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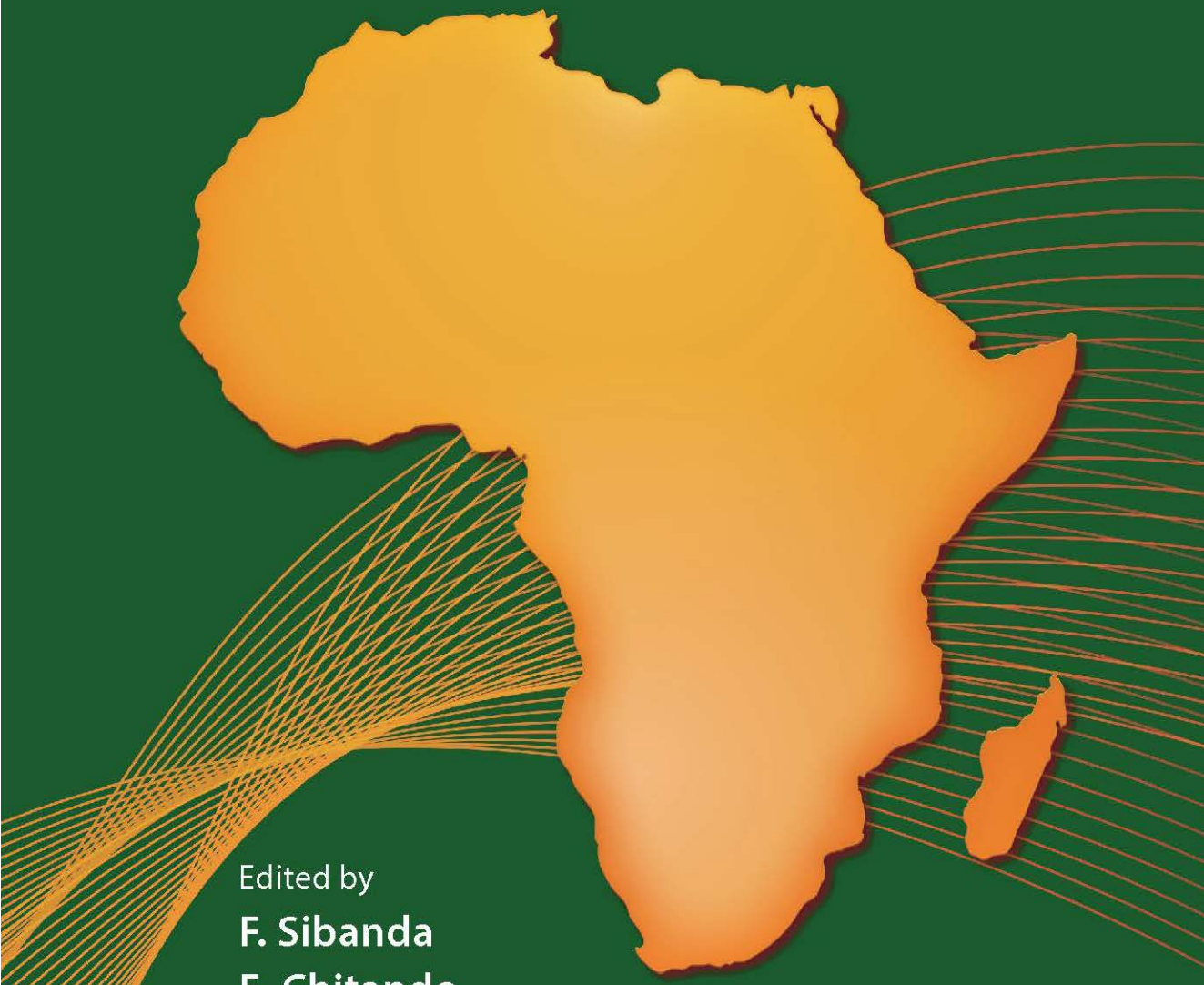

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12 A crisis of leadership: The failure of Islamism in Egypt

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INTRODUCTION

In 1924, the Ottoman Caliphate, which once spanned North Africa, West Asia and Southeast Europe, was abolished. Islamic political leadership in the form of the Caliphate has been absent in the Muslim world for over a century. In the early twentieth century, the Muslim world found itself in a crisis of leadership, contending with a political vacuum, the incursions of colonialism and the hegemony of secular modernity. One response to this reality was the birth of Islamism. Most prominent was the Muslim Brotherhood. It eventually grew to become the largest Islamist group in the Muslim world, and the most dominant in Egypt. After a period of British colonial rule, socialism and authoritarianism, Egypt underwent a popular revolution in 2011. And in 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood was democratically elected, only to be ousted in a military coup a year later. The Muslim Brotherhood's period of political leadership was short-lived, and confidence in Islamism as a paradigm of leadership waned in the imagination of the populace. A plethora of reasons exist for the failure of Islamist rule in Egypt. A revolution and successful political transition cannot be sustained with mere opposition politics and religious rhetoric. It necessitates sound governance, inclusivity of other state actors and an ambitious political project.

In this chapter, I explore two reasons for the failed leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood. Firstly, there is the ideological attitude of religious fatalism, the appeal to which has led to a lack of concrete political solutions and inefficient governance, contributing to the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood. Secondly, there is the conflation between the religious and the political domains. Historically, if we survey Muslim civilisation, the *shariʿa* has been an autonomous sphere, an exclusive domain of the religious scholars (*ʿulamā*), operating in parallel to political power (sultanate). Although, political authority supported the implementation of the *shariʿa* and upheld the common good (*maslaḥa*), it remained an independent sphere. A sphere which necessitated competence in the non-*sharʿi* ("secular") aspects of governance. The blunt conflation of these two realms in the political ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt contributed to incompetent governance and a shallow political vision. A vast body of political analysis exists about the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, but very little exploring the theological and ideological dimensions that led to their political shortcomings. This began not in 2011, but decades prior, shortly after the dissolution of the political leadership of the Caliphate.

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INSIDE THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD PRIOR TO 2011

In 1928, four years after the abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate, the imam and schoolteacher, Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest and most influential Islamist group. Hasan Al-Banna's objective was the re-Islamisation of Egypt through social, economic and educational reform. His agenda included resistance against British colonial rule and the eventual establishment of an Islamic state and implementation of *shari'a*.[2] Al-Banna's approach to reform was bottom-up, through preaching, politics of piety and socio-cultural activity.[3] He promoted a gradualist agenda through moral and social reform, not power politics. Al-Banna maintained a stance of nonviolence and advocated for the organisation to work within the confines of the law to achieve its objectives. A fundamental philosophy of Islamism is the universality of Islam, as a complete system applicable to the social, economic and political realms. To Islamists, Islam is not merely a system of beliefs, but a totalising order, that encompasses all dimensions of life and society.[4] The *shari'a* is unbounded, and applicable to all areas of personal life, society and the state. Thus, the impetus for the Brotherhood's famous slogan, "Islam is the Solution."[5]

The Brotherhood's theological and ideological leanings took different contours over the last century.[6] In the early twentieth century, Al-Banna, and the Brotherhood, was influenced by the modernist trend initiated by the reformist thinker, Muhammad Abdu (d. 1905). This trend rejected the accumulated tradition (*turāth*), and advocated for the return to the Quran and Sunna, and independent legal reasoning (*ijtihād*). The reformists took inspiration from the original sources to respond to the challenges of secular modernity and colonialism. They promoted Islam as a catalyst to empower the political, economic and social edifice of the Muslims and the eventual unification of the Muslim world. Over the decades the Brotherhood became less homogenous, and incorporated traditional-minded scholars, who embraced the tradition (*turāth*) and the scholarship of the al-Azhar University.

In the 1960s, the Brotherhood embraced the leadership and Islamic political ideology of Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966). This trend was more radical than the previous generations, in its politicised interpretation of the Quran. Qutb saw Egyptian society as a binary between Islam and *jāhiliyya* (ignorance). He regarded the socialist regime of Gamal Abdel Nasr (d. 1970) as an anathema to Islam and advocated for state implementation of the *shari'a*. He excommunicated from Islam (*takfīr*) those who

2 Ramadan T. 2012. *Islam and the Arab Awakening.* New York: Oxford University Press, 70.

3 Mohamed NY. 2018 "The Role of the Qur'ānic Principle of Wasaṭiyyah in Guiding Islamic Movements," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 3(2):28.

4 Roy O. 1994. *The Failure of Political Islam*. Volk C (trans) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 39.

5 Mahmmud H. 2005. "A Symposium Discussed (Islam Is the Solution) Slogan," IkhwanWeb, 25 October.

6 El Houdaiby I. 2013. "From Prison to Palace: The Muslim Brotherhood's Challenges and Responses in Post-Revolution Egypt," *Fride and Hivos* 113(2013):2.

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associated with the political regime and took a nominalist attitude to the place of the *shariʿa*. Although Qutbism opened the door to radicalism among other Islamist groups, the Brotherhood maintained a demilitarised and non-violent approach.[7] Unlike al-Banna, who focused more on the social welfare and social activism among the down-trodden Egyptian masses, Qutb redirected his goal towards changing the super-structure of the secular Egyptian government. Qutbism left an indelible mark on the Brotherhood and influenced it to take a top-down approach to the Islamisation of the society and state. The leadership placed a pause on all intellectual questions, and aggressively worked towards recruitment, and strengthening the organisation.[8] In the 1970s, the organisation took a more puritanical bent and became influenced by Salafi/Wahhabi doctrine, adopting an aversion to Sufism, philosophy and much of the accumulated Islamic intellectual tradition (*turāth*). Their parochial understanding of the *shariʿa* stems from a hermeneutic that emphasised a literal reading of the Quran and Sunna. This approach to reading their faith influenced the organisation's attitude to politics and governance.

In the decades prior to the revolution the Brotherhood was subject to state suppression and excluded from political participation. After the 1952 coup, and overthrow of the Egyptian monarch, President Gamal Abdel Nasser placed over 40,000 members in concentration camps and severely tortured them. Sayyid Qutb was brutally tortured and eventually hanged in 1966. It's not surprising that his radical ideas were formed during his period of incarceration. After the assassination of Nasser in 1970, his successor, Anwar Sadat (d. 1981), lessened pressure on the Brotherhood and released many of its imprisoned members. However, they remained an illegal organisation in Egypt, with no opportunity to form a political party and engage in political participation. Sadat worked towards economic liberalisation during his decade rule. Thus, strategically, he tolerated the Brotherhood to undermine his leftist opponents, and advance his neo-liberal policies.[9] During this period, the Brotherhood successfully petitioned to convince the government to apply *shariʿa* law, and in 1980 they amended the constitution to read "the principles of the Islamic *shariʿa* are the main source of legislation."[10] This amendment excluded details of how the *shariʿa* is meant to be implemented, or any qualification to the expansive reading of the "principles" of the *shariʿa*.[11]

During the period of Hosni Mubarak's three-decade-long rule, the attitude to the Brotherhood was much like that of Sadat – toleration, illegal status and sporadic imprisonment. Mubarak positioned himself as the favourable alternative to the

7 El Houdaiby, "From Prison to Palace", 2.

8 El Houdaiby, "From Prison to Palace", 2.

9 Kandil H. 2015. *Inside the Brotherhood.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 82.

10 Arab Republic of Egypt, Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights (SSCHR). Constitution of Egypt, 2014 (English version) Online at: https://sschr.gov.eg/en/the-egyptian-constitution.

11 Brown NJ. 2012. "Egypt and Islamic Sharia: A Guide for the Perplexed," CarnegieEndowment.org, 15 May.

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Brotherhood and entertained them to offset secularists pressure to democratise.[12] Two characteristics of Mubarak's rule were aggressive liberalisation of the economy and authoritarianism. Beneath the economic boom were deep inequalities. Less government spending resulted in a deteriorated infrastructure and abject poverty. The discontent of the people resulted in increased spending on internal security services and authoritarian measures to suppress uprising.[13] Increased spending on internal security meant less spending on the army. Prior to 2011, the army became marginalised, the Central Security Forces became empowered, and neo-liberal policies were promoted at the expense of the majority of the population.[14] Egypt went from a military state to a police state. Poverty, social security and basic freedoms were among the central concerns of the Egyptian people.

While enduring the political marginalisation and arrests, the Brotherhood continued with their grassroots activism and contribution to the socio-economic void created by the regime. They established clinics and hospitals throughout Egypt, schools in every governorate, charities for orphans and widows and general welfare aimed at lifting poverty. In addition to their philanthropic activities, they engaged in preaching and the moral reform of society. To achieve this impact, the Brotherhood established a large network of members throughout Egypt, and a complex and rigid hierarchy. Not just anyone can join the Brotherhood, one must be chosen and ideologically compatible. The Brotherhood had thousands of members from various backgrounds. Political sociologist Hazem Khandil holds that to maintain cohesion and prevent dissent, the Brotherhood emphasised praxis over enquiry, the censure of arguments and an aversion to intellectualism.[15] Despite their narrow outlook, their social welfare activities bought them currency and support from the populace. A populace that lost faith in the heavy-handed regime to provide it basic goods and freedoms.

THE POPULAR REVOLUTION AND ROAD TO POLITICAL POWER (2011-2012)

After decades of police repression and miserable economic conditions, almost 12 million people took to the streets on 25 January 2011. The eighteen-day popular unrest demanded the resignation of Hosni Mubarak and free elections. It was a popular uprising of the Egyptian people, it included the youth, the working class, professionals, liberals, secularists and Islamists. No ideology or group could claim monopoly of the uprising; it was a revolt of the people. Their grievances were not religious, but they included police brutality, civil liberties, corruption, low-wages, unemployment and inflation. In the beginning, the Muslim Brotherhood kept a distance from involvement in the protest movement and issued ambiguous

12 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 82.

13 Pioppi D. 2013. "Playing with Fire. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Leviathan," *The International Spectator* 48(4)(December 1):53.

14 Pioppi, "Playing with Fire", 53.

15 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 10.

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statements. However, a few of its youth members endorsed and partook in the uprising. Eventually, on 28 January 2011, the Brotherhood leadership officially supported the uprising and called for nationwide protests.[16] The security forces killed over 800 people and injured more than 6000. The protests escalated and eventually resulted in Mubarak stepping down from his presidency on 11 February 2011, and he handed power over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). The SCAF declared that it would transfer authority over to an elected authority after a transition period.

After the dissolution of Mubarak's regime, the SCAF worked with the Brotherhood, as it was the only mass-based political force in Egypt. The Brotherhood accepted the SCAF's roadmap for elections and legal reforms, but not the deep reforms the people sought.[17] Soon after the transition of power to the SCAF, the Brotherhood created a nominally independent political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). The FJP announced that it did not have its eye on the presidency but merely sought a seat at the table – to be included in political participation. Although the FJP was meant to be flexible and open to all Egyptians, it maintained its close ties to the Brotherhood, its ideology and rigid structures.[18] In the 2011 parliamentary elections, the FJP (used synonymously with the Brotherhood) won a majority share of the seats. In 2012, seeking further power, the Brotherhood changed course, and announced that it will contest for the presidency and appointed Mohamed Morsi (d. 2019) as its candidate. In June 2012, the Brotherhood's FJP won the popular elections and Morsi was made the first democratically elected president of Egypt. It was not smooth sailing for the Brotherhood; the path was laden with political challenges. The executive powers of the president were severely limited, and the leadership required political prudence and experience to navigate the terrain.

THE FALL OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The revolution was an uprising of the people, from different sectors of Egyptian society, not the Brotherhood. Paradoxically, the Brotherhood took power—not the people. It was thus imperative that the Brotherhood represent the will of the populace, realise the demands of the revolution and not their own ideological agenda or will to power. In the early period of rule, the Brotherhood was in the executive seat but not in control of the state. The SCAF did not relinquish all the reins of government immediately – the constitutional addendum limited the executive powers of the president. Neither did the judiciary and interior ministry embrace the authority of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood understood opposition politics, but they lacked political experience in governance to handle the belligerence of the old-state's bureaucracy. They were barred from politics for decades prior to their rise to power. The Brotherhood was adept at grassroots activism, preaching and

16 El Houdaiby, "From Prison to Palace", 7.

17 Pioppi, "Playing with Fire", 56.

18 Pioppi, "Playing with Fire", 57.

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cultivating pious personalities, but fell short of developing statesmen to deal with matters of governance. Their failure to strategically confront and engage the "deep state" undermined their period of rule.

On 12 August 2012, power was restored to the presidency, and Defence Minister Hussein Tantawi was replaced with 'Abd Al-Fatah al-Sisi. Although the Brotherhood now had power, they over relied on the technocrats of the old regime because of their lack of knowledge and experience in statecraft.[19] It stifled their opportunity to purge the remnants of the authoritarian regime. The Brotherhood held no revolutionary agenda, and they continued upon the status quo of the previous regime. There was no reform of the security forces, they maintained their privileges and continued using repressive measures.[20] No different to the neoliberal policies of the previous regime, the Brotherhood accepted an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to boost the economy, but issued no progressive economic plan for the country. [21] It merely continued to repeat the policy of old in order to establish its power base. The Brotherhood was unprepared for the revolution, let alone governance. It had a superficial political programme and no experienced statesman. [22]

The Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was not independent to the Brotherhood, but it acted as a political arm to execute its demands. Rigidity, hierarchy and a shroud of mystery remained. The Brotherhood favoured loyalty and personal piety at the expense of merit and competence.[23] The closely aligned relationship with the mother organisation prevented the party from becoming transparent and participatory. A progressive party, open to revolutionary change, cannot remain non-transparent and exclude other interest groups. Liberals, secularists, leftists and other non-Islamists groups were excluded from power-sharing or input on executive matters and legislation. The FJP operated solely as a party of the Brotherhood, not the popular will of the people. No political party can succeed in a revolutionary climate, without a genuine will to enact change.

In November 2012, Morsi issued an interim Constitutional Declaration that granted him extensive powers. It immunised the president from judicial review, and made all pending lawsuits against him void, until a new constitution was adopted. This protection was extended to the Islamist-dominated constituent assembly.[24] The declaration excluded consultation with non-Islamist interests, and Morsi was dubbed Egypt's new Pharaoh. Political analyst H.A. Hellyer remarks that "Morsi had given himself immunity from any check and balance in the most brazen

19 Létourneau J-F. 2016. "Explaining the Muslim Brotherhood's Rise and Fall in Egypt," *Mediterranean Politics* 21(2)(May 3):6.

20 Pioppi, "Playing with Fire", 59.

21 Pioppi, "Playing with Fire", 59.

22 Pioppi, "Playing with Fire", 60.

23 Al-Anani K. 2015. "Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Middle East Journal* 69(4):553.

24 Beaumont P. 2012. "Protests Erupt across Egypt after Presidential Decree," *The Guardian*, 23 November.

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of fashions."[25] The declaration provoked widespread protests and accused the president of a "constitutional coup."[26] Morsi supporters argued that the declaration was necessary to bypass legal obstacles and speed up the democratic transition and protect the revolution.[27] Some may argue that expediencies were needed, but his "self-serving decision further isolated and weakened Morsi and his government."[28] It bolstered the opposition to unite under the National Salvation Front (NSF), and undermine the authority of the Brotherhood.

After weeks of unrest and discontent, Morsi signed a new constitution into law on 26 December 2012. It still granted the president extensive powers, and limited check and balances, but was not completely authoritarian.[29] The constitution did not attempt to establish an Islamist theocracy, like Iran, but in a vague manner gave the state capacity to protect ethics and public order.[30] The events prior to its ratification conjured little trust and polarised Egyptian society between Islamist and non-Islamists. The Brotherhood appeared to seek domination rather than national unity and a consensual political system.[31] The incompetence at governance and vying for political power undermined the Brotherhood's religious legitimacy amongst the people. They were labelled "purveyors of religion" (*tujār al-dīn*), implying they used religion to their political ends.

Instead of adopting a revolutionary agenda, in terms of the economy, state security or the armed forces, the Brotherhood remained conservative and aimed at consolidating its power. It cooperated with the military, and maintained a tolerant, non-confrontational, and conciliatory approach.[32] Morsi made several concessions with the military to ensure their commitment and support while the Brotherhood managed the political transition.[33] However, the military elites did not consider themselves subject to the will of the Brotherhood, but an independent and privileged entity.[34] On 30 June 2013, millions of Egyptians mobilised in protest to remove Morsi from office. The protest started as an initiative from an opposition coalition that were dissatisfied with the economic crisis, increased authoritarianism, and lack of reform. And on 3 July 2013, a coup d'état took place, led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. The army suspended the 2012 Constitution and introduced an interim president to lead the country. On 14 August 2013, in response to the

25 Hellyer HA. 2016. *A Revolution Undone: Egypt's Road Beyond Revolt*. New York: Oxford University Press, 111.

26 Beaumont, "Protests Erupt across Egypt after Presidential Decree".

27 Beaumont, "Protests Erupt across Egypt after Presidential Decree".

28 Jaraba M. 2014. "Why Did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Year-Long Rule Fall?," *Zeitschrift Für Politik* 61:75.

29 Hellyer, *A Revolution Undone: Egypt's Road Beyond Revolt*, 114.

30 Hellyer, *A Revolution Undone*, 114.

31 Jaraba, "Why Did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Year-Long Rule Fall?," 75.

32 Jaraba, "Why Did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Year-Long Rule Fall?," 75.

33 Jaraba, "Why Did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Year-Long Rule Fall?," 78.

34 Jaraba, "Why Did the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Year-Long Rule Fall?," 75.

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coup, Brotherhood supporters protested at Rabaa al-Adwiya Square and Al-Nahda Square. In attempts to halt the protests, the security forces and military massacred over 900 protesters. It is regarded as the deadliest day in recent Egyptian history.

The Brotherhood was dealt a bad hand. They inherited a dwindling economy and limited powers at the start of their tenure. Added to this, they lacked the vision and political competency to navigate the terrain. They failed to govern adequately due to a lack of experience and training. The leadership ignored the character of the uprising. They did not meet the popular expectation of revolutionary reform. The security sector and the economic policies remained the same. The revolution was not ideological or religious, but an expression of genuine political and socio-economic grievances. Instead of forming an alliance with the military and placating existing structures, it would have been more prudent to align with both Islamist and secular voices of the revolution. The leadership's swift attempt at consolidating power and disregard of growing dissatisfaction alienated them from the populace and hindered their assessment of the political landscape. These apparent shortcomings contributed to the failure of the Brotherhood. Nonetheless, the ideology and political theology that guided their actions cannot be ignored in seeking to understand the downfall of Islamist political leadership in Egypt. There were two primary reasons for this: (1) religious fatalism and (2) the conflation between the religious and political spheres. We now explore these factors, to shed light on the deficiency in political leadership of the Brotherhood.

Religious fatalism and personal piety

The religious fatalism of the Muslim Brotherhood contributed to their incompetency in governance and lack of political vision. In the sociologist Hazem Khandil's study of the Brotherhood, he shows that the Brotherhood regard faith as a cause not only of otherworldly salvation, but temporal success, too. He argues that for the Brotherhood historical change is influenced by their religious observance.[35] God manifested material change in the world based on their personal piety and religious virtue. Through rigorous sociological analysis of the movement, he argues that their attitude of religious determinism influenced their superficial attention given to matters of political governance, economic policy and military warfare. Consequently, they were ill-equipped to handle the presidency and statecraft during their tenure. For the Brotherhood, moral edification is the means through which they secure worldly success. Hasan al-Banna states, "it is from the pages of history that we derive [the] certainty that [if Muslims] cultivate spiritual strength and moral righteousness, the material instruments of power will hail to them from all directions"[36] Khandil observes that for Brothers, "by obeying God, economic resources would be discovered, political factionalism and social tensions would

35 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*.

36 Cited Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*.

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disappear, and geopolitical rivals would collapse under the weight of their own problems."[37]

The Brotherhood understood the Quranic verse, "If you support [the cause of] God, He will support you and make you steadfast,"[38] to imply that religious observance will directly translate into worldly victory.[39] However, traditional exegetes understand it to imply God making them firm in faith and endowing them with composure.[40] Personal piety and observance of the *shari'a* entitles one to otherworldly success, not political power, military conquests and prosperity in *this* world. The former is promised by God, but the latter is contingent on our own efforts and *ultimately* the will and power of God. The Quran states, "man only achieves that for which he strives."[41] It is not a trade of personal piety for worldly glory. We don't reject the laws of causality in anticipation of divine intervention based on religious observance. God is the primary cause, but the means are through our efforts. Ultimately, God provides and heals, but the fisherman must still cast his net, the farmer must still till the soil and the doctor must still administer medication.[42] It is no different in matters of governance, military warfare or institution building. Personal piety is inconsequential to the empirical workings of the world, but it may weigh on the scales in the hereafter. The Brotherhood's fatalism blinds them to the worldly instruments needed to govern a nation. Study and experience in economic policy and statecraft cannot be replaced with saintly endeavours, such as worship and charity. Khandil remarks, that "Sayyid Qutb, the avowed leader of the insurgency [in the 1960s], had no experience in clandestine operations, nor bothered to acquire any, since he believed that 'the age of miracles has not passed.'"[43]

The Quran affirms that humanity, whether morally devout or not, will be tested with abundance and scarcity. It says, "And as for man, when his Lord tries him through honour and blessings, he says, 'My Lord has honoured me.' But when he tries him though restriction of his provision, he says 'my Lord has humiliated me.'"[44] The Quranic worldview affirms that this world is an abode of trial—in it one may encounter comfort or beset with travail. The Brotherhood instead assumed that their religiosity entitles them to divine grace in *this* world. The Quranic verse, "God

37 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood,* 88.

38 Quran 47:7.

39 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 83.

40 Nasr SH et al (eds). 2015.*The Study Quran* (New York: Harper One, 2015), 1237. Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 82.

41 Quran 53:39

42 "If you were to rely upon Allah with the reliance He is due, you would be given provision like the birds. It goes forth hungry in the morning and returns with a full belly at dusk." Sunan Ibn Majah 4164.

43 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 82.

44 Quran 89:15-16.

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will not change the status of a people until they change what is in themselves,"[45] is not an imperative to forget about the reality of the workings of the world, and *only* focus on moral reform, and "God will take care of the rest." The context of the verse implies that no individual will be held to account for the state of an entire community. Each person will bear the burden of their own deeds on the Day of Judgement. Individuals are a microcosm of society. And the greater moral and social condition of society begins with each individual. However, the verse is not an endorsement to subscribe to religious fatalism and assume personal piety will *necessarily* pave the path to political victory.

The Egyptian people demanded a revolutionary agenda, not a fatalist attitude that relinquished the responsibility of effective governance. The Brotherhood failed to offer concrete solutions or a coherent vision to the mounting problems facing Egypt's bureaucracy and economy. Instead, they focused on strengthening their grip on legislative and executive powers, but they ignored the plight of the populace. As if to say that divine support would automatically accompany the Brotherhood's ascent to power. The North African sociologist and historian, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) stated that groups succeed politically through social solidarity and unity of purpose.[46] This unity of purpose is enhanced through religious fervour and participation in a common religion, not direct divine intervention in the natural course of events based on religiosity. Essentially, this religious fervour would apply to whether this religion is Islam, Christianity or Hinduism. The rise and fall of states or civilisations occur as a function of solidarity and laxity, not *necessarily* piety. The distinguished jurist, Ibn Taymīyya (d. 1328) argued that victory is granted to a just state, even if it is non-Muslim, over an unjust one, even if it claims to adhere to Islam.[47] We are not saying that the means to worldly and other-worldly success do not overlap, or that divine intervention is not possible, but relinquishing the instruments of attaining worldly goods because of our personal piety and virtue is naive.

The Brotherhood believe that their religiosity suspends the laws of causality and invites divine assistance. Their fatalism breeds a superficial attention to economic policy, military strategy and efficient governance. The Brotherhood's insufficient technical knowledge of state affairs made them reliant on the technocrats of the old regime.[48] They lacked the competency to manage internal security and continued to permit security violations during their tenure. Neither did they take the reins of the army, instead leaving them to their own devices, only to remove them from power in a coup a year later. Khandil states, "Now, the pious vanguard fell upon a large army and an experienced security force that was not of their making, but could be

45 Quran 13:11.

46 Issawi C (trans). 1987. *An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis.* London: John Murray, 131.

47 Ibn Taymīyya, *Al-ʾAmr bi al-maʿrūf wa an-nahī ʿan al-munkar* [Enjoining Good and Forbidding Wrong] Beirut: Dar Al-Kitab AL-Jadid, 1976).

48 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 139.

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– with God's grace – converted to their cause."[49] The Brotherhood was clearly unfit to rule. Instead of clasping on to power and waiting for divine assistance, it would have been more prudent to consult and strategically align with adept members of the opposition to manage the affairs of the state. Instead, the opposition, including other Islamists, aligned against the Brotherhood and called for their removal from power.

The French political scientist, Olivier Roy shows that Islamists only consider individual virtue as a criterion for political leadership.[50] They give superficial attention to the structure or strength of political institutions. The form of the institutions is inconsequential — what matters is the piety, faith and principles of those that make up the institutions. Roy states, "The discussion of who should be the leader consists in sketching the portrait of the ideal sovereign according to Quranic norms. Similarly, reflections on administration are reduced to discussion of the virtues and honesty of the functionary."[51] The fall of the Brotherhood was not a scarcity of virtue, but a superficial knowledge of how to build effective political institutions. Roy remarks that "this fall to earth is considered to be corruption by the actors themselves, who dream of the past moment of purity instead of attempting to build institutions capable of handling the weakness of men. Failure brings a setback to square one. Failure is scandalous. Either God has forgotten men, or men have forgotten God. Obviously, it is the latter proposition that is adopted."[52]

Conflation of the religious and political spheres

The conflation of the religious and the political spheres in the political ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood contributed to their incompetent governance and shallow political vision. The Brotherhood disregards the political as an autonomous sphere, for them it is *completely* a dictate of the *sharīʿa*. Historically, in Muslim civilisation, legislation has been the exclusive domain of the religious scholars (*ʿulamā*), operating in parallel to political power (sultanate). Although, the latter served to defend and implement the *sharīʿa* and uphold the common good (*maslaḥa*), it remained an independent sphere. The *sharīʿa* does inform normative principles of governance, but competence in non-*sharʿi* aspects of governance is also necessary. The Brotherhood assume the *sharīʿa* is comprehensive and unbounded in scope and ignore the non-*sharʿi* aspects that inform sound governance. This does not mean that the *sharʿi* and the non-*sharʿi* are antagonistic to one another. Islamic law scholar Sherman Jackson calls the latter the "Islamic Secular" — it is outside of the *sharīʿa* but

49 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 139. "When some complained of the absence of a clear economic agenda, they were reminded of the reign of the Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, whose virtue all but obliterated poverty, to the point where charity was no longer needed." Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 92.

50 Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 61.

51 Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 62.

52 Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 67.

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still within God's adjudicative gaze.[53] Thus, Jackson argues that Islam is universal and totalising but the *shariʿa* is bounded, leaving room for a space not reliant on divine ordinances.[54] Thus, administrative practices, institution-building, economics and military strategy, are non-*sharʿi* in nature. The desire to bring about an Islamic State and implement the *shariʿa*, does not magically solve the problems of a nation. Political competency and a concrete political programme is still necessary. It is incumbent upon Muslims to live according to the *shariʿa*, for it guides their moral lives, but it does not replace an experienced statesman, a trained army general or an educated economic minister.

The *shariʿa* prohibits usury, censure against corruption and the killing of non-combatants, and it prescribes its own criminal law (*ḥudūd*). However, there are aspects to economics, governance, warfare and criminal justice that are secular in nature. The Brotherhood, much like many orientalists (ironically), assume that Muslims did not make a distinction between the religious (*dīni*) and the secular (*dunyawi*), and the two spheres were in tension with one another.[55] The ideological bent that the *shariʿa* has an all-encompassing jurisdiction is germane to the Brotherhood, and has contributed to their superficial treatment of the political. Many jurists understood that the observance of the *shariʿa* does not translate into *every* aspect of worldly life. The respected jurist Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), when asked who is a better military commander, a pious weakling or a strong wrongdoer, responded, "As for the strong miscreant, his power benefits the Muslims, while his corruptness affects only him; as for the pious weakling, his piety benefits him, while his weakness affects the Muslims."[56] The weakness of the Brotherhood in statecraft spoilt the chances of democratic transition and damaged the reputation of the Islamist paradigm of leadership in Egypt.

Expounding on his ideology that Islam is all-inclusive, encompassing the political, the social and the economic, Al-Banna, stated, "We believe that the rules and teachings of Islam [meaning: *shariʿa*] are comprehensive in organizing people's affairs in this life and the next, and that those who believe that these teachings only cover worship and spiritual matters are mistaken. Islam is belief and worship; homeland and citizenship; religion and state; spirituality and practice; revelation and sword."[57] This informed the Brotherhood's slogan: "Islam is the Solution." It is

53 Jackson SA. 2017. "The Islamic Secular," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 34 (2):1.

54 Jackson, "The Islamic Secular," 2.

55 For a comprehensive account of the existence of the distinction between the religious (*dīni*) and the secular (*dunyāwi*) in classical Islamic thought, see Abbasi R. 2020. "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish the Religious and Secular? The Dīn–Dunyā Binary in Medieval Islamic Thought," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31(2):1.

56 Quoted in Ibn Taymīyya. 1983. *Al-Siyāsa al-sharʿīya fī iṣlaḥ al-raʿī wa al-raʿiyya* [Islamic Politics in Conducting the Affairs of the Ruler and the Ruled]. Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadeeda. Cited in and translated by Jackson, "The Islamic Secular", 284.

57 Al-Banna H. [1949] 1993. *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna* [The Martyred Imam Hasan al-Banna's Collection of Epistles]. Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, 181. Cited and translated in Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 85–86.

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seen as a comprehensive system that will solve the problems of the Egyptian state and society. The foremost historian on the Brotherhood, Richet P. Mitchell, states that Al-Banna, "generalized his views within the 'Islamic system' (*al-nizam al-islami*) without much specification as to what this meant in terms of government theory and practice."[58] Sherman Jackson argues that "the absence of a *sharʿi*/non-*sharʿi* distinction produces a zero-sum choice, between the legal/political and the moral."[59] The Brotherhood's dismissal of this distinction led to a superficial understanding of the former, and exclusive focus on the latter.

The political philosopher and polymath Al-Māwardi (d. 1058) states that, "there are two types of ethics: The ethic of divine law (*adab shariʿa*), and the ethic of political administration (*adab siyāsa*). The ethic of divine law is that which brings about the execution of (religious) obligations, and the ethic of political administration is that which brings about the prosperity of the earth."[60] The foremost Islamic scholar, Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), outlines the nature of the subjects of philosophy and remarks that in "*the political sciences* all that the philosophers have to say comes down to administrative maxims concerned with secular affairs (al-umūr al-dunyawiyya) and the government of rulers."[61] Prominent jurist Ibn Taymīyya (d. 1328), emphasises that the appointment of the state's administrative personnel should also consider the non-*sharʿi,* pragmatic requirements such as competence.[62] His student, the jurist Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 1350) underscored that the condition of practical wisdom and intelligence cannot be dispensed with in political governance.[63] The clear distinction, but not hard separation, can be seen in military matters during the life of Prophet Muhammad (ṣ). At the Battle of Badr, a companion of the prophet, Al-Ḥubāb ibn Al-Munthir, asked Muhammad (ṣ) if his military strategy was from divine revelation or his personal opinion. Muhammad (ṣ) responded that it was from his opinion. Thus, Al-Ḥubāb suggested an alternative strategy that Muhammad (ṣ) accepted.[64] From this event, we notice that military strategy may stem from revelation or personal expertise, but the latter cannot be ignored to

58 Mitchell RP. 1993. *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 40.

59 Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*, 285.

60 Translated and cited in Abbasi, "Did Premodern Muslims Distinguish the Religious and Secular?", 218.

61 Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī. 1980. *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazālī's Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī*, McCarthy RJ (trans). Boston: University of Beirut, 11.

62 Ibn Taymīyya. 1983. *Al-Siyāsa al-sharʿīya fī iṣlaḥ al-raʿī wa al-raʿiyya* (cited in An-Na'im AA. 2010. *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari`a.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 49).

63 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. 1985. *Al- Ṭuruq al-ḥukmia fī al-siyāsa al-sharʿiya* [Methods of Government in Islamic Politics]. Cairo: Dār al-Madanī. (cited in An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State,* 50.

64 Al-Mustadrak, 5801.

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advance in worldly affairs. In a famous narration about worldly matters, Mūsā bin Ṭalḥa narrates that:

> I and God's Messenger (ṣ) happened to pass by people near the date-palm trees. He said: What are these people doing? They said: They are grafting, i.e. they combine the male with the female (tree) and thus they yield more fruit. Thereupon God's Messenger (ṣ) said: I do not find it to be of any use. The people were informed about it and they abandoned this practice. God's Messenger (ṣ) [was later] on informed [that the yield had dwindled], whereupon he said: If there is any use of it, then they should do it, for it was just a personal opinion, and do not go after my personal opinion; but when I say to you anything on behalf of God, then do accept it, for I do not attribute lies to God, the Exalted and Glorious.[65]

In another narration, from Rāfi bin Khandīj, it states, "I am only a human, if I command you to do something pertaining to your religion (*dīn*), then accept it; but if I command you to do something based on personal opinion, then [realize] that I am only human," and in a narration from Anas bin Mālik, it says, "You know better of your worldly affairs." This report clearly shows that Muḥammad (ṣ) recognised the place of worldly expertise and competence, and a sphere that is non-*shar'i*. The affairs of this world (*dunyawi*), from feeding the hungry, to forming feasible economic policy, to defending the borders, to establishing efficient systems of governance, are for the most part, non-*shar'i*. In a response to a critique of the Brotherhood's lack of a clear economic agenda, a Brother mentioned the rule of the Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, "whose virtue all but obliterated poverty, to the point where charity was no longer needed".[66] The lack of a concrete economic plan for Egypt led the Brotherhood to continue the economic policy of the old regime, i.e. liberalisation and knocking on the door of the IMF.

Former Brother, Ibrahim El-Houdaiby, states that "the lack of intellectual debate on the role of the state is a persistent deficit in the Brotherhood's political thought. The lack of a coherent position vis-à-vis the state-religion relationship is not unique to the Brotherhood, or even to Islamists at large."[67] It is important to recognise that ninety per cent of Egyptians are Muslim, and that Islamists do not represent all Muslim interests. Opinion polls show that most Egyptians do not reject the role of religion in the political system, but the question is "rather *how* this role should be managed and which domains it should cover."[68] Political science, or even political philosophy, does not feature in the deliberations of the Brotherhood. The relationship between the religious and secular spheres is for the most part conflated, and the nuanced dynamic between them is not duly considered. No different to secularists, Islamists assume the secular and the religious to be antagonistic to one another. Islamist Egyptian intellectual Abdel-Wahhab Elmessiri (d. 2008) makes

65 Saḥīḥ Muslim 2361. See also Ibn Māja 2471.

66 Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 92.

67 El Houdaiby, "From Prison to Palace," 9.

68 El Houdaiby, "From Prison to Palace," 9.

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the distinction between comprehensive secularism (*al-ʿalmāniyyah al-shāmila*) and partial secularism (*al-ʿalmāniyyah al-juzʾīyya).*[69] The former is totalising and excludes religion as a frame of reference, much like Turkish Kemalism or French *laïcité*. Not only is religious authority excluded, but religious values and ethics too, from both public and private life.[70] On the other hand, partial secularism is procedural, religion has no bearing on the technical workings of statecraft, yet its moral framework persists. The Brotherhood had no concrete political model, or understanding of how the religious will interface with the political. Neither did they seek such guidance from once former Brother, Abdel-Wahhab Elmessiri, who although aligned to the left, sought to form an alliance with the Brotherhood during the Kefaya movement.[71]

The marginalisation and perversion of the *shariʿa* in Egypt through modernisation and the incursions of colonialism are well-known.[72] Many French codes and laws, from commercial to penal, were translated and passed as Egyptian legislation. This happened to the extent that the *shariʿa* courts' jurisdiction were confined to matters pertaining to personal status law alone. Many Islamic laws were also codified, in a way detached them from the complex and sophisticated legislative process (*iftāʾ*) of the religious scholars (*ʿulamā*). Despite this travesty, in the realm of pre-modern Islamic governance, the sovereign (sultan) did establish positive law. According to political scientist Andrew March, "there are many areas of public, social and economic life for which no specific Islamic religious rules exist, but where Muslim authorities are permitted to act within broad moral constraints as long as their actions are justifiable as advancing communal welfare (*maslaḥa*)."[73] The sultan often implemented codes (*qanūn*) that were mainly political, and outside the bounds of the *shariʿa*, but still within the spirit of Islam. The *qanūn* was an extrajudicial supplement to Islamic political law (*siyāsa sharʿiya*) and known as the sultan's edicts.[74] These

69 Elmessiri A. 1968. *Al-ʿAlmāniyya al-juzʾīyya wa al-ʿalmānīyya al-shāmila* [Partial Secularism and Comprehensive Secularism]. Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk.

70 Elmessiri, *Al-ʿAlmāniyya al-juzʾīyya wa al-ʿalmānīyya al-shāmila* [Partial Secularism and Comprehensive Secularism]. See also Mesard HE. 2013. *Abdelwahab Elmessiri's Critique of Western Modernity and the Development of an Islamic Humanism*, Ph Diss, University of Virginia, 161–62.

71 Elmessiri was a former Brother and a leader of the Kefaya movement. It was a protest movement prior to 2011, against the Mubarak regime's human rights abuses and corruption. It is said, "Elmessiri hopes his legacy will be of creating a unified front combining the banned Brotherhood's grass-roots power with Kifaya's big-tent inclusiveness." Elmessiri understood the importance of coalition and inclusivity. He attempted to create an alliance between the Brotherhood and the Left. Khalil A. 2007. "Seeking a Bridge to Change in Egypt", *Los Angeles Times*, 27 April.

72 Hallaq WBB. 2009. *An Introduction to Islamic Law*. First Edition. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 104–5 Hallaq.

73 March AF. 2015. "Review: What Can the Islamic Past Teach Us about Secular Modernity?," *Political Theory* 43(6):838–49.

74 Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 78. It is worth noting that Hallaq takes an unbounded conception of the *sharīʿa*, and thus argues that it is incompatible with the

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edicts were often related to establishing public order and general governance. The *qanūn* were often non-*sharʿi* in content and occasionally would contradict the *shariʿa*. In the latter cases, the jurists (*muftis*) and judges (*qadis*) would often ignore them when possible, and at other times, militate against them.[75]

In a 1947 article, the second general guide of the Brotherhood, Hassan al-Houdeibi, rejected the "introduction of positive laws to the civil code, *even* if they did not contradict the *shariʿa*."[76] Olivier Roy speaks about an "Islamic political imaginary," that exists in the minds of Islamists, dominated by a single paradigm, "that of the first community of believers at the time of the Prophet and the first four Caliphs."[77] He argues that in this imaginary, positive laws are prohibited, the *shariʿa* is the only source of law for the sovereign, and the separation between the political and the religious are an abomination.[78] The political practice of Muslim civilisation for more than fourteen centuries is just a parenthesis, to be ignored. Sayyid Qutb makes the case of returning to a "pre-*jahiliyyah*" time, and replica the religio-political model of the Righteous Caliphs.[79] This is an ideal, but the current reality is starkly different, however, we can strive to apply the universal principles of their leadership. The Brotherhood's nostalgia for the period of the Righteous Caliphs blinds them to the subsequent historical reality, and the fact that from the first century AH, a de facto separation of the political existed with its own *qanūn*. Their rejection of history and most of the Islamic intellectual tradition (*turāth*) makes them impervious to the rich sources of Islamic political thought, which they could have drawn upon for our current context.[80]

modern nation state, thus an Islamic state is impossible. See Hallaq WBB. 2012. *Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Modernity's Moral Predicament.* New York: Columbia University Press. See also the discussion of *taʾzir* in Yasien MY. 2024. "The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Meccan Amnesty: An Analysis of Justice, Forgiveness and Reconciliation," in Green MC, Sourou J-B and Gnonzion C (eds) *Law, Religion, and Reconciliation in Africa*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 57.

75 Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 78.

76 Al-Houdeibi H. 1973. *Al-Islam wa al-Daʾiya* [Islam and the Advocate]. Cairo: Dar Al-Ansar (cited in Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood*, 115).

77 Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 12.

78 Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 13.

79 Qutb S. 2000. *Social Justice in Islam.* New York: Islamic Publications International. See also: Mohamed Y. 2008. "Muslim Fundamentalism: The Case of Sayyid Qutb," *Scriptura* 99:379–87.

80 Ibn Khaldun states in his *Muqadima*, "The first stage [of Muslim history] the Caliph existed alone, without any monarchy: later on Caliphate and Monarchy were intertwined and intermixed: finally Monarchy stood out independently of the Caliphate, because it could lean on a power and solidarity distinct from that of the Caliphate." Issawi, 138–39.

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CONCLUSION

The Muslim Brotherhood's embrace of religious fatalism and blunt conflation of the religious and political spheres contributed to their shallow political project. They assumed that their personal piety and virtue would invite divine support and ignored the statecraft essential to navigating the turbulent political landscape of post-revolutionary Egypt. The Brotherhood overlooked the predominantly secular character of political governance. Their perception of the *shariʿa* was totalising and paid little attention to the non-*sharʿi* dimensions of political administration. As a result, their party lacked a coherent political vision and expertise in governance and economic policy.

During their political leadership, the Brotherhood remained exclusive and focused on vying for power. Instead of adopting a revolutionary agenda, they maintained the status quo and merely replaced one authoritarianism for another. The principles of leadership, such as transparency, accountability and inclusivity, were ignored during their tenure. They were experienced at opposition politics, but lacked expertise in governance. Their rule has left a bitter taste of Islamism as a paradigm of leadership in the minds of Egyptians. This is not the end of Islamism in Egypt but for Islamism to thrive again, they would have to shed some of their ideological baggage.

Other Islamist groups managed to successfully transition from opposition politics and establish feasible political programmes. Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, political philosopher and co-founder of Ennahda party, lead a successful democratic transition in Tunisia. He is widely credited for his pluralism and willingness to compromise with secularists in Tunisia. Although affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, he is critical of them and adopted a pragmatic and progressive political agenda in Tunisia. After the coup, the Egyptian government imprisoned many Brothers and labelled the Brotherhood a terrorist organisation. Should this blight ever be lifted, the Brotherhood cannot afford to overlook Islamist thinkers who offer pragmatic models of leadership aligned with our present reality, nor can they ignore the abundant resources of the Islamic intellectual tradition (*turāth*).

The *shariʿa* holds a central position in Islamic governance, but the non-*sharʿi* aspects of political administration are equally important to its functionality. If the *shariʿa* is perceived as the sole directive for politics, it faces undue criticism and the shortcomings in governance are ignored. Politics and ethics can never be divorced, yet a dogmatic and narrow religious agenda should never impose upon politics. Leadership and the timeless wisdom of faith should be inextricably connected, while not disregarding competency and pragmatism. New vistas of Islamic political leadership in Egypt should embrace the diversity of political actors, the grievances of the people, a revolutionary agenda and prudent statecraft, while still upholding the intents of the Divine Law.

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