

## “Islamic Order”: Semeiotics and Pragmatism in the Muslim Brotherhood?

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### *Abstract*

*The article argues that Ḥassan al-Bannā (d. 1949) developed a pragmatist hermeneutics, in the twofold sense that religious experience provides the framework for defining and interpreting political concepts; and that a concept acquires meaning through the action that an interpreter infers from it. The hermeneutic is analysed here also with reference to al-Bannā's concepts 'aqīda (creed), niẓām islāmī (Islamic order), da'wa (invitation), and minhāġ (methodology), and by considering the Muslim Brotherhood's political development in the period 1990–2013.*

This, O my Brother, is the sum of what I wanted to tell you about our invitation, which is the interpretation [of a dream], which in its turn has [other] interpretations, and you are the Josef of these dreams.

Hasan al-Bannā, *Da'watuna*, p. 32

The majority of studies of the Muslim Brotherhood have focused on the organization and its members' political behaviour. Several analysts have drawn attention to the pragmatism that characterized both the founder Ḥassan al-Bannā (1906–49) and the organization after him, meaning by pragmatism that he as leader and the organization adapted to different circumstances and were prepared to negotiate interests with other politicians and groups when necessary.<sup>1</sup> This article seeks to show that al-Bannā's political pragmatism had a hermeneutical dimension as well, by exploring the key concepts related to his program: 'aqīda (creed), da'wa (invitation), niẓām islāmī (Islamic order), and minhāġ (methodology).

Sanā' 'Abed-Kotob has showed that while the Muslim Brotherhood has adapted to changing circumstances and demands, the organisation has never abandoned al-Bannā's original objectives, to perform da'wa for an Islamic all-encompassing social order based on Šarī'a, which transcends national boundaries and unites the Muslim Umma.<sup>2</sup> Others have shown how the organisation between the 1990s and 2011 actually departed from al-Bannā's program, specifically his

<sup>1</sup> Abed-Kotob, 1995; Lia, 1998; Stacher, 2002; Utvik, 2005; Brown and Hamzawi, 2008; Mandaville, 2009; Harnisch and Mecham, 2009; Tamam, 2010; Pargeter, 2010; Gardell, 2011; Rosefsky Wickham, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Abed-Kotob, 1995.

rejection of political parties, by preparing themselves for party politics, and coining the new concept ‘civil Islamic state’ (*dawla islāmiyya madaniyya*) – all the while maintaining al-Bannā’s principle that properly applied *Šarī’a* should be the legal framework of an Islamic order.<sup>3</sup> Sāmer Šeḥata and Joshua Stacher have described how when Brothers in 2005 entered parliament for the first time as a Muslim Brotherhood block, they were firmly committed to serving their constituencies and focused on the issues at hand, collaborating with secular parliamentary blocks in order to secure majorities. In this way, they infused a fresh democratic spirit into the nepotistic and moribund parliament, the authors argue.<sup>4</sup> Thus, up until 2006–7, research shows that the Muslim Brotherhood expanded beyond al-Bannā’s principles in order to participate in politics, while retaining the general objective of ‘Islamic order’. This suggests that ‘Islamic order’ is a concept that is subject to reinterpretation within the MB.

The religious ideas in al-Bannā’s writings and within the Muslim Brotherhood have not received as much attention as the political. In a preliminary study, I have analysed al-Bannā’s concept of the Qur’ān as constitution in terms of ‘fundamentalism’, defined as the belief that no power and no progress for the Muslim community is possible without attaching their faith and actions to God’s own power. Only when the Qur’ān becomes the constitution (*dustūr*) of an implemented Islamic order will the Muslim community become united and truly empowered. I also argued that al-Bannā was inspired by Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1328) concept *siyāsa šar‘iyya* for his idea that Islamic order requires *Šarī’a* as its legal framework and that politics should be in line with Islamic or *Šarī’a* principles.<sup>5</sup> Thus, al-Bannā’s concepts of Islām and the Qur’ān are quite specific to him and his political vision. Concerning interpretation of the Qur’ān, al-Bannā held its meaning is linguistically and historically defined and that the authoritative sources are the classical commentaries, foremost of which al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) *Ġāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl ‘āy al-Qur’ān* (“The Encyclopaedia of Clarifications Concerning the Original Meaning of the Qur’anic Signs”); the medieval *asbāb al-nuzūl* works; and the Prophet’s biography for historical context. However, at the individual level, true understanding of the Qur’ān comes through *išrāq*, ‘illumination’ of the believer’s heart, when he or she understands the Qur’ān not only as a ritually recited text but also as the constitution of Islamic order. Al-Bannā attributed this view of the Qur’ān to Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), the famous moderniser of Egypt’s Sunni Islamic university al-Azhar and companion of Ġamal al-Dīn al-Afġānī (d. 1897), the Iranian Šī‘ite journalist, intellectual and campaigner for pan-Islamic unity against colonialism and for

<sup>3</sup> Brown and Hamzawy, 2008; Haqqani and Fradkin, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Shehata and Stacher, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Mårtensson, 2011, pp. 27–52; pp. 39, 43–46. On Ibn Taymiyya and *siyāsa šar‘iyya*, see also Laoust, 1986, pp. 27–28; and Hassan, 2010.

modern progress in the Islamic world. However, a similar view is also found in Ibn Taymiyya's hermeneutics, as the idea that esoteric revelatory insight (*kašf*) can produce new meaning in the Qur'ān and new precepts of *Šarī'a* (although not abrogate existing ones).<sup>6</sup>

Hāzem Kandīl's recent monograph on al-Bannā's and the MB's is based on fieldwork.<sup>7</sup> Kandīl argues that as long as the Muslim Brothers were in opposition and concentrated on providing social work, their essentially cultic belief that God would one day reward their pious labour with full political empowerment remained concealed from the public. However, after their wins in the general and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012, Brotherhood politicians and President Muḥammad Morsī put everything they had into inscribing their Islamist principles into a revised constitution, rejecting collaboration with secular parties, and even seeking to harness the army to their own cause. The reason for this shift is, Kandīl argues, their religious belief that it was God, not the people, who had granted them political power. To share power with the secular parties would thus have meant thwarting God's plan. Faced with massive popular opposition in July 2013, Morsī and his supporters exhibited traits associated with messianic cults: complete refusal to recognize the nature of the political crises and clinging to the belief that God would intervene on their behalf, as He did for the Prophet and his adversaries, and threatening their enemies with divine destruction. In this context, Kandīl argues, it is not strange that the Muslim Brotherhood was for the first time designated as a terrorist organisation.<sup>8</sup> Concerning the Muslim Brotherhood's approach to the Qur'ān, Kandīl claims that it relies on Sayyid Qutb's (d. 1966) famous literary interpretation, *Fī ḡilāl al-Qur'ān* ("In the Shade of the Qur'ān", or, figuratively, "Under the Influence of the Qur'ān"). Qutb embraced the Romantic ideal of creating oneself as a personality through artistic and emotional experiences. In the Muslim Brotherhood context, this principle was put into practice in such a way that Brothers and Sisters read the Qur'ān through the pious and self-effacing emotional disposition that the organisation fosters in its members, and which frames their *ad hoc* and, in Kandīl's view, thoroughly anti-scholarly way of interpreting the Qur'ān.<sup>9</sup>

This article takes as its point of departure the above described fact, that the Muslim Brotherhood have changed some of al-Bannā's key political principles and also coined new concepts, and the implication that follows from this fact, namely that the practical meaning of 'Islamic order' depends on the Brothers' activities in a

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<sup>6</sup> Mårtensson, 2011, p. 46, ref. to al-Bannā, 1981, pp. 6, 26–27; on Ibn Taymiyya and *kashf*, Mårtensson, 2011, p. 39, ref. to Weismann, 2001, p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> Kandīl, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Kandīl, 2015, p. 144.

<sup>9</sup> Kandīl, 2015, pp. 11, 41–42.

given context. I will explore this implication with reference to hermeneutical pragmatism, and to two more of al-Bannā's concepts, namely Islamic creed (*'aqīda*), and methodology (*minhāğ*).<sup>10</sup> I will argue that al-Bannā's hermeneutics has enabled the Brothers to take considerable leeway in interpreting his conceptual framework. Contrary to Kandīl, who argues that the events in 2013 are a logical outcome of al-Bannā's religious thought as maintained within the Muslim Brotherhood, I hold that they were contingent upon a particular context and choices made by specific individuals. Al-Bannā's hermeneutics makes it equally possible for the Brothers to interpret the same concepts in the direction of consensus building and see that as the sign of divine empowerment.

### Pragmatism

In Western contexts, pragmatism refers to an epistemology, hermeneutic and form of logic, which emerged among American academics in the late nineteenth century. Its founder was Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914), whose student John Dewey (1859–1952) and friend William James (d. 1910) further developed his theories. According to Christopher Hookway, pragmatist hermeneutics has three essential characteristics:<sup>11</sup>

1. All of the classic pragmatists identified beliefs and other mental states as *habits*. The content of a belief is not determined by its intrinsic phenomenal character; rather, it is determined by its role in determining our actions. The role of tacit habits of reasoning and acting in fixing our beliefs and guiding our actions is a theme that recurs in the work of all of the pragmatists.
2. All concepts and theories are instruments to be judged by how well they achieve their intended purpose. The content of a theory or concept is determined by what we should do with it.
3. A sign or thought is about some object because it is understood, in subsequent thought, as a sign of that object, rather than because it captures something essential pertaining to the object. The subsequent thought is the 'interpretant', i.e. what determines the interpretation. Furthermore, interpretation is generally a goal directed activity. In such cases, our action or the conclusion of our inference is the interpretant; interpretation is thus not primarily a matter of intellectual recognition of what a sign

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<sup>10</sup> The arguments are based on two conference papers: 'How God's Power becomes the People's Power: Faith and Pragmatism in the Muslim Brotherhood', BRISMES Annual Conference 26–28 March 2012; 'Islamic Order: al-Banna's Pragmatism and the Muslim Brotherhood's Interpretation', EASR Annual Conference 11–15 May 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Hookway, 2008.

means but of our inference of our own actions relative to the sign.

The last point relates particularly to Pierce, who developed the theory of semeiotics, or ‘appearances as signs’. By ‘signs’ Pierce meant ‘qualities, relations, features, items, events, states, regularities, habits, laws’, i.e. everything that has meanings, significances, or interpretations, or ‘the world of appearances (phaneron)’.<sup>12</sup> According to Robert Burch, the sign for Pierce is that which means something and the interpretant is that to which the sign represents an object. As Burch points out, the interpretant refers to the mental state or act of the interpreter as s/he interprets the sign. This mental act of interpretation then itself becomes a sign of the same object that was the sign of the original appearance of object. Consequently, as Burch puts it, ‘everything in the phaneron, because it is a sign, begins an infinite sequence of mental interpretants of an object’. It follows that the signs constitute a system, which is in constant evolution.<sup>13</sup> Thus, given that apprehension of signs is the way in which we gain knowledge, it was of central importance to Pierce to ascertain that we can attain clear conceptions of objects, which is the pragmatist epistemology’s main contribution:

the rule for attaining the third grade of clearness of apprehension is as follows: Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.<sup>14</sup>

In several ways, pragmatism emphasises the importance of emotions: for apprehension, since interpretants are effectively mental states; and for the evolutionary process of apprehension as a whole. Pierce viewed *agape*, selfless love in the sense of the Gospel of John, as the force that drives evolution, according to which entities sacrifice their own self-perfection in order to help neighbour entities to advance. According to Burch, he developed his standpoint as a critique of Herbert Spencer’s materialistic evolutionism and the ‘social Darwinism’ of his day.<sup>15</sup> Pierce’s friend William James developed his version of pragmatism as a response to the modern sciences and to what he perceived as the dominance of empiricism and logic over emotion and religion. James’ famous study *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) ranks among the classics in the discipline Psychology of Religion.<sup>16</sup> In James’ view, the dominance of

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<sup>12</sup> Burch, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Burch, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Pierce, 2001 [1878].

<sup>15</sup> Burch, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> See for example the contributions to Ferrari, 2002; and Bridgers, 2005.

empiricism within philosophy and science left no room for religion and imagination. He sought to develop a system that could accommodate scientific loyalty to facts with confidence in values and imagination; a confidence that he claimed was rooted in religious experience and romanticism.<sup>17</sup>

As we shall see below, Ḥasan al-Bannā in his treatises described how the Muslim Brothers infer meaning from his concepts as they work towards specific goals; and the contemporary Freedom and Justice Party emphasise the need for religion and the emotional life for true progress. Indeed, Kandīl's interviews reveal that the Muslim Brotherhood does seek to foster a particular self-sacrificing and all-devoted state of mind in its members in order to keep a unified program and practice in place. Viewed from the perspective of pragmatism, such a strategy appears to echo Pierce's view that 'good evolution' requires the Evangelical self-sacrifice for the greater common good.

Assuming, then, that there are some affinities between pragmatism and the Muslim Brotherhood and its founder, there are two possible sources from which al-Bannā could have been acquainted with such ideas. The first is the teachers training program that he was enrolled in at the modern college Dār al-'Ulūm in Cairo, founded in 1871, and from which he graduated in 1927, and which offered a combination of Islamic disciplines with a modern western science curriculum.<sup>18</sup> While al-Bannā never studied English language, he did read Arabic translations of contemporary European thought.<sup>19</sup> We do not know whether pragmatism was part of the Dār al-'Ulūm curriculum; it could have been so.

The second possible source is the modernist *Salafīyya* movement connected with Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rašīd Riḍa (d. 1930), which at least in Riḍa's version drew heavily on Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), the famous *muḡtahid* or reformer of the Ḥanbalī legal methodology.<sup>20</sup> Al-Bannā was acquainted with this strand of *Salafīyya* through his father's contacts and work on Ḥanbalī sources, and through his own personal contacts with *Salafīyya*-oriented circles in Cairo and

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<sup>17</sup> Hookway, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, 1969, p. 3; Lia, 1998, p. 25. Note that where Mitchell claims that al-Bannā chose to intellectually reject modern western sciences and focus on Islamic sciences, Lia who has used many more sources shows that al-Bannā in fact prioritized the modern teachers training program offered by Dar al-'Ulūm over al-Azhar, which was another option and one favoured by his father.

<sup>19</sup> Krämer, 2010, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Sedgwick, 2010, pp. 122–23; Calder, 2007, pp. 235–36. Sedgwick claims that Ibn Taymiyya played a very limited role for 'Abduh since he hardly mentioned him and that it was Riḍa who in his writings assigned a significant role for Ibn Taymiyya in 'Abduh's thought. Calder argues on the contrary, that Ibn Taymiyya is the only medieval jurist that 'Abduh held in high esteem and that 'Abduh followed Ibn Taymiyya's methodology of limiting the number of doctrinally acceptable sources of law and theology.

Alexandria.<sup>21</sup> He also identified the message of his own organization as a “*Salafīyya* message”.<sup>22</sup> According to Yūnus ‘Alī, *Salafī* hermeneutics from Ibn Taymiyya onwards is comparable with modern pragmatism. It distinguished itself from Aš‘arī hermeneutics by locating meaning not in the linguistic concept itself but in the communicative situation:

What distinguishes the *Salafīs*’ communication model from its mainstream rival is the neutralisation of the difference between *wad‘* (assigned meaning; UM) and use. The *Salafīs* main contention is that conventions are not established in isolation from the communicative situations, but are, rather, set up, and modified by them. Hence, words have elastic rather than firmly fixed meanings so that they may change according to the verbal and non-verbal contexts in which they are uttered. Accordingly, if an expression is isolated from context, it will no longer be part of the language, simply because it cannot be used to communicate in a well-defined manner.<sup>23</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya’s reason for choosing a pragmatic hermeneutics over the Aš‘arite foundational one would have to do with his taking issue with the legal and theological mainstream and thus needing a methodology which allowed for new interpretations of given concepts, on the premise that the dominant methodologies had lead the Muslims beyond the Prophet’s *sunna*. Ibn Taymiyya limited the consensus (*iğma‘*) about the meanings of the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s Sunna to the Companions, who were the ones who had experienced the Prophet’s guidance of the community through divine revelation. It was thus the Qur’ān, *ḥadīṭ*, and the Companions’ rulings that provided the sources for further interpretation through inductive reasoning.<sup>24</sup>

In al-Bannā’s case, the fact that he, like his contemporaries in the *Salafīyya* movement, sought to break out of established scholarly definitions of the Qur’ān and Islām and to thereby reconnect the Muslims with the divine guidance implies that a hermeneutics along the line of Ibn Taymiyya’s pragmatist one would have been a suitable methodological choice. There are obvious differences between Ibn Taymiyya and al-Bannā. Ibn Taymiyya was a scholar and *muğtahid* within the Ḥanbalī

<sup>21</sup> Lia, 1998, pp. 22–5; Krämer, 2010, pp. 7, 22–4.

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, 1969, p. 14, quoting al-Bannā, *Risalat al-mu‘tamar al-khamis*; see also Krämer, 2010, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Yūnus ‘Alī, 2000, p. 8; cf. pp. 87–140.

<sup>24</sup> Laoust, 1986.

school,<sup>25</sup> who sought to develop a doctrinal and legal system that had political implications, while al-Bannā was a modern schoolteacher and political activist seeking to empower first the Egyptian people and then the Arab Muslim community by inviting them to become worthy of power in the eyes of God. Yet they shared the belief that the correct apprehension of the Islamic creed of divine Oneness and the mental states that accompany this apprehension *is* a way of behaving politically in this world through self-sacrifice, which will inevitably have beneficent outcomes.

In the treatise *al-‘Aqā’id*, al-Bannā developed the creed that underpinned his organisation and its objectives, through the conventional genre of *‘aqīda*, ‘creed’ or ‘dogma’. Earlier examples of *‘aqīda* include al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) *Ṣariḥ al-Sunna* (“The True Sunna”) and *al-Ṭabṣīr fī ma‘ālim al-dīn* (“Discerning Discourse Concerning the Dogma of Religion”, written for the scholars in his home province Tabaristan);<sup>26</sup> and Ibn Taymiyya’s famous *al-‘Aqīda al-Wasitiyya* (“The Creed for the City of al-Wāsiṭ”), which treats the divine Oneness and its implications concerning the group who understand and practice it correctly.<sup>27</sup> Producing an *‘aqīda* treatise is often connected with scholarly innovation. Thus, al-Ṭabarī was a *muḡtahid muḡlaq* who developed his own legal methodology, *al-madḡhab al-ḡarīrī*, while Ibn Taymiyya staked out new positions with reference to the Ḥanbalī school by employing reasoning in new creative ways, arguing that reason is identical with revelation.<sup>28</sup> Al-Bannā adopts a similar approach in his *‘aqīda*, which he introduces with the argument that the Qur’ān and *Sunna* encourage Muslims to use reason to gain knowledge, in general as well as about the meaning and implications of Islām. As Ibn Taymiyya did, al-Bannā identifies revelation with reason, in the sense that no scientifically or rationally sound knowledge could be in contradiction with it. On this basis, al-Bannā defines his creed as *al-‘aqīda al-naḡariyya al-sahla* (“the clear rational creed”), and *al-‘aqīda al-fiṭriyya fī al-nufūs al-salīma* (“the creed which is natural to the sound souls”).<sup>29</sup> The constituents of the creed is that there is a Creator – God – Who has created everything and therefore is beyond anything which the human intelligence can fathom, in the same time as that knowledge is innate to the human intellect.<sup>30</sup> It appears that al-Bannā is echoing Ibn Taymiyya’s concept of *fiṭra* as referring to humanity’s faculty of natural intelligence.<sup>31</sup> In

<sup>25</sup> On Ibn Taymiyya’s relationship with Ḥanbalī *fiqh*, see Laoust, 1939; al-Matroudi, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Sourdel, 1968, pp. 177–99; al-Tabari, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, 1973.

<sup>28</sup> On al-Ṭabarī’s legal methodology, see Stewart, 2004; Mårtensson, 2016. On Ibn Taymiyya’s synthesis of reasoning and Ḥanbalī *fiqh*, see Laoust, 1939; Rapoport, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> al-Banna, 1978, pp. 28; 53.

<sup>30</sup> al-Banna, 1978, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Holzman, 2010, p. 178.

the introductory paragraphs of *al-‘Aqā’id* he refers to Q. 30:30: ‘It is the original nature according to which God fashioned mankind (*fiṭrat Allāh al-latī faṭara al-nās ‘alayhā*) and there is no altering God’s creation; that is the upright religion’.<sup>32</sup>

Against this background, I have identified four components that I assume connect al-Bannā’s creed with his hermeneutics and political program. The first component is God’s function as Creator and Sustainer, which means that God is the ultimate source of human life and power. Secondly, God is knowable in this capacity through His attributes (*ṣifāt*) contained in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīṭ*; in fact, the bulk of this *‘aqīda* is about the divine attributes or, with a pragmatist term, the signs through which God can be apprehended as a way of being and acting in the world.<sup>33</sup> Thirdly, the creed is not only rationally comprehended but also *experienced emotionally*: ‘You will experience yourself [the examples] I will present to you’ (*li’an taṣ‘ur fī nafsika bimā qaddamtū laka*).<sup>34</sup> This point connects with the pragmatist insistence that the emotional experience is part of the apprehension of a sign. Fourthly, al-Bannā concludes the creed by stating, programmatically, that the way to proceed regarding interpretation of God’s attributes and their meaning in the Qur’ān and *ḥadīṭ* is to follow the methodology of the first generation, *maḍhab al-salaf*. He argues:

The conclusion from this investigation is that the first generation (*al-salaf*) and their successors (*al-ḥalaf*) agreed that the objective is not the obvious (meaning) that is common knowledge and is the general interpretation; and that any interpretation, which contradicted the legal principles (*al-uṣūl al-šar‘iyya*), is unacceptable. Consequently, they restricted the debates about how to interpret the verbal expressions to what is acceptable in terms of legislation (*bimā yağūz fī al-šar‘*). This is quite limited, as you can see, and something to which even some among the first generation (*al-salaf*) resorted. Today the most important of the (many) concerns, which Muslims need to address, is to unite their ranks and speak with one voice as far as possible, with God as our reckoning and blessing.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, al-Bannā on the one hand opens up and broadens the scope of interpretation compared with the legal scholars’ agreed-upon subject

<sup>32</sup> al-Banna, 1978, p. 28. My modification of Majid Fakhry, 2000; Fakhry renders *qayyim* as ‘true’, while I translate it as ‘upright’, in line with the beginning of the verse.

<sup>33</sup> al-Banna, 1978, p. 28 *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> al-Banna, 1978, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> al-Banna, 1978, p. 78.

matters, and on the other hand asserts the need for a new uniformity of vision.

In the treatise *Da'watuna* ("Our Invitation"), al-Bannā draws the contours of this vision by reference to the concept *da'wa*, usually translated as 'mission' or 'call'.<sup>36</sup> However, *da'wa* also means 'invitation', for example to a party. This meaning captures the sense of empowerment that is central to al-Bannā's vision. As Gudrun Krämer has pointed out, al-Bannā was, like a great many intellectuals and reformers of his time, an avid reader of early Islamic history, which served him as the ideal Golden Age which Muslims should seek to revive in order to perfect both the Muslim community and mankind as a whole.<sup>37</sup> However, since the real source of power is God the Creator, in order to attain empowerment, Muslims must dedicate their entire existences and beings to the service of God:<sup>38</sup>

Annihilation (*fanā'*):

We want our people (*qawmunā*) to know (. . .) that this invitation (*da'wa*) is suitable only for he who embraces it in all its aspects and devotes to it everything that it will cost him in terms of his self, his property, his time, and his health: 'Say: "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your spouses, your relatives, the wealth you have gained, a trade you fear might slacken, and dwellings you love are dearer to you than God and His Messenger or than fighting in His way, then wait until God brings His command; God does not guide the sinful people (*al-qawm al-fāsiqīna*)".'<sup>39</sup> This is an invitation (*da'wa*), which does not accept being shared [with anything else] for its nature is unity, and he who is prepared for it shall live through it and it shall live through him. He who is too weak for this burden shall be deprived of the rewards awaiting those who struggle (*tawāb al-muḡāhidīna*), and he will be among the left-behind (*al-muḡallaḡīna*) and the slackers, and God will extend His invitation to another people in his stead: 'Humble towards the faithful but mighty towards the unbelievers. They fight in the way of God and do not fear anybody's reproach. This is a favour which God bestows on whomever He wishes'<sup>40, 41</sup>

Al-Bannā's *da'wa* means that in order to attain God's guidance, it is not enough to believe in the creed and participate in rituals: one must

<sup>36</sup> Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996; Mahmood, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Krämer, 2010, pp. 97–103; Kandil, 2015, pp. 88–89.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mårtensson, 2011, pp. 44–45.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'ān 9:24.

<sup>40</sup> Qur'ān 5:54.

<sup>41</sup> al-Bannā, 1977a, p. 8.

commit one's entire being. Without this commitment, there can be no empowerment, since all power comes from God. It is fitting that he headed the section 'Annihilation' (*fanā*), which is a Ṣūfī concept signifying the annihilation of the self in the union with the divine. However, as in Ṣūfī contexts, there is an exclusive claim involved here: not everyone is fit to accept the invitation, which means that not all Muslims are equally capable of attaining divine guidance. Hence, the passage implies that al-Bannā perceived the MB as an elect group in this respect. The all-encompassing commitment of the individual is mirrored in the all-encompassing scope of *da'wa*:

a *salafī* invitation (to God's power); a *sunni* path; a Ṣūfī truth; a political organisation; a sports club; an association for learning and culture; an economic company; and a social theory (*fikra*).<sup>42</sup>

The social theory implied establishing an all-encompassing (*šāmil*) Islamic social order, including Islamic government, and based on Ṣarī'a, which is equally all-encompassing.<sup>43</sup> Al-Bannā believed society was unable to progress without the people enacting Islam in the true way, and therefore individuals applying Islām should permeate all spheres of society.<sup>44</sup> The majority of those who were attracted to al-Bannā's invitation were young men, often immigrants from the countryside to the big cities, who made up a new class of urban professionals who were ambitious but excluded from political power and cultural influence, which was concentrated in the hands of elites close to the colonial rulers. Al-Bannā's invitation to empowerment through Islām was available to all Muslims regardless of social class, which made it attractive for this growing group of Egyptians.<sup>45</sup> In other words: his organization's exclusivity cut across existing social hierarchies, creating a new elite of pious civil servants and professionals.<sup>46</sup>

### Islamic Order

The social theory is signified by the key concept *nizām islāmī*, 'Islamic order'. Al-Bannā's *da'wa* implied that all spheres of society should be governed by Islām, including government (*ḥukūma*). Indeed, Islamic government would be the crown achievement that marked the Egyptian society's transformation into an Islamic order,

<sup>42</sup> Quotation from al-Bannā, *Risalat al-mu'tamar al-khamis*, p. 14, cited in Tamam, 2010, p. 94; also in Mitchell, 1969, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> al-Bannā, 1977b, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> al-Bannā and Wendell, 1978, pp. 17–8; Lia, 1998, pp. 74–6.

<sup>45</sup> Lia, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> See Krämer, 2010, on al-Bannā's strong civil servant-ethos.

and which would attract the attention of other countries. In this manner, by inspiring others, Islamic government would enable political unity among Islamic countries:

If we had Islamic government (*ḥukūma islāmiyya*) that was true to Islām, of sincere faith, free to think and edify, for which learning the true knowledge was the greatest treasure, which inherited the might of the Islamic order (*al-nizām al-islāmī*), and if we had faith in it as the cure for the people and guidance for mankind as a whole, we could strengthen this world by the name of Islam so that other states would investigate and observe it and want it for themselves, and so that we could conduct them to it, through continuous invitations, conviction, proof, delegations, and other means of information and communication.<sup>47</sup>

In the treatise *Naḥwa'l-nūr* ("Towards the Light") al-Bannā describes Islamic government in some more detail. Negatively, it excluded political parties because they divide the nation and the community. Positively, it involved bringing the law in line with the principles of Islamic *Ṣarī'a*; strengthening the bonds between Arab and Islamic countries and assessing the loss of the Caliphate; diffusing the Islamic spirit and teachings throughout the government departments and the military; anti-corruption measures; and surveillance of government functionaries to ensure their adherence to Islamic values both professionally and in their private lives; and dissolving the distinction between public-private domains.<sup>48</sup> As Lia has pointed out, al-Bannā's opposition to political parties was not because he opposed popular representation, as such. Rather, he saw the problem with the parties of his time that they represented only the elites and their interests. He envisioned a consultative 'national body' (*ḥay'a waṭaniyya*) composed of representatives of all groups in society. This body should function within what he called 'constitutional consultative rule' (*ḥukm dustūrī ṣūrī*).<sup>49</sup> The following is his definition of 'constitutional':

to preserve the freedom of the individual citizen, to make the rulers accountable for their actions to the people and finally, to delimit the prerogatives of every single authoritative body. It will be clear to everyone that such basic principles correspond perfectly to the teaching of Islām concerning the system of government. For this reason, the Muslim Brothers consider that of all the existing systems of government, the constitutional system is the form that best suits Islām and Muslims.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Al-Bannā, 1950?, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Bannā, 1977c, pp. 109–10.

<sup>49</sup> Lia, 1998, pp. 204–5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 204, quoting al-Bannā, 1939, p. 22.

Thus, Islamic order in al-Bannā's writings implies constitutional government, with rule of law, accountability, a notion of separation of powers, and civil rights and freedoms within a consultative system, but without political parties and general elections. To safeguard the Islamic character of government and society, the law would have to be *Šarī'a*, but interpreted in a much broader way than in traditional *fiqh* so as to meet the needs of a modern nation.

### **Hermeneutical pragmatism?**

In *Da'watunā* al-Bannā describes three pillars (*arkān*) around which the Muslim Brotherhood theory (*fikrat al-iḥwān*) revolves, and which can be seen as also defining his hermeneutics:<sup>51</sup>

1. *The sound methodology (al-minhāğ al-šāliḥ)*: The Brothers have found it in God's scripture and the *Sunna* of His Messenger and the rulings of Islām from the time when the Muslims understood them at their face value in a fresh and pure way, far from internal intricacies and falsities. [The Brothers] devote themselves to studying Islām according to these principles in an easy, broad and accessible manner.
2. *Activists guided by the faith (al-'āmilūna al-mu'minūna)*: The Brothers apply themselves to practicing what they have understood about God's religion in an uncompromising manner. Praise God, they are faithful in their thoughts and confident in their objectives and trusting that God will support them as long as they work on His behalf and proceed under the guidance of God's Messenger.
3. *Resolute and trustworthy leadership*: The Muslim Brothers have found [its leadership] to be so, and thus they obey it and work under its standard.

The second pillar expresses the idea that the Muslim Brothers' application of Islām follows from their understanding of it; while the third introduces the organisation's leadership as the Muslim Brothers' authority. It appears to follow that the authority includes interpretation. However, in the immediately following paragraph al-Bannā declares that the Brothers' understanding of Islām will vary depending on the person and the context:

This, O my Brother, is the sum of what I wanted to tell you about our invitation (*da'wa*), which is the interpretation [of a dream], which in its turn has [other] interpretations, and you

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<sup>51</sup> al-Bannā, 1977a, p. 32.

are the Josef of these dreams. If our [plans] are attractive to you, your efforts add to ours as we work together along this path, with God as the guarantor of our success and yours. He is our reckoning, and the blessing of the deputy is the same as the blessing of the Lord and the blessing of the Supporter (al-Banna 1977a:32).

Pragmatism implies that the meaning of a sign depends on the practical outcomes that the interpreter has already inferred from the concept referring to it, which correspond to his or her experiences. Here, al-Bannā established that the meaning of *da'wa* depends on the Brother's interpretation, which takes form in the struggle, i.e. through action. In other words, the Brother will interpret *da'wa* with reference to the practical outcomes he has already inferred. Consequently, if 'divine empowerment leading to Islamic government' is the aim of *da'wa*, pragmatist hermeneutics implies that empowerment can be apprehended as coming about through power sharing and political compromise just as well as through al-Bannā's vision of a self-effacing elite leading the nation.

The above-mentioned acceptance of political parties would be one example of how the Muslim Brotherhood actually has reinterpreted 'Islamic order' in a new context. Further examples include how the organisation in the course of the 1990s developed a new concept of Islamic *state*, which al-Bannā had left undefined. By 2005 consensus had emerged around the concept 'civil Islamic state' (*dawla madaniyya islāmiyya*).<sup>52</sup> The context required the Muslim Brotherhood to distinguish its Islamic state at the domestic level from such contenders as Ġamā'a Islāmiyya and Islamic Ġihād, and at the international level from the Islamic Republic of Irān. Growing popular support for multi-party democracy would also play an important part.<sup>53</sup>

In 2007, the Muslim Brotherhood publicly circulated a draft platform, which included a model for a state constitution in which Sharia as the frame of legislation would be complemented by a council of '*ulamā*', who would "advise the government's legislative and executive branches in matters of religious law", and who would be elected by the community of Muslim religious scholars. The platform also suggested that the council of '*ulamā*' should have a say on a wide range of legislative and executive matters, and that the council's rulings would be absolute on matters deemed not subject to interpretation.<sup>54</sup> The traditional Islamic stance that excludes Christians and women from the highest offices was introduced as well.<sup>55</sup> The

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 190.

<sup>53</sup> Harnisch and Mecham, 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Brown and Hamzawy, 2008, p. 4; Harnisch and Mecham, 2009; Pargeter, 2010, pp. 57–60.

<sup>55</sup> Brown and Hamzawy, 2008, p. 5.

draft received heavy criticism from the public as well as from progressive Brothers. The latter put forth an alternative draft that exchanged the council of *'ulamā'* for a Supreme Constitutional Court, which may contain religious scholars but should not be limited to them, since 'the Muslim community' (*al-'umma*) is the source of political authority. This approach was grounded in a view of *Šarī'a* as a 'frame of reference' (*marġa'iyya*) for legislation. The position was supported by, among others, Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, and the Waṣatiyya-group.<sup>56</sup> The concept *marġa'iyya* derives from deliberations over how to maintain *Šarī'a* while allowing interpretations in accordance with reason and need, and the development of new laws for matters which are outside of the scope of *Šarī'a*'s principles. It also implies rejecting the traditional concept of non-Muslims as *ahl al-ḍimma* ('subjects entitled to protection by the law') and opens up for Christians to participate in legislation since legislation is detached from *Šarī'a* as practiced by religious scholars. Consequently, it would be the broadly constituted Constitutional Court, not a council of Islamic scholars that judges whether a law complies with *Šarī'a* principles.<sup>57</sup> In fact, this new concept, while absent from al-Bannā's writings, is nevertheless in line with his argument in the creed mentioned above, that interpretations of the Qur'ān and Sunna are not limited to the traditional *fiqh* categories and principles.

The revolution of 25 January 2011 and the ousting of President Ḥusnī Mubārak enabled the Muslim Brotherhood to found the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) on 30 April 2011, led by Mūḥammad Morsī up to his victory in the presidential election in June 2012. The program reflects the progressive position within the Brotherhood.<sup>58</sup> The section 'Vision and Program' appears to reflect a 'Jamesian' pragmatist view, that material dimensions should be complemented by religion and 'the emotional life':<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Brown and Hamzawy, 2008, pp. 9, 14. Another supporter of the progressive position is Ibrahim al-Ḥudaybī, great grandson of Ḥassan al-Ḥudaybī, al-Bannā's successor. According to Ibrāhīm al-Ḥudaybī, models for an Islamic civil state can be sought in the USA or in the Scandinavian welfare states, rather than in an Islamic theocracy such as Iran; seminar in Cairo, 3 November 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 3; Utvik, 2005, pp. 302–3. These changes within the Muslim Brotherhood at the national Egyptian level are connected also with developments at the global level of Islamic reform. As Utvik points out, there are similarities between the MB combination of *marġa'iyya* with liberal democracy and the views of Iranian reformers like Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar of the relationship between religion and politics; ibid, p. 303. Concerning al-Qaradāwī, he also founded the ecumenical International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) which includes Sunnīs and Šī'ites, and which (among other things) calls for democratic government and equal legislative rights for men and women; Gräf, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> al-Anani, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) Platform, 2011.

When the people develop their programs for reform they concern themselves with material issues and external matters of organizational, administrative and legislative nature, which are absolutely necessary and incumbent for reform and progress. Yet, without detracting from the previously mentioned matters, there are other matters which are essential to the FJP, and which concern thought, faith, spirituality, ethics and the emotional life. These are the matters that shape the essence of the human being and his loftiest characteristics, for man does not live of bread alone but needs both the spiritual and the material for his completeness. Thus we find that reform of the internal life (*al-bāṭin*) is of no less importance than reform of the external (*al-zāhir*), and this is an eternal truth that has been established by the Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-ra'd*, verse 11: 'God will never change a people's circumstances unless they change what is in themselves'. [...] Through these two dimensions – the material and the spiritual – the individual and society will be able to soar towards the horizons of the rising sun of the future, God willing.

The program mentions nothing of the 2007 provision that barred Copts and women from the highest political office, nor a council of '*ulamā*'. It also emphasizes that any citizen of whatever creed can join the party.<sup>60</sup> The section describing 'The Civil State' reads:

The Islamic state is by its nature a civil state (*dawla madaniyya*). It is not a military state ruled by an army that seizes power through coups, nor is it a dictatorship. Equally, it is not a religious state (theocracy) ruled by the class of religious clerics – as indeed Islam does not have clerics, only specialized scholars of religion – so that no one can rule in the name of divine truth and no individuals can claim infallibility in order to monopolize interpretation of the Qur'ān and legislation for the community (*al-'umma*) and impose absolute obedience for themselves on the grounds of self-acclaimed holiness. Instead the rulers of the Islamic state are citizens who have been elected by popular mandate (*wafqa 'l-irāda al-ša'biyya*), for the Muslim community (*al-'umma*) is the source of power and governing posts are assigned according to competence, experience and reliability. Just as the Muslim community (*al-'umma*) has the right to elect its rulers and representatives, it has the right to hold them responsible and depose them.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

The fundamental difference between the Islamic state and other states is that it has as its frame of reference (*marǧaʿiyya*) the Islamic *Šarīʿa*, derived from the creed of the vast majority of the Egyptian people. It is in the nature of *Šarīʿa* to organize, in addition to worship and ethics, the various other aspects of life for the Muslims. However, it organizes these aspects in the manner of general principles, leaving the details to interpretation (*al-iǧtihād*) and legislation (*al-tašrīʿ*) in accordance with the time and place, and in view of truth, justice and the common good (*al-mašlahā*). This is the duty of the legislative bodies (*al-maǧālis al-tašrīʿiyya*), while the Supreme Constitutional Court is the guardian of their legislation. It should be taken into consideration that non-Muslims have the right to be judged according to their own legislation in matters of family and personal status law.

In addition, the state is responsible for protecting freedom of belief and worship and the houses of worship for non-Muslims, with the same zeal as it protects Islām, its affairs and its mosques.<sup>61</sup>

We now know that when Morsī was president, he did not achieve any viable cooperation with the secular parties. The task of developing a new constitution was a breaking point. Morsī eventually rushed through a version, which secured a majority consisting of only 15 per cent of the vote, and which reverted to the conservative 2007 platform by introducing al-Azhar as the council of *ʿulamāʾ* that should be consulted in legislation; and he inscribed in the constitution the military's exemption from civil rule over its budget.<sup>62</sup> Kandil explains this political behaviour as due to the most powerful Muslim Brothers having retained at heart al-Bannā's belief that God would eventually empower the Brothers, and that sharing that divine power with secular parties was by definition sinful.<sup>63</sup> Marina Ottaway explains the same outcome in political terms, pointing to the secular judiciary's arbitrary tactics to limit Islamist power. The old Supreme Court dissolved the Islamist-dominated parliament in June 2012 upon Morsī's election to president, a move that entrenched distrust between 'seculars' (old elites) and 'Islamists' and escalated conflict between Morsi and the secular parties. The secular parties and leaders contributed to the rift, Ottaway argues, by opposing everything coming from the president, and not least by failing to unite among themselves and thus putting up a solid counter-block to Morsī. As it were, the fragmented secular opposition gave Morsī and the Islamists both little choice and little democratic resistance. The move of introducing a council of *ʿulamāʾ*

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Ottaway, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Kandil, 2015, pp. 139–45.

thus appears as much as an attempt to counter-balance a hostile Supreme Court as an attempt to Islamize the legislature. While Ottaway wrote this analysis before July 2013, she predicted that if the 'seculars' took their opposition to the streets the army would inevitably step in and restore the old order.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

Both Kandīl's and Ottaway's perspectives shed light on the political developments leading up to July 2013. Yet, as I have argued here, al-Bannā's hermeneutic and methodology is less deterministic than Kandīl argues. The indications that the Muslim Brothers have interpreted al-Banna's vision in a democratic direction from the 1990s onwards suggest that his methodology (*minhāğ*) has been applied in a pragmatist way as a sign of 'Islamic order' whose interpretant is the state of mind of the Brothers. This state of mind is constant regarding the self-sacrificing ethos but changes regarding political forms, from 'national representative bodies' to 'multi-party democracy'. Even if it were the case that Morsī sought a wholesale return to al-Bannā's vision of the sign 'Islamic order', this would have been Morsī's decision, not a necessary outcome of al-Bannā's program. I would argue instead, that al-Bannā's *minhāğ* (methodology) enables new apprehensions of the key concepts attached to 'Islamic order'. Consequently, and in contrast with Kandīl, I see no ideological need for the Muslim Brotherhood to abandon al-Bannā's program in order to collaborate and govern with secular parties. Theoretically, if the Brother's interpretant is 'exclusivity', al-Bannā's definition of *da'wa* (above, pp. 11–12) could be apprehended as meaning that the pious Muslims must lead for the sake of the common good and progress; but if the interpretant is 'inclusivity' the outcome could be power sharing for the sake of the common good and progress. However, much more research, including textual studies, interviews and comparative hermeneutics (within and beyond the Islamic disciplines), is required in order to test the present hypothesis of the Muslim Brotherhood as the embodiment of pragmatism.

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<sup>64</sup> Ottaway, 2013.

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