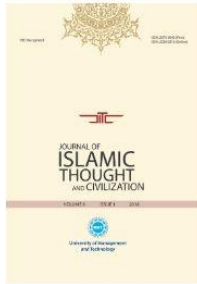


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Dina Abdul Rahman Hosni

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Islamism and Democracy: The Dilemma of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Youth

Dina Hosni*

Institute for Sociology Goethe-University
Frankfurt, Germany

Abstract

The paper is a follow-up analysis of a study about the rise of Islamist youth as a subculture in the Egyptian context in recent years. Focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as an organizational entity, the study has classified youth into 'supportive' youth in terms of their organizational attachment and 'critical' youth, who have called for more democracy and youth empowerment. Critical MB youth have been further subdivided into those who have left the organization and those who have stayed in it despite their political and/or ideological disagreements with the organization. The subculture of critical Islamist youth, notably MB youth, has conspicuously converged with other liberal and secular Egyptian youths regarding their views about democracy. The proposed study suggests some form of internal mobility, as exhibited by the above classification, where based on their altered stance towards democracy a number of 'critical' Islamist youth have joined the 'supportive' camp and a number of 'supportive' Islamist youth have developed 'radicalized' stances. Interestingly enough, some level of convergence could bind supportive and critical Islamist MB youth together, at the expense of their relationship with other liberal and secular youths. The paper is based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis using academic sources and journalistic material.

Keywords: Critical Islamists, youth subculture, Muslim Brotherhood, democracy, plurality versus unity

Introduction

The last decade witnessed the rise of a subculture of Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) youth who were largely urban, technologically savvy and connected with other youths through social networks, and who developed critical stances toward the Brotherhood's ideological rigidity and lack of internal democracy.¹ The recent political events pertaining to Islamism, including the wavering prospects of political Islam as exhibited by the alternating political status of the Muslim Brotherhood and the rise of radical Islamist movements, have further exacerbated the relationship between Islamism and democracy notably in the eyes of Islamist youth. Focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the paper endeavors to explore this convoluted relationship.

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dina Abdul Rahman, Doctoral Candidate, Institute for Sociology Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany, dina_h@aucegypt.edu; The initial paper is an unpublished MA thesis. See Dina Hosni, *The Potential Rise of an Islamist Youth within 25 January Revolts: A Case Study of the Muslim Brotherhood Youth*, Unpublished thesis (American University in Cairo, 2013)

¹Carrie Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 141.



2. A Closer Look into Islamism

Islamism could represent both an ideology and a social movement. The rise of Islamism and Islamist movements, both moderate and violent, could historically be grasped broadly as a reaction to the growing infiltration of the secular state into the role assumed by religion in society.² Islamism as a notion could enfold both ‘Islamist politics’ and the process of ‘re-Islamization,’ where ‘Islamist politics’ refers to the activities of movements and organizations that deploy symbols and signs from Islamic traditions, thus espousing a political ideology that calls for establishing an Islamic government, i.e., a government enforcing the *shari‘ah* (Islamic law). ‘Islamization’ or ‘re-Islamization’ denotes a drive towards Islamizing the social sphere comprising a process through which various facets of social life operate using symbols and signs linked with Islamic cultural traditions.³ Such a definition is required as a point of departure for this paper since the related literature highlights a clear distinction between the two forms of Islamism and focuses on one (i.e., political Islam) rather than the other. Denoëux, for example, has defined Islamism as “a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups or organizations that pursue political objectives.”⁴ The recent events have clearly demonstrated some form of fluidity between the two forms which have significantly impacted the younger generations. Since the Arab uprisings, ideologies have blurred because of the political circumstances such as some Salafists have become MB and vice versa. Such blurring of ideologies may indicate that Islamist youth have recently experienced ideological changes and they are a bit confused. As far as MB youth are concerned, some were recently dominated by Salafist thought but now they have become more open minded. On the contrary, others have noticed the slanting of MB youth members toward the right.

Another distinction in literature on Islamism pertains to ideological strictness which affects the mechanisms deployed toward attaining the specified goals. In this respect, researchers have distinguished between ‘moderate’ Islamists who argue that reform within the existing system could be implemented gradually and ‘radicals,’ who opt for revolutionary change often through the use of violence.⁵ In the wake of the Arab uprisings, it can be noticed that a number of historically apolitical Islamist forces as the Salafists and formerly militant ones such as *Tandheem al-Jihād* and *al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya* in Egypt have espoused the democratic route to compete with mainstream Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶ A considerable number of Muslim Brotherhood youth, their number estimated at 200, are believed to have joined Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and can be labelled as radicalized youth.

²Peter Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2006), 177-181.

³Salwa Ismail, “Being Muslim: Islam, Islamism and Identity Politics,” *Government and Opposition* 39 (4), (2004): 616.

⁴Guilain Denoëux, “The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam,” *Middle East Policy* 9 (2), June (2002): 61.

⁵Jilian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.

⁶Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai, *Political Islam in the Age of Democratization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

Within the whole spectrum of Islamism or rather Islamisms, all Islamists agree on implementing the *Shari'ah*. The diversity lies in the variety of tactics utilized to attain the aspired goals and in the disputes regarding the imagined Islamic state premised on different interpretations of religious texts.⁷

With regard to the ideological transformations within Islamism, three overlapping ideological waves can be identified. The first wave was internationally witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s manifestly inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.⁸ Since Islamist ideology particularly attracted young urban poor at that time,⁹ a delineation of the history of recruiting youth into the Muslim Brotherhood follows in the next section.

3. Youth Recruitment within the Muslim Brotherhood

The goal of Hassan al-Banna was to found an Islamic state premised on gradual reform¹⁰ and maintain a large youth corps.¹¹ He thus worked on recruiting youth particularly university students into MB for the sake of the survival and expansion of the movement. Lower middle class youth were increasingly recruited into MB, not driven solely by the benefits they would gain from joining the organization but also due to the ideological outreach toward them in a fashion conducive to their normative commitment with MB.¹² Politically speaking, MB is clearly affected by the surrounding environment as manifested in the expansion of the organization during periods of political openness and its contraction in times of trouble engendering a pyramid-type relationship and enforcing leadership obedience for the intactness and survival of the organization.¹³ The focus on organizational unity was instrumental for its survival since its conflicting relationship with Nasser's regime during the 1950s and 1960s. Apparently, MB leadership has been able, at least until Mahdi Akef's leadership, to maintain two trends; an 'organizational' or 'conservative' trend that gives priority to the organization and a 'reformist' or 'pro-democracy' trend that which is supported by a high percentage of youth members.¹⁴ Despite all the differences between the two trends, no real conflict has been witnessed. The internal dynamics of MB and the relationship binding it with the regime, particularly during the last decade, have however demonstrated that MB has lost the ability to maintain the coexistence of those two separate trends and the 'organizational' trend has gained supremacy at the expense of the 'pro-democracy' one.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Peter Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World*, 91-176.

⁹ Mathew Cleary and Rebecca Glazier, "Contemporary Islamism: Trajectory of a Master Frame," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 24 (2), (2007): 12.

¹⁰ Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (I. B. Tauris, 1993), 47.

¹¹ M. Zahid and M. Medley, "Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Sudan," *Review of African Political Economy* 110, (2006): 693-708; Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (I. B. Tauris, 1993), 47-48.

¹² Carrie Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹³ Hossam Tammam, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn: Sanawat ma qabl al-Thawra* (The Muslim Brotherhood: The Years before the Revolution) (al-Shorouq, 2012), The Years before the Revolution) (al-Shorouq, 2012), 34.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23-27.



Within the former trend, obedience does not merely constitute an institutional element but rather an ideological concern, such that religion can be used as a means to safeguard the organization.¹⁵ Quoting one pro-democracy ex-MB youth, MB has prioritized *khuṣūṣiyyat al-tanzīm* (exceptionalism of the organization) over *shumūliyyat al-Islam* (comprehensiveness of Islam). As a result of the organizational prioritization, MB base particularly its youth has suffered from a lack of democratic rights.¹⁶ This loss has generated a sense of disgruntlement among many MB youths who have risen as a subculture calling for more democracy and youth empowerment. MB youth subcultural trend has manifested a clear convergence with other youth cultural trends. MB youth accordingly have framed events differently in a way conducive to the generation of two youth orientations; a 'conservative' orientation that has tended to follow the trails of the older generation and a 'pro-democracy' one that has started to criticize the lack of internal democracy as an unacceptable obstacle.¹⁷ The pro-democracy ex/current MB youth members could see that MB leaders do not have a clear concept of 'democracy.'

4. Democracy as a Rising Point of Contention between MB Leadership and its Youth

Democracy has been generally defined as a mode of government where the people rule.¹⁸ Beyond this lie variegated definitions which might in broader terms be categorized into 'procedural' or 'minimalist'; definitions which tend to view democracy as merely a political method used to select political leadership,¹⁹ as well as definitions that bind certain values and ideological goals to the practice of democracy including personal freedom and social justice.²⁰

In general terms, Islamism and Islamist movements are ideologically incompatible with democracy.²¹ The Muslim Brotherhood, which represents moderate Islamism, would virtually refuse the notion of liberal democracy since its emphasis on individual rights conflicts with the emphasis in Islam on the rights of community and the obligation to abide by divine laws.²²

In his epistle to the fifth conference of the Brothers, Hasan el-Banna announced that:

In the eyes of al-Ikhwān: freedom of opinion, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of consultation and freedom of advice are all necessitated in Islam. But excessive insistence on one's opinion, rebellion against unity, seeking to widen

¹⁵ A. R. Ali, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn min Hassan al-Banna to Mahdi Akif* (The Muslim Brothers from Hassan El-Banna to Mahdi Akef) (El-Mahrousa, 1988), 294.

¹⁶ Ibid, 295.

¹⁷ Dina Hosni, "The Potential Rise of an Islamist Youth within 25 January Revolts: A Case Study of the Muslim Brotherhood Youth," (Unpublished Dissertation: American University in Cairo, 2013), 84-85.

¹⁸ G. Sorensen, *Democracy and Democratization* (University of Notre Dame, 1993), 3.

¹⁹ J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen, 1976), 260.

²⁰ Anthony Bubalo, Greg Fealy and Whit Mason, *Zealous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia, and Turkey* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2008), 8.

²¹ Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism*, 224.

²² Bubalo, Fealy and Mason, *Zealous Democrats*, 9.

differences and aiming to destabilize the government are all prevalent to today's party politics. Islam, though, makes the former obligatory and refers to the latter as Harām because Islam in all its basic principles invites toward unity and co-operation and encourages love and brotherhood.²³

Most militant Islamists would also generally oppose procedural democracy. According to Qutb, elections and popular participation in decision-making were acts of apostasy,²⁴ bearing in mind that the Muslim Brotherhood includes a significant percentage of Qutbists particularly among the middle leadership.

For Islamists, particularly MB youth, the period before the Arab uprisings did not witness intellectual *ijtihad* (i.e. thinking) as regard to democracy. They, as MB youth, did not realize then that they would have to explicitly revolt against conservative beliefs regarding democracy. This does not deny the existence of differing views of some pro-democracy MB youth. The launching point of disagreement of those pro-democracy youth with MB culture is the 'sacredness' conferred on the way the Islamic project could be unfolded. MB youth have shown to be 'critical' of such sacredness, yet at differing levels. This applies to those who have not pursued any explicit political direction through establishing or joining other political parties, but it seems to be more manifest among MB youth who have later joined or established other political parties. The latter group also exhibits a relatively less marked Islamic identity in comparison to the former group, which could in a sense be attributed to the political track they have followed. The *Misr al-Qawiyya* party established by a number of ex-MB youth could emblemize the second group since it gives prominence to the state and thus focuses on citizenship values.²⁵ The party thereby identifies on its Facebook page a number of values which include sharing, transparency, responsibility, accountability and professionalism, moral practice and commitment, without furnishing them with an Islamic reference. While *Misr al-Qawiyya* has depicted the moderate Islamic character as a defining trait of the Egyptian identity, it has also emphasized that such an identity is not exclusive to a certain religion and it pertains to the common values and history of the state binding its citizens together.

5. Democracy within the Organization

The differences between MB leadership and pro-democracy ex/current MB youth as regard to the practice of democracy within the organization could be expected in view of the commandments of the MB pledge. Based on such a view, the unity of the organization could be prioritized to the idea of plurality. That youth have accordingly developed critical attitudes toward the organizational lack of democracy since 2005 when they were in the students' department but unfortunately they were not provided opportunities to voice their opinions. While democratic values and political pluralism represent two of the four principles that have been conducive to the unity of the organization despite all the ideological differences among its members, the two principles

²³From "Risala al-Mu'tamar al-Khamis" (Epistle of the fifth conference) in Hasan al-Banna, *Majmu'at al-Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shaheed Hasan al-Banna* [The collected epistles of the imam, martyr Hasan al-Banna] (Cairo: Dar al-Da'wa, 1990).

²⁴Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq (Milestones)* (Dar Ammar Publication, 2009).

²⁵For more detail, see Strong Egypt Party regulation on its Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/MisrAlQawia/app_208195102528120 (accessed on August 11th, 2013)



seem to be interpreted differently by MB members which pertain to the culture of *khuṣūṣiyyat al-tanzīm* (exceptionalism of the organization). In addition, a very narrow grasp of the idea of democracy and pluralism could be exhibited by MB members who follow a Salafist or Qutbist vision as they conceptualize that a strong centralized state is instrumental to foster good morals and values.²⁶ From an organizational standpoint, MB has reacted to regime repression by decentralizing decision making on one side and decentralizing execution during sudden security attacks with the goal of keeping the unity of the organization intact. Conspicuously, the political openness within 2011 Egyptian uprising seems to be more challenging to MB than its former history of repression since the openness witnessed tends to undermine the dominant organizational discourse which advocates unity at the expense of plurality.

Some of those youth have thus resorted to the virtual space as a means to transform democracy²⁷ according to the culture of MB without jeopardizing the unity of the group. This information revolution which has allowed Egyptian youth to participate directly in politics and join the global discourse on democracy, freedom and human rights,²⁸ has furthered the intricacy of the pro-democracy MB youth conceptualization of the Islamist framework as it poses novel socio-political questions.²⁹

MB itself has sought to express its own views through online media during the last decade as a means to proliferate their ideas.³⁰ We should distinguish here between two types of online media discourse propagated by MB, 'Ikhwān online' and 'Ikhwān web,' as regard to form, content and vision in terms of the practice of democracy although both websites are run under the auspices of the media committee of MB. 'Ikhwān online' acts as the official MB website in Egypt and thus represents the organization's anti-democratic policies since its members write in a way geared to preventing any endeavor to attack the organization. In this sense, its discourse is similar to national newspapers that seem to present a single line of thought. On the contrary, 'Ikhwān web' acts as a milieu for MB members' free contribution and thus is tolerant toward elements of self-criticism which could mirror a democratic tendency. The tolerance of 'Ikhwān web' writers by the organization despite their self-criticism could be explained in the existing political context since the punishment of its own members was not deemed tactful in the critical era of Mubarak's rule. From another perspective, youth at that time could not find an *alternative* society to join before the uprisings with the

²⁶Ibrahim al-Houdaiby, "al-Ikhwān al-Muslimun wa Tajrubāt al-Ta'addudiyya" (Muslim Brotherhood and the Experience of Pluralism), *Midan Masr*, <http://www.midanmasr.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=20> (accessed on September 3rd, 2013)

²⁷L. Dahlberg, "Democracy via Cyberspace: Mapping the Rhetorics and Practices of Three Prominent Camps," *New Media and Society*, 3 (2), (2001): 158.

²⁸K. Al-Anani, "The Young Brotherhood in Search of a New Path," *Current Trends Islamist Ideology*, Volume 9, (Hudson Institute: Center on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World, 2009), 96.

²⁹E. Polijarevic, *Exploring Individual Motivation for Social Change: Mobilization of the Muslim Brotherhood's Youth in Pre-Revolutionary Egypt* (Florence: Unpublished PhD Thesis European University Institute, 2012), 197.

³⁰Dina Hosni, "The Potential Rise of an Islamist Youth within 25 January Revolts: A Case Study of the Muslim Brotherhood Youth," (Unpublished Thesis: American University in Cairo, 2013).

existence of the National Democratic Party (NDP) as the sole domain to do public and political work which was associated with the regime. This was in addition to a number of blogs which were launched by a small number of MB members as far back as 2006 which reflect an 'internal mobility' within MB, notably among young members. From early on, the issue of separation between the *da'awi* (proselytizing) leadership and the political leadership has been raised by MB bloggers which resurfaced when MB came in power. Moreover, online and virtual space acted as a meeting milieu between MB bloggers and liberal and secular bloggers who realized by discussion that they share common concerns.

In the public sphere, MB youth have bridged frames³¹ with other youths outside their organization through movements such as *Kefaya* with the stated goal of improving the existing conditions in the country, which was conducive to the 2011 Egyptian uprising. During their student years, MB youth have formed a coordinated council (*lajna tansiqiyya*) with the goal of working together with secular groups at Cairo University regarding political activities going on the campus.³² The council has been further replicated at other universities in the Greater Cairo area, allowing for more cross-partisan cooperation. MB youth worked with *Kefaya* in 2005 and 2006 and have worked with April 6 group since 2008. They resumed this cooperation during 2011 Egyptian uprisings such that they were the first organized group on the Tahrir Square.

6. Relevance of the 2011 Egyptian Uprising

Just like other Arab Spring revolts, 2011 Egyptian uprising is believed to be inspired by largely young, educated and liberal youth (including Islamists with liberal views) who strongly believed in democracy, justice and the rule of law.³³ The events were an eye-opener for a number of MB youth who have become cognizant of the relevance of liberal ideas to the notion of modern state and separation of powers. Some of those MB youth have thus realized the incompatibility between the conservative MB attitudes toward democracy and the new political developments.

Due to the democratic momentum of the uprising, MB realized that it needed to run certain activities separately from its organizational structure.³⁴ The way to do this was to found a political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). MB youth were, however, disappointed that the party leadership was not elected by its founding youth members but by the *Shura* council. Many of them were also against the forced recruitment of the party cadres from within the organization which highlighted that MB opted for unity at the expense of plurality. This resulted in the dismissal of a number of MB youth who did not

³¹D. Snow, E. Rochford, S. Worden, and R. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review*, 51 (4), (1986): 467-468.

³²Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 156.

³³Bokhari and Senzai, *Political Islam*, 16.

³⁴R. Habib, "Ru'ya l-il-Mustaqbal al-Siyasiyy li-l-Ikhwan al-Muslimin: al-Ikhwan bayna al-da'awiyy w-al-Siyaasiyy" (A Vision of the Political Future for the Muslim Brothers: The Brothers between the Proselytizing and the Political). In Amr Al-Shobaky (Ed.), *Azmat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (The Crisis of the Muslim Brothers)* (Al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies, 2009), 17-18.

join the FJP and instead founded their own parties.³⁵ MB youth supporting Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh's presidential candidacy faced a similar retort. A considerable number of MB youth also left the group gradually afterwards. That youth felt that they did not have to back up the organization after it had gained power following the Egyptian uprising as compared to their sense of obligation in earlier times of distress or *meḥ na*, particularly since it was functioning in the same undemocratic manner as it had been under the repressed regime in spite of all the political openness. Their disagreements with the organization as regard to democracy were first structural and gradually deepened to be ideological.³⁶

Two orientations could be noted within the MB youth body; the first supported the organization whereas the second developed a critical stance toward the organizational conceptualization and practice of democracy. The second orientation could further be categorized into two groups; the first saw the difference as more ideological and thus decided that reform could be achieved only by stepping out of the shadow of the Brotherhood through establishing youth parties such as *Al-Tayyar al-Misriy* (The Egyptian Trend) or joining Abul Futūh's *Misr al-Qawiyya* (Strong Egypt) or staying independent. The second group deemed the difference as merely political and did not leave the organization. For this group, the Brotherhood constituted the society they lived in and they could not find any alternative for it. Their fear of being exposed to a similar social instability faced by those who left MB could be a further impediment that prevented those pro-democracy youth from leaving MB. Many of those pro-democracy MB youth members who did not leave the organization within the events lost interest in being organizationally engrossed in any form of political participation until they found an alternative.

The disagreement between the MB leadership and its pro-democracy youth as regard to democracy however seems to be deeper than the preference of one option over another. The Brotherhood, according to these pro-democracy ex/current MB youth, does not seem to have a clear conceptualization of democracy. The notion of '*Shūra*' is not clearly defined but that of 'democracy' including how it could be applied is well-defined. According to these critical youth, MB leaders have opted for the notion of *Shūra* only as it was mentioned in the Qur'ān in two verses "*wa shāwirahum fi-l-'amr*"³⁷ (and take council with them in all matters of public concern) and "*wa 'amruhum shūra baynahum*"³⁸ (and whose rule (in all matters of public concern) is consultation among themselves).³⁹ So, for them the main problem is the Brotherhood's lack of conceptualization of the notion of democracy. As stated in the MB's FJP, the principle of

³⁵ I. El-Houdaiby, "Islamism in and after Egypt's Revolution," In Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi, *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond* (AUC, 2012), 140.

³⁶ Dina Hosni, *The Potential Rise of an Islamist Youth within 25 January Revolts: A Case Study of the Muslim Brotherhood Youth* (Cairo: Unpublished Thesis: American University in Cairo, 2013).

³⁷ al-Qur'ān: al-'Imrān 3:159.

³⁸ al-Shūra 42:38.

³⁹ From my conversation with these pro-democracy MB youth, I could see that as much as the MB was sticking to the notion of *Shūra* to assert that they are Islamists, these MB youth were avoiding the notion to emphasize that they are not.

Shūra is considered as equivalent to democracy⁴⁰ and the function of civil society is to work towards fulfilling the interests of the country.⁴¹ In contradiction, *al-Tayyar al-Misriy* (which later coalesced with the *Misr al-Qawiyya* party) considers Egyptian citizens and their needs as the guiding principle toward real democracy, in which individuals and civil society would work together toward managing the public affairs of the state.⁴² In a similar fashion, Egyptian citizens enjoy real sovereignty as envisaged by the *Misr al-Qawiyya* party, such that the relationship between citizens and state as well as society and state is reconstructed in a manner which renders the state the ‘server’ and citizens the ‘served’ and decision-makers.⁴³ The positioning of citizens vis à vis the state and civil society vis à vis the state could thus be compared between FJP on one side and *al-Tayyar al-Misriy* and *Misr al-Qawiyya* on the other with regard to centrality.

Moreover, contested concepts such as ‘domination’ vs ‘participation’ for the disaffected youth comprise political practices that could possibly be disagreed on. Many pro-democracy MB youth have criticized MB’s fielding of *Khayrat el-Shater* in the 2012 presidential elections, which could denote that the organization has abandoned its propagated slogan of *mushāraka lā mughālabā* (participation no domination). Based on those youth’s testimonies, the underlying problem is not merely the idea of domination but it reflects more what the Brotherhood has attained with such domination, i.e., the (democratic) practices of the Brotherhood when it assumed power. The Muslim Brotherhood did not suffice itself with their massive 2011 parliamentary success but spared no effort to field a presidential candidate as emblemizing the group’s *tamkīn* (empowerment) or *tanfīdh* (implementation) stage, as conceptualized by al-Banna. The appointment of a new prosecutor-general in fact came among a series of actions taken by the then (newly elected) president Muhammad Morsi in what was dubbed by critical Egyptian newspapers as an ‘Ikhwānization’ trend. The process deemed President Morsi and MB as bringing all state-run institutions under their grasp within a short period of time.⁴⁴

7. Conservative MB Youth’s Attitude towards Democracy

The coming of MB to power remarkably generated a gulf between supportive MB youth and other youth members. Among the former group, even those who earlier demonstrated revolutionary tendencies growingly represented the ‘regime’; whereas the

⁴⁰For further information see the election program of the Freedom and Justice Party, 11, <http://www.fjponline.com/uploads/FJPprogram.pdf> (accessed on August 10th, 2013).

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 15.

⁴²For more information, see: *al-Tayyar al-Misriy* Facebook page, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/TMParty/info> (accessed on August 2nd, 2013)

⁴³For more detail, see *Misr Al-Qawiyya* party regulation on its Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/MisrAlQawia/app_208195102528120 (accessed on August 11th, 2013)

⁴⁴Daniel Steinvoth and Volkhard Windfuhr, “Nervous on the Nile: Minorities Fear End of Secularism in Egypt,” *Spiegel Online International*, October 31st, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/growing-influence-of-religion-sparks-fears-across-egypt-a-864226.html> (accessed on February 28th, 2013)



latter including pro-democracy MB youth members stood as the ‘opposition.’⁴⁵ The existing supportive MB youth members developed more introverted, violent and extreme tendencies than the MB leadership itself and the chasm between them and pro-democracy MB youth clearly widened. This growing trend could be attributed to the MB leadership’s efforts to inhibit diversity within the organization and to polarize its youth with the goal of protecting the unity of the organization. From another perspective, those youth seemed to be experiencing some dilemma between their attachment to the organization and their wish to be tolerated by others. Such instability could be witnessed through an array of groups on Facebook such as “*Iḥ nā Shabāb al-Ikhwān ʿid Wāḥ da ma^c a Qiyādatinā*”⁴⁶ (We the Muslim Brotherhood Youth Are One Hand with our Leadership), or “*Iḥ nā Shabāb al-Ikhwān Iʿrafnā ṣ aḥ*”⁴⁷ (We the Muslim Brotherhood Youth - Know us Properly).

8. The Period between June 30 and July 3 as a Historical Moment of Discontinuity

The rising discontent within the Egyptian society particularly since Morsi’s constitutional declaration in 2013 deemed as an “explicit affront to the democratic process”⁴⁸ was conducive to the June 30 events launched by the Tamarod campaign with the aim of overthrowing the regime. A considerable number of ex-MB youth, notably members of *Misr al-Qawiyya* participated in the events and called for early presidential elections.

But if those youth largely agreed on the necessity of protesting against the MB rule, they have almost unanimously viewed the July 3 events, when Morsi was deposed by President al-Sissi, as a coup. They were neither particularly opposed to his deposition nor did the violation of the notion of legitimacy as raised by most MB members worried them but they were opposed to the enforcement of the sole power of the military. From that moment onwards, the framing disputes between pro-democracy MB members on one side and the MB leadership and the MB supportive youth on the other have started to dissolve.

Obviously, the period of June 30 to July 3, 2013 constituted a reaction to the political events rather than any chance for intellectual thinking. For young Islamists, July 3 was a point of ‘othering’ and getting rid of whoever adheres to different ideologies. Since then, the project of reconciling religion and state in a democratic way has stalled.

When MB supporters occupied the *Rab'a* mosque area, many pro-democracy MB youth visited the site a number of times to advise their friends to clear the site for early presidential elections to be held. Citing one of them, “we have hoped then that we could

⁴⁵Based on the researcher's interview with an MB member (21 years), October 10th, 2012, Cairo.

⁴⁶For further information see Facebook Page available at <https://www.facebook.com/shabab.ikhwan> (accessed on May 6th, 2013)

⁴⁷For further information see Facebook Page available at <https://www.facebook.com/ikwan.s7> (accessed on May 6th, 2013)

⁴⁸Kristen Stilt, “Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes: The Egyptian Constitution of 1971,” In *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes*, Tom Ginsburg and Alberto Simpser (eds.), 111-140 (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

politically and democratically defeat the MB through the ballot box, not using security measures as what has happened afterwards which would breed nothing but more violence.”

The evacuation of the *Rab'a* sit-in which resulted in a large death toll among MB members and supporters could stand as a turning point for those pro-democracy youth who sensed outrageous resentment against the military and had intense feelings of sympathy for their fellow Brothers. The evacuation has generated a “Karbala-like”⁴⁹ impact on MB members where it has turned into a *déjà vu* such that they have referred to the events as a “massacre,” to their killed Brothers as “martyrs” and to the whole experience as reminiscent of Nasser’s massacres against MB back in the 1960s. Their older feelings of ‘injustice’ against MB, which was ‘repressed’ by the military regime, have thus been diminished and their entrenched sense of victimization has loomed up and has converged the MB youth toward the organization.

9. Later Internal Mobility within the MB Youth Divisions

The previously mentioned divisions among MB ex/current youth have thus accordingly witnessed some form of internal mobility under the broader classification of supportive/critical (pro-democracy) youth.

For pro-democracy MB members who used to call for reform from within two further orientations could be detected; one orientation has maintained its critical stance toward the organization and has considered the leadership accountable for the status quo, but still believes that they should hold on to their grudges against MB during its hardship and blame it later when the distress is over. Many of those have thus refused to leave the organization reckoning such act as devoid of *jad'ana* (manhood) but have become louder in their criticism of the lack of democracy as practiced by the old guard. The second group has shifted its stance from being critical to being supportive, believing that MB was thus acting in a right way anticipatively of the frail prospects of democracy in Egypt. The picture has become more complex in view of the conflict between the new MB leadership that has realized the need to abandon the organization's antediluvian top-down approach in favor of internal democracy within the new political circumstances and the old guard that could see that such democratic practice might manage the current crisis but in the long run could jeopardize the organization's unity. Hence, they would prefer to give up part of the MB base in order to keep the organizational structure intact.⁵⁰ The new MB leadership is now struggling to keep a balance between its new practice of internal democracy and its ability to maintain the now non-centralized less-intact structure of the organization.

As for pro-democracy members who have left the organization, an overall sense of sympathy could bind such ex-MB members into groups, whether those who tend to agree with the acts of violence committed by MB youth members as a normal reaction to the sufferings they have lately endured, or those who might not agree with the violent

⁴⁹ Ibrahim Houdaiby, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Transition,” *Mada Masr*, March 18, 2015, <http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/politics/muslim-brotherhood-transition>

⁵⁰ George Fahmy, “al-Sirā' 'ala qiyādat jamā'at al-'ikhwān al-muslimīn fi miSr” (The Conflict over the Leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood Group in Egypt), *Carnegie* 4 July 2015, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/07/14/ar-60720/idgl>



acts but could still be understanding of such acts. The differences between those ex-MB youth members and the organization reveal a shift from being *ideological* to being merely *political*, and their strong sense of ‘brotherhood’ seems to rule. Moreover, the ex-MB youth members who have joined different parties and groups seem to show some level of convergence, as exhibited by youth members in *al-Tayyar al-Misriy* who have coalesced with *Misr al-Qawiyya*. More recently, a significant number of *Misr al-Qawiyya* members who left the party following its decision to participate in June 30 protests decided to rejoin the party as a token of solidarity when *Misr al-Qawiyya* president and deputy head were detained over ties with MB. The convergence could be more evidently exhibited among current and ex-MB members, both pro-democracy or supporters who have travelled to other states as a form of political exile, whether for those who have been summoned for interrogation or those who feared that they would be summoned. This poses the question as to how their ideas and orientations change during their political exile which might raise some concern particularly in view of their countries of destination. Qatar and Turkey have recently been the major points of attraction for those youth. We cannot forget that the growing impact of Salafi ideas and practices among MB youth members has been imported from the Gulf;⁵¹ Similarly, we cannot ignore the projection of Turkey as a potential nucleus for the Islamic *Cilāpha* (rule).

Even those who have stayed in the country and who have been advocating democracy within the organization and on the state level, they are lingering in limbo since they have left the organization and on the state level they could see democracy as currently nonexistent.

Supportive (Conservative) MB youth could be split into two groups having two different orientations; a *more supportive* group that has become more tolerant of the leadership and even more conservative than it had been with the rising crackdown on the members and their assets. Some of them have started to adopt a *radical stance* with the excessive dehumanization and ‘othering’ they have been exposed to in the media, the exclusion they have confronted from society, the dearth of leaders whether arrested or missing and the interim absence of the organization as an ideological reference.⁵² Those representing this second orientation have started to feel that the democratic option did not do them good, and thus in view of the martyrdom and sufferings of their fellow Brothers, a considerable number of them have started to give up the peace principle believing that peace will not help the organization attain its goal; namely, the downfall of the existing political regime or at least pressuring it to make some concessions.⁵³ Some of these youth have been recently engaged in some limited individual violent acts as burning security cars. The MB leadership failed to stop these acts. Instead, it has worked on controlling them based on the level of anger of its youth in certain districts. So, the leadership refused to allow its members to practice random violence against the military and security forces, but has permitted ‘limited violence’ in order to keep the organizational unity intact and to prevent youth members from joining fundamentalist jihadist

⁵¹ Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 144.

⁵² Ibrahim Houdaiby, “The Muslim Brotherhood in Transition,” *Mada Masr*, March 18, 2015, <http://www.madamasr.com/opinion/politics/muslim-brotherhood-transition>

⁵³ George Fahmy, “al-Sirā' 'ala Qiyādat Jamā'at al-'Ikhwān al-Muslimīn fi miSr” (The Conflict over the Leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood Group in Egypt), *Carnegie* 4 July 2015, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/07/14/ar-60720/idgl>

movements. *The Islamic State in Saynā'* also known as *Wilāyat saynā'* as a matter of concern is believed to be keen on recruiting disgruntled MB youth toward carrying out suicide-bombing attacks.⁵⁴ Since, unlike before, when youth commented that they could not leave the organization though they were not contented with a number of aspects due to the unavailability of an alternative toward promoting an Islamic project, radical alternatives have now loomed up. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) for instance, has declared a Muslim Caliphate, which goes in line with the MB's sixth goal; namely, establishing a state of united Islamic states encompassing all Islamic states placed as one state under one central leadership, the Prophet's (*SAW*) *Calīpha* (successor).⁵⁵ The Islamic State has not only attracted those who seek "to find identity, purpose, belonging or spiritual fulfillment,"⁵⁶ but has also gained the support of others as some tribes not out of their support for the ambitions of the Caliphate but largely because they oppose the government have thrown in their support.⁵⁷ The disgruntled MB youth could fit into both categories where they could mourn the loss of their parent organization declared as banned and terrorist and they also could largely oppose the government due to the large toll of detentions and killings of their folks. The current MB leadership is now in a predicament since it cannot fully control those radicalized movements nor does it has the luxury to dispense with some of its youth base at this critical stage. The concern of the old guard goes beyond the borders of MB in Egypt to the prospects of the Muslim Brotherhood worldwide.

The silver linings cannot, however, be ignored. The disgruntlement of the supportive-to-radicalized MB youth could still be absorbed on both the organizational and state levels. Within the organization, some level of democratic practice or even democratic dialectic between the current MB leadership, old guard and MB youth base seems to have materialized, which could be a good start. On the state level, a considerable number of MB youth who have been detained based on the demonstration law have now been released.

With all the antagonism of those youth shown toward the lack of democracy, even in view of those who have developed reactionary stances toward the prospects of democracy because of the events, for example the recent arrest of Abdel Moneim Abul Futūh and the freezing of the *Misr al-Qawiyya* party, we can still see that the conceptualization of democracy by many of them is still far from that espoused by radical Islamist movements such as ISIS as stated in the statement of the ISIS legislative committee, "The call for establishing a civil pluralistic democratic government is anti-Islamic ... as it calls for the judgment of *TaGūt* (tyranny) rather than God."⁵⁸

In concur with pro-democracy ex/current MB youth, the time is now ripe for a clear conceptualization of the notion of state, democracy and the relationship between religion and state. Based on their comments, we are now beyond the intellectual

⁵⁴The issue of radicalized youth subcultures in fact is not new to the history of the MB. In 1939 *jama'at shabab Muhammad* (Muhammad Youth Group), a group of youth members under the leadership of Mahmoud Osman Abo Zeid has dissented from the Organization.

⁵⁵S. Hawwa, *al-Islam* (Islam) (Cairo: Wahba Library, 1977), 63-64.

⁵⁶Richard Barrett, *The Islamic State*, 2014, 7.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁸See ISIS legislative committee statement on the Islamic Front and its Leadership.

dormancy of the period before the Egyptian uprising and the political and ideological polarization post June 30th. The impact of the eye-opening experience of the Egyptian uprising has alerted the society, notably the Islamist youth, to the importance and compatibility of the notion of democracy in their lives.

10. Conclusion

Focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood, the paper has explored the dynamics of the Islamist youth subculture in the Egyptian context during the recent years. Some form of internal mobility could be witnessed within the cadres of MB youth based on their altered stance toward democracy. A number of 'critical' Islamist youth have joined the 'supportive' camp, and a number of 'supportive' Islamist youth have developed 'radical' stances. Some level of convergence could bind supportive and critical Islamist youth, notably MB youth, at the expense of their relationship with other liberal and secular youths.

The paper has however concluded that with all the cheerless prospects of democracy in the eyes of ex/current MB youth, the hope for the recuperation of democracy is still there whether for supportive MB youth who are still far from radical Islamist groups' anti-democratic outlooks, or for critical pro-democracy MB youth who, though disappointed by the limited public space allowed, are seeking new avenues for the practice of democracy. In tandem with the previous research, the future of Islamism will depend on the way the movement is framed,⁵⁹ notably on its conceptualization of democracy.

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⁵⁹Mathew Cleary, and Rebecca Glazier, Rebecca. "Contemporary Islamism: Trajectory of a Master Frame," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 24 (2), (2007): 17.

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