

The Muslim Brotherhood: From the Caliphate to the Modern Civic State

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Abstract

The Muslim Brotherhood plays a prominent role in the politics of many Muslim countries as one of the largest Islamist groups. As a politico-social movement, the Muslim Brotherhood has gone through many tactical and ideological shifts over the past 90 years since its founding in 1928. Studying these shifts and the reasoning behind them can help us to understand the behaviour of certain groups. This paper studies one of the major shifts in the discourse of the movement, from the advocacy for restoring the Caliphate to the call for a modern civic state, despite the idea of the Caliphate having been one of the core motives behind the founding of the Brotherhood. This paper traces the change in Muslim Brotherhood discourse of the Caliphate through a thick analysis of the writings and statements of the prominent leaders of the group, starting with Brotherhood's founder, al-Banna, and progressing to the leaders of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. This paper examines **this shift's degree** of significance and its underlying rationale. Instead of addressing changes collectively, each change is considered individually to gain further insight into the incentives driving the major shift under study, namely the overhaul of the political discourse of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in so far as shifting from adopting the caliphate to the modern civic state. This shift in the Caliphate discourse is approached singularly, opening room for exclusive explanations that are unique to the altered concept. While a wholesale approach that treats changes as a collective succeeds in explaining the changes within some social and political movements, it ignores substantial factors and elements that are advantageous for profound understanding of the case in question. The shift in the Caliphate discourse, though it was not significant in practice, is useful in suggesting an alternative method for the justification of tactical and ideological shifts of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Keywords: Muslim Brotherhood, Caliphate, al-Banna, Egyptian Revolution

Introduction

Tactical and ideological shifts commonly occur in social and political movements around the world. Many studies investigate the motives behind these shifts in order to understand the behaviour of certain groups and predict the consequences of its policies. Political Islam movements (i.e., Islamist movements) have attracted the attention of sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, and area studies specialists for the last two decades. One of the major transnational Islamist movements that has survived for over ninety years and enjoys presence in eighty countries worldwide is the Muslim Brotherhood. Any study of Islamist movements and their ideological, behavioural, and strategic shifts over time rarely overlooks the Muslim Brotherhood, such is their significance to Islamism globally.

Ideological and tactical shifts within Islamist movements could be significant enough to usher a new era, called post-Islamism,¹ yet on the other hand, the shifts may be insignificant, leaving core goals or beliefs intact. This paper focuses on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and one of the major shifts in the discourse of its leaders from supporting the restoration of the Caliphate to adopting the modern civic state, and examines this shift's degree of significance and its underlying rationale. Instead of addressing changes as a collective, I approach them individually to gain further insight into the incentives that drive them. This is because studying changes as a whole tends to lead to justifications that may not be accurate or overlook significant motives. The exceptionalist approach, which treats Islamist groups as an exception to social movements, is not accurate, while the moderation-inclusion approach, which argues that extremist groups adopt moderation to be included in the broader community, overlooks motives that inspire some individual changes.

Ideological changes within the Muslim Brothers

There is a rich literature on the ideological, behavioural, and strategic changes of socio-political and Islamist movements in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. The literature has primarily moved on from a discussion on the compatibility between democracy and Islam to examine the changes in beliefs and practices of Islamist groups and the extent to which they support liberal democratic values. Arguing against the exceptionalist studies of Muslim Brothers, Mona El-Ghobashy explains the dynamics of the ideological changes within the Muslim Brothers showing how they are similar to Western social movements.² Some

¹ Bayat 2013.

² El-Ghobashy 2005.

previous studies focused on whether the inclusion-moderation approach is sufficient to explain the ideological shifts of the Muslim Brotherhood.³ A decent body of research was directed to the study of activism, tactics, and social provision of the Muslim Brotherhood,⁴ while other researchers studied the history, formation, order, and the development of the group.⁵ However abundant, research on the Muslim Brotherhood has ignored the centrality of the Caliphate to its members' core beliefs and in the discourse of its founders and successive leaders. As time passed, this centrality began to wane, especially in the last two decades, to give rise to the civil democratic state as the **Brotherhood's** primary aspiration. Although ideological and behavioural changes in the movement are the focus of this study, this important shift in discourse and goals is absent in Western academic research. One likely reason is that many academics treat changes as a single composite subsumed under the category of liberal values, when in fact, some cases show that such changes involve illiberal motives or are adopted by individuals or a minority group within the movement, not the mainstream. This study will address this by centring the **Muslim Brotherhood's shift in attitude towards the Caliphate** and examining how the shift took place.

Centrality of the Caliphate

Being one of the foundations on which the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood is established earns the caliphate top priority. Thus, the shift in the **movement's goals** from reviving the Caliphate to the adoption of the modern civic state, or the democratic state is worthy of analysis.

Caliphate took centre stage in the mission of some movements and organizations. Established in 1928, the prominent Muslim Brotherhood '*al-'Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*' was a reaction to the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. The announced main goal of the Muslim Brothers was the reinstatement of the Caliphate. The **Brotherhood's founder, Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-49)**, stated that:

"The Muslim Brotherhood believes that the Caliphate is the symbol for Muslim unity and an Islamic rite to which Muslims must pay attention and think about, Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood places caliphate and its restoration at the highest [priority] in their project."⁶

Al-Banna believed that the reestablishment of the Caliphate would be difficult to accomplish during his life, as it required several preconditions. At the

³ Al-Anani 2020; El-Ghobashy 2005; Schwedler 2011; Wickham 2004; Wickham 2013.

⁴ Al-Arian 2014; Awadi 2004; Brooke 2019; Brown 2012; Masoud 2014; Wickham 2002.

⁵ Al-Anani 2007; 2016; Brynjar 2010; El-Ghobashy 2005; Mitchell 1993; Munson 2001; Wickham 2013.

⁶ Al-Banna n.d.

time, Egypt was under British occupation, especially in the Ismailiyya governorate where al-Banna was raised. In Ismailiyya, the elite were the British and their allies, while Egyptians were the proletariat, who were culturally and religiously oppressed.⁷ Other Egyptian governorates were in better condition than Ismailiyya. They were under the control of Egyptian leaders who bid loyalty to the British occupation. Most of the Muslim countries of this era were under different occupational forces and experiencing the same fate as Egypt. Aware of the then-new order that had been established in Egypt and the deplorable status of other Muslim 'states', al-Banna followed a strategic plan to re-establish the Caliphate, and accordingly established the Muslim exemplary order '*ustādhiyyat al-Ālam*'. Al-Banna aimed to offer an Islamic education for the Muslim public to qualify their members for building 'ideal' Muslim families and gradually become the ideal Muslim community. Through free 'elections', this community would yield a Muslim government that placed Sharia as the source of legislation and guidance for both the rulers and the ruled. Sharia will govern the societal relations as well as the governmental practices. The existence of such governments in all Muslim 'states' is required for the institution of the unity of the Muslim *ummah*, who could then elect a caliph or a president for this unified body, commonwealth, or Muslim union; the title is unimportant so long as unity is achieved. It lines up with the common goal espoused by all the historical shapes of the Caliphate. In short, any form of government capable of forging this unity is equivalent of the desired Caliphate.

The endeavours of al-Banna reflected his deep appreciation of this unity. In an article titled 'No for Nationalism, No for Globalization', al-Banna rejects both notions, as the former breaks Muslim unity and raises nationality above the unifying bond (Islam), while the latter serves the dominant powers of the world and weakens Muslims.⁸ Instead, al-Banna suggests the Muslim Brotherhood as a unifying umbrella concept for all Muslims around the globe. From the early days of his mission, al-Banna developed transnational links by communicating with Muslims from other countries to establish the department of foreign communications inside the movement. In 1933, the first foreign branch was founded in Djibouti.⁹ This global vision of the Muslim Brotherhood was manifested at the time when two critical moments exhausted the group's efforts and mind. In 1948, the UN issued the Partition Plan for Palestine and the Constitutional Revolution, otherwise known as 'Al-Waziri Coup' that took place in Yemen. Although the Muslim Brotherhood

⁷ Abd al-Ḥalīm 1994.

⁸ لا القومية ولا العالمية .. بل الأخوة الإسلامية n.d..

⁹ التنظيم العالمي للإخوان المسلمين .. النشأة والتاريخ n.d.

were depleted while fighting against the Al-Nuqrashi government in Egypt, they stopped all their opposition activities to side with King Farouq and the Egyptian government, hoping that they could intervene and oppose the UN plan. In addition, the group sought to reduce their local liabilities so that they could strongly support the Yemeni Constitutional Revolution. At that early phase of the movement, while al-Banna was actively advocating his mission in the Egyptian society, he was also targeting other Muslim countries. In other words, al-Banna moved deliberately towards achieving his strategic plan to unite Egypt and other Muslim countries under one order. Thus, as a symbol for Muslim unity, the Caliphate occupied a pivotal status for al-Banna and constituted the prime rationale for establishing his movement.

Contrary to al-Banna, Sayyed Qutb was not tolerant to all forms of governance around him. Rather, he espoused a new agenda where the Muslim creed must prevail and form the base on which the whole community is organized. This means that God is the sole legislator, and the state constitution must conform to the decrees dictated by God in the Quran or the tradition of the prophet of Islam. The mission for Qutb was not to modify the existing order to make it 'Islamic', but to create a new order that enforces Islam throughout all social, economic, and political domains. That is, affiliation to Islam, according to Qutb's model, is dependent on fulfilling such goals, and the individuals who do so constitute the Muslim community in the face of other non-Muslim communities who fail to accomplish those goals. Hence, Qutb aims at achieving two different types of caliphate 'vice-regencies'. First, every single Muslim is a caliph appointed by God to exemplify the Muslim who surrenders oneself to the will of God alone, and rejects all other orders, laws, and values that are obtained from earthly authorities (Qutb 2012, 114). It could be argued that Qutb's proposal is not different from al-Banna's strategic plan for the accomplishment of the Muslim society. However, Qutb's imagination requires complete isolation from any individuals or communities non-compliant with Sharia. In his vision of the community, there is no outreach to other communities or to recruit more members. That is, when an individual achieves the status of 'believer', he will automatically join the community of believers. This way, the believers' community will emerge and shape itself. This way of emergence and composition is a unique feature of the Muslim community as Qutb views it. This community, according to Qutb, cannot be studied, modified, treated, or formed using concepts, methodologies, or tools of any foreign order (Qutb 2012, 119). Unlike Qutb, al-Banna views his community as a valid order to grow his ideal form of the Islamic community. In need of reformation and spiritual education, the nascent Muslim

Brotherhood recruited Egyptians, upon whom al-Banna would depend when founding the Muslim community as a precondition for the Caliphate.

The second type of caliphate ‘vice-regency’ that Qutb calls for is the rule of God over all believers. In other words, the governance of this community of believers will formulate its laws exclusively from God alone; that is, from His revelation and the commandments of His messenger. As a consequence of the first type of caliphate, each person will conduct oneself in accordance with God’s law. Therefore, the same believer would follow God’s code of law when dealing with others and when practicing any aspect of communal life. In this order, the believers are obliged to create the territory of Islam against any other order. The criterion for an individual to affiliate with this community is being a Muslim who surrenders oneself fully to the will of God in all matters of life.

The political and social contexts in which Qutb lived provide an explanation for the radicality in Qutb’s thought. While Qutb agrees with al-Banna in as far as the necessity of the Muslim unity on the bases of Islam, he differs in his vision of how the community should be and the strategic plan needed to establish it. Qutb calls for an immediate break with the Muslim community if it violates the criteria of the believers’ community, such as displaying reluctance to disavow the current state of the world and its tyrannic *jāhiliyyah*-like practices. This radical proposal was in response to the severe oppression inflicted on Qutb and his comrades by the Nasserite regime. Abdel-Naser, once a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, became the group’s fiercest enemy.¹⁰ After the events of al-Manshiyyah, Abdel-Naser accused the Muslim Brotherhood of the assassination attempt, arresting some of its members, including Sayyid Qutb. Imprisoned in the ill-reputed military prison and severely tortured for ten years, Qutb afterwards introduced his radical thoughts.¹¹ Without engaging the indecisive narratives around the truth of the accusations or trials, Qutb’s prison experience was a nightmare. This dreadful experience is what shaped Qutb’s views of society and is why many researchers divide Qutb’s life into three stages: the secular, the moderate Islamist, and the radical.¹²

Facing the same fate, Abdel-Qader ‘Odeh – a judge, constitutional jurist, a pioneer, and proto thinker of the Muslim Brotherhood – was sentenced to death directly after the events of al-Manshiyyah. Although ‘Odeh was a close friend of Abdel-Naser, like Qutb, and an ardent supporter of his coup in July 1952, he was

¹⁰ Muhyī al-Dīn 1992, 41-47.

¹¹ Abd al-Ḥalīm 1994; Jami 2004; Toth 2013, 80-81; Uqayl 2006.

¹² Musallam 1997; 2005; Toth 2013.

accused of abetting the failed assassination attempt. ‘Odeh was executed just a few months after his arrest in 1954, so his prison experience did not shape his ideas. As a jurist and a close disciple of al-Banna, ‘Odeh’s view of the Caliphate is a continuation of al-Banna’s view. In his book on the role of Islam in politics, ‘Odeh devoted the biggest portion of his book *‘al-Islām wa-awḍā‘unā al-siyāsīyah’ (Islam and Our Political Situation)* to the discussion of the Caliphate and its status in Islam.¹³ ‘Odeh explained some of al-Banna’s ideas on governance and the ideal structure the Muslim Brotherhood endeavours to accomplish. ‘Odeh insists on the inevitability of the Caliphate for Muslims seeking reference for this inevitability in scripture, historical caliphal experiences, and consensus amongst jurists and the companions of the Prophet. Like al-Banna, ‘Odeh does not require a certain form of order or particular titles to achieve his vision of the Caliphate, as it requires employing Sharia as the main reference in governance and *shura* as the sole method of state decision-making. He does not agree with democracy and other modern forms of government since they are not equivalent to their Islamic peers. However, unlike al-Banna, ‘Odeh sought reference for the Caliphate in the tradition of *al-Siāsah al-Shar‘īyah* or Sharia political theory, frequently citing ibn Khaldoun, al-Mawardi, and other theology scholars.¹⁴ The book follows the same pattern of classical Muslim works on the Caliphate; thus, it was no novelty but rather building on the works of classical Muslim political theory scholars.

Following the same legacy, ‘Omar al-Telmsani, the third General Guide for the Muslim Brotherhood, criticizes the opponents of Muslim governance and denounced their description of it as theocratic. When defending Muslim governance, al-Telmsani lists several examples and historical precedence to show the superiority of this type of rule over any other. All the examples mentioned in this study are from the historical eras of the Caliphate. Although the word ‘Caliphate’ was not mentioned in al-Telmsani’s long treatise, his entire narrative and supporting evidence are attributed to what was historically called the Caliphate. Moreover, al-Telmsani believes that a Muslim government must abide by Sharia and discard man-made laws. At the end of his treatise, al-Telmsani refers to the treatises of al-Banna for additional information on the superiority of the Muslim governance. Contrary to Olivier Roy, who argues that the term ‘Caliphate’ ended after al-Banna,¹⁵ in fact until 1984, following the death of al-Telmsani and during the time of Mustafa

¹³ Odeh 1994, 247-371.

¹⁴ Odeh 1980.

¹⁵ Roy 2007.

Mashhour who agrees with his forebears, the Caliphate was alive and strongly displayed in the public discourse and writings of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Caliphate Convolutd: Accounts of the Key Figures

Reviewing the accounts of al-Banna, Qutb, ‘Odeh, and al-Telmsani on the idea of the Caliphate and its integration in the ideological structure of the Muslim Brotherhood, we notice inconsistencies and vagueness. This vagueness is one of the reasons why the discourse on the Caliphate became dimmer, especially in light of requests for the movement to provide a clear agenda of the social and political reform plan. For al-Banna, the Caliphate focuses on the idea of uniting the Muslim masses under one leader: the Caliph. However, al-Banna believes that the time for this Caliphate has not yet come. Al-Banna is convinced that Islam is against nationalism and geographic borders, yet urges his followers to work for their countries and the territories within which they live, asserting that loving one’s country is encouraged by Islam.¹⁶ For al-Banna, Muslim states that have a Sharia-consistent and reform-minded government would qualify them to join ranks and establish the Caliphate under the rule of one Caliph. Still, al-Banna’s thought process confuses the Caliphate as a transnational idea with the nation state as a geographically defined body. In contrast, for Qutb, the Caliphate is ideological. The least number of members to establish it is as low as three individuals. The political and social contexts were entirely overlooked in Qutb’s model of the Caliphate; thus, his idea was regarded as utopian. While al-Banna argues that righteous leaders are necessary to drive the reform, Qutb insists that reform and righteous governing is a natural result of the existence of a group of believers. Unlike al-Banna, who states that Muslims “must think about the Caliphate”,¹⁷ ‘Odeh rephrases the classical literature on the Caliphate, rendering it as an obligation for all Muslims. ‘Odeh neither questions the feasibility of the classical model of the Caliphate and its implications on today’s world, nor does he discuss the fate of the state-quo if his model of Caliphate is put into effect. It is noteworthy that these visions leave many questions unanswered: from the diverse array of historical caliphal forms, which model is to be applied? If the historical forms are not compulsory for Muslims to follow, what are the characteristics of the new order? What is the role of existing nation states and what are the limits of their sovereignty? What is the situation of the non-Muslim minorities and the relationship with Muslim minorities in other

¹⁶ رسالة المؤتمر الخامس n.d.

¹⁷ رسالة المؤتمر الخامس n.d.

countries? These are disturbing questions that produce unrest within the Muslim Brotherhood, especially between the reformists and the conservatives.¹⁸

I argue that the vagueness of the meaning of 'Caliphate' and the diverse forms of caliphal rule are key reasons behind the demise of the term in the Muslim Brotherhood's discourse and literature. However, the four leaders do agree on three characteristics of the Caliphate: the Muslim unity under one rule, *shura* ('consultancy'), and ruling according to Sharia. And, since the Caliphate was perceived to encompass those characteristics, the term was used in the literature of the group to represent them. Still, the term does not express the three principles exclusively, which is the reason why it has been replaced by the term 'Islamic state'. 'Caliphate' is historically an institution of government rather than a description of justice, as it applies to both righteous and unrighteous forms of government. Even though the term 'Islamic state' is vague, it is flexible, innovative, and poses no historical dilemma of any type. In the literature of the Muslim Brotherhood, the 'Islamic state' does not intersect with the modern nation-state; rather it is any polity that guarantees the realization of the three founding principles required for the 'Islamic' regime. The following section, which explores the emergence of the state discourse, supports this hypothesis.

The State Discourse

The discourse of the state was present since the time of al-Banna yet unattached to the modern nation state. The state was broadly defined as a polity without any specifications attributed to the modern nation-state. 'Odeh and al-Telmsani used the term 'Islamic state' as well, but their vision of the Islamic state conforms with the model of the historical caliphate, or any polity that is governed by Sharia. We can glean this vision from al-Banna's rejection of all forms of partisanship or nationalism. Importantly, we must note that the Arabic term '*dawla*' is not identical to the term 'state' in its Western origins. '*Dawla*' was used in some pre-modern literature to refer to the different dynasties that ruled the Muslim territories, and the term 'Islamic state', though widely cited in the literature of the Muslim Brotherhood, lacks its definitive technical dimensions.¹⁹

Although the modern or democratic state discourse gained traction directly after the Egyptian revolution in 2011 in the discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood, the beginning of this discourse could be attributed to the mid-1990s, when a group of the movement decided to form a coalition with other opposition parties and sign

¹⁸ Tammam n.d., 6-7.

¹⁹ Abed-Kotob 1995, 325.

document of national concord known as '*al-Wifāq al-Waṭanī*'.²⁰ Even though the agreement ultimately failed under General Guide Ma'moun al-Hudibi, a reformist wing appeared who were active and willing to develop coalitions on national bases. The agreement failed because al-Hudibi's insisted on stipulating the dominance of Sharia over the articles of the agreement. This did not mean that the reformists, who were from the younger generation, were abandoning the call for Sharia. Rather, it was a strategic move designed to create a common platform with other opposition groups and gradually introduce Sharia to the platform. Still, during these times, discourse on the Caliphate was present in the background, and Muslim government was the main goal driving the endeavors of the Muslim Brotherhood. What changed is that the Muslim government would adopt democracy as a method for decision-making.²¹

The beginning of 2004 is the date claimed to mark a new era of openness and accommodation from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood towards other groups and ideas. The Brotherhood had won 88 seats in the parliamentary elections of 2005, representing 20% of the total seats.²² During this era of political openness in Egypt, known as the 'Cairo Spring', the reformist wing of the Muslim Brotherhood was able to speak publicly and express themselves. They exhibited **some 'liberal' views** that were thought of as taboo within the movement, such as accepting a non-Muslim president for Egypt if he was democratically elected.²³ Both reformists and conservatives in the movement supported democracy and called for it repeatedly on different occasions, even announcing the Muslim Brotherhood was calling for a civil democratic state.²⁴ What must be explored is this: when the members of the Muslim Brotherhood call for democracy and a civil democratic state, does this reflect an acceptance of the modern liberal state and Western democracy? Is the term civil '*madaniyyah*' laden with its Western signification? Does the above announcement to accept a democratically elected non-Muslim president reflect the group's position?

In 2007, the Muslim Brotherhood published a manifesto organizing their political participation. The manifesto illustrates their stances on different political arguments in the Egyptian political and social scenes.²⁵ One article asserts the inability of women and Coptic Christians to run for presidency or to hold supreme

²⁰ El-Ghobashy 2005, 385-386.

²¹ Tammam 2012, 19.

²² Tammam 2012, 18-19.

²³ Tammam 2012, 19.

²⁴ الجزيرة 2009.

²⁵ Nugent 2020.

leadership positions. Another, on the establishment of a Higher Ulama Council, explains clearly what the Muslim Brotherhood means by democracy and civil democratic state. The limitations on the status of women and non-Muslims in this platform were justified in light of Sharia by some members of the conservative and dominant wing of the movement. The Deputy of the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammad Habib, defended the article, asserting that it agrees with the decisive texts of Sharia and follows the predominant legal opinion of the Muslim jurists. Hence, this situation infers that the perception of democracy held by the official voices of the Muslim Brotherhood is a democracy limited by the commandments of Sharia. This form of democracy is otherwise termed *shura*. For the Muslim Brotherhood, the term *shura* means the exchange of opinions among certain groups to reach an agreement on certain matters, usually relating to rule and governance.²⁶ *Shura* is only applied in the absence of textual evidence and must conform to the guidelines of Sharia. Democracy, as perceived by the Muslim Brotherhood, means adopting the procedural element of democracy as a method to decide on contested matters that are un-definitively addressed by Sharia. However, democracy as a comprehensive philosophy is not supported by the Muslim Brotherhood; they reject the very concept of equal political rights for all. It could be argued that this view is not necessarily the view of the movement, since some members, especially from the reformist wing, disagreed with several of these terms. It would be a strong argument if the opposing branch took a firm stand and altered these articles in the final draft, but this did not happen. Rather, they conceded and conformed to the *shura*-imposed majority opinion.²⁷

The second contested article reflects the dominance of Sharia and its centrality to the doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood. To assure that laws are consistent with Sharia, the draft suggested the establishment of a Higher Ulama Council to monitor and censor legislative and executive authorities when dealing with matters that are definitively decided by Sharia, rendering their decisions enforceable. For matters that are not definitively decided by Sharia, their opinions are not enforceable but to be consulted. When asked about this article, members from the reformist wing expressed their anger at passing this article against their preference. Members like Gamal Heshmat declared, ironically, that this article was inserted without consulting with the members.²⁸ Considering the disagreement of the reformist wing on this article, and the weaker justification made for it compared

²⁶ الشورى n.d.

²⁷ Brown and Hamzawy 2008, 18.

²⁸ Brown and Hamzawy 2008, 18.

with the first article, the reformists appear to have had no significant leverage in the decision-making process of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2010, after receiving negative reviews from different Egyptian figures to whom the draft was directed for feedback, the Muslim Brotherhood did not annul this article. Instead, they replaced it with al-Azhar requesting the Grand Imam to be elected from an independent body of the Ulama.²⁹

The 2007 manifesto shows that the shift in discourse from the Caliphate to the state was not significant. As previously illustrated, the Caliphate represented three major values for the Muslim Brothers: the unity of the Muslim *ummah*, ruling with Sharia, and applying *shura* as a method for decision-making. Even when the state is described as modern, civil, or democratic, the imagined form of this state must be governed by Sharia and apply *shura*, making the desired unity would be attainable. Nevertheless, despite the insignificance of the shift, the question remains unanswered: why did the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood abandon the term ‘Caliphate’, especially as they fight to maintain some of its components? The answer cannot be simply drawn either from the inclusion-moderation theory, since the shift was shaped under state repression, or the in-group conflict approach, since the two wings were not equally powerful or balanced. Moreover, it was not a strategic move, since the core components that triggered an outrageous wave against the movement were still announced and fought for.

Historically, the term ‘Caliphate’ was employed to describe divergent – even contradictory – forms of government.³⁰ None of these historical forms were aimed at or claimed by the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, the Muslim Biotherapy often cites an exemplary model of Caliphate that exists in the early political writings of Muslim jurists. However, most of the early sources require the Caliph to be from the clan of Quraysh, based on a tradition narrated at the first congregation to choose a successor to the Prophet Muhammad. Such requirement is not feasible nowadays. The only method for choosing the Caliph or any ruler in the literature of the Muslim Brotherhood is through *shura*, even though a quick look at history reveals that this method was only applied to the Caliphate in its first thirty years, over 1,300 years ago. In addition, the early literature was not clear about many aspects of the Caliphate, and was, in most cases, an attempt to legitimize the status quo. This unclarity, along with its infeasibility, explains why the Muslim Brotherhood abandoned the historically-charged term ‘Caliphate’, to use ‘state’. Several different adjectives are used to describe the form of state, but always with the core

²⁹ Nugent 2020, 185.

³⁰ Kennedy 2016.

components of what constitutes the Caliphate for the Brotherhood. In other words, the Muslim Brotherhood aimed for the realization of the constituent bases for the Caliphate but under the name of the democratic or civil state.

Two interviews held with the seventh General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mahdy Akif, support this argument. In an interview from the year 2011, Akif was accused of cursing Egypt as a state. In the interview, Akif was allegedly asked about the Caliphate and if he would accept for the Caliphate to be governed by a Malaysian leader. The interviewer condemned Akif's acceptance and said that he, the interviewer, could not accept a non-Egyptian leader. So, the interviewer reported that Akif cursed Egypt. In two different TV shows, Akif was questioned about his stance on the Caliphate and his response to the alleged accusations. In a later interview in 2012, when asked about this alleged curse, Akif insisted that he did not curse Egypt or Egyptians. He said that the story started when Akif was asked if the Muslim Brotherhood was trying to establish an Islamic Caliphate. Akif said that his answer was "no, we are trying to establish a Muslim unity that God has required us to build". Responding to the question of how, Akif answered, "by applying the model of the European Union". He added that the problem started when he proposed a rotational leadership like that of the EU, after which the interviewer denounced the potential leadership of a president from a different nationality. Then Akif cursed those who do not accept Islamic rule in Egypt.³¹ Previously, in the oldest interview in 2009, he was asked about the problematic articles of 2007. Akif responded to the one related to the non-Muslim president, stating: "There are two different opinions on this matter in Muslim jurisprudence, and the members of the movement decided through *shura*. However, we will accept the votes of the Egyptians if they choose a non-Muslim president."³²

Akif's statements provide the caliphal triangle with its third dimension: Muslim unity under one leadership. They also support the idea that the Muslim Brotherhood sought feasibility and unambiguity in their proposed governance system. That is, Akif denied that the Muslim Brotherhood are pursuing the creation of the Caliphate, which avoids the 'how' question that went unanswered by previous group leaders. As an alternative, he instead held to the principles that are perceived to represent the Caliphate as righteous Muslim governance.

³¹ Fi Zaman al-Ikhwān tv show by Tony Khalifa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pDevY5GoBc>, this part was deleted from the original episode: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xsrbb1>.

³² الجزيرة 2009.

Conclusion

The idea of the Caliphate was and still is critical for the Muslim Brotherhood. Even though the term ‘Caliphate’ itself has been abandoned, its elements are always present and enforced. The shift in the Caliphate discourse, though it was not significant in practice, is useful in suggesting an alternative method for the understanding of tactical and ideological shifts of many social and political movements, as it provides more details on the factors at play. As this paper shows, the shift in the Caliphate discourse was not only for inclusion but more significantly for the lack of a clear vision for the Caliphate. Hence, studying changes collectively would not reveal the exclusive explanations that are unique to some individual shifts. While the wholesale approach are successful in explaining the changes of some social and political movements, it ignores substantial factors and elements that are advantageous for the profound understanding of the case under study.

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