

6-3-2014

Brothers in Motion: Religious Practice, Political Action, and the Mobilization of the Early Muslim Brotherhood

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**BROTHERS IN MOTION: RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, POLITICAL ACTION, AND THE
MOBILIZATION OF THE EARLY MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD**

BY

IAN H. VANDERMEULEN

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies
in satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

BROTHERS IN MOTION: RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, POLITICAL EXPRESSION, AND THE
MOBILIZATION OF THE EARLY MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

by

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Advisor: Professor Samira Haj

In light of Randy Martin's proposal to use dance as an analytic tool for understanding social movements, this article seeks to reconstruct the early mobilization of the Muslim Brotherhood as "bodies in motion." Through a re-examination of both primary and secondary source material, this study will highlight the ways in which founder Hasan al-Banna appropriated both Islamic and colonial choreographic logics into the Muslim Brotherhood's pious training regimen, scouting programs, political expression, and social welfare projects. I argue that the Muslim Brotherhood was mobilized through al-Banna's revival of traditional Islamic practices concerning the body, reconfigured for the goal not of otherworldly transcendence, but of the construction of a moral community committed to *da'wa* and the care of the material needs of others. This reconfiguration of embodied Islamic practices sets al-Banna apart as a unique figure within the political problem space of 1930s and '40s Egypt.

Acknowledgements

This paper, like the Muslim Brotherhood it portrays, involved the mobilization of multiple bodies unified in their support of a common goal. I would like to pay tribute to at least a few of them. Hasan al-Banna himself would no doubt have said that learning starts in the home, and I thank my parents, first and foremost, for helping inculcate the intellectual discipline necessary for the work herein. I owe significant debts to my thesis supervisors Samira Haj and Simon Davis, without whose corrective guidance I might easily have strayed from the straight path. Jonathan Shannon's introduction to the work of Randy Martin and comments on an earlier version of this paper were foundational. Thank you finally to the insight and wisdom of my many other professors at the CUNY Graduate Center; the tireless support of Anny Bakalian and Beth Baron in the Middle Eastern Studies department; and my own brethren, the many passionate and vivacious students who inspired me and helped keep me going, foremost among them Jennifer Nina, my partner in life and learning and my editor at large.

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“Muslims are represented in their mutual love, mercy, and compassion as one body (al-jesid al-wāhid)—if one member complains of faltering, for him there is another body with insurance and safe haven.”

-Hasan al-Banna¹

Introduction:

There is a much-repeated story from Hasan al-Banna’s memoirs about his first stay in Cairo as a student in his early twenties. Surveying the various forms of indulgence around him—music and dance, coffeehouses, gambling, drinking, drugs, prostitution—and Al-Azhar’s proximity to the heart of these activities in the Azbakiyya quarter, al-Banna recalls being

deeply pained, for I saw that the social life of the beloved Egyptian nation was oscillating between its dear and precious Islam . . . and this violent Western aggression (*ghazw*), armed and equipped with all the deadly material weapons of money, status, outward appearance, indulgence, power and the means of propaganda.²

Put another way, al-Banna saw Islamic society in Egypt as horribly out of balance, its subjects having been anesthetized by material temptations and dominated by material repression. This episode, along with al-Banna’s impressions of the British-dominated town of Ismailiyya where he took his first teaching post, are regarded by scholars as the seed of al-Banna’s moral outrage that inspired the Muslim Brotherhood, one of the most prominent and debated Islamist movements of the last century.

However earnest al-Banna’s recollection may be, scholars commonly take it as evidence for the Muslim Brotherhood’s reactionary origins, as a movement that gained explosive momentum by exploiting a political crisis. A particular danger with Islamist trends, this tendency

¹ Hasan al-Banna, “Al-Usra” (“The Family”), in *Majmu‘at al-rasā’il lil-Imām al-Shahīd Hasan al-Banna* (Beirut: al-Mu’assasah al-Islāmīyah lil-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Ṣihāfah wa-al-Nashr, 1981), 375.

² Gudrun Krämer, *Hasan al-Banna* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 21.

extends to other social movements as well. As sociologist and dance theorist Randy Martin points out, this method of analyzing the history of social movements is problematic insofar as it “suggests a series of unconnected moves, each of which is prompted by a thought and decision, rather than something continuous in itself and capable of going beyond itself.” According to this view, he argues, political ideas themselves occur “in stillness, awaiting something that will bring people to action or mobilize them.” The ontology of dance, however, which takes bodies-in-motion as its normative condition, “could bridge the various splits between mind and body, subject and object, and process and structure that have been so difficult for understandings of social life to negotiate.”³ The purpose of this study then is to explore how Martin’s concept of social movements as dance can help us understand the mobilization of the Muslim Brotherhood in its early period. I argue that this mobilization was rooted in al-Banna’s reconfiguration of Sufi practices—informed by the choreographic logic of Egypt’s interwar political sphere—as a means of training effective and moral Muslim bodies for embodied *da‘wa* (Islamic outreach) and political action.

Previous explanations for the Muslim Brotherhood’s early success have tended to privilege a narrow set of factors over others. Ideational approaches emphasize al-Banna’s ability to condense the thought of previous Muslim intellectuals like the “liberal” reformer Muhammad ‘Abduh and his *salāfi* pupil Rashid Rida into a simplified political ideology that appealed to the marginalized urban masses.⁴ Others have stressed socio-political factors of Egypt’s broader post-World War I milieu, casting the Brotherhood as an alternative to the Wafd party after the latter’s failure to gain true independence from the British,⁵ or as a social program that appealed to the masses more than the highly theoretical, materialistic, and “Western” ideals of the Wafd or

³ Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 1-3.

⁴ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁵ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt’s Liberal Experiment, 1922-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

communists,⁶ or further as an urban movement that grew alongside the rise of a “new effendiya” class of small-time landholders and local politicians.⁷ More recent studies have attempted to contextualize the Muslim Brotherhood in relation to other Islamist trends, applying social movement theory to understand the success of such movements, as well as their ideological shifts over time.⁸

Despite their apparent differences in emphasis, each of these approaches falls short insofar as they cast the Muslim Brotherhood in a reactionary mold, with its ability to mobilize contingent either on its adaptation and response to opportunity and need or, more reductively, simply being in the right place at the right time. One of the foremost scholars on the early Muslim Brotherhood Brynjar Lia, for example, attributes the movement’s growth and expansion to its “ideological appeal, modern organization, and the interests of the lower middle class.”⁹ This assessment follows similar logic to the “resource mobilization theory” of scholar Mancur Olson, whom Martin criticizes for explaining mobilization and participation through the rational choices of individuals based on a cost-benefit analysis of resources obtainable from a given political program. By relegating subjectivity to “an ideational form that could not account for what kept people in motion, for what maintained or mobilized participation,” these approaches create a “conceptual divide between interest and action ... that separates agency and history.” In brief, “the movement is taken out of ideas.”¹⁰

⁶ Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁷ Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁸ Ziad Munson, “Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2001): 487-510; see also Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁹ Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942* (Reading, U.K.: Garnet & Ithaca Press, 1998), 280.

¹⁰ Martin, *Critical Moves*, 9-11.

While acknowledging the merits of the studies outlined above and drawing a number of insights from them, reconceptualizing the Muslim Brotherhood's early mobilization as bodies in motion can improve on such studies in a number of ways. First, such an approach can avoid the common trap of looking at social change "under the purely oppositional rubric of resistance," which by assuming "the perspective of that which blocks social movement ... already cedes much to the forces of social control."¹¹ In other words, dance can evoke the Muslim Brotherhood's intellectual and physical dynamism in ways not dependent on mere reaction to foreign domination, or failure of the Wafd, or even the disenfranchisement of the urban masses. Rather, we can see it more clearly as movement whose productive forms of power are deeply rooted in an Islamic tradition that is not only discursive, but physically lived.

Key to this objective is the notion of dance training, where what appears at first to be pure mimicry of a teacher or advanced student's technique is in fact "a multiplicity of demands that the dancer learns to negotiate and, within limits, to surpass the strictures of technique to display the intrinsic diversity that composes each citizen-body."¹² For Susan Foster, the process of dance training in fact "creates two bodies: one, perceived and tangible; the other, aesthetically ideal." The perceived body is restructured in the mold of the ideal body, their relation mediated by a third demonstrative body, which exemplifies correct movement. "Neither the perceived body nor the ideal body remains constant throughout the process: definitions of both are altered and refined."¹³ Similarly, al-Banna reconfigured and reoriented bodily practices from the Islamic tradition, such as prayer and Sufi *dhikr*, to serve the disciplining of a new "ideal body": the politically engaged, modern Muslim subject.

¹¹ Martin, *Critical Moves*, 12-13.

¹² Martin, *Critical Moves*, 21.

¹³ Susan Leigh Foster, *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies in Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 237-39.

Secondly, this study can harmonize with and build upon other work that highlights the importance of the body to recent discourses on an “Islamic revival.”¹⁴ While these studies are attuned to the role certain Islamic bodily practices play in constructing pious Muslim identities within an Egyptian public sphere somewhat hostile to Islamist politics, their concern has more to do with individual bodies and less with how the disciplining of bodies contributes to the mobilization of the Muslim collective. Here, it is helpful to consider the various colonial and post-colonial discourses that sought to understand collective mobilization of bodies through the emergent concept of “society.”¹⁵ The notion that, as a collective body, human society (*al-ijtimāʿ*) is subject to the same laws as individual bodies is reflected in al-Banna’s vision for the revival of an Islamic civil society, where individual Muslim practices not only shape moral individuals, but bind the community together while empowering it at the same time. Like a dance troupe, al-Banna’s Muslim community is in a sense in a constant state of training, even as their “performance” on the political stage is being carried out.

Finally, this study can also contribute to scholarship on the Middle East that acknowledges the role of performance and ritual in political mobilization, yet restricts the role of bodies to that of either sites for the inscription of political symbols or instruments of ideological expression, rather than as active agents in and of themselves. James Gelvin, for example, takes an innovative approach to Syrian nationalist foment in the two year interval between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the application of the French mandate, focusing on performative interactions such as theater performances, political marches and demonstrations, and public

¹⁴ See Gregory Starrett, “The Hexis of Interpretation: Islam and the body in the Egyptian popular school.” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4 (1995): 953-69; Saba Mahmood, “Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Ṣalat.” *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (2001): 827-53; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ See Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1988); Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

readings and debates of press articles. Gelvin argues that, “by breaking down the distinction between audience and participant, these demonstrations symbolically recreated the nation in microcosm and confirmed an underlying transformation of social relations in urban Syria that rendered sustained and proactive contentious collective action possible.”¹⁶ However, his focus on the discursive and symbolic aspects of these political performances lacks the weight of bodies—the role they play not just as symbols but agents in the collective motion of the social body. This paper will show that ideology and the motion of bodies mutually constitute each other, and thus mobilization is not merely a later stage in a political movement’s development.

Through a re-examination of both primary and secondary source material, this study will highlight the ways in which al-Banna appropriated these choreographic logics into the Muslim Brotherhood’s pious training regimen, scouting programs, political expression, and social welfare projects. I argue that the Muslim Brotherhood was mobilized through al-Banna’s revival of traditional Islamic practices concerning the body, reconfigured for the goal not of otherworldly transcendence, but of the construction of a moral community committed to *da‘wa* and the care of the material needs of others. Al-Banna’s vision of a modern Muslim society in the mold of the “choreographic ideal” of the early Islamic community should not be understood as the return to an ossified tradition, nor the “invention of tradition,”¹⁷ but the attempt to discipline a community through reconfigured Islamic practices, and bind it together through the constant forward momentum of its activist mission. This reconfiguration of embodied Islamic practices furthermore sets al-Banna apart as a unique figure within the political problem space of 1930s and ’40s Egypt.

¹⁶ James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 290.

¹⁷ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Al-Banna's Choreographic Influences

In order to understand how al-Banna made the body central to the Muslim Brotherhood's social activism, we should first examine both the modern discourses on the body and Islamic bodily practices that were relevant to his project. In the case of Egypt, the debates about proper bodily comportment that played a significant role in education reform can be traced back to colonial discourse nearly a century before al-Banna's political career. The "degradation" of Egyptian society, Charles Pellissier argued in his 1849 *Rapport sur l'instruction publique*, was certainly due to the conditions of traditional *kuttab* education.

Everyone knows that packed in an often too-small room, squatting all day long, [the students] repeat all together in loud voices the verses taught to them by the master. The monotonous noise of these incessant cries and the oscillating movement that they impart to their bodies as they stammer the words without comprehension, soon produces among them a kind of intoxication resembling that of dervishes during certain religious festivals.¹⁸

The derogatory implication of the comparison to dervish behavior will become apparent later. The problem in this context, it seems, is that this incessant repetition ruled out true mental or intellectual activity. "If the object of true education be intellectual gymnastic," Under-Secretary of Finance for the British occupation Alfred Milner argued almost a half-century later, "if it be to exercise and render supple the joints of the mind, then this system is its opposite, for it tends to stiffen them."¹⁹ The bodily metaphor in discussion of mental activity is striking, and serves to enhance the ontological opposition of mind and body within Milner's argument. Incessant physical motion in education prevented the development of mental "suppleness." This is why, in Starrett's estimation, the spinning dervish and rocking schoolchild "had in common a physical engagement that appeared automatically to exclude mental activity."

¹⁸ Quoted in Starrett, "Hexis of Interpretation," 957.

¹⁹ Quoted in Starrett, "Hexis of Interpretation," 955.

Over the next fifty years, the colonial government under Lord Cromer (in office 1882-1907) operated separate religious *madrassas* and primary schools based on European models. Successful graduation from the latter could earn one placement in the Egyptian civil service, or as a public school teacher.²⁰ Central to these new forms of education was a certain disciplining of the body. “The body was to be treated as a physical machine, and disease as a mechanical process of cause and effect.” Yet this is only half of the story, for the body was only the beginning of a process whose ultimate goal was to form the morals—or mind—of the child. This duality paralleled a similarly dualistic notion of culture, which “referred to both the moral order of the community and to the set of rules or values to be acquired by the individual.”²¹ As will be shown, similar logic was at the core of al-Banna’s project of re-instilling Islamic virtues in the modern national subject through disciplining the body.

At the same time, it was not only individual bodies that were to be understood and conditioned, but the collective body of the mass, evidenced by the proliferation of the social sciences in early twentieth century Egypt. Omnia El-Shakry has argued that many Egyptian intellectuals appropriated the rhetoric and categories of colonial governance to articulate a concept of an educable, collective national subject whose purpose was the establishment of social welfare for the masses. This intellectual ferment was rooted in the fields of human geography, population studies, and sociology that began emerging in Egypt in the early 1920s. Working against colonial anxiety about the unpredictability of “the crowd,” the aim of positivist sociology in particular “was to formulate empirically grounded general laws and predictions of human behavior, based on observation and the determination of regularities.” A second, more “romantic,” strand of social science discourse posited a social whole based on cultural and

²⁰ Starrett, “Hexis of Interpretation,” 960.

²¹ Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 99-101.

historically specificity, splitting the realm of culture into inner and outer spheres so as to provide “a formulation for the selective appropriation of Western modernity.”²² In both cases, movement of the human collective, like the individuals of which the collective is comprised, can be analyzed scientifically, suggesting that they can also be trained to move in concert and on command.

This was the intellectual milieu within which al-Banna would come to articulate his vision of an Islamic moral order. His exposure to such discourses concerning the body and society, through his training at Dar al-‘Ulum teacher’s college and subsequent career as a public school teacher, bore great influence. But in order to reconstruct the Brotherhood’s early history as a dance movement, in line with Martin’s proposal, we must identify prior sources of momentum leading to the movement’s founding—genealogies less in the discursive sense of concepts and their histories,²³ and more in the sense of embodied memories and experiences. Here we might turn to two elements of Egypt’s spiritual and political milieu that Lia identifies as having made particularly powerful impression on al-Banna.²⁴ One was Sufi practice, particularly of the Hasafiyya order, which initiated al-Banna as a disciple (*murid*) when he was a teenager. Crucially, Sufi practices in general were subject to significant debate during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly regarding their appropriateness to the construction of “modern” subjectivities, and their place in the public sphere. Secondly, the Egyptian uprising against the British in 1919 seems to have made an equally strong impression on al-Banna. Regardless of the accuracy of his claims to having participated in student demonstrations—he

²² El-Shakry, *Great Social Laboratory*, 10-12.

²³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

²⁴ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 25-27.

would have been all of thirteen—the mention in his memoirs clearly expresses a performative relationship with the memory of the events.

Scholars have debated the role of Sufi influences within the Muslim Brotherhood, struggling to reconcile al-Banna's apparent affinity for Sufi concepts with other members' overt disdain. Mitchell notes al-Banna's involvement in Sufism as a youth, but posits that his "formal links" to Sufi trends broke after founding his own organization.²⁵ In line with the comment above, Lia seems to acknowledge a deeper influence on al-Banna, yet suggests that the opposition of the Brotherhood's "salāfiyya" adherents forced al-Banna to mediate between those two "extremes."²⁶ Abu-Rabi' alone considers Sufism "the single most important factor in al-Banna's establishing and sustaining an active religious and social organization with a clear social and political mission."²⁷ Yet while he highlights how the organizational principles of the *tariqa* offered a model for al-Banna's own organization, he pays little attention to the role of *dhikr* in the training regime al-Banna would eventually establish for the Brotherhood. By reducing the debate to a discursive opposition between al-Banna and his followers, however, these studies miss the relevance of embodiment within Sufi practice. The integration of *dhikr* within the training regimen of the Rover Battalions in fact suggests that for al-Banna, Sufism was less a source of ideological or philosophical inspiration than a method of instilling embodied moral principles in a socially-active community. Moreover, Egyptian Sufis more generally had faced harsh criticism for what British observers and Islamic modernists alike saw as "backward" practices, such as public *dhikr* ceremonies and drumming parades, resulting in significant

²⁵ Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993/1969), 214.

²⁶ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 60.

²⁷ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 67.

purging of these practices from public life in the early part of the 20th century.²⁸ Thus, Al-Banna's moderation between Sufi practices and Salafi views was not so much an ideological battle within the Brotherhood specifically, as his effort to reconfigure these practices within broader colonial and reformist debates, making these practices relevant to people's contemporary experiences and avoiding their complete dismissal from the public sphere.

While direct testimony regarding the *dhikr* chants led by al-Banna is hard to come by, more recent studies of Egyptian Sufi practices can help shed light on the centrality of the body. While the ultimate goal of *dhikr* is to obtain union with God, recent examinations of Egyptian Sufism display an important collectively-embodied element to the practice that feeds into the social structure of Sufi orders more generally. Hoffman, for example, argues: "The involvement of the entire body in the process of recollection is consistent with other practices in Islam, such as the movements of the body in *salat*, and is part of the general recognition of the connectedness of body, mind, and spirit in Islam."²⁹ The movements in the *dhikr* ceremony she describes "require considerable exertion": recitation of the name is given force by throwing the head and upper body back and forward with full 180-degree turns "sustained for anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour." The Sheikh acts as conductor, keeping the brothers in line through personal example and clapping. Interestingly, in such collective *dhikr* performances, the group perspective takes precedence: part of the Sheikh's role is in fact to make sure none of the other brothers goes into ecstasy, and to intervene or change the tempo or intensity of the *dhikr* to avoid such an event.³⁰ Given that ecstasy carries with it a notion of being outside oneself, or being disembodied,

²⁸ See Meir Hatina, "Religious Culture Contested: The Sufi Ritual of *Dawsa* in Nineteenth-Century Cairo." *Die Welt des Islams* 47, no. 1 (2007): 33-62; Samuli Schielke, "Hegemonic Encounters: Criticism of Saints-Day Festivals and the Formation of Modern Islam in Late 19th and Early 20th-Century Egypt." *Die Welt des Islams* 47, no. 3-4 (2007): 319-355.

²⁹ Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 167.

³⁰ Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints*, 168.

the Sheikh's careful monitoring of the *dhikr* is in fact aimed at keeping the performance rooted in one's body.

Gilsenan has observed similar attention to collective dynamics among the *Hamidiya Shadhiliya* in particular. He describes their *dhikr* ceremonies as “marked by a series of climaxes rather than by any one particular moment.” Again, any risk that one of the brothers may slip into an ecstatic out-of-body experience during the *dhikr* is “limited by the careful control exercised by the Sheikh in the duration of the climactic moments.”³¹ The brothers arrange themselves in “ranks,” clasping hands with fingers interlaced. While the *Hamidiya Shadhiliya* arrange themselves in two facing ranks, another *tarīqa* or order, the *Demerdashiya Khalwatiya* arrange themselves in consecutive ranks all facing the direction of the Sheikh.³² Thus, the *dhikr* performance, though in many ways rigorously controlled, takes place within a dynamic collective structure that reflects “the essential flexibility and multiplicity of variations” that Gilsenan also observes in Sufi social structures and recruitment practices. Furthermore, despite the ultimate goal of communion with God, in a group setting, Sufis look to maintain a certain sense of embodiment within *dhikr* performance. Referring to similar *dhikr* performances in Aleppo, Shannon argues that the experiential aim “is not a transcendence related to objects outside the body, or what Merleau-Ponty (1962: 70, 419) calls *ek-stase*, but rather of more closely realizing divine truths within the body.”³³ To summarize, Sufi *dhikr* is an embodied practice that, despite its mystical aims, also functions as a framework of social organization within certain flexible limits. As will be shown, the prominent role that al-Banna gave *dhikr* within his training regimen, and its seamless integration with the structures of social organizing

³¹ Michael Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 169.

³² Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi*, 159-62.

³³ Jonathan H. Shannon, “The Aesthetics of Spiritual Practice and the Creation of Moral and Musical Subjectivities in Aleppo, Syria,” *Ethnology* 43, no. 4 (2004): 388.

that he laid out for the Muslim Brotherhood, helped give the movement a flexibility that aided its mobilization and expansion early on.

Given these characteristics, it's not surprising that al-Banna would turn to the already-familiar practice of *dhikr* as a means of reconstructing a social order based on religious principles. In an examination of Medieval Latin Christianity, Asad draws attention to “the conditions within which obedient wills are created.”³⁴ Arguing against an anthropological view that sees ritual as instilling the ideal social structure within participants via essentially symbolic praxis, Asad maintains that the interrelation of the meanings of ritual performances on the one hand and the feelings and intentions of performers on the other was in fact crucial to monastic discipline, since it allowed for physical disciplining of the body to cultivate inner virtues. The creation of obedient wills was thus not a restriction of people's choices per se, but a reorganization of “the basis on which choices were to be made.” As such, discipline was “the proper organization of the soul—of understanding and feeling, desire and will,” simultaneously serving a social function by drawing an equivalence “between the human body and the community ... not simply for the collective life of the cloister but ... for political order too.”³⁵

For al-Banna, reconfiguring Islamic principles to render them relevant to his social vision meant working through similar debates within his own religious tradition. One particularly crucial issue was the distinction (or not) between action and inner conviction or intention, exemplified by the debate over whether an external act of submission (*islam*) equated with inner conviction or faith, or *imān*. The Hanbaliyya school, which gained wide acceptance in Egypt and to which al-Banna is thought to have adhered, distinguished between the two but also posited that the former was prerequisite to the latter, and “faith is to be affirmed by both utterance (*qawl*

³⁴ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 125.

³⁵ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 130-38.

bil-lisān) and action (*bil-‘amal*).” For the eighteenth century reformer from the Hijaz (contemporary Saudi Arabia) Muhammad ibn ‘Abdul Wahhab, this process of activating *imān* through conscious action “is transformative, as it involves both exertion (*juhd*) and discipline (of desires) on behalf of the individual believer to become a good Muslim.”³⁶ In other words, performance not only actualizes or expresses inner virtues, it also cultivates them.

The interrelatedness of one’s internal and external dimensions was also at the heart of nineteenth century Egyptian reformer Muhammad ‘Abduh’s efforts to reconfigure “an Islamic subjectivity more consonant with the modern condition.” ‘Abduh, often identified as an intellectual predecessor of al-Banna, drew on a particular notion of ethics (*ādāb*) initiated by thirteenth-century intellectual al-Ghazali whereby the cultivation of ethical conduct takes place “through a slow process of educating and disciplining the self (body and soul) until a set of virtues, or *fada’il*, become interiorized.” To continue the loop, the actualization of these virtues through interactive transactions (*mu‘amalāt*) binds the Muslim subject to the community, for he “realizes his righteous self through a living collective.”³⁷ This has important implications in relation to a conception of dance, for the end goal of individual effort is not transcendence, but a harmonization of one’s individual action with those of the larger group. Keeping in mind al-Banna’s indebtedness to both colonial and Islamic discourses outlined above, Sufism wasn’t so much an ideological influence as a practical one, drawn from his own youthful experiences and reconfigured for his contemporary political conditions. In short, while al-Banna may have shared in the nationalist project of creating active, modern political subjects through disciplining the body, *dhikr* provided a form of discipline that could at the same time instill Islamic virtues, thus

³⁶ Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 41-49.

³⁷ Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 109-18.

preparing al-Banna's followers not just for mass mobilization but also for carrying out the social welfare mission that he saw as the duty of a modern Muslim community.

The uprisings of 1919 followed in large part from the Wafd's humiliation on the world stage a year earlier. Egypt had been declared an official British protectorate in the midst of World War I, but following President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points peace proposal in 1918, promising self determination to former Ottoman territories, the organization soon to be known as the Wafd was formed to discuss Egypt's future.³⁸ But the Egyptian nationalists' exclusion from the Paris Peace Conference in January prompted Wafd leader Saad Zaghlul to stir up the Egyptian public, resulting in his March arrest and exile to Malta.³⁹ Protests began the next day, involving students from some of the professional schools, secondary students, Azharites, public transit workers, the professional classes, even government officials. Despite the Wafdists' inclusion at the next Peace Conference on April 6, unrest continued through the end of the year, with Egyptians killed by British police eventually numbering some eight hundred.⁴⁰ Images from the 1919 uprisings exemplify the performativity of political expression in this period. Protesters seem to often be caught in motion and rarely appear alone, instead coalescing into groups, and often making gestures to the camera, belying their acknowledgment of an "audience" to their protest. A number of funeral marches appear highly stylized, their apparent choreography and use of banners paralleling the pageant culture that Graff has shown to have been so closely tied to socialist dance movements in interwar New York City.⁴¹

³⁸ Al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment*, 45.

³⁹ P. J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak*, Fourth Edition. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991/1969), 263-67.

⁴⁰ Al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment*, 51-52.

⁴¹ Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

However, while the 1919 demonstrations mirror the socialist pageants of interwar New York in terms of their political display, al-Banna's own recollections of the Egyptian uprising (from his student days in Mahmūdiyya) indicate a more visceral understanding of the events.

I still remember the scenes of the demonstrations, strikes and processions. ... They had the flags in their hands and endeavoured to surpass each other in this *jihād*. I also remember the enchanting national songs sung by the demonstrators.

By the time al-Banna had begun studying at the Teacher Training School

the heat of the movement had subsided. However the people tried to keep the movement alive by strikes, demonstrations and clashes with the policemen. ... Though I was engrossed in my mystic thoughts, it was my belief that it was a *jihād* and that there was no exception for a Muslim.⁴²

The author goes on to portray himself as an advisor to many of the students on how to participate in ongoing strikes and other demonstrations. The passages show not just the impact that the 1919 uprisings (and those shortly thereafter) had on al-Banna but the politicization of his thought from a young age and the integration of Islamic principles within it. His “mystical thoughts” seem to provide an anchor for his pre-Brotherhood political activism, in the form of embodied demonstrations, physically manifested, like strikes, processions, and revolutionary song. As Martin's arguments might suggest, then, mobilization is not a discrete stage in al-Banna's political career, but an ongoing practice that would impact the ideological foundations of the Brotherhood movement. Furthermore, al-Banna's framing of the events as *jihād*—which can be understood not just in the external sense but also in the internal sense as *jihād al-nafs* (struggle of the self)—casts the protests as more than a symbolic display, but as a bodily practice that through sustained effort (*juhd*) helps instill virtue. In other words, the external struggle required

⁴² M. N. Shaikh, trans. *Memoirs of Hasan al-Banna Shaheed* (Karachi : International Islamic Publishers, 1981), 82-84.

in political protest is both internally transformative and externally empowering, motivating individuals to enact those virtues as one body through political expression.

The Collective Body of the Muslim Brothers: from training to action

Hasan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in the town of Ismailiyya, where he had been posted the previous year following four years at Dar al-‘Ulum teachers college. Initially, he had joined another activist group, the Young Men’s Muslim Association, but found them lagging behind his own political vision.⁴³ What appears to be al-Banna’s first Brotherhood pamphlet is, not surprisingly, concerned almost exclusively with educational reform, but surprisingly makes few references to Islam.⁴⁴ By 1931-2, just before al-Banna relocated the organization’s headquarters to Cairo, he began to experience opposition from some other members, an episode that he dramatizes in his memoirs as a battle between the “forces of truth” (*quwa al-haqq*) and the “forces of falsity” (*quwa al-bātil*).⁴⁵ The move to Cairo seems to have been a turning point in the organization’s growth, as its branches increased in number from 15 in 1932 to 300 in 1938, eventually reaching 2,000 by 1949, the year of al-Banna’s assassination.⁴⁶ Al-Banna’s leadership of the Brotherhood ended tragically, and somewhat ironically, with his assassination in front of the YMMA headquarters.

In addition to a variety of publications, much contemporary evidence of the Brotherhood’s ideology emerged from six conferences between 1933 and 1941, and a special mass plenary in 1945. Lia argues that even by 1932, the first internal conflict dramatized by al-Banna in his memoirs “appears to have strengthened the authoritarian and centralized character

⁴³ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 57.

⁴⁴ Johannes J. G. Jansen, “Hasan al-Banna’s Earliest Pamphlet,” *Die Welt des Islams* 32, no. 2 (1992), 254-258.

⁴⁵ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 63. *Bātil* carries a connotation of falsity or nullity, not so much “evil” as Lia translates it.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 328.

of the movement.”⁴⁷ However, a closer look at the output of the Brotherhood’s first five conferences reveals that both its political philosophy and the methods it prescribed for its social organization were still going through an evolutionary process. In Mitchell’s view, it was not until the fifth conference in 1939 that “the Society had assumed its fundamental shape and was sufficiently strong, in its own mind, to flex its muscles publicly albeit cautiously.” Yet it wasn’t even until the plenary of 1945, following Banna’s arrest and failed run for office in the early 1940s, that he presented the *Qanūn al-Nizām al-Asāsi li Hay’at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn al-‘Amma*. According to Mitchell, this “comprehensive set of statutes . . . remained the basic constitution of the Society” until 1951.⁴⁸ If we want to avoid the separation of agency and history that, as Martin warns, takes the movement out of ideas, we must examine more closely the connection between the Brotherhood’s ideological ferment and the construction of the social collective through bodily practices and physical training. In the case of the Brotherhood, we must also be careful about casting training as “indoctrination,” as do many scholars of the movement, including Mitchell. As Martin has argued, the internalization of technique through training allows for transcendence of the disciplinary regimes that structure the training process itself.

The importance of training within al-Banna’s conceptualization of social activism may in fact predate the foundation of the Brotherhood itself. Even during his membership in the YMMA, al-Banna seems to have put forth a detailed education program that included both public education reform and the establishment of a private Islamic school system—supported by a virtuous home environment. “Only when these steps had been taken and the members had been thoroughly prepared and inculcated with the Islamic spirit, could the Islamic message (*da‘wa*) be

⁴⁷ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 70.

⁴⁸ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 36.

communicated to others.”⁴⁹ The YMMA’s inability to satisfy al-Banna’s demands in this regard was likely one of the driving reasons behind his departure from that organization to found a new one. Reform thus begins with the individual and progresses outward, much like the colonial education’s aim of shaping productive citizens. Yet in statements just after the internal crisis of 1931-32, al-Banna seems intent on avoiding the type of top-down modeling that would render his education into a form of indoctrination, insisting that the Society’s philosophy is not “a system of external regulations” (*nizām mazhāri*) or an “administrative idea” (*fikra idāriyya*).⁵⁰ Change had to come from within. This may help explain the weight al-Banna gave to the advice of Sa‘id al-‘Urfi, a Syrian Sufi and politician who visited Egypt in 1930:

Do not refrain from accepting into the *da‘wa* those who come short of fulfilling all their duties towards God and still commit some minor misdeeds (*ma‘asi*) as long as you know that they are God-fearing, disciplined and obedient.⁵¹

Clearly, the emphasis is not on a potential member’s predisposition for upholding a certain ideological program, or even his initial propensity for pious action, but on his potential to be molded into a moral Muslim subject through a particular disciplinary regime. As in dance, perfect performance of the choreographic ideal is not expected to be immediate, but the result of repeated disciplining of the body.

Al-Banna’s concern for discipline and care of the body is evident in his recollections of his early missionary activity on behalf of the Society. In keeping with his desire to reach out to the popular classes rather than engage in purely intellectual discourse, al-Banna opted to make the various coffee-houses around Ismailiyya the site of his preaching. “The people of Ismailiyya liked my method and they talked about my lectures. It stirred them ... I also noticed awakening

⁴⁹ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 57.

⁵⁰ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 69.

⁵¹ M. N. Shaikh, *Memoirs of Hasan al-Banna*, 98.

in the regular listeners,” al-Banna recalls. Though the actual impact of his speech may be idealized, al-Banna is clearly most interested in audience’s visceral reaction, rather than conceptual understanding. His purported response to their queries afterward is much in the same spirit as al-‘Urfi’s advice, and problematizes the training of the Muslim Brothers as a process of “indoctrination.”

I replied to their questions but not in a clear-cut manner. I did so only to keep their interest alive and keep them pondering over the issues confronting them.

The implication, in harmony with many of al-Banna’s other statements throughout his memoirs, is that he is not concerned with Muslims’ intellectual understanding of their creed, but their active participation in what he conceived as an authentically Islamic social project. According to al-Banna, this is reflected by his audience who “suggested to me to adopt [a] line of social action that could make them true Muslims.”⁵² In a sense, the body replaces the intellect as the primary organ of understanding, capable of comprehending divine truths through participation in embodied Islamic practices.

It should come as no surprise, then, that al-Banna began with points of proper bodily comportment when beginning the training regimen of his new initiates. “In the beginning I took them straight to the watertaps and made them sit in a row. I stood among them as a guide and taught them every part of the ablution.” Al-Banna reports having done the same with one small group after another, before moving on to the practice of prayer. Following a thorough explanation, “I requested them to offer prayers before me so that I could see whether they were performing it correctly or not.”⁵³ In short, al-Banna’s priority with new members of the organization is not ideological indoctrination, but proper bodily practice. Given that for al-Banna,

⁵² M. N. Shaikh, *Memoirs of Hasan al-Banna*, 128.

⁵³ M. N. Shaikh, *Memoirs of Hasan al-Banna*, 128-29.

Islamic authenticity is expressed through social activism, we should surmise that the proper bodily aspects of prayer are not simply a matter between man and God, and that al-Banna's attention to these issues should be taken as essential to the Brotherhood's larger mobilization.

One particularly important development not only for instilling correct bodily practices but also activating them on the political stage was al-Banna's establishment of Rover Battalions (*firāq al-jawwala*) sometime around 1937. These small, tight-knit groups, designed equally for social welfare projects and political protest, were indicative of a national "scouting" trend: by this time similar groups had been established by the Wafd, the fascist Italian expatriates, and the anti-Wafdist Young Egypt Society.⁵⁴ Central to the scouting movement as a whole, yet particularly salient for al-Banna's project, was a reimagining of the concept of *al-riyāda*. The concept has a long genealogy within the Islamic tradition, where it generally meant caring for the (physical and spiritual) self, but even for Muhammad 'Abduh, *riyāda* refers to the disciplining of the body necessary for the realization of truth through the heart (*qalb*) and reasoning ('*aql*).⁵⁵ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, the term was delinked from the more traditional *riyādat al-nafs* (caring for the soul) and "reworked and redeployed (as sports) in order to produce a genuinely modern, national subject." Yet in the interwar period, "discourses and practices related to al-riyada continued to proliferate beyond its nationalist framings."⁵⁶

Al-Banna can be situated within this latter trend. A tract appearing in the Muslim Brotherhood's newspaper on August 31, 1934 argues that nations like Egypt who are struggling for independence—literally "nations in struggle" (*al-umam al-mujāhida*)—are in desperate need of self-formation (*banā' al-nufūs*), construction of character (*tashīd al-akhlāq*), and proper

⁵⁴ James P. Jankowski, "The Egyptian Blue Shirts and the Egyptian Wafd, 1935-1938," *Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 1 (1970), 77.

⁵⁵ Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 115.

⁵⁶ Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 24.

masculine discipline instilled in their sons. History, he claims, is “made by men who are the most outstanding in strength of self (*al-aqwiya’ al-nufus*) and will power.” Such words resonate vibrantly with nationalist scouting discourses. In al-Banna’s 1939 article for the monthly *al-Muntakhab* titled “Scouting and Islam,” the *hadith* “You have a duty to your body”—a phrase which the Prophet Muhammad reportedly spoke to ‘Umar—“is repeated and resignified within a modern discourse of *riyāda*.” The Prophet himself is portrayed as the model scout: “a sturdy build, strong muscles, powerful energy, and a mighty will constituted his noble body.”⁵⁷ In this spirit, the training regimen for the Rover Battalions included “modern” forms of *riyāda* alongside all-night vigils and practice of *dhikr*, presumably based on al-Banna’s tract *risālat al-mu’turāt*.⁵⁸ Clearly, for al-Banna, care of outer physique and inner character is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition. Thus his re-association of *dhikr* and other Islamic practices with other physical discipline under the category of *al-riyāda* both recontextualizes these practices as tools for constructing a modern political subject, and reconfigures *al-riyāda* as something that is at once modern, and yet more morally grounded than the *riyāda* of his nationalist contemporaries.

Prayer was another performative act valued by al-Banna for the way it instills virtue and, as a collective act, binds Muslims together in a particular space. A description of prayer from al-Banna’s article “New Renaissance” illustrates how directly conversant he was with political ideas originating in the West, and his positing of the Islamic community as the most perfect of political systems. More importantly, proper functioning of bodies is crucial to uniting the *umma*.

Islamic prayer ... is nothing but a *daily training* in practical and social organization, uniting the features of the Communist regime with those of the dictatorial and democratic regimes ... the moment [the believer] enters [the mosque] ... there are no great, no small, no high, no low, no more groups or classes ... And when the muezzin calls, “now is the hour of prayer,” *they form an equal mass, a compact block*, behind the imam ... The

⁵⁷ Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 109-110.

⁵⁸ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 115.

imam himself is in any case limited by the teachings and rules of the prayer, and if he stumbles or makes a mistake in his reading or in his actions, all those behind him have the duty to tell him of his error in order to *put him back on the right road during prayer*. ... This is what is most appealing in democracy. [Emphasis added].⁵⁹

In other writings al-Banna stressed the importance of corrective advice or *nasīha* as a duty incumbent on all Muslims and an essential element in the functioning of a moral Muslim community.⁶⁰ In theory *nasīha*—a practice that parallels the tradition of senior dance students correcting their junior cohort—could refer to a discursive technique of correcting a fellow Muslim’s speech. However, the clear focus here on the actions of the imam emphasizes *nasīha*’s physical aspects, and this physical exchange helps bind participants together as one body—“an equal mass,” or a “compact block.” Meanwhile, as a space where bodies gather, the mosque itself, helps solidify this physical togetherness, for in al-Banna’s description, “the secular domain and space cease to exist. The space of the mosque is protected by the divine and not by the political elite of the country.”⁶¹ The physical occupation of space, whether it be a mosque or Sufi lodge, or the marches and political protests which will be treated below, has both an outward function—prayer, *dhikr*, political protest—and transformative impact on the body performing the act.

At the same time, the mosque’s centrality to the Brotherhood’s welfare mission helps link the physical practices of prayer and *nasīha* to the public sphere. As Abu-Rabi‘ notes, al-Banna saw the mosque as serving triple functions as a place for worship, education, and caring for the physically, mentally, and spiritually sick. By treating the mosque as both a space and a signifier of meaning, al-Banna interpolates the physical space of the mosque itself “with the cultural and

⁵⁹ Kemal H. Karpat, ed., *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 121.

⁶⁰ Al-Banna, “Al-Usra” (“The Family”), *Majmu‘at Hasan al-Banna*, 374.

⁶¹ Abu-Rabi‘, *Intellectual Origins*, 77.

religious space—namely, the mosque’s functions.” New functions like education and caring for the sick help imbue the mosque with new meanings and differentiate it from the “mosque” of al-Banna’s political opponents, namely the Azharite *ulama*’. In essence, Abu-Rabi’ argues, the mosque “denotes a network of signifiers, a whole system of inner-oriented meanings and outer-oriented practices and mores.”⁶² However, while Abu Rabi’s argument—that the mosque is important as a space distinct from the “secular” sphere—may hold weight, the mosque’s function as a center for social welfare activity in fact links religious and “secular” spheres by providing a conduit for the transformative impact of *nasīha* and prayer to reach the public space. The expansion of the mosque’s meanings and functions thus helped al-Banna reconfigure the practices of prayer and *nasīha* to not only bind fellow Muslims together as one, but undergird their mobilization in political activism and social welfare work.

Thus, not only does training support effective *da’wa*, attracting new potential trainees, training and *da’wa* mutually constitute each other. Saba Mahmood has argued convincingly that recognizable pious practices like veiling are not simply expressions of belief or inner devotion, but are in fact seen by Muslims as tools for conditioning pious subjectivities.⁶³ Additionally, prayer has a certain built-in flexibility despite the emphasis on adhering to prescribed choreography enforced by *nasīha*. Saba Mahmood argues that, among the Egyptian women with whom she has worked, prayer “did not require the suspension of spontaneous emotion and individual intention, neither was it a space for the cathartic release of unsocialized or unassimilable elements of the psyche.”⁶⁴ The flexibility of both as tools of mobilization that take root first in one’s body undermines a conceptualization of al-Banna’s training regimen as

⁶² Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins*, 78.

⁶³ Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 202-36.

⁶⁴ Mahmood, Saba. “Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Ṣalat,” *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (2001), 828.

“indoctrination,” which implies a rational, top-down process. Furthermore, al-Banna’s channeling of the productive power of socially-committed Muslim bodies through the mosque ideal into a singular, collective power, suggests that collective social action rooted in *da‘wa* has the same feedback effect upon individual bodies. The unified religious practices and social activism of the collective body help to morally shape the individual bodies that make up the collective. Just as any dancer would attest, for al-Banna there is no end to the training that supports *da‘wa* work, and the act of *da‘wa* itself—the equivalent of a dancer’s “performance”—contributes to both individual and collective training experiences such that there is a seamless connection between preparation and *da‘wa*, and individual and collective action.

The mosque’s functionality as a tool for political mobilization may help explain its centrality to al-Banna’s own *da‘wa* work. Immediately after the Muslim Brotherhood’s move to Cairo, al-Banna began to embark on regular “round tours” of Egypt, to reinforce his relationship with other existing branches, get a feel for local rhythms, and network with local notables and religious leaders.⁶⁵ For members of these outlying branches, this meant exposure to al-Banna’s charismatic personality, evident in his ability to communicate in multiple registers and ability to convey “a sincerity, selflessness, and humility about himself and his activities.”⁶⁶ Al-Banna was, essentially, a skilled performer, able to connect with and rouse diverse audiences. Yet each performance began with a visit to the local mosque, which he referred to as “the epitome of Islam,” “the place for the fraternization of believers,” and “the people’s university.”⁶⁷

In 1938, al-Banna published an editorial in the journal *al-Nadhīr* declaring the beginning of a “special call” (*al-da‘wa al-khāssa*), a new phase of intensified engagement with Egypt’s political landscape:

⁶⁵ Krämer, *Hasan al-Banna*, 43.

⁶⁶ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 298.

⁶⁷ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 33.

The time for action has come, Brothers. We will move from the general call to the special call and from a call based on words (alone) to one based on words accompanied by struggle and action.⁶⁸

This public declaration exhibits a language of conflict between the Brotherhood and the established Egyptian political elite that Lia sees as indicative of “increasing militancy.” Yet the tone of al-Banna’s accompanying speech to the Society’s Student Section is far from militant.

Tell me, Brothers: if Islam is something other than politics, society, economy and culture, what is it then? Is it only prostrations devoid of a beating heart?⁶⁹

This statement, and other similar ones made by al-Banna, is often taken as evidence of the inseparability of different spheres of life within an Islamic framework, and thus as a threat to liberal values. But the passage warrants a more detailed examination. While al-Banna’s first question does indeed seem to be trying to bridge a gap between religion and other spheres of life, the second appears to be an attempt to close a more fundamental gap, established within colonial discourse, between an outer (performative) self—symbolized by the act of prostration—and an inner, essential self—represented by the heart. Based on al-Banna’s characterization of prayer as a performative act that binds individual bodies together as one, this statement roots the performative construction of the community within the individual’s most essential inner being. Yet at the same time, the positing of prostration first in the causal chain suggests that the performance of prayer is an essential act in bringing one’s *imān* into full expression through the *umma*. If we extend this notion into the other spheres of life mentioned in the first part of the statement—politics, society, economy and culture—virtue can be cultivated through other performative acts in other spheres, and al-Banna’s “new phase” is really a continuation of the

⁶⁸ This is a synthesis of translated quotations in Krämer, *Hasan al-Banna*, 52; and Lia, *Mass Movement*, 206.

⁶⁹ Krämer, *Hasan al-Banna*, 51.

embodied forms of discipline found in reconfigured Islamic practices. Furthermore, since the performative cultivation and expression of virtue in one sphere is integrated with performative acts in the others, al-Banna's *umma* takes on the characteristics of a coherent body, whose limbs serve different functions (economic, political, cultural) yet are nonetheless inseparable. This notion will return in al-Banna's discussion of the Brotherhood's relationship to Egypt's Ministry of Social Affairs, examined later in the paper.

One aspect of this shift in the Brotherhood's activity during this time was the increasing role of the Rover Scouts in helping to establish new branches, often appealing to the rural masses through public demonstrations. A description from *al-Nadhīr* of one such display near al-Qitawwiyya in 1939 is particularly vivid:

The 20 Rover Scouts from al-Qitawwiyya marched in their uniforms to the village of Bani Ayub some five miles away. They carried the banner of Muslim Brothers and the Glorious Koran. A crowd of people on bicycles followed them ... The Islamic slogans of the Brothers resounded all over the village and their hymns were heard everywhere.⁷⁰

A British intelligence report confirms the impact of the demonstration, stating that "onlookers have been powerfully impressed by these displays and many have hastened to enlist."⁷¹ The use of banners and chanted slogans recalls the choreography of the 1919 uprising, which, it should be remembered, had a profound impact on al-Banna during his formative years. However, the anecdote about people on bicycles suggests the way in which such demonstrations were effective not just in their visual or symbolic appeal, but for the way they could mobilize potential new members physically, quite literally carrying them along with the procession. In an interesting transposition of the containment of ecstatic behavior within the *dhikr* ceremony, the mobilization of masses through the procession also offers a different form of transcendence, a way forward

⁷⁰ Quoted in Lia, *Mass Movement*, 171.

⁷¹ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 171.

through submission to the momentum of the crowd. In other words, the inner transcendence of Sufi *dhikr*, translated outwardly into political display, demonstrated the power to attract the attention and the support of the uncommitted masses and energize them into action.

Likewise, the practice of slogan chanting itself, as a sort of reconstitution of *dhikr*, was likely an effective tool of political mobilization not just for the meaning of what was being chanted, but more crucially for its visceral aspects. Some chants—such as “God is Great and to Him be Praise” and “God is Great and Glory to Islam”—were used by a variety of activist groups, not just the Brotherhood. But Mitchell argues that, if ascribed to a particular group, the chants were often “the only available recognition” between different groups or members of the same group in what he calls a “mixed meeting.” In addition to these, the Muslim Brotherhood had a longer, compound credo:

Allah ghayatuna. Al-rasūl za'imuna. Al-Qur'an dusturuna. Al-jihād sabīluna. Al-mawt fī sabīl Allah asma amanina. Allah akbar, Allah akbar.

(God is our goal. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur'an is our constitution. Struggle is our way. Death in service of God is the loftiest of our wishes. God is great, God is great.)⁷²

The first four phrases are of course significant symbolically as a modern re-affirmation of the core Islamic creed—particularly reframing the Qur'an as a modern constitution. Just as important, however, is their simple rhyme scheme and loose adherence to a short-long-short-short-long rhythm that falls in easily with a marching tempo. By synthesizing a common physical activity with the core of the Islamic message, bodies become not only sites upon which that message is inscribed, but productive agents in the constitution of that message through social action. Furthermore, while the last line of the chant above is now equally common to Islamic and

⁷² Quoted in Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 193-94.

“secular” chants in Egypt, rooting it in Sufi *dhikr* through the Rover Scouts’ training regimen opens up the possibility for the spread of the chant’s power through the mechanics of what Hirschkind describes as “ethical listening.” Hirschkind relates how, at the dawn of the twentieth century, the original ethos of sermon-giving that cast the listener as an active subject was abrogated in favor of a new emphasis on the rhetorical and expressive tools needed to convince passive listeners. *Da’wa* (“the call”), meanwhile, emerged as a new form of preaching running counter to this trend.⁷³ Given al-Banna’s conceptualization of the expansion of his movement through *da’wa*, it seems likely that he saw the Brotherhood’s chants as operating through a similar process of ethical listening. While the chants were certainly intended to convince listeners of the general public to join the movement, al-Banna’s demand for active, politically engaged Muslims could not have encompassed a notion of passive listenership.

Such an attitude is suggested by al-Banna’s emphasis on active engagement even in the midst of curtailing the Brotherhood’s political activity in the face of increasing repression under British war-time surveillance. In late 1938, the same year as al-Banna’s article in *al-Nadhīr*, the Supreme Guide initiated comprehensive reorganization to, as he put it, “purge the ranks of every idle member whose contributions to the Brothers’ cause are nothing but useless discussions.”⁷⁴ The regulations for organizational structure drafted by al-Banna in 1934 and adopted at the Third General Conference in 1935 had given local branches significant autonomy, though central administration maintained the right to veto certain local decisions. In al-Banna’s eyes, this had eventually led to internal clashes between conservative local notables and “another camp of serious, active and fast-working members.” Yet al-Banna also faced a conundrum: anti-imperialist sentiment and disenchantment with Egypt’s corrupt ruling elite were on the rise

⁷³ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 32-66.

⁷⁴ From *Tagrir Ijmalī Khass*, quoted in Lia, *Mass Movement*, 186.

during this period, fomenting a desire for activism and even violent struggle.⁷⁵ The Palestinian uprisings of 1936-39 also provided an unlikely issue of common interest for leaders of the Brotherhood, the Young Men’s Muslim Association (YMMA), and Liberal Constitutionalist Party, who formed a unique entity for the coordination of fundraising efforts. However, the exertion of the Brotherhood’s public demonstrations—such as the 5,000-strong protest at ‘Ābdīn Palace in October 1937—contrasted heavily with “sedate affairs” of YMMA assembly.⁷⁶ Compounded by Britain’s institution of the Middle East Command in Egypt at the dawn of World War II, al-Banna was facing the prospect of additional government surveillance and repression. By the time of the Fifth Conference of 1939, a significant cohort of the Brothers were testing al-Banna’s gradualist three-stage approach, “demanding the implementation of the third stage, ‘execution,’ which involved ‘uncompromising struggle.’ ”⁷⁷ The solution was a new governance structure that would provide for centrally appointed deputies, and place more responsibility with the local spiritual guide, offering, in al-Banna’s view, a balance between centralization and decentralization. Further adjustments in 1940 replaced the previous tripartite structure—areas (*manātiq*), districts (*dawa’ir*), and branches (*shu‘āb*)—with four new levels—“principal areas” (*manātiq ra’isiyya*), “principal branches” (*shu‘āb rā’isiyya*), district branches (*shu‘āb markaziyya*), and sub-branches (*shu‘āb far’iyya*).⁷⁸

Faced with the difficult task of trying to placate radical voices from within to avoid greater surveillance and repression from without, al-Banna extended the burden of control to his members themselves through an article in *al-Nadhīr* in late 1939:

⁷⁵ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 230.

⁷⁶ James P. Jankowski, “Egyptian Responses to the Palestine Problem in the Interwar Period,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 1 (1980), 13-14.

⁷⁷ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 178.

⁷⁸ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 186-9. I have change Lia’s translation of two of these organizational levels in order to, in my view, better reflect the original Arabic.

The Muslim Brothers anticipate serious action, like clashes with the government. They always express this desire to enter the battlefield. No, my dear Brethren! Clash with yourselves first and struggle with the individual practices that are contrary to Islam. Soon I will call you to change your clothes in order to approach the “external appearance of Islam” [*mazhar al-Islam*].⁷⁹

By calling for the Brothers to restrain themselves lest their actions get out of control, al-Banna is in a sense taking on the role of the Shaykh within the *dhikr* ceremony transposed to the political stage. Furthermore, by substituting individual practice for political activism al-Banna turns self-control into the central disciplinary virtue, and thus makes political disengagement an empowering move rather than a restrictive one. In this way, the Brothers themselves maintained their corporal momentum during a period of necessary political quietism. Indeed, 1941 was a particularly difficult year for the organization, including al-Banna’s forced transfer from Cairo to Upper Egypt, the arrest of al-Banna and other prominent members, and censorship not just of the Brotherhood’s own journals and public gatherings, but any mention of the Brotherhood by any other paper.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, while keeping its public demonstrations to a minimum, the Brotherhood continued to recruit and train Muslim youths for membership in the Battalions, and despite going somewhat underground between 1941 and 1945, managed to double the number of branches in their network from 500 to 1,000 during that period.⁸¹ In short, the political activism of the postwar period was possible because the movement’s momentum had been maintained quietly during the previous years.

The notion of bodies maintaining their momentum during periods of political inactivity raises questions how we might think of “stillness” when conceptualizing political mobilization as dance. André Lepecki has argued that the notion of continuous flow that seems to undergird

⁷⁹ Hasan al-Banna, “Wajibat al-Ikhwan,” quoted in Lia, *Mass Movement*, 255.

⁸⁰ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 21-23.

⁸¹ Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, 232.

Martin's model of social movements as bodies-in-motion is endemic to the modern condition.⁸²

The modern dancer's preference for continuous motion as the body's natural state—as opposed to classical ballet's still, geometric shapes—parallels the continuous forward progress of the modern age. Stillness within dance thus runs counter to modern epistemology. We must tread carefully in applying this notion to social movements, however, for the Muslim Brotherhood's activities at the dawn of the 1940s demonstrate that perceptions of political quietism or “stillness” are not representative of political stagnation but in fact may mask periods of continued mobilization. The organization's boom in the early 1940s, like previous periods of growth, did not come out of nowhere, nor was it simply a result of political opportunity. Al-Banna's ability to continually empower his followers both individually and collectively through bodily practices and the discipline of self-control was crucial to the movement's expansion in this period. The effort expended by al-Banna in maintaining the Brotherhood's internal mobilization, and the subsequent success the movement achieved because of it, render the movement a distinctly modern one, rather than one based on an antiquated ideology that appealed to the right people under the right conditions.

By 1943, after imprisonment and an aborted run at parliamentary office, al-Banna faced increased British surveillance and, he feared, imminent exile. That year he issued a “farewell” message to his followers, aptly titled “The Obstacles in our Path,” warning them of the numerous “hardships and obstructions” ahead in spreading their message. “The common people's ignorance of the reality of Islam will stand in your way.” Likewise, the “ignorant” *'ulama* would use a misunderstood concept of Islam against them. “One government after another will obstruct you, and each of them will attempt to hinder your progress. All the oppressors will exert every

⁸² André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

effort to restrain you and to extinguish the light of your message.”⁸³ These statements are significant not just for the sense of struggle they communicate, but the sense of directed motion through which the struggle takes place, and thus suggest a community in a fully mobilized state and a trajectory that al-Banna felt needed to be maintained.

Interestingly, the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideological development continued with the same vivacity in the postwar years as it had previously. A mass plenary session in September 1945 was an opportunity not just to reaffirm the principles expressed at the Fifth Conference in 1939, but for al-Banna to present “a comprehensive set of statutes, *Qanūn al-Nizām al-Asāsi li Hay’at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn al-‘Amma*, which, although modified in 1948 and supplemented in 1951, remained the basic constitution of the Society.”⁸⁴ In other words, the movement’s ideological precepts and social structure were under constant revision even in the years immediately before and after al-Banna’s assassination. Thus, while the Brotherhood’s ideological evolution after al-Banna is well documented,⁸⁵ it is worth re-emphasizing that the movement’s expansion and social activities are not a simple expression of its ideology, but with social developments and ideological ferment being mutually constitutive. Despite successfully adapting to and surviving both internal and external pressure throughout World War II, the Brotherhood did not emerge with a fully crystalized ideology and social structure intact. Rather, this choreographic logic was continually subject to revision based on the success of the movements’ training regimens, social expansion, and the conditions of political mobilization within which it existed.

⁸³ Wendell, Charles, trans., *Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna (1906-1949): A Selection from the Majmu’at Rasa’il al-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 34. See also Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 29.

⁸⁴ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 36.

⁸⁵ See Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2008) on the ideological split between Hudaybi and Sayyid Qutb. For more recent developments, see Wickham, *Muslim Brotherhood*.

Thus, political mobilization is not simply an expression of a certain ideology or a phase in a given political movement's history, but a process through which the movement of bodies helps shape political ideas as it adapts to changing conditions. This has important ramifications for the development of political ideologies within contested spheres, for ideas are no longer restricted to a purely discursive field. Seemingly "reactive" ideologies do not react through a simple idea-for-idea exchange, but come about equally through a process of enactment within a given problem space. As bodies in motion adapt to changing political conditions, their movement can influence the discursive expression of ideas. If we extend this feedback loop to the level of social organization, we can in fact speak of a collective *body*—or the collective body *in motion*—not just metaphorically, but in the sense that Hirschkind, Mahmood, and Starrett convey, as a multi-limbed physical entity capable of undertaking action not merely as a mode of expression, but as a way of constituting a moral identity. For al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood, the collective motion of marches, chanting, and welfare-driven social activism helped constitute the community's moral core in a similar way as prayer and *dhikr* ceremonies. The following section will elaborate further on how these ideas translated into al-Banna's conception for Muslim social order within Egypt's late-1930s and 1940s political milieu.

Reconfiguring the Muslim Social Body

To this point, we have seen how al-Banna drew upon bodily practices from the Islamic tradition, reconfigured them to serve his political activist vision, and in so doing helped mobilize and expand the Muslim Brotherhood movement drastically in just its first decade. Although the movement's expansion gained a boost from certain political opportunities—such as the 1936-39 Arab revolts in Palestine—its corporal momentum allowed it to approach these opportunities

through a given trajectory, rather than reactively exploiting certain political conditions, as many social movement theorists would maintain. The mobilization of the Brotherhood through reconfigured Islamic practices follows a similar trajectory to what Foucault identifies as “pastoral power”: an “individualizing and totalizing form of power” that allows individuals to be integrated into structures of governance in exchange for having their individuality “shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.”⁸⁶ Within this context “salvation” takes on new meanings: health, well-being, security, protection against accidents. In other words, “a series of ‘worldly’ aims took the place of the religious aims of the traditional pastorate.”⁸⁷ Al-Banna’s integration of *aslāh al-nafs* (care or purification of the self) into various forms of collective activism, and his emphasis on the material benefits of washing before prayer, fits this model quite well, displaying at least a partial substitution of material for “otherworldly” benefits.

However, although Foucault is particularly concerned with forms of pastoral power that undergird the “modern state,” pastoral power is equally salient to other forms of governmentality, including that exhibited by the Muslim Brotherhood in its first two decades. Al-Banna’s vision for a civil society capable of governing itself through disciplined moral action fits Foucault’s definition of governmentality quite well, in fact, concerning itself with “men in their relations, their links, their imbrication, with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence ... customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking.”⁸⁸ Particularly crucial for the Muslim Brotherhood in this period were discourses on the family and social welfare. As this final section will show, concerns over proper family functioning and caring for the material (bodily) needs of the poor became important foci of “this-worldly” salvation that, by employing

⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power.” In *Critical Inquiry*, 8, no. 4 (1982), 783.

⁸⁷ Foucault, “Subject and Power,” 785.

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 95.

similar logics to al-Banna's training regimen and reconfigured Islamic practices, helped mobilize Egyptian Muslims behind the Brotherhood's agenda.

In order to delve into the kinetics of the Brotherhood's welfare activity, it makes sense to begin by noting its connection to one of the most immediate, perceived threats to Egyptian Muslim social order: Christian missionaries. In her forthcoming work on the topic, Beth Baron takes the 1933 beating of Turkiyya Hasan, an orphan girl living at a missionary boarding school, as the key event that turned many in the Canal Zone and across Egypt against the missionaries and helped provide fuel for the Brotherhood's mobilization and expansion. The missionaries offered "more than a rallying point for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists: they also provided an excellent model for organizing and a template for action," developing "in response to missionary enterprises as well as in their image, mimicking their ways and borrowing their tactics."⁸⁹ Some of these tactics, employed well before the Turkiyya Hasan affair, included founding social welfare institutions—schools, orphanages, and health clinics—in proximity to missionary branches, and modeling many of their proselytizing efforts on the outdoor "revival meetings" that missionaries were trying to recreate in Ismailiyya and other Canal Zone towns. Nonetheless, the Turkiyya Hasan affair galvanized the Brotherhood and its supporters, allowing them to effectively double the number of branches in the ensuing summer.⁹⁰

Given that Hasan was not the only orphan known to have been adopted—even converted—by the missionaries, the significance of the event, I suggest, was the way it symbolized a threat to Egyptian Muslim bodies. Indeed, although al-Banna speaks of "colonialism" and "imperialism" as sort of "diseases of the mind" that have afflicted the Egyptian masses, his statement quoted in the introduction of this paper makes clear that he sees

⁸⁹ Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming, 2014), 133.

⁹⁰ Baron, *Orphan Scandal*, 196.

the process of intellectual colonization as beginning with the temptation, cooptation, and domination of bodies. The missionary orphanage caretaker's caning of Turkiyya Hasan for supposed insubordination is thus a particularly visceral representation of that colonial threat, and thus most effective in giving the Brotherhood a popular mandate for their mission and mobilizing the masses behind their cause.

The Brotherhood's social welfare initiatives were also connected to broader national discourses on poverty and population control. In the mid-1930s, with desire for independence from British rule intensifying, Egyptian "social planners were eager to assert their own control over the realm of population—a new object of 'governance' in the post-independence period."⁹¹ Central to many of these population discourses were debates about family planning. In April 1937, al-Banna, along with many other Egyptian intellectuals—doctors, geographers, health inspectors, university professors—attended the Conference on Birth Control, sponsored by the Egyptian Medical Association. As El Shakry discusses at length, the conference was fueled by concerns about high infant mortality rates and debates about the propriety of birth control as a way of addressing the problem. Included in the proceedings was the first known twentieth century *fatwa* on birth control, given by Shaykh Abd al-Majid Selim from Dar al-Ifta, which deemed use of birth control permissible—under certain circumstances and with certain restrictions. Meanwhile, al-Banna, along with Ali Fu'ad and Muhammad Hasan, opposed birth control on two primary bases, the first being class issues as they related to eugenics. The three thinkers feared that those who would take up birth control would be the educated middle class—for them the creative, intellectual, and productive sector of the nation—while peasant procreation would continue apace due to their need for many hands in the field. This imbalance would have disastrous consequences for the nation. Secondly for al-Banna, the duty incumbent upon all

⁹¹ El Shakry, *Great Social Laboratory*, 150.

Muslims to be always prepared for *jihād* required “a multitude of offspring.” The principles of social welfare contained in the Islamic tradition, meanwhile, offered a much better alternative for addressing potential poverty caused by increased population.⁹² As al-Banna’s fellow Muslim Brother Issa ‘Abduh put it: “The unfortunate and needy have a claim over the more affluent; they are not simply to be sterilized or prevented from marrying.”⁹³ Thus the various social strata of the Muslim community are bound together, with the material (i.e. bodily) needs of the poor anchoring a principle of welfare that mobilizes social activism.

Although some of these social welfare projects would be put on hold under increased British control during the Second World War, such themes remained essential to Brotherhood discourses. Themes of ethical governance and social justice are central to al-Banna’s speeches from the Brotherhood’s Sixth General Conference in January 1941, just before al-Banna was forced to leave Cairo for a school in Qena, Upper Egypt. The strong anti-British tone of the meeting’s proceedings was quite likely the primary reason for al-Banna’s transfer.⁹⁴ In “Some consequences of the decay of the current social system in Egypt” (*ba‘d natā’ij fasād an-nidhām al-ijtimā‘i al-hāli fi misr*), al-Banna expresses many of the same concerns about rural poverty and the need for “reconstruction” that were on the minds of many Egyptian social scientists of the day: just four months later, the Ministry of Social Affairs initiated the construction of rural social centers to help improve peasant education, health and hygiene.⁹⁵ With strikingly modern rhetoric and a flood of statistics, al-Banna demonstrates the poor living conditions of the *fellahin*, noting with particular impact that the average per capita income in the countryside is less than

⁹² El Shakry, *Great Social Laboratory*, 165-89.

⁹³ Quoted in El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*, 183.

⁹⁴ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 260-61.

⁹⁵ El Shakry, *Great Social Laboratory*, 138.

the cost of keeping donkeys fed, watered, and sheltered.⁹⁶ Such a shocking comparison hinges on an emergent category of the human—defined in contradistinction to animals—that Samera Esmeir has shown was crucial to modern colonial discourse around the turn of the previous century.⁹⁷

In his next passage, titled “Sickness and its Cure” (*al-dā’ wa al-dowā’*), al-Banna builds on this theme equating social inequality with physical ailment, arguing that “the decay of the social system in Egypt is a decay that must be treated.” But al-Banna diverges from the top-down rhetoric of the Egyptian administration’s reform projects, placing responsibility with “ruler and ruled alike.”

The ruler, who is the pulse of the people, makes his leadership compliant with the aggressors and takes care of himself more than his nation, thus causing the Egyptian administration ill that hampers its usefulness, and brings affliction upon the people.

The “ruled” subject, however, is equally at fault, for he is

satisfied with humiliation, unmindful of his duties, misled by trifles, is dragged behind fancy things, and has lost the power of faith and the power of his community, preyed upon by looters and destroyed by desire.⁹⁸

Al-Banna’s conception of the proper social order, then, displays the logic of Foucault’s understanding of governmentality as inclusive of both ruler and ruled, and transformative insofar as it enlists individuals in the collective project of constructing a healthy population. Furthermore, the theme of social empowerment through individual empowerment rings especially clear in this passage. Al-Banna’s use of physical imagery like being misled and dragged indicate political

⁹⁶ Hasan al-Banna, “Ba’d natā’ij fasād an-nidhām al-ijtimā’i al-hāli fi masr” (“Some consequences of the decay of the current social system in Egypt”), in *Mabādi’ wa-uṣūl fī mu’tamarāt khāṣṣah* (Cairo: al-Mu’assasah al-Islāmīyah; al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Shihāb, 1980), 85-88.

⁹⁷ Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

⁹⁸ Al-Banna, “Al-dā’ wa al-dowā’ ” (“Sickness and its Cure”), in *Mabādi’ wa-uṣūl*, 89-90.

objectification: the Egyptian Muslim is a passive agent (“preyed upon by looters”) in the political machinery, rather than an empowered, active subject, and as a result the community has lost its power as well. The fact that al-Banna’s ideas for social reform more generally did not require a state at its center only enhances the bottom-up nature of the productive flow of political power.

By the end of World War II in May 1945, when calls to expel the British intensified and helped rouse the Brotherhood from its brief period of quietism, the organization’s burgeoning social welfare activity set it at odds slightly with the Ministry of Social Affairs. A new law required that the Brotherhood submit its records to the ministry, and al-Banna made the decision, detailed in a speech at the September 1945 plenary, to divide the organization into two sections: the society proper, and a “section of welfare and social services.” The passage in question, titled “Us and the Ministry of Social Affairs” (*Nehnu wa wizārat al-shu ’ūn al-ijtima ’iyya*) is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, al-Banna uses the category of *al-riyāda* to refer to all of the Brotherhood’s activities *not* encompassed within its official “social welfare” arm. Mitchell has argued that the move provided “a legal basis for the protection of the services of the Society from the caprice of the precarious political order.”⁹⁹ If this is correct, we should conclude that al-Banna’s conception of *al-riyāda* encompassed not just embodied Islamic practice and athletic exercises, but political demonstrations. These activities more than any other could have brought increased political attention detrimental to the society’s social welfare projects. In other words, *dhikr* and prayer, athletics, and political demonstrations are all, for al-Banna, interconnected forms of caring for the self that connect the individual (internal) to the political (external).

Secondly, al-Banna qualifies his adaptation to the Ministry’s demands by rejecting narrow categorization, simultaneously critiquing the Ministry based on the logic of the Muslim social contract outlined by Issa ‘Abduh above. Although he states that the Brotherhood doesn’t

⁹⁹ Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers*, 36-37.

mind cooperating with the Ministry so far as their interests coincide, al-Banna rejects the Ministry's reductive categorization as a "welfare organization" (*jam 'iyya khayriyya*) because the Brotherhood's activities are supported by "the wealth of its members and its special budget (*mayzāniyya khāsa*), not on what is collected from the public." In other words, it does not require the tax money upon which the Ministry itself is dependent.¹⁰⁰ This distinction carries an implicit critique of the Ministry of Social Affairs itself, for by relying on money from the general public (including the less affluent), the Ministry reverses Issa's social contract, whereby the wealthy are responsible for meeting the material needs of the poor. Al-Banna thus applies *nasīha* at the institutional level, admonishing the Ministry—and by extension the Egyptian government as a whole—for not upholding the duties incumbent on all systems of Islamic rule, and the individuals who make up an Islamic society's elite.

In a letter from al-Banna to the Brotherhood's *mujāhideen*, one section titled "The Family (*al-usra*)—the passage from which the opening quote is taken—is particularly heavy with corporal metaphors and references to the body. He urges his readers/listeners to aspire "to be a sturdy brick in this structure (Islam)," noting that there are three bases upon which this goal can be achieved. The first is "getting to know each other" (*al-t'āruḥ*), but rather than focus on discursive relations, al-Banna speaks of embodying or emulating (*tamathil*) the Qur'an and *hadīths*, and quotes the Qur'an in saying that, "One believer to another is like a structure that ties them tighter together," and—echoing the opening quote—"The believers find expression in mutual love, mercy, and compassion as one body (*al-jesid al-wāhid*)." The third and longest base is "solidarity" (*al-takāful*), with *nasīha* at its core. But al-Banna closes with a number of physical activities "to increase cohesion (*al-tarābut*) among the brothers": nighttime athletic excursions,

¹⁰⁰ Al-Banna, *Mabādi' wa-uṣūl*, 17.

mountain and desert excursions, fasting and dawn prayer once every week or two.¹⁰¹ These various forms of *riyāda* are thus intended not only to help shape the individual (internally and externally), but also bind individuals together into a collective entity and empower it for political action.

Situating the Brotherhood's rise within a shift from elite politics to mass mobilization, Lia argues that the movement's "condemnation of party politics can be understood as a rejection of a malfunctioning political system, not necessarily as a rejection of democratic principles *per se*."¹⁰² While frustration with party politics was central to al-Banna's critiques of the Egyptian political system, these critiques did not amount to an outright rejection of that system. Neither were "democratic principles" really the issue. In an article titled "Blind Partisanship," al-Banna laments party politics in part for the way rivalry and antagonism undermine national unity, but more so for the lack of a public forum for open discussion and disagreement among different political viewpoints.

We in Egypt will never understand that a difference of opinion does not spoil intimacy, so long as we understood enmity and hatred. For we arrange the view of the public interest into divisions in all affairs, public and private, until we see the truth on the side of rival parties as falsehood, and the falsehood on the side of our party supporters as truth, and we let this feeling permeate into all our actions and prayers, and the disease worsens and becomes rampant even in the most intimate situations.¹⁰³

It is difficult to believe that someone yearning for open political debate as much as al-Banna does here could reject the current political system outright, a move that would be more in line with the partisans he criticizes. Keeping this in mind, al-Banna's critique of the Ministry of Social Affairs is not an outright rejection, but a criticism for not carrying out its Islamic duty of

¹⁰¹ Al-Banna, "Al-Usra" ("The Family"), in *Majmu'at al-rasā'il*, 375.

¹⁰² Lia, *Mass Movement*, 205.

¹⁰³ Al-Banna, *Majmu'at al-rasā'il*, 332.

materially caring for those in need. This sort of institutional or political *nasīha* harmonizes with his goal of constructing a civil society grounded in the Islamic tradition. Thus, *nasīha* itself has been reconfigured as a *collective* embodied practice, mobilizing the Muslim community not purely in opposition to a status quo order, but as an interconnected whole that can embody moral principles.

Furthermore, although al-Banna may seem to harmonize with “democratic principles” by lamenting the absence of fruitful political debate, the central issue in the passage above seems to be one more of practice. In fact, al-Banna in essence describes the way partisanship does the exact opposite of condition virtues: it promotes divisive feelings that become embodied in “intimate” performative action—whether prayer or relations within the family—and through such actions begin to permeate every sphere of life. Al-Banna thus reverses the typical dialectic of political expression, wherein political performance gives symbolic expression to a particular ideology for feeling. Instead, the feelings generated by political performance get rerouted into religious practice and private life, conditioning one’s inner core, the *imān* as al-Banna would have understood it. In this way, al-Banna closes the loop between inculcation of virtues through religious practice, the activation of those virtues in the public sphere through political performance, and the feeding-back of those political expressions—whether productive or divisive—into one’s *imān*. Thus action, rather than ideology, is the connective tissue that binds religion to the various spheres of public life.

Conclusion: Toward a Concept of Islamist Mobilization

Like many other political movements, the Muslim Brotherhood’s early mobilization under its founder Hasan al-Banna has been problematically treated as instantaneous, reactionary, and as a

discourse that sought to mobilize the masses through ideology and “indoctrination.” Lia finds fault with Mitchell’s assessment of the Muslim Brotherhood as a “traditionalist” movement based on the emphasis on obedience, discipline, and veneration of the Supreme Guide. The movement was representative of the rise of mass politics in Egypt, he argues, “not an aggressive reassertion of religious traditionalism.” In fact, the movement’s appeal was “linked to their ability to distance themselves from the image of religious reactionism,” and its growth and expansion “based on ideological appeal, modern organization, and interests of the lower middle class.”¹⁰⁴ In contrast, this article has shown that historicizing the Brotherhood under the rubric of dance movement, as “bodies in motion,” offers a different, much more dynamic, picture. By highlighting the use of Sufi *dhikr* and other embodied Muslim practices I have argued that al-Banna was not attempting simply to mobilize people with a discourse that appealed to their moral and material predicament, but conditioning moral Muslim subjects for political action as an coherent collective. The practice of *da‘wa* was thus not purely a discursive tool for political mobilization, but in fact a way of conditioning moral subjects through expression of the Islamic “call.” Furthermore, I have suggested that by reconfiguring these practices within a choreographic logic of Egyptian politics that treated “society” as one collective body, al-Banna was bridging the gap between the moral individual and the ideal of Islamic society in the model of the first community.

Looking at the Muslim Brotherhood in this way problematizes even nuanced analyses of Islamically motivated political trends. Critiquing the view of modernization theorists that Muslims had to choose between reform and eventual secularization on the one hand and resurrected tradition on the other, Eickelman and Piscatori take up the paradigm of the “invention of tradition” to show that “tradition” is subject to reconfiguration and revision under

¹⁰⁴ Lia, *Mass Movement*, 279-80.

particular historical circumstances. Central to this reconfiguration in the contemporary world is the process of “objectification.” They argue somewhat contradictorily, however, that this process “does not presuppose the notion that religion is a uniform or monolithic entity,” yet nonetheless renders religion “a self-contained system.” This objectification engages Muslims on a mass scale, with the wider dissemination of texts leading to competition over who speaks for the invented Islamic tradition. Within an Islamic context, then, “Islamists” are those whose view of religion has been “objectified” in these ways, “and who are committed to implementing their vision of Islam as a corrective to current ‘un-Islamic’ practices.” This trend contains “a certain measure of protest ... against the prevailing political and social status quo and establishments.”¹⁰⁵

Indeed, al-Banna’s statements about the Muslim Brotherhood being a Sufi order, a welfare society, a sports club, a political movement, and more seem to describe a self-contained system, and his corrective critiques of the Ministry of Social Affairs do carry a tone of protest. However, there are still a number of drawbacks with Eickelman and Piscatori’s analysis. First of all, al-Banna, like Muhammad ‘Abduh, was equally critical of pious but socially disengaged Muslims as he was of “un-Islamic” elements in society. More importantly, looking at forms of protest (Muslim and otherwise) as bodies in motion highlights the fact that they do not simply mobilize people through an “objectified” vision for society in opposition to the status quo, but in fact mobilize physical bodies through new forms of social organization rooted in embodied acts. The Muslim Brotherhood’s own mobilization did not follow a trajectory of progression from ideological ferment to political activism, but took place through a constant process of (spiritual and material) self-care and care of others, thus incorporating individual into the dynamic of a living collective. In this context, ideology and mobilization in fact mutually constitute each other. The ramifications of this for scholars of modern Islam extend to religious studies more broadly,

¹⁰⁵ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 38-44.

where “religion” is all too often banished to the realm of the thinking mind, while individual bodies and the moral collective are given expressive and disciplinary roles, respectively.

Applying Martin’s ideas to religious communities invites us to reconsider the way the individual and collective moral subjectivities mutually constitute each other through embodied practices.

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