious reform. The article analyses the forms of their educational actions. The analysis is based on the Brotherhood’s literature on their educational principles, internal documents on how to apply these principles, and accounts published by former young Muslim Brothers. The production of a “true Muslim” relies as much on the affection *built* by the organisation as on the scrutiny and control of individuals. This article highlights the importance of the cultural factor as the main resource for disengagement.

KEYWORDS

Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood, individual preaching, loyalty, dissent

“The purpose of the Islamic movement is first to prepare the individual to become a true Muslim before preparing him to become a member of the movement, since belonging to Islam is the foundation and belonging to the movement is inextricable from the sincerity of faith in Islam.” (Yakin, 2015)

Introduction

A recent article (Ben Néfissa & Abo Kassem, 2015) defended the hypothesis that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is first and foremost an undertaking to “construct” the true Muslim. It put that this is the logical consequence of the brotherhood’s view of social and political reform, perceived as a result of individual religious reform. The Muslim Brotherhood’s difficulty separating religious preaching from political action was pointed up by historian Tewfik Aclimandos (2007) and corroborated by the publications of dissident senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood (Abu Khalil H., 2012) during their brief time in power in 2012. The purpose of this article¹ is to conduct a more thorough and detailed analysis of this “construction”, focusing on one of its most important steps: the selection, education and mentoring of young people. The article shows how this is done drawing on internal brotherhood documents and accounts published by former young Muslim Brothers (Eid, 2013; Fayez, 2013; Abu Khalil A., 2012; Farouk, 2014) who were approached and recruited by the organisation in the 1980s and 1990s.²

The main purpose of the production of the true Muslim or “Super Muslim” (Benslama, 2014) is to create an “us and them” divide and forge exclusive adherence and allegiance to the *gamaa* (“community”). This relies

1 This article has been published in french: Ben Néfissa, S. (2017). La production du « vrai musulman » par l’organisation des Frères musulmans égyptiens : fidélité et dissidences. *Revue internationale des études du développement*, 229, 185-207. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3917/ried.229.0185>

2 Sameh Eid went from child militant to student cadre at the University of Damanhur. His wife, Ezzat Afifi, is a member of the Muslim Sisterhood. Ahmed Abu Khalil, from a family of Muslim Brothers, defended his position as an “independent Islamist” throughout his time with the organisation. Sameh Fayez, from an extremely poor background in the village of Kerdasa, was never really assimilated into the organisation due to his unruliness. These accounts formed a highly prized body of literature in Egypt following the revolution of 25 January 2011. Published when Mohamed Morsi was still in power, they served the political and ideological struggle against the Muslim Brothers.

as much on the affection intentionally built by the organisation as on the regular, meticulous scrutiny and control of the individuals and their behaviour, actions and mental representations. Loyalty is therefore as much coveted as it is imposed, in view of the undeniable existence of sanctions and punishments. Nevertheless, violence is primarily moral, since the ultimate punishment, chosen or inflicted, is (self-)exclusion from the “Brotherhood paradise” (Fayez, 2013).

The article draws on accounts of leaving the organisation combined with other information to understand the resources that actors can harness to pull out of the *gamaa*, which itself has techniques to curb dissent and resignation. The article points up the importance of the cultural factor as the main resource for disengagement. However, cultural capital is highly unevenly distributed in Egypt. This phenomenon corroborates the theory of an across-the-board decline in socioeconomic and cultural levels among the *gamaa*'s senior and middle ranks, as advanced by Hossam Tammam (2010).

How does the *gamaa* produce the “true Muslim” and thereby build its members’ exclusive loyalty? How does it control dissent? Can “cultural” resources really be considered enough to secure a definitive exit from the organisation? How does this original conception of the *gamaa*'s mission provide considerable insight into the difficulties encountered by the Muslim Brotherhood following their transition to legalisation and power?

1. An Educational “Administration”: Affection, Surveillance and Punishments

The brotherhood’s “individual preaching” doctrine (Machhour, 1995; Al-Sissi, 1985; Mahmoud, 1990) is the cornerstone of the Muslim Brotherhood’s militant socialisation. It involves a specialised “administration” in charge of filling in forms, making reports and, where necessary, punishments and in-house trials.

As explained by Mustafa Machhour,³ the true Muslim is produced gradually in a subtle and step-by-step manner (Ben Néfissa & Abo Kassem,

3 The Fifth General Guide of the *gamaa*.

2015). Vice-Guide of the *gamaa* in the 2000s, Mohammed Habib⁴ (2012) explains the “instruments” used for this process. Forging a religious elite who are devoted servants of God in all aspects of their lives calls for mentoring based on two pillars: the educator and the *usra* (“family”). The *usra*, he says, is the Muslim Brotherhood’s fundamental educational “incubator”. It is based on the foundations of getting to know one another, understanding and solidarity. Similarly, holiday camps play a fundamental role in forging this religious elite. The Muslim Brotherhood’s leadership, he says, has to pay the closest attention to the selection, training and preparation of the educators. Educators present a range of profiles and are specialised by recruit gender and age, since there is a difference between the men and women’s education, as there is between the young people and adults, and between children and adolescents (Habib, 2012).

1.1. Delegation and Specialisation of the Education Chain

A true Muslim is therefore not forged by standalone initiatives. The *gamaa* has an administration in charge of planning and organising the process (Farouk, 2012).⁵ One branch of the activities concerns children and pre-adolescents in primary and middle schools (“the cubs”). They are targeted by a programme called “Islamic education”, which starts in the mosques under Muslim Brotherhood control and continues in the schools and all places and organisations attended by children such as clubs and the scouts. The adult educator is assisted by young men who take special training focused on the organisation’s political aims, in the broad sense of the term, based mainly on the need to defend Islam and restore its lost prestige.

The sources categorise children in a given age bracket based on the extent of their Islamisation (Farouk, 2012): the first category concerns those who already have “Islamic attributes” (their family is part of the Muslim Brotherhood or they were approached from early childhood) while the last category covers those who merely take part in the leisure activities organised by the Brothers and who are described in terms of their “instability, behavioural versatility and herd instinct.”

4 He was First Deputy to Supreme Guide Mahdi Akef before losing his position in the organisation’s leadership.

5 The journalist says that the documents were handed to him by former Muslim Brothers who clashed with the leadership.

The educational activity continues through to university, continually selecting, attracting and ultimately conducting the real work of ideological indoctrination. Where individual preaching theorists have explained the different steps of this indoctrination, the heads of the Muslim Brotherhood's education section have planned its implementation with the use of forms that educators have to fill in from reports on the recruits (Farouk, 2012). The forms contain the following boxes: name and address, preaching stage and associated activities. The “selection stage” form includes the following information: stated objective, value to instil in the recruit, action required to achieve this, references used by the educator-preacher, advice and stage success criteria (Farouk, 2012).

Making contact is one of the most delicate stages, since it forges the first affective bond between the organisation and the new recruit, as evidenced by the “familiarisation stage” form. The form contains the individual's name, address, father's job, number of people in the family, the family's material conditions, and the individual's personality traits, regularity of prayer, knowledge of the Koran and conduct towards others, as well as a box reserved for the instructor's comments.

Nevertheless, interpersonal bonds between recruit and educator must not get in the way of the greater affective bond between the individual and the organisation, hence the multitude of educators. This is how the number of collective resignations has been reduced. The example of Ahmed Abu Khalil's father in the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and Nasser speaks for itself (Abu Khalil A., 2012): his entire *usra* resigned. Sameh Eid (2014) recounts the same phenomenon at the University of al-Azhar in the 1990s: all the brotherhood students resigned together after the organisation ousted their leader of more than 15 years. It was subsequently decided to keep on unit leaders for no longer than four years.

A member of the Muslim Brotherhood is hence taken in hand by a half a dozen educators before attaining the status of *amel*.⁶ This status is not granted to everyone: some have varying levels of membership of the *gamaa* without ever managing to work their way up to fully-fledged member. Yet this is no obstacle to conducting educational missions, which is what young recruits do under the supervision of the longer-standing members.

6 Status designating fully-fledged membership of the *gamaa*.

This system therefore forms a sort of “educational chain” by delegation: the adults supervise the educational work of the young people who are themselves in charge of attracting and educating adolescents and children. Such is the case with Ahmed Abu Khalil who, although he always wanted to remain an “independent Islamist”, worked in all the brotherhood’s structures and activities due to his membership of a traditional brotherhood family.

– What exactly are your activities at the university as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood?

– I don’t have any activities at the university as a Muslim Brother!

– Why not? Do your activities in your neighbourhood prevent you from being active at the university?

– No, I’m active neither in one place nor the other [...]. I want to be close to the Brothers, but not be part of the organisation, and I have told my superior so.

– But then, tell me what you do exactly?

– In my neighbourhood, I’m the one who coordinates the work of the Koran teaching groups, I’m the one who organises the competitions and excursions for the children and all the cub activities with a group of volunteers who are not all Muslim Brothers, because the leader of the mosque wouldn’t have them. If I hadn’t been there, we would have lost that mosque entirely! (Abu Khalil A., 2012).

The *gamaa* inspires parental trust by supervising and running their children’s activities. Sameh Fayeze (2013) tells how, in his childhood mosque in Kerdasa,⁷ the educator regularly filled in the boxes of a table on the duties that the children had to perform. In addition to religious obligations such as prayer and alms, the table also contained “good conduct with parents”. This account is corroborated by Ahmed Abu Khalil’s experience. When he was seven or eight years old, a 22-year-old man picked him out at the mosque and asked his father for his permission to fetch Ahmed every morning at dawn to take him to the mosque to teach him the Koran with a group of children. Ahmed’s father agreed, since he considered that the Muslim Brothers played an outstanding role in children’s education: “That’s how they prevent crime,” (Abu Khalil A., 2012).

7 A village – unofficially a small town – just outside Cairo known for its large contingent of Muslim Brothers.

1.2. Initiation Education

One of the major lessons of Mustafa Machhour, a Muslim Brotherhood education theorist, is not to cut corners and gradually integrate the recruit into the organisation (Ben Néfissa & Abo Kassem, 2015).

As a teenager, Sameh Fayeze (2013) happened upon a sale of books on leaving the mosque and bought a book on Hassan al-Banna. Pleased with his purchase, he hurried to his educator to show him, positive that he would be pleased. Yet not only was the educator angry, but he ordered him to return it to the bookseller without reading it. Sameh Fayeze did not obey and went home to avidly read the book!

Ahmed Abu Khalil (2012) knew the Muslim Brotherhood literature well as he had come across it in his father's bookcase, in particular documents explaining the individual preaching methods. He was delighted when he was spotted by an educator, because he wanted to find out about the world to which his parents had belonged. “Finally,” he says, “I had become the target of individual preaching ...” In his regular meetings with his instructor, he often asked him about his membership of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the face of his instructor's denial, Ahmed became annoyed:

I know you're a Muslim Brother! And I also know that, since you've been seeing me, you've been writing reports on me to the organisation and that you contact me every other day because that's generally the way with individual preaching. I also know that all the people we go to see on a regular basis are Muslim Brothers. I can even tell you that, in a month or two, another person will take charge of me ... and when that happens, I won't hear from you again. It's up to you if you want to act like that with a novice, hide your membership of the brotherhood and your recruitment mission from him, up to you to if you want do as the Brothers tell you. But then learn to treat people in line with their intelligence and ability! (Abu Khalil A., 2012)

Despite this argument that led him to break with the organisation, Ahmed was spotted by another educator. Following almost daily meetings with this second educator, he found himself member of an *usra*. And where the selection of recruits starts in the public space, the real enrolment in the organisation takes place in private houses, generally those of the educators.

Never would I have thought that it was so easy to become part of a brotherhood family. You don't even notice that you're becoming a member. What you do notice, however, is that the meetings, which were weekly or almost every week, become more regular. Then you're given *The Principles of Islam* by Ali al-Ban to read. It wasn't until a month later that I realised I belonged to a brotherhood family. I was overjoyed. I had finally managed to become part of this world! We started by each reading a page from the Koran and trying to draw the lessons from it. Then there was the "our personal information" session where we each talked about what had happened over the week in our personal and family life and with our friends. After this session about our private life, we read and commented on the book that we had been given and, at the end, we were set duties to perform over the week such as certain supererogatory prayers, special religious invocations and even certain tasks to do with our parents. Sometimes, there was a break in usra meetings due to exams or a change of educator, but it was a perfect education model. All week, we thought about what we were going to say at the family meeting. (Abu Khalil A., 2012)

1.3. Holiday Camps and Mass Gatherings

The Muslim Brotherhood's educational literature regards holiday camps as fundamentally important to instil in recruits a feeling of belonging to an overarching organisation transcending the many other structures in which its activities usually take place.

Sameh Eid (2013) describes the different camps he attended in the 1980s on the beaches of the Mediterranean. He relates the Spartan living conditions, the tests of endurance, the permission to swim for just one hour in the morning (to avoid mixing with the holidaymakers in swimwear) and the conferences with senior-ranking members, cadres and militants from other regions of the country. The camps were also an opportunity to meet the *gamaa's* historical leaders who told the epic tale of the *gamaa* and shared memories of their struggles and suffering. Yet, at the same time, Sameh Eid describes moments of intense pleasure derived from these huge gatherings and communal life: cooking together, the fun and laughter, long evenings among friends, Islamic plays, card games (when the organisation only permitted chess), and so on. Selection to attend these camps was moreover seen as a promotion.

The camps had different themes. In the 1990s, Ahmed Abu Khalil attended the "Jihadist" camp in Sinai. Contrary to what its name suggests,

its purpose was to provide training in unarmed combat to the nearly 200 young men who attended. Ahmed remembers that once they had set up the tents on their arrival, the organisers divided them into small groups and all mobile phones were confiscated. Orders were given by the blow of a whistle and iron discipline was exercised. Punishment generally consisted of slithering over the sand full of stones and thorns, bare-chested with their hands tied behind their backs. In fact, those punished were the older group leaders rather than the novices. Meals were frugal and the nights were short. Three hours after going to bed, the whistle blew:

We all assembled outside for morning ablutions, prayers and religious invocations. Then we were given the order to march at the double to a village miles away. That march in the heat of August was exhausting. The march lasted six hours and, when we got back, everyone collapsed into bed. Yet barely had we closed our eyes when we heard another whistle calling us to assemble outside again. This time, the order was to march to the town of Arish: a heavy silence hung over the ranks and complaints could be heard as the leader scrutinised our every reaction. After a few minutes, he declared it was a joke to see how we would react and to test us. (Abu Khalil A., 2012)

1.4. Punishments, Sanctions and Humiliation

Punishments and sanctions are not reserved for army camp simulations. In the *usra*, the *taazir*⁸ serves daily to call the recalcitrant to order. Sameh Eid (2013) experienced this a number of times, especially in his childhood in Damanhur when he was made to go and pray at dawn in a mosque far from his home, despite the stray dogs on the way. On another occasion, a very important member of the *usra* was sentenced to stand in the foul-smelling toilets for a few hours. Yet it is as if the “punishments” were not “real” punishments, but rather more of a call to obedience and discipline with respect to the “organisation” irrespective of each person’s social status in everyday life. This is what Ahmed Abu Khalil (2012) has to say about the Jihadist camp he attended, which was also attended by the son of a high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The camp leader explicitly punished the son in question. It is this equality in submission to the great Leviathan that is the *gamaa* that makes discipline and obedience accepted and even desired. Ezzat Afifi talks about her disagreements with the leader

8 Reprimand and rebuke.

of her *usra* (Farouk, 2014), but she did obey her since, as she says, “We had gone beyond the first stage of individual preaching in our *usra*. We had to obey the hierarchy to the letter.” In fact, it is the affective attachment and loyalty to the brotherhood family that hold off the need for the organisation to resort to punishment and humiliation. This factor is especially important in that the biological family generally comes to the assistance of the brotherhood family.

In addition to the pleasure of the weekly meeting with the members of his *usra*, Ahmed Abu Khalil (2012) talks about the other events that made it possible for him to live in this “ideal Islamic society” of which Hassan al-Banna spoke. Discovering this Islamic world seemed easy to him: the Muslim Brothers have expressions and a specific way of greeting each other, boys and girls have similar first names since they are all taken from the Prophet’s entourage, and so on. Ahmed was also taken with the Muslim Brotherhood weddings held in rooms adjacent to the mosques. At these ceremonies, future Muslim Brotherhood couples meet and court in keeping with their own specific codes.

Sameh Fayeze (2013) observes that a Muslim Brother who wishes to marry seeks to take a wife from within the *gamaa*, and vice-versa. This endogamy is encouraged by the organisation, since it keeps dissent in check:

In fact, he says, it is easy to stop going to the mosque and the weekly *usra* meeting, but impossible to stop seeing your wife or biological family, which inevitably brings those who stray back into the fold of the *gamaa*. One of my friends left the Muslim Brotherhood because he wanted to live his own life. He did so for three years, played the field, and so on, but in the end, he returned to the *gamaa*’s fold because his entire family was in the brotherhood. This is not my case. No one in my family is a member of the brotherhood.

2. Dissent Paths and Resources Available

What economic, social, relational and cultural resources can be leveraged by the member who wants to leave the *gamaa*? In answer to this question, note first that the organisation tolerates some dissent more than others.

2.1 Dissent and Dissent

Sameh Eid left the Muslim Brothers in the late-1990s. Ezzat Afifi, his wife who he met in the organisation in 1989, did not follow him of her own accord (Farouk, 2014). Although Sameh Eid left it up to her to decide whether to stay with or leave the organisation, her *usra* leader ended up cutting her off by no longer informing her of meeting dates and places.⁹ It has to be said that Sameh Eid had stormed out of the organisation, even going so far as to self-publish a book criticising the organisation in 2000. Following this separation, Ezzat Afifi, fell into a depression for over a year. She observes how the organisation treats dissent according to its nature. In her own *usra*, one of the Sisters had married a Brother who everyone knew to be bisexual. Yet no one said anything and everyone remained united behind the Sister in question. Dissent is therefore more acceptable when it is restricted to individual behaviour – compared with brotherhood norms – than when it is political or “organisational”. The extent of freedom is conditioned by the matter of the organisation’s survival.

Sameh Fayeze (2013) observes that each member of his *usra* had a secret life outside of the Muslim Brotherhood. Everyone knew about it, he says, but they all avoided divulging each other’s secrets. It has to be said that a Muslim Brother’s “good conduct” calls for compliance with a certain number of principles and proscriptions concerning *all* human activities and therefore far from confined to religious activities: reading, music, shows, sports ... everything has been Islamised and everything must serve the “great cause”, which is that of the *gamaa*.

Both Ezzat Afifi and Sameh Fayeze were criticised for their reading matter.¹⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood had their own literature, which was recommended to if not imposed upon members of the organisation. In addition to strictly religious works, the writings of Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Mustafa

9 Her exclusion would also appear to correspond to the traditional and brotherhood concept of the gender distribution of roles, whereby if it is the husband who leaves the *gamaa*, his wife can but follow him. Had it been the other way round, it would seem that the *gamaa* would not have had the same attitude.

10 Ezzat Afifi chose Taha Hussein, whom her *usra* leader had called an “infidel”. Sameh Fayeze chose *Children of Gebelawi* by Naguib Mahfouz, which had brought disgrace on one of the Brothers in his *usra*.

Machhour are naturally advocated, but there are also books relating the epic tale and history of the organisation of Muslim Brotherhood, “this organisation selected by God to carry on the Prophet’s work, founded by martyr Imam Hassan al-Banna, the reformer of the century chosen by God to regenerate Islam following the fall of the caliphate,” (Eid, 2013).

2.2. Obedience, Defection and Benefits

Although obedience is a value assimilated by the member, there has to be a “benefit” to obeying as there is for those thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members and cadres for whom the organisation is their main, if not only environment in which to live, work, seek medical care, educate their children and go on holiday (Aouiz, 2013). Although the *gamaa* is known for its charitable activities, decisive in the brotherhood’s electoral conquests (Vannetzel, 2007), it is first and foremost a huge mutual support and solidarity organisation for its own members, not to mention the symbolic rewards of belonging to such a prestigious organisation. At the same time, it is vital to include the “cost” of engagement in an organisation that is regularly subject to crackdowns. Belief in the brotherhood’s sacred goals must be factored into the analysis of commitment to the *gamaa*, and time spent in prison obviously confers a prestigious status on those who have been imprisoned.¹¹

Ahmed Abu Khalil, Sameh Eid and Sameh Fayez have all left the organisation. Ahmed, the independent Islamist who has frequented other elements of the Egyptian political scene, remains loyal to the Muslim Brotherhood from an ideological standpoint even though he is critical of the *gamaa*’s attitude during the 2011 revolution. The organisation has structured both his identity and that of his biological family. Gaza, Turkey, Malaysia, Qatar and Syria are the significant steps on his journey these last ten years. Yet he is clear-sighted about the upheaval that the revolution caused in the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the “security operations, political repression and media blackout justified closing the organisation and protected its purity and its influence over individuals,” (Abu Khalil A., 2012), the revolution snapped the invisible chains that made the discipline

¹¹ Prison sentences served by Muslim Brothers is a subject that warrants development, although there is not the space in this article to do so.

of the *ousar*¹² acceptable. The walls patiently built around the brotherhood could not resist the battering of society’s liberating waves. Ahmed observes that the revolutionary tsunami actually hit all Islamic walks of life and not just the Muslim Brotherhood: the mosques emptied, the Ramadan *itikaf*¹³ were attended by very few people and there was no longer anyone to take care of the children in the mosques. No one talked about religion anymore, because everyone was talking politics, even the Salafists who considered politics as *haram*.¹⁴ Even the Muslim Sisters no longer wore the veil, not even in the provinces, and the female presenters on Islamic television channels were heavily made-up!

Notwithstanding his clear-headed analysis, Ahmed Abu Khalil remains faithful to the cultural ideal of the brotherhood, which granted him – despite his impertinence – the special status of “supporter”. It is worth noting that his brotherhood network opened professional doors for him: a graduate in information studies, he made documentaries for Al-Jazeera from 2009 to 2013, was a correspondent for a Turkish television channel from 2010 to 2011, and currently works for a production company.

This is not the case with Sameh Eid. Well before the revolution, he broke with the organisation despite 15 years of membership. Sameh Eid had attained the status of *amel*, pledged allegiance¹⁵ and had even served two prison sentences, in 1988 and 1990. Yet his lifestyle – as described by his wife – and his style of writing full of humour and self-mockery are actually an example of what Hossam Tammam calls the Muslim Brotherhood’s “loss of ideological unity” (Tammam, 2010). The organisation appears to have attracted a large number of young people quite simply because of its overwhelming domination over “the political and ideological opposition market”, especially in provincial towns such as Damanhur. Sameh Eid is not from a brotherhood family. Both of his parents, civil servants for the local housing and health authority, “returned to religion” like many Muslims at the time following the defeat of 1967, but without taking it any further. The

12 Plural of *usra*.

13 Pious retreats in mosques during Ramadan.

14 Prohibited by the religion.

15 The oath of allegiance by members to the brotherhood also warrants more in-depth analysis.

seeds of his defection can be traced back to when he left university and started to find the weight of militancy in his neighbourhood difficult to bear. After studying mathematics, he emigrated to Yemen where the *gamaa* helped him to secure a job. Yet during that period, he baulked and rebelled against the severity of the Muslim Brotherhood's methods in Yemen. This led to Brotherhood trials against him for laxity of religious practice and his criticism of Hassan al-Banna and of the Muslim Brotherhood's attitude under Nasser. The world of Muslim Brotherhood emigrants in Yemen was decidedly different to the world of revolting Damanhur University students. He returned to Egypt as a simple national education administrative employee and joined the reformist Brothers (Ben Néfissa & Abo Kassem, 2015) of Wasat. In 2000, he self-published a book in which he criticised the brotherhood's bureaucracy. The book failed to make an impact, was read only by certain politicised circles and was blacklisted by the organisation. His meeting with journalist Ibrahim Eissa¹⁶ reassured him of his decision, especially when the journalist invited him onto his highly popular TV show to talk about his experience as a Muslim Brother when Mohamed Morsi was still in power. This is how Sameh Eid, like many others, became a specialist, an expert in Islamic movements talking on television and writing in newspapers. It is how he turned his brotherhood experience into a professional asset.

Ahmed Abu Khalil and Sameh Eid are middle-class Egyptians. Not so Sameh Fayeze whose father is from a village in Beni Suef Governorate who moved to Kerdesa to find work. After a long time working as a day labourer, he was hired as a bus driver. Sameh Fayeze never really became assimilated into the *gamaa*, since he quickly stood out for his unruliness. His path out of the organisation is undoubtedly the most original. He almost missed out on going to university, because his father did not have the means to finance his studies, despite wanting to see him become a great writer. As luck would have it, one of their neighbours, a woman who was a literature teacher, lent him books and plays by Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare (Fayeze, 2013). To pay for his law studies, he worked in a bar in Cairo and a

¹⁶ Famous in Egypt for his head-on opposition to Hosni Mubarak before the revolution and for his relentless campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood when they were in power. He was one of the leading defenders of the army's intervention in 2013. He is currently campaigning for a change in religious thinking in Egypt and has distanced himself from the current regime.

famous hairdressing salon in the affluent Zamalek district. In his book, he refers to this back and forth between “normal life” and “brotherhood life” as fundamentally important to his leaving the brotherhood. Although he graduated as a lawyer, he could not manage to break into the profession. This is when he met a young chemist from his village who told him that the Ministry for Culture was organising a competitive-entry training course entitled “Building Research Capacities in Knowledge”. He passed the competitive examination and took the course.

That, he says, was the turning point in my life, because that’s how I learnt how to seek out the real sources of knowledge. I left the Brotherhood, because I climbed over the walls they had built around me. I read about them in sources other than their literature; I got to know other people and other worlds. (Fayez, 2013)

Indeed, Sameh Fayez met Khaled El Sergany, a researcher with the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies at Al-Ahram University, who helped him publish his book, released in February 2013. Today, he spends his time writing short stories and film scripts.

2.3. Class and Social Distinction in the *Gamaa*

The forms of disengagement and types of capital that facilitate defection highlight the importance of the “cultural” factor in forging the new Muslim, i.e. the moulding of an individual’s way of thinking by the *gamaa*’s dogmatic vice. Cultural capital would therefore appear to be essential to leaving the *gamaa*, even though the examples discussed above show that it is not enough in that their defections were underpinned by the professional opportunities associated with their leaving the organisation.

Significantly, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was very thin on the ground in the cultural, intellectual and media spheres that played a key role in precipitating their fall (Ben Néfissa, 2015), as observed by Ezzat Afifi (Farouk, 2014). As a university student, she was surprised at her *usra* leader’s low level of culture:

She had an “average” level of education and was not very cultured, whereas I read a great deal before I joined the Muslim Sisterhood, not to mention that I knew French literature, because I am a French speaker.

Her husband, Sameh Eid (2013), is no exception to this form of Egyptian “social racism” towards those with little education. On his return from Yemen, he attended a few meetings with “average” members. He realised that it was impossible to strike up intellectual and political discussions without shocking them. The *gamaa* hierarchy ordered him not to have these kinds of conversations and to make his criticism known only to the senior leadership. He feels that the less-educated members are the most faithful and devout.

Sameh Fayez (2013) considers that there is not much difference between young urban Muslim Brothers and young liberals or left-wingers, since they share the same culture and the same type of discourse. Most of them actually leave the organisation. The majority of the members and cadres come from villages, informal neighbourhoods and poor regions.

3. Sociological Change in the *Gamaa* and the Test of the Transition to Power

So what are the profiles of the national, regional and local cadres in the *gamaa* and, more generally, its members? Sameh Eid explains that, when he became a militant in his neighbourhood, he attended a dozen meetings per month, not counting the evenings spent strengthening “affective” bonds with his social circle to draw him into the *gamaa*. His own wife also tells of dawn meetings at the mosque, where the Sisters handed reports to the leader on progress made with the people they had singled out for individual preaching. It would therefore seem logical that cadres would not be trained by social and economic elites who have succeeded in their professional lives, such as certain doctors, chemists, engineers and businessmen, who are busy with their professional and union activities and, more importantly, have no need of the organisation to earn their living.

Although the revolutionary period was a trial for the organisation, defections would appear to also have been driven by an older, silent process of social change within the *gamaa* as discussed by Hossam Tammam (2012), which he describes as the “ruralisation” of the *gamaa*. Such an expression has serious connotations in Egypt, suggesting ignorance, illiteracy and more

generally a low social and cultural level.¹⁷ It follows that the expansion of the *gamaa*'s social and geographical influence brought with it a sweeping drop in the socioeconomic and cultural levels of its elites. The brotherhood's bureau is thought to have fostered this development¹⁸ in order to strengthen its control over the organisation. This change would therefore have cultivated the creation of the devout vanguard party operating under orders from the *gamaa*'s Qutbist bureau (Ben Néfissa & Abo Kassem, 2015).

It follows that in recent decades, the *gamaa* has represented not only a material and social shelter for the “little people”, but has given them dignity, recognition and respect, not to mention pride in being part of this great adventure to restore to Islam its lost prestige. At the same time, this development has led to the gradual exclusion of the most educated, the most educationally and professionally competent and, obviously, the most critical members – the reformist Brothers (Ben Néfissa & Abo Kassem, 2015).¹⁹

In fact, the *gamaa*'s sociological changes are not simply a “natural” development, but tie in with the very conception of what its “true” elite should be, that is less a political elite than an elite religiously reformed by the organisation.

This was the main root of the conflicts between the Muslim Brotherhood leadership and its main dissidents rallied around the figure of Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, who stood in the 2012 presidential election. He had declared the need to differentiate between preaching, which is the Muslim Brotherhood's main role, and politics, which is the role of the political party. His position was radical. He was opposed to the creation of a political party by the Muslim Brotherhood on the grounds that its members should be free to either create their own parties or join other parties. Note that the Muslim Brotherhood's bureau not only established the Freedom and Justice

17 Research on elections held since the revolution has found that the Islamist vote in Egypt has become mainly a rural vote (Al Alfy, 2012).

18 Hossam Tammam shows how the bureau changed leadership training procedures in the 1990s and 2000s in favour of cadres from the provinces over cadres from the capital.

19 In some way, it could be said that the profiles of the brotherhood's members and cadres saw an inverse process to that of the members of the French Communist Party in the 1980s and 1990s (Leclercq, 2012).

Party, but also prohibited its members from joining other parties. And when making the preparations for the creation of the Freedom and Justice Party, some of the Muslim Brotherhood's leaders were against the selection criteria for Muslim Brotherhood membership of the party. The majority of the bureau wanted selection to be based on trust, seniority and loyalty to the organisation, while others put forward the need for a choice based on competence and specialisation. Their voices were not heard ...

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to analyse the particularities of the militant socialisation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, sources of both their strength and their weakness. Inculcation of the *gamaa* deep in the “gripped” militant's mind from the youngest age and the *gamaa*'s discipline combined to form an organisational strike force that won elections and brought them to political power. Yet managing this power called for other profiles and skills. The point here is not to lay the blame solely on the Muslim Brotherhood for the failure of their short stint in power, far from it. It is to contribute to a new analysis of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood using new materials published since the revolution and their transition to legalisation and power. The examples of pathways out of the organisation given in this article demonstrate the importance of cultural capital in facilitating defections. This suggests that it would also be worthwhile analysing the *gamaa* from the angle of studies on certain religious sects operating by means of mind control and mind moulding. Similarly, studies on the production of a “new man” by institutions and organisations not in power could also make an immense contribution to honing the analysis of militant socialisation by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Grojean, 2008).²⁰

20 Olivier Grojean is one of the few researchers to have analysed the microscopic mechanisms at work in the construction of individuals in an organisation not in power.

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