

Seeking a voice : How a young
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Seeking a voice

How a young Muslim Brotherhood blogger counters
'Ikhwanophobia'

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Riots are the voices of the unheard.

Martin Luther King

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Introduction

"Massive and effective street protest" was a global oxymoron until — suddenly, shockingly — starting exactly a year ago, it became the defining trope of our times. And the protester once again became a maker of history.¹

TIME Magazine Person of the Year 2011: the Protester

The Arab Spring took the world by surprise. Although many people were hoping for a revolution, no one could predict that the year 2011 would be such a turbulent year. The popular protests during this year managed to bring down three of the five longest serving heads of state of that moment.² The number four on the list, the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, had to step down after only 18 days of protests. In neighboring Libya, Gaddafi had to clear the field after 42 years on the throne — making him the longest serving head of state in the world at the time of his downfall. The number two on the list, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was also forced to step down in 2011, after being the president of Yemen for 33 years. Suddenly, the power of demonstrating was back on the map, and it is not surprising that TIME Magazine not only proclaimed 'the Protester' Person of the Year 2011, but went as far as stating that 2011 was 'unlike anything in any of our lifetimes'.³

For months the revolutions in the Middle East dominated the news in the West, the one in Egypt in particular. It was evident that from the first day there was broad international solidarity with the revolution. Across the West, people declared their support for the demands of the Egyptian people. On the other hand, many Western governments hesitated until the last moment: should they support the people and their revolution, or should they back Mubarak, once their staunch ally? Since Mubarak was ousted after only 18 days, the question soon changed into: what to do with the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest political force in Egypt? Could it be a friend of the West, or should it be seen as an enemy? And what should be the West's policy towards it?

Besides the words 'Muslim Brotherhood' another word was buzzing around the news: 'Facebook'. The major international newspapers headlined with titles like: 'The Facebook post that sparked the Egyptian Revolution' (CNN), 'Did social media create Egypt's revolution?' (BBC) and 'Spring Awakening. How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook' (NYT).⁴ In a short time Wael Ghonim, the head

¹ Kurt Andersen, 'Person of the Year. The Protester', in *TIME Magazine* (Dec. 14, 2011) 1.

http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373-2,00.html.

² Rabab el-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet, 'Introduction', in: Rabab el-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet (eds), *Egypt. Moment of change* (London and New York 2009) 156, note. Gaddafi of Libya came to power in 1969, Saleh of Yemen in 1978, Obiang of Equatorial Guinea in 1979, Dos Santos of Angola in 1979, Mugabe of Zimbabwe in 1980 and Mubarak of Egypt in 1981.

³ Kurt Andersen, 'Person of the Year. The Protester', in *TIME Magazine* (Dec. 14, 2011) 2.

http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373-2,00.html.

⁴ CNN IBN World, 'Facebook post that sparked Egypt revolution' (February 3, 2011).

<http://ibnlive.in.com/news/facebook-post-that-sparked-egypt-revolution/142328-2.html>. BBC News, 'Did social media create Egypt's revolution?' (February 11, 2011). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east->

of marketing of Google in the Middle East and North Africa, became a symbolic figure for the Egyptian revolution – TIME Magazine chose him as the number one ‘Most Influential Person of the Year 2011’.⁵ Since he was the administrator of the Facebook page *We are all Khaled Said*, he was interrogated in secret by the Egyptian police for eleven days. On the same day of his release he gave an emotional interview on *DreamTV*, which made him famous instantly. On February 11, 2011 Ghonim stated that the revolution was born on Facebook:

This revolution started online. This revolution started on Facebook. This revolution started in June 2010 when hundreds of thousands of Egyptians started collaborating content. We would post a video on Facebook that would be shared by 60,000 people on their walls within a few hours. I always said that if you want to liberate a society just give them the Internet.⁶

The role accorded to modern communication tools such as Facebook and twitter is enormous. At the same time this raises many questions. How essential were social media in the Egyptian revolution? Is all you need to topple an entrenched autocratic regime a collection of Facebook updates, YouTube videos and Twitter hash tags? Can you ‘liberate a society’ by just using the internet?⁷ And alternately, if this is not the case and there still is a big role for old-fashioned protesting, how does the existence of new media transform traditional patterns of activism? How do social and power relations influence virtual space?

My thesis is a case study of exactly this intersection between online activism and offline political power relations. In June 2010 the young blogger Abdelrahman Ayyash, well-known in Egypt, started a website under the name *Ikhwanophobia.com* – ‘the fear for Ikhwan’, which is Arabic for Brothers. Ayyash is one of the many Egyptians who uses the internet for his activism. In anticipation of the 2010 elections, Ayyash wanted to convince the Western public that the fears of the Muslim Brotherhood that were then widespread in the Western media were unfounded. By criticizing examples from Western – mostly American – media on his website, he reacted on what he perceived as a negative and stereotypical image of the Muslim Brotherhood. By doing this, he aimed at ‘correcting’ the negative image people have of the Muslim Brotherhood by showing them ‘the true face of moderate Is-

12435550. Jose Antonio Vargas, ‘Spring Awakening. How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook’, *New York Times* (February 17, 2011). <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁵ TIME Magazine nominated Wael Ghonim as ‘Most Influential Person of the Year 2011’. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, is elected at the sixth place on the list. See for the complete list: <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,2066367,00.html>.

⁶ Interview with Wael Ghonim on CNN, February 11, 2011. See <http://edition.cnn.com/video/?/video/bestoftv/2011/02/11/exp.ghonim.facebook.thanks.cnn>.

⁷ See for scientific discussions of how the Internet and other new media contribute to democracy: Zizi Papacharissi, ‘The virtual sphere. The Internet as a public sphere’, in *New Media & Society* 4 (2002) 9. Papacharissi defines ‘virtual space’ as a space that enhances discussion, but a ‘virtual sphere’ enhances democracy. Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy’, in C. Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge 1992) 359-376. The standard work on this subject is Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New media in the Muslim World. The emerging public sphere* (second edition, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2003). See for a discussion of Habermas and the concept of ‘counter publicity’ John Downey and Natalie Fenton, ‘New media, counter publicity and the public sphere’, in *New Media and Society* 5 (2003) 185-202. See also Papacharissi’s new book *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (Cambridge 2010), in which she discusses how online media redefine our understanding of public and private in late-modern democracies. John B. Thompson gives in his work *Ideology and Modern Culture. Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Stanford 1990) a systematic theoretical reflection on the role of ideologies in modern societies in which mass communication plays a central role.

lamists'.⁸ The website he created is completely written in English – not in Arabic, his mother tongue – and focuses on a Western audience. It is made with the newest technologies, and has links to Facebook, MySpace, Delicious and many other 'new social media'.⁹

After Ayyash started the website, it quickly became noted by Western journalists.¹⁰ This is not surprising, since the website Ayyash has created is special in several ways. First, it focuses completely on a Western audience. It is an interesting example of what media can do with people in a globalized world: to change something in his own country, and to get 'his' party into power, Ayyash does not focus on local obstacles that are in the way of achieving this goal. Instead, he focuses on 'the West' – as if he is saying: before the Muslim Brotherhood can come to power in Egypt, we should try to get the Western public on our side.

Second, the website *ikhwanophobia.com* occupies an interesting 'in between' genre: although Ayyash is the only person behind it, he has chosen not to create a blog but a website, which makes his message seem less personal. This is also caused by his deliberate attempt to create the illusion that there are more people working on the site. He even states that the website is 'run by a group of academic intellectuals'.¹¹ On the 'contact us' page, he presents himself – using his internet alias Omar Mazin – as chief editor of the website, rather than its sole author.

Third, the focus of the website is mainly on the defense of the Muslim Brotherhood and the dispelling of prejudices, creating a kind of 'counter-image' of the organization – the emphasis lies mainly on what the organization is *not*. At the same time, Ayyash tries to bring this image in line with what he thinks people in the West would like to hear – both in terms of the themes he tries to counter, as the communication tools that he uses to seem reliable to people in the West.

However, there are many tensions and uncertainties in the way in which Ayyash creates this image. The attempt to meet 'Western expectations' in itself contains an element of translation, since these are always 'Western expectations' as perceived by Ayyash himself. A second interpretive step is made when Ayyash chooses how to present the Muslim Brotherhood, emphasizing some aspects and pushing others into the background. In many ways, Ayyash feels the need to create an ideal image of the Brotherhood that he thinks is more in touch with the audience he addresses. A third set of tensions arises from the clash between these two images, both part of the process of making the website, and the off-line political realities under which Ayyash operates. The Muslim Brotherhood itself is internally divided, and the views defended by some fractions are more easily brought in line with dominant discourse among Western audiences than the views of other fractions. The outbreak of the revolution and the subsequent positions taken by various sections of the party have further increased these divisions, and being an active participant in the revolutionary movements on the streets, Ayyash himself has been caught up in this. The seemingly innocent act of creating a website

⁸ *Ikhwanophobia*: <http://ikhwanophobia.com/about/>.

⁹ The term 'social media' refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social media are media for social interaction, as a superset beyond social communication.

¹⁰ See for example Muhammad Shukri, 'Website takes on Muslim Brotherhood critics', *BBC News* (6 September 2010). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11203623>. See also Sarah A. Topol, 'Meet Radical Islam's Tech Guru', *The Daily Beast* (December 26, 2010). <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/12/26/meet-radical-islams-tech-guru-the-muslim-brotherhood-creates-a-media-savvy-machine.html>.

¹¹ *Ikhwanophobia*: <http://ikhwanophobia.com/about/>.

on stereotypes puts Ayyash between the two poles of his image of the West, and the political realities under which his organization operates. The tension between these two poles is the focus of my thesis:

Research question: How does the creator of Ikhwanophobia.com cope with the tensions between reaching out to a primarily Western audience through the Internet, and maintaining his loyalty to the policies and identity of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood?

To analyze how this process works, I formulate four sub-questions. First, I analyze in which way Ayyash has presented the Muslim Brotherhood on his website.¹² Second, I examine in which debates he has chosen to intervene and on what points he wants to defend the Muslim Brotherhood. These two questions are interconnected: they show which characteristics Ayyash wishes to ascribe to the Muslim Brotherhood, but furthermore, they show what the Muslim Brotherhood in his opinion should be, as well as what it should not be. Third, I look at the communication strategies he has chosen to defend his image of the Muslim Brotherhood towards a Western audience. Finally, I analyze in more detail how Ayyash employs the concept of democracy, one of the main topics on the website. Within this debate I show how this friction between reaching out to a Western audience and maintaining his loyalty to the Muslim Brotherhood works in practice. These four sub questions are summarized as follows:

- What are the main self descriptions of the Muslim Brotherhood employed on the website ikhwanophobia.com?
- What are the main debates in which Ayyash chooses to intervene on the website ikhwanophobia.com?
- Which kinds of communication strategies does Ayyash use to present himself, the website ikhwanophobia.com and the Muslim Brotherhood to a wider audience?
- How does Ayyash employ the concept of democracy?

The answer on the first three sub questions can be found in Chapter 3 and 4. In Chapter 3 the main focus is on the structure and layout of the website. In Chapter 4 I look at the substantive choices of the website: which audience did Ayyash have in mind, what are the debates he has chosen to counter, and what communication strategies are used? In Chapter 5 I elaborate on the concept of democracy, one of the main debates on the website.

Before an analysis of the website can be made, it is important to get a clear perspective on the broader context in which the website was created: the pre-revolutionary Egypt of 2010, in which the Muslim Brotherhood was firmly suppressed by the semi-dictatorial regime of Mubarak. His regime barred any meaningful contestation over political authority, but still left some room for opposition to be expressed and, to a lesser extent, organized. Until the popular uprising of January 2011, the governing National Democratic Party used to dominate the political scene.¹³ Sometimes it merged with the state bureaucracy and parts of the business community. Often it utilized instruments of the state to maintain its monopoly on power. In Egypt, opposition parties could only be established under specific conditions, but the Brotherhood itself had never been granted any legal status. It was always

¹² I have made a complete copy of all the articles on the website using WinWSD Website Downloader (see http://download.cnet.com/WinWSD-WebSite-Downloader/3000-2377_4-10562531.html).

¹³ With 'popular uprising' I refer to the short period between January 25, 2011 and the stepping down of Mubarak on February 11, 2011. 'Revolution' refers to the process that is still taking place in Egypt.

hindered to form a political party – and in 2007 even constitutionally barred.¹⁴ Thus, Egyptian elections were in a sense ‘foregone conclusions’: there was never even a prospect of political power changing hands on the basis of electoral results.¹⁵ The researchers Eickelman and Salvatore point out that it is easy for Western readers to think the influence of organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood was largely political: ‘At their base, however, they appeal to their respective constituencies through their implicit and explicit invocation of shared moral understandings of social action.’¹⁶ When we are looking at the ways in which the Muslim Brotherhood deals with the media and with the concept of democracy, we have to keep this in mind. The history of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as its position within the political landscape, will be the subject of Chapter 1. The specific media landscape of Egypt will be discussed in Chapter 2.

To analyze the interplay between online text and off-line activity, a methodology is needed that clearly combines textual and contextual approaches. If the analysis is limited to only the written texts on the website, much essential information will be excluded. Discourse analysis includes different approaches, some of which are more, others less sensitive to the importance of social structure. It is important to state that ‘discourse analysis’ is not a method per se, but ‘a research perspective or research style that applies a spectrum of possible methods in order to answer its guiding research question’.¹⁷ Within discourse analysis, different methodological choices can be made. The schools of discourse analysis that attach great significance to social and political context became known under the name of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). These trends locate the critical dimension of their analysis in the interplay between discourse and society. As Jan Blommaert, whose approach is followed here, suggests: ‘Critical analysis is thus always and necessarily the analysis of situated, contextualized, language and context itself becomes a crucial methodological and theoretical issue in the development of a critical study of language.’¹⁸

Since the website is intended as a form of propaganda, questions arise: propaganda for whom, and why? Who does Ayyash want to convince? What does he try to achieve, and how? These questions cannot be answered without taking into account the specific context in which the website is produced. There is still much debate between scientists who make use of discourse analysis on what exactly can be considered as context. Blommaert, an expert in the field of linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, takes into consideration the emergence of ‘super diverse’ environments and issues of social and cultural inequality that accompany these globalization processes. This ‘context of globalization’ is especially important for my own research: Ayyash is a young blogger who is not only aware of the position of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian politics, but also of the influence of Western political and intellectual leaders. To change the position of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, he focuses on the world at large. The purpose of his website cannot be understood without taking this into account.

¹⁴ Thus, when I talk about ‘party’ in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood, I do not refer to a political party in the official sense of the word: until the popular uprising it was forbidden for the Muslim Brotherhood to establish an official political party and take part in elections.

¹⁵ Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics* (Washington 2010) 12-14.

¹⁶ Dale F. Eickelman and Armando Salvatore, ‘The public sphere and Muslim identities’, in *European Journal of Sociology* 43 (2002) 103.

¹⁷ Kocku von Stuckrad, ‘Discursive Study of Religion: Approaches, Definitions, Implications’ (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Blommaert, *Discourse. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge 2005) 39. See also his article ‘Context is/as Critique’, in *Critique of Anthropology* 21 (2001), 13-32.

Although Blommaert has taken much inspiration from the tradition of CDA, he has some major criticisms on the approach of many scientists within this school, that have informed my own approach in this research.¹⁹ To understand Blommaert's critique on CDA, however, we should first look at the overall characteristics of this school.²⁰ Largely grounded in a European tradition of scholarship, CDA was groundbreaking in establishing legitimacy for linguistically oriented discourse analysis, with a strong emphasis on social reality and social inequalities.²¹ Although CDA often is called a school, it is incorrect to see CDA as a unitary and homogeneous entity. There are many types of CDA, which are theoretically and analytically quite diverse.²² Moreover, CDA is a dynamic and developing movement; by calling it a 'school', the danger exists of locking it into time and space.

Despite all the internal differences, people within CDA agree on certain principles of analysis, as well as on addressing similar issues. Ruth Breeze writes in her article 'Critical Discourse Analysis and its Critics': 'The general consensus is that CDA contains two essential elements: A more or less political concern with the workings of ideology and power in society; and a specific interest in the way language contributes to, perpetuates and reveals these workings.'²³ The terms 'discourse', 'power', 'ideology' and 'critical' are central – although each scientist seems to define the terms differently. Although CDA is influenced by Cultural Studies and focuses on social questions, it is important to realize that CDA should primarily be positioned in a linguistic setting. Teun van Dijk, one of the four main scientists within CDA, defines it as follows:

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.²⁴

CDA advocates (active) intervention in the social practices she is analyzing. It openly professes strong commitments to change, empowerment and practice-orientedness. This is also reflected in the subjects and areas that are often chosen to analyze, such as political discourse, ideology, racism, gender,

¹⁹ See Blommaert, *Discourse*, 1-38 for a precise explanation of his position towards Critical Discourse Analysis.

²⁰ Leading representatives of this school are Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk and Paul Chilton. All four are also editors of journals such as *Discourse and Society* (edited by Teun van Dijk), *Critical Discourse Studies* (edited by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak), and *Journal of Language and Politics* (edited by Ruth Wodak and Paul Chilton).

²¹ Blommaert, *Discourse*, 5-6. Teun van Dijk describes the position of CDA as follows: 'Crucial for critical discourse analysts is the explicit awareness of their role in society. Continuing a tradition that rejects the possibility of a 'value-free' science, they argue that science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction. Instead of denying or ignoring such a relation between scholarship and society, they plead that such relations be studied and accounted for in their own right, and that scholarly practices be based on such insights. Theory formation, description, and explanation, also in discourse analysis, are socio-politically 'situated', whether we like it or not. Reflection on the role of scholars in society and the polity thus becomes an inherent part of the discourse analytical enterprise. This may mean, among other things, that discourse analysts conduct research in solidarity and cooperation with dominated groups.' Teun van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', in: *Ideology and discourse. A multidisciplinary Introduction* (2001) 352.

²² Norman Fairclough has a background in systemic-functional linguistics; Teun van Dijk in text linguistics and cognitive linguistics; Ruth Wodak in interactional studies; Paul Chilton in linguistics, semiotics, and communication studies. Blommaert, *Discourse*, 21.

²³ Ruth Breeze, 'Critical Discourse Analysis and its Critics', *Pragmatics* 21 (4, 2011) 493-525, 495.

²⁴ Van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis', 352.

and institutional discourse.²⁵ Most histories of CDA trace the origins of this politicized concern with society to authors within the Frankfurt School, such as Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer. But inspiration is also drawn from thinkers as diverse as Michel Foucault ('orders of discourse' and 'power/knowledge'), Antonio Gramsci ('hegemony'), Louis Althusser ('ideological state apparatuses'), Pierre Bourdieu ('habitus' and 'symbolic capital') and Jürgen Habermas (who stressed the crucial role of communication in modern social systems).²⁶

Although Blommaert shares many of the goals of CDA, his approach differs substantially from that of the mainstream of the school, given his background in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. Blommaert describes his own approach as an 'ethnographic-sociolinguistic analysis of discourse', or just 'ethnography':

It is a common misunderstanding that ethnography is an analysis of 'small things', local, one-time occurrences only. It is, and always has been, an approach in which the analysis of small phenomena is set against an analysis of big phenomena, and in which both levels can only be understood in terms of another.²⁷

This approach enables Blommaert to look at language in society in ways that allow him to focus on linguistic form and on social environment at the same time, in which a discontinuity between various explanations is avoided. Blommaert uses the term 'language-in-society', 'referring to the intrinsic interrelatedness of language and society, in fact, to the irrelevance of their separation as different terms. The shape in which language-in-society comes to us is discourse.'²⁸

Blommaert endorses many of the basic paradigmatic principles underlying CDA: 'Discourse analysis should result in a heightened awareness of hidden power dimensions and its effects: a *critical language awareness*, a sensitivity for discourse as subject to power and inequality.'²⁹ He also agrees with the call for increased dialogue between linguistic analysis and other social-scientific endeavors. Moreover, he argues that CDA 'rightly focuses on *institutional environments* as key sites of research into the connections between language, power, and social processes'.³⁰ Although he states that CDA offers considerable potential, he sees three main problems that are of relevance to this research, and therefore have to be addressed here.

The first of these problems is what Blommaert describes as the 'linguistic bias in CDA'. As mentioned, CDA emphasizes a linguistic-textual analysis. However, Blommaert argues that 'the emphasis on lin-

²⁵ Blommaert, *Discourse*, 26.

²⁶ It goes too far to discuss here the many possible critiques on CDA, but I would nevertheless like to highlight one critique. As said, there exists a major contradiction between the Marxist and post-structuralist strands in CDA's intellectual antecedents: 'While Marxists rely on a normative theory of history and society, authors within the post-structuralist or post-modern movement see all such totalizing meta-narratives as invalid and potentially manipulative. Moreover, on the level of individual political decisions, in the post-modern philosophical landscape it is hard to justify adopting a particular meta-narrative to interpret the phenomena one has observed. Foucault, for example, at one time notoriously refused to commit himself to value judgments about the discourses that he studied (Foucault 1969). Instead, in a post-modern framework, it has been suggested that one simply 'chooses' particular values or stances, in a process of existential self-definition which is sometimes referred to as decisionism.' Breeze, 'Critical Discourse Analysis and its Critics', 500.

²⁷ Blommaert, *Discourse*, 16.

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Ibid., 33 [emphasis in original].

³⁰ Ibid., 34 [emphasis in original].

guistic analysis implies an emphasis on *available* discourse, discourse which is there.³¹ There is no way in which you can research linguistic discourses that are absent, despite the fact that what remains unspoken often is as telling as that which is for the conditions under which discourses are produced and circulated. This bias means that within CDA discourse analysis begins only when actually linguistically encoded discourse is produced, 'bypassing the ways in which society operates on language users and influences what they can accomplish in language long before they open their mouths, so to speak.'³² Blommaert, however, argues that 'if we wish to understand contemporary forms of inequality in and through language, we should look inside language *as well as outside it*, in society, and both aspects of analysis are not separable.'³³

The second problem that Blommaert points out, is that CDA is mainly confined to 'analyses of discourse in their countries of origin and other countries from what we would call the core of the world system'. Blommaert argues that there is no reason

to restrict critical analysis of discourse to highly integrated, Late Modern, and post-industrial, densely semiotised First-World societies. There is even less reason to assume that descriptions of such societies can usefully serve as a model for understanding discourse in the world today, for the world is far bigger than Europe and the USA, and substantial differences occur between different societies in this world. The self-evident way in which features of the First World are projected onto the globe and attributed to all mankind is perplexing.³⁴

Blommaert stresses that the particular shapes taken by Late Modernity, including its semiotic shapes, are very different across the world, and that the majority of the people in the world live in conditions 'closer to those of villagers in Central Tanzania' – where more than 75 percent of the inhabitants are illiterate and where no single house has electricity – than those of inhabitants of cities in Europe. In an era of globalization, it is very unwise to assume universal validity for our ways of life, he argues, and every scholarship that aspires to a critique of the present system should take this into account: 'CDA takes far too much sharedness for granted when it comes to discourse in contemporary societies across the world. One could say, by way of summary, that CDA overlooks sociolinguistics.'³⁵

The third problem that Blommaert sees within CDA, is that barely an analysis of historical developments (with a possible exception of Wodak). This problem is of course related to the previous two problems: one focuses on contemporary developments in their own society. Blommaert argues:

A critical analysis of discourse necessarily needs to transcend the present and address history in and through language. Power and inequality have long histories of becoming; so have the linguistic repertoires of people; so too have social structures and systems such as capitalism and its many transformations. We need to take history seriously, for part of the critical punch of what we do may ultimately lie in our capacity to show that what looks new is not new at all, but the outcome of a particular process which is systemic, not accidental.

These critiques are important for my own research. To understand the website lkhwanophobia.com, we have to look beyond the website itself. Since the website is meant as propaganda, it is significant to take into account which debates Ayyash has chosen *not* to counter, and why he did so. Moreover,

³¹ Ibid., 35.

³² Idem.

³³ Idem.

³⁴ Ibid., 36.

³⁵ Idem.

because of the propagandistic nature of the texts, to get behind the meaning attached to the words that are written on the website often requires taking into account the implicit aims with which they were written. Ethnographic methods, concretely in the form of intensive interviewing to understand the person and his context behind the text, were employed to gain an understanding how political realities shaped the content of the website and the choices of its editor.

This is the reason why, in addition to analyzing the website, I have built up a good relationship with Abdelrahman Ayyash. This has resulted in extensive contact by email and a three-hour interview on March 25, 2011. Unfortunately, this interview took place via *Skype*. During my three months of research in Cairo it was not possible to meet each other in person. An interview was scheduled on January 30, 2011, but illustrating the importance of context, could not take place due to the popular uprising. Not only was the café we had chosen for our interview unreachable because of its location just fifty meters from Tahrir Square, also the telephone lines and the internet were cut off so we were not able to arrange another meeting place. In the end, these practicalities proved to be only a secondary hindrance: since Ayyash was a well-known Muslim Brotherhood blogger, the police arrested him at the start of the popular uprising and held him for several days.

The above example strikingly illustrates the third insight of Blommaert – the importance of placing a certain discourse in a particular kind of society and time-frame. Due to the specific political situation in Egypt – in which the Muslim Brotherhood was suppressed in many ways and had no perspective at government participation – Ayyash was challenged to come up with creative ways to shape his activism. He was accustomed to the dangers of doing certain political statements as an Egyptian blogger – one of the reasons why he has created the website under a false name. The above example also suggests a short but powerful answer to the question whether social media were decisive for the revolution in Egypt: the demonstrations and the resistance continued although the government had decided to cut off the telephone lines and internet. Most of the people on Tahrir Square, as well as the majority of the organizers and strikers, had nothing to do with Facebook or twitter, and could easily use more traditional forms of communication to continue their struggle for democracy. As researchers, we should be careful not to overemphasize the role of new social media, especially when this is related to the discussion of increasing democracy. Moreover, we should be sensitive to the specific media landscape of Egypt: in 2010 only 21% of the population had access to internet.³⁶ Furthermore, the illiteracy rate is still high in Egypt: in 2006 the World Bank estimated that only 66% of the Egyptian population was literate.³⁷

Taking into account the social context also means including the position of Egypt in the world, especially in relation to the United States and ‘the West’. This position produces many inequalities that influence the vantage point from which Ayyash enters the worldwide web. Egypt is a developing country, with 22% of the population living under the poverty line of \$2 dollars a day – millions live in ‘working poverty’, either partially employed or employed at wage-rates which do not provide income above the poverty line.³⁸ In Egypt, like in many other places in the Middle East, people often have a

³⁶ Internet World Stats, *Egypt Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports*.
<http://www.Internetworldstats.com/af/eg.htm>.

³⁷ Literacy is defined as all persons 15 years and over who can read and write. The World Bank, *Egypt, Arab Rep.* <http://data.worldbank.org/country/egypt-arab-republic>.

³⁸ el-Mahdi and Marfleet, ‘Introduction’, 5-6. See also The World Bank, *Egypt, Arab Rep.*,
<http://data.worldbank.org/country/egypt-arab-republic>. The index of \$2 a day is of course a bit arbitrary, with

love-hate relationship with the U.S. On the one hand appreciation is expressed with the many positive concepts that are rightly or wrongly associated with America, such as freedom, democracy, wealth, opportunities, etc. On the other hand, there is widespread disapproval of the role of the US as global military power and its interventions in the wider region, from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran to its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Closer at home, the annual average of \$2.1 billion in aid from the U.S. under Mubarak was perceived as direct support to the unpopular dictatorship.³⁹ The dual feelings towards the U.S. was reflected in the images of the Arab Spring. Everybody has seen the pictures of angry demonstrators pointing to tear gas canisters with the line 'Made in the USA'. This double sense of love and hate can also be seen in the website of Ikhwanophobia.com. Ayyash looks to America with great admiration, but also points regularly to the hypocrisy of its actions. To analyze the texts on the website in a proper way, we should be sensitive for the position of Egypt in a globalizing world.

To summarize, I argue that to analyze the website Ikhwanophobia.com, it is important to not only look at the available texts on the website, but to include sensitivity to the personal motivations of its author as well as an analysis of the society in which the texts are written. Second, we should be sensitive to the specific time in which the website was created – pre-revolutionary Egypt – and the specific location – an urban area in a developing country which is part of a global power-structure in which the U.S. plays a dominant role.

The website Ikhwanophobia.com is an interesting example of how a young blogger from Egypt actively counters the established opinions and beliefs about the Muslim Brotherhood in the West, against the background of a globalizing world. One of the critiques often expressed towards CDA is that it mainly produces work that is negative in nature, since it focuses primarily on problems within society.⁴⁰ My thesis is an example of how, by means of critical discourse analysis, also positive examples can be analyzed: it researches the ways in which a young person from an oppressed position tries to oppose the prevailing definitions of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also of how during that process he redefines his own position towards the organization of which he is part.

which you exclude tens of millions who live at or just above the official poverty line, and who are profoundly affected by the increased prices for food since the economic crisis started.

³⁹ Anne Alexander, 'Mubarak in the international arena', in: Rabab el-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet (eds), *Egypt. Moment of change* (London and New York 2009)136.

⁴⁰ See for example J. Martin, 'Positive discourse analysis: Solidarity and change', in: *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 49 (2004) 179-202 and A. Luke, 'Beyond science and ideological critique: Developments in critical discourse analysis', in: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 22 (2002) 96-110.

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The research in Egypt consisted of two phases. The first phase consisted of identifying the different 'Islamic actors' in Egypt, such as official actors, political actors, social actors and independent Islamic intellectuals and preachers. Of each of the groups, their formal and social statuses were 'mapped', as well as their activities, discourses and communication strategies. Within this phase, special attention was given to the ways in which these 'Islamic actors' make use of new media to disseminate their ideas – with an emphasis on the use of the Internet, blogs, chat rooms and satellite television.

The second phase of the research focused on the research question: What communication strategies do Islamic preachers use to address issues of citizenship in the public sphere? My thesis falls under this second phase of the research. In this phase three other master students and five international researchers – two of the NVIC and three of ACPSS – were working on their own, specific research question. This phase was concluded with an international congress at December 18-20, 2011, under the title *Islam, Citizenship and the New Media in pre- and post-revolutionary Egypt*, where I have presented my paper on this subject. This paper will be published in the volume coming out of this conference.

I would like to thank the employees of the Dutch embassy for their hospitality and excellent support for our research, as well as the research team of the NVIC and ACPSS – especially Sabine Dormüller and Dina Shehata. They made my research possible and deepened it during the process, and I look back on this period with pleasure and gratitude. I would also like to thank Christoph Jedan, Jan-Jaap de Ruitter and Kocku von Stuckrad for their good advise during the process of writing my thesis and their willingness to act as supervisors. Finally, I would also like to thank Jan Blommaert for his valuable suggestions and intellectual support. His way of combining engagement with scholarship has been inspiring to me.

Chapter 1. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian government: a battle for legitimacy

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is one of the oldest Islamist organizations in the Middle East.⁴¹ The organization, called in Arabic *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* and abbreviated as MB, is considered as the 'mother organization' of many different Islamist groups all over the world. The movement started in Egypt, where Hassan al-Banna founded the Brotherhood in 1928 in the port town of Isma'iliyya. Later the movement spread to other countries, where it attracted a lot of followers with its combination of Islamic ideology and modern grass-roots political activism. In each country, the Brotherhood has adapted itself to the specific political context and local conditions, thereby developing its own policies and methods. In this chapter, I will outline several developments that the movement in Egypt has gone through, as well as the context in which the Muslim Brotherhood took shape.

There is a rich body of scholarly work on Islamic political thought and Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴² The majority of this work has focused on Islamism in intellectual terms. Books and articles about the Muslim Brotherhood tend to emphasize the thoughts of key figures such as Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, instead of the structure, organization, strategy and tactics of the movement in relation to the broader political environment.⁴³ One of the important exceptions is the book of Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, published in 1969 as part of a series edited by the renowned Islamic scholar Albert Hourani.⁴⁴ The first part of this chapter is largely based on his original research in the 1950s.

The second part of the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in this chapter is partly derived from the work of three other important researchers. Hesham al-Awadi shows in his work *In Pursuit of Legitimacy. The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak, 1982-2000* how the Brotherhood was repeatedly suppressed by the successive regimes of the 'Free Officers'. He emphasizes how the Brotherhood and the Egyptian regime are in constant battle over recognition and authority, in which the room of maneuver that the Egyptian regime allows the Brotherhood fluctuates. The behavior of the Brotherhood

⁴¹ In short, the term 'Islamism' stands for a set of ideologies holding that Islam is not only a religion but also a political system. For a more elaborate discussion of the term 'Islamism', see for example Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic. Social movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford 2007) 6-14. He states that 'Islamism emerged as the language of self-assertion to mobilize those (largely middle-class high achievers) who felt marginalized by the dominant economic, political, or cultural processes in their societies, those for whom the perceived failure of both capitalist modernity and socialist utopia made the language of morality, through religion, a substitute for politics.'

⁴² I base myself mainly on sources written in English. For scholars who read Arabic, see: Abd al-Hamid, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun. Al-Tariq li-l-qimma: sumud* [The Muslim Brotherhood. The road to the top: the persistence] (Cairo 2006). Khalil al-Anani, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi Misr: shaykhukha tusari' al-zaman* [The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: an aging movement struggling with time] (Cairo 2007). Sameh Naguib, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun – Ru'ya ishtirakiyya* [The Muslim Brotherhood – A socialist point of view] (Giza 2006). Amr al-Shubaki, *Mustaqbal al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* [The Future of the Muslim Brotherhood], ACPSS Report 16 (163, 2006), accessible through <http://acpss.ahram.org.eg/htm%5Cikhwan.htm>. Hussam Tammam, *Tahawwulat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun: tafakkuk al-idyulujiya wa-nihayet al-tanzim* [The transformation of the Muslim Brotherhood: the collapse of the ideology and the end of the organization] (Cairo 2006).

⁴³ Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 5-6.

⁴⁴ Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford 1969).

has to be seen in relation to the behavior of the Egyptian regime, because both are seeking for legitimacy among the people.⁴⁵

In their book *Between Religion and Politics*, the political scientists Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy look into the parliamentary experience of Islamists in the Middle East, which often can be described as a kind of 'in between' politics: 'regimes playing with democratic procedures without being fully committed to them and Islamists investing in political participation without sacrificing their broad focus on religious and social activism.'⁴⁶ Brown and Hamzawy have researched in what way the Muslim Brotherhood has changed as a result of its experiences within electoral politics, as well as its relationship to a regime that repressed the Brotherhood.

1.1. The founding years of the Muslim Brotherhood

The 19th century was the age in which Europe dominated the world. European trade expanded greatly due to the emergence of large-scale factory production and changes in transportation means. This was accompanied by an increase in military power of the great European powers. The Middle East was deeply shaped by these changes, as well as by their economic integration into the emerging global system. Also the political and physical interventions of Western powers in local politics and the colonization of the societies as a whole changed the Middle East profoundly.⁴⁷ In 1876 no more than ten percent of Africa was under European rule, but within twenty-five years, more than ninety percent of the continent was colonized.

By carving up the world, European capitalism engaged in a new period of expansion. For Egypt this European expansion meant that the British government established a 'protectorate' by bombarding Alexandria and dropping troops in the Canal zone in the early 1880s. Although the relationship between Egypt and Britain was never formally defined until the outbreak of World War I, the country was absorbed into the British Empire, thereby guaranteeing the dividends of the Suez Canal Company and safeguarding the route to Britain's even bigger investments in India.⁴⁸ The British governed Egypt through an arrangement that was frustrating for Britons and Egyptians alike: because Egypt was officially still an Ottoman province, the Egyptian government structure was retained, but to every ministry there were British advisors attached. The Egyptian Muslims were annoyed with the laws and administrative



Figure 1 Photo of Alexandria after the bombardment and fire of 11–13 July, 1882

⁴⁵ Hesham al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy. The Muslim Brothers and Mubarak, 1982-2000* (London and New York 2004).

⁴⁶ Jessica T. Mathews, in the foreword of Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, vi.

⁴⁷ Ilan Pappé, *The Modern Middle East* (New York 2005) 271.

⁴⁸ Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World: From the Stone Age to the New Millennium* (London and New York 1999) 396.

rules that were arbitrarily imposed on them by British Christians. The historian William L. Cleveland writes about this period in his *A History of the Middle East*:

By the turn of the century, hundreds of British officials, army officers, engineers, and teachers (...) dominated all areas of important decision making within Egypt. Their salaries, several times higher than those of their Egyptian counterparts, were paid by the Egyptian rather than the British government, and their air of cultural superiority, emphasized by their membership in exclusive British sporting clubs, contributed to growing tensions with the Egyptian educated classes, who believed they were qualified to govern their own country.⁴⁹

Within this changing world, also the way of thinking started to change. Religious elites tried to adapt religious dogma to the socio-political reality around them. In Egypt, as in other regions under colonial rule, people tried to explain Europe's power. Some people argued that Islamic countries could take over European ideas and methods without renouncing their own beliefs. This was more an elitist intellectual exercise, in which Western political thought and moral philosophy was used to clarify the relevance of Islamic precepts to the society. Others saw the Arabic societies as a 'sick body – a healthy body that had been invaded by a foreign virus that threatened to kill and destroy'.⁵⁰ The British conquest and colonial occupation generated a lot of grievance among Egyptians. As Juan Cole writes in his book *Engaging the Muslim World*:

The Egyptians' resentment at having their national identity forcibly reshaped in what they viewed as a kind of large-scale cultural rape and impregnation led to the formation of movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵¹



Figure 2 British soldiers with their desert helmets line up for inspection in Cairo, 1911

⁴⁹ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (3th edition, Colorado 2004) 105.

⁵⁰ Pappé, *The Modern Middle East*, 271.

⁵¹ Juan Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World* (New York 2009) 50.

Although Egypt was not a battleground during World War I, the population suffered severe hardships during the years of 1914-1918. Egypt was the launching point for the Gallipoli and Syrian campaigns, and the material and human resources of the country were used in the service of the British war effort. Egyptians suffered from the effects of inflation and shortages of basic consumer goods. Farm animals and crops were requisitioned, thousands of farmers conscripted into a civilian labor corps and forced to join the British army on its invasion of Ottoman Syria. When the British exiled Sa'd Zaghlul, the leader of the Wafd Party and the Egyptian independence movement, in March 1919, a part of the Egyptian population started to demonstrate. This eventually resulted in a nationwide upheaval now known as the Revolution of 1919. The British responded to the demonstrations with armed force, which cost the life of more than 800 Egyptians before the end of the year. In 1922, the British proclaimed the independence of Egypt, but the declaration was a mockery: Egypt could not control its own foreign policy and the British military presence in Egypt was ensured.⁵² For the next three decades, the making of the conditional independence into an unconditional one would be the focus of nationalist efforts.



Figure 3 Hassan al-Banna

The history of the Muslim Brotherhood starts with the history of Hassan al-Banna. As the oldest of five sons, he was born in 1906 in Mahmudiyya, a small village near Alexandria. His Hanbali father was a small shop owner, the imam for the local mosque, and author of various works on the *hadith*. He had been educated at al-Azhar University at the time of Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh. Hassan al-Banna's last year at primary school coincided with the outbreak of the Revolution. Richard P. Mitchell writes that al-Banna as a student in this period 'participated in demonstrations which erupted in and out of school, and in the composition and recitation of nationalistic poetry. He was afterwards to remember with special bitterness the sight of British forces in occupation of his home town at this time'.⁵³ Al-Banna took these memories with him when he enrolled in the Primary Teachers' Training School at Damanhur at the age of 14. Two years later, in 1923, he entered *Dar al-'Ulum* in Cairo.⁵⁴ In this period,

Hassan al-Banna became more convinced that 'the mosque alone did not suffice' to bring the faith to the people. He organized a group of students from al-Azhar and his own college, to preach not only in mosques, but also to 'the people's institutes', places where workers gathered, such as coffee-houses and other popular meeting places.⁵⁵

At the age of 21, al-Banna was posted as a schoolteacher in Isma'iliyya, a town next to the Suez Canal. This city was a focal point both of the British military occupation and of foreign economic occupation:

⁵² Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 194-196.

⁵³ Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 3.

⁵⁴ Dar al-'Ulum was founded in 1873 as the first attempt to provide 'modern' higher education (in addition to the religious sciences which were specialties of the traditional and ancient university of al-Azhar). Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

Here it was not only the British military camps, but, equally hateful to Banna, the Suez Canal Company; complete foreign domination of the public utilities; and the conspicuously luxurious homes of the foreigners overlooking the 'miserable' homes of their workers. Even the street signs in the popular Egyptian quarters, he observed, were written in 'the language of the economic occupation'.⁵⁶

It was in the town of Isma'iliyya where, according to his own account, a group of workers (members of the British camp labor force) came to him, looking for his guidance. With them al-Banna launched the Muslim Brothers' Society.⁵⁷ The first three years were focused on the enlargement of the Society in and around Isma'iliyya. Soon, branches of the Muslim Brotherhood also appeared in Port Sa'id, Suez, Abu-Suwayr, Shubra Khit, and there was also minor contact with Cairo. All these branches were founded on the same pattern: first the headquarters was established, followed by the creation of a project, such as a mosque, a school, a club, or some small home industry. This came to serve as a focus for the interest or activities of the community.⁵⁸ In 1932, al-Banna was transferred to Cairo. There, one of his brothers, Abdelrahman al-Banna, was leading the *Society for Islamic Culture*. The two groups merged together and formed the first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo, which provided them with an 'organizational entrée' to the Islamic circles of the capital of Egypt.⁵⁹

1.2. The Muslim Brotherhood during the Second World War

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the Society of the Muslim Brothers grew into one of the most important political groups on the Egyptian scene. The Brotherhood cut across class lines and became the focus for those who were marginalized by Egypt's disruptive transformation. Not only the urban laborers and the peasants were attracted to the movement, but also civil servants and students. One of its attractions was that the Brotherhood forged close ties with the labor movement, and defended worker's demands for union protection and unemployment benefits. It also established its own enterprises in the fields of weaving, transportation and construction, where it granted workers shareholding rights in these companies. The organization also provided material assistance to the poor sections of the society, by establishing free medical clinics, and setting up food kitchens to feed the poor during the depression.⁶⁰

The Brotherhood program was traditional in the sense that al-Banna believed that the social and the political revival of Egypt would only be achieved by restoring Islam as a guiding force. But their call for the restoration of the *sharia*, for example, cannot be seen as a simplistic resurrection of the past:

Al-Banna sought to find a way for Muslims to take advantage of the technological advances of the twentieth century without feeling that they were compromising their commitment to Islamic values. (...) In al-Banna's view the restored *sharia* would be subject to interpretation and would hence be fully compatible with the needs of a modern society. The lack of specific-

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁷ Mitchell writes that the exact date of the launch of the Muslim Brotherhood is not known, because al-Banna later recounts that the Society was established in *Dhu al Qi'da* 1347 / March 1928, but the *hegira* date corresponds to the period of April – May 1929.

⁵⁸ Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁰ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 199-200.

ity in al-Banna's political proposals should not detract from the power of his vision: he called forth not so much an Islamic state as an Islamic order that – precisely because of its Islamic basis – would ensure social justice, economic well-being, and political harmony.⁶¹

In his time, al-Banna was influenced by the totalitarian ideologies of the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy; he developed the concept of Islam as a 'total' and 'comprehensive' system (*nizam shamil*), an idea that would remain characteristic for the movement for the following decades.⁶²

Throughout the 1940s, the Muslim Brotherhood became more radical in character. This was partly due the Zionist colonization under the British Mandate of Palestine and its consequences for native Palestinians. The main goal of the Brotherhood was on freeing Egypt from British dominance – it took part in anti-British, pro-Axis plotting. In the late 1930s, al-Banna organized several rallies, and launched heated criticism of the Egyptian government for its alliance with the British government. In 1941 the British military authorities ordered al-Banna out of Cairo, and he was arrested briefly a few months later. In the meantime, some members of the Muslim Brotherhood founded a small 'Special Apparatus', a secret paramilitary group that turned to terrorist activities in the second half of the 1940s.⁶³ By 1945, the society claimed half a million members and as many sympathizers.⁶⁴

The postwar years were a period of great instability in Egypt. There was a profound crisis within the parliamentary system, and political assassinations became very frequent. The Muslim Brotherhood contributed to this mayhem through their Special Apparatus. In the postwar years, militant members of the Brotherhood engaged in a systematic campaign of violence against foreigners, foreign business establishments and Egyptian officials who were regarded as accomplices of imperialism.⁶⁵ Gun battles between members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the police became common.

Prime Minister Mahmud al-Nuqrashi feared that the growing Muslim Brotherhood was planning a coup, so in 1948 he decided to ban them. Their response was to assassinate him. Al-Banna himself was shot in the street on February 12, 1949, when he was entering a taxi. Numerous investigations and trials indicate that the assassination was planned, or at least condoned, by the prime minister and executed by members of the Egyptian secret police. The prime minister inaugurated a new wave of arrests, and it is estimated that in July 1949 there were about 4.000 Muslim Brothers in the camp-prisons of Tur, Huckstep (former American barracks near Cairo International Airport) and 'Uyun Musa.⁶⁶ The rest of the Brotherhood members went underground, although most of them had probably never even heard of the Secret Apparatus, and had not been violent at all. These events demonstrate the political disorder and social disarray of the Egyptian society at that moment. The regime was finally overthrown on July 23, 1952 by a group of young military officers, the so-called 'Free Officers'. Two of the officers, Nasser and Sadat, were to govern Egypt for the next twenty-nine years.

⁶¹ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 200.

⁶² Ana Belén Soage and Jorge Fuentelsaz Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt', in Barry Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement* (New York 2010) 40.

⁶³ Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World*, 52-53.

⁶⁴ Soage and Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt', 40.

⁶⁵ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 303.

⁶⁶ Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 71-72. Maye Kassem writes that the attack was 'planned and carried out by the head of the special police department responsible for the safety of ministers (*haras al-wizaraat*).' Maye Kassem, *Egyptian Politics. The dynamics of Authoritarian Rule* (London 2004).

1.3. Ideological debates about al-Banna's heritage: Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Hudaybi

After the assassination of al-Banna, the Brotherhood entered a period of uncertainty and power struggles. An ideological debate arose about al-Banna's heritage. Al-Banna had offered a cocktail of ideas that suited the plethora of problems faced by most Egyptians in his time: 'a bit of socialism, quite a lot of militancy and radicalism and a large share of traditionalism and piety'.⁶⁷ As a Salafi, he wished to recreate an ancient Islamic society and he called for the return to the rule of Islamic orthodoxy. But it was supposed to construct a very modern world, with modern education, community building, industrial growth and an effective social welfare system. In general, his vision was interpreted in two very conflicting ways.

On the one side stood Hassan al-Hudaybi, the official successor of Hassan al-Banna. Hudaybi was a retired judge, with a strong distaste for violence and public displays. He was 'uncharismatic but close to the palace' which permitted the Muslim Brotherhood to resume their activities.⁶⁸ He developed a moderate strategy for the movement, which appeared in his book *Preachers and Not Judges*. This book was written as a response to his main contender, Sayyid Qutb. He was the main ideologue of the movement in the 1960s.

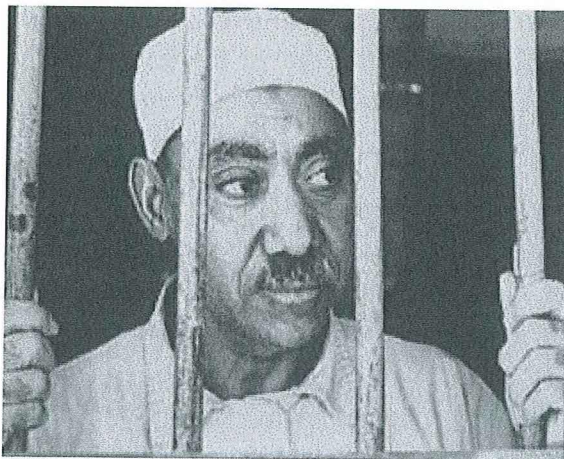


Figure 4 Sayyid Qutb from behind bars

Qutb had been a literary critic who had studied in the United States and then moved toward Muslim fundamentalism. He was one of those arrested in Egypt by Nasser's secular Arab nationalist state, and would spend most of the rest of his life in jail. He was horrified by prison life and the treatment of the prisoners by the guards. During his first three years in prison, he was tortured and suffered severely, but after these years he was able to write in prison.⁶⁹ His major works were written during this time, including his famous *Ma'alim fi'l-Tariq* (*Signposts on the Road / Milestones*⁷⁰), published in 1964. In this manifesto, he declared that liberal democracy and socialism both had revealed themselves as dead ends.

Now it was Islam's turn. The society had to be Islamized, and the movement had to confront those who refuse to accept religious authority and who battle against Islam. It was 'either Islam or *jahiliyyah* (barbarism)'.⁷¹ Qutb added that *jihad* was necessary to get rid of the corrupt rulers of the Muslim world, because they were an obstacle in the way of the instauration of an Islamic order. In his view, Nasser's regime was in a state of *jahiliyyah* and needed to be destroyed by any

⁶⁷ Pappé, *The Modern Middle East*, 272.

⁶⁸ Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 84-86.

⁶⁹ Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh. Muslim Extremism in Egypt* (Paris 1984) 26-30.

⁷⁰ English translations of the book are usually simply entitled 'Milestones'. The Arabic title *Ma'alim fi'l-Tariq* translates into English as 'Milestones Along the Way', 'Signposts on the Road', or different combinations thereof.

⁷¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi'l-Tariq* (Damascus 1964) 201.

means necessary in order to restore the *sharia*. This could only be achieved by vanguards of armed men willing to wage a holy war.

When Qutb was released from prison in 1964, he became involved with some radical Muslim Brothers who were discussing how to assassinate Nasser. The discovery of the plotting led after a show trial to Qutb's execution in 1966. Since then, he became a martyr for Muslim extremists, not only in Egypt but throughout the Muslim world. He was a sort of ideological grandfather for groups like al-Qaeda and several other terror groups.⁷² But his ideas were rejected by the mainstream Sunni Muslim authorities, such as the grand imam of al-Azhar, and mainstream political Islam, in particular by the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in that time, Hassan al-Hudaybi.⁷³ Qutb's writings eventually caused several splits within the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1970s, many young members criticized the older generation for their passivity towards aggression by the government. They left the movement and started their own militant groups, inspired by the message of Sayyid Qutb. Nowadays, Qutbism is not a mass movement but only a small group of activists, some of whom have turned to terrorist violence. Outside occupied warzones such as Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, they have little political significance.⁷⁴

Although al-Hudaybi also spent time in jail and suffered similar trials and tribulations as Sayyid Qutb, he did not leave prison as a bitter man. He was rather optimistic and advocated mildness in future relations with 'unbelievers'.⁷⁵ Hassan al-Hudaybi concluded that only God could judge faith, not men (hence the title of his book, *Preachers and not judges*). 'He rejected *takfir* (the act of declaring another Muslim an apostate), arguing that "whoever judges that someone is no longer a Muslim (...) deviates from Islam and transgresses God's will by judging another person's faith."⁷⁶ Most of the members remained loyal to the moderate line of Hassan al-Hudaybi, and eventually came to find democracy compatible with its notion of slow Islamization of the Egyptian society. In the article 'The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood. Friend or Foe?' Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke quote a senior member for saying: 'It would be unjust if the Brotherhood were to come to power before a majority of the society is prepared to support them.'⁷⁷



Figure 5 Hasan al-Hudaybi

⁷² Pappé, *The Modern Middle East*, 273-274.

⁷³ Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World*, 57-61.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁵ Pappé, *The Modern Middle East*, 274-275.

⁷⁶ Leiken and Brooke, 'The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood', 110. The authors quote Hudaybi, but without a source.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

1.4. The Brothers and the Free Officers

Under Nasser, at first, the Muslim Brotherhood was allowed to continue its work as an 'organization' while all the other political parties were banned, even though the officers were for the most part secular Arab nationalists. But it soon became clear that the Brotherhood and Egypt's new leadership had conflicting views of the future tasks of each:

The former saw in the officers an instrument to realize their vision of an Islamic state, whereas the latter wanted to turn the Brothers into the grassroots they lacked. Qutb was even offered a leadership position in the Liberation Rally, Nasser's first project for a single party system, but the society refused to grant legitimacy to a regime unwilling to implement sharia.⁷⁸

The relation between the Brotherhood and the 'Free Officers' rapidly deteriorated. In October 1954, a young tinsmith and Brotherhood member tried to assassinate Nasser. The incident gave Nasser a chance to crush the Brotherhood.⁷⁹ More than 800 militants were given heavy prison sentences, most of them savagely tortured, and as many as 6000 others were imprisoned without trial. Seven were condemned to death, including al-Hudaybi – his penalty would later be commuted to life imprisonment.⁸⁰ The Brotherhood was outlawed and the organization practically disappeared from the Egyptian political map.⁸¹

It is interesting to see that, in the words of Hesham al-Awadi, the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the different Egyptian regimes followed 'a sort of a cyclical pattern that usually began with an accommodation or an alliance, and ended with confrontation'.⁸² Under the regime of Nasser, we saw that although Nasser was supportive of the Brotherhood in the beginning, two years after the success of the revolution he felt that the support of the Brotherhood had become redundant. This pattern would repeat itself in the next 55 years, during which the Brotherhood was used in several different 'pursuits of legitimacy' by the regimes of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Under these three presidents, the system in Egypt has generally displayed the following features: it has been highly centralized (with the president as the figure in which all the authority is concentrated), with strong limits on political contestation. Any attempt by the opposition to remodel the existing political arrangements has been regarded by leaders as a security threat, instead as a political challenge.⁸³

Nasser's regime suffered a serious crisis after the June War of 1967. In just six days, Israel had defeated Egypt (as well as Jordan and Syria). Egypt lost the Sinai Peninsula and the Suez Canal, an important source of revenues, was blocked. The war was a humiliating disaster for the Arab armies and a blow to the popularity of Nasser. Many Muslims interpreted the defeat as a punishment of God, because of the regime's departure from religion, as well as its persecution of the Islamists.⁸⁴ Nasser survived the crisis by virtue of his charisma and coercion, but he became increasingly responsive to

⁷⁸ Soage and Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt', 41.

⁷⁹ Leiken and Brooke, 'The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood', 109.

⁸⁰ However, even during the darkest days of Nasserist persecution it is estimated that the Brotherhood still had between 250.000 and 300.000 members. Soage and Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt', 41.

⁸¹ Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian politics* (New York and Hampshire 2002) 12-13.

⁸² Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy*, 30.

⁸³ Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 13.

⁸⁴ Soage and Franganillo, 'The Muslim Brothers in Egypt', 42.

public demands for democratic reform and the rule of law. He also courted religious sentiments to maintain the stability of his regime after 1967 and released many Brothers from prison.⁸⁵

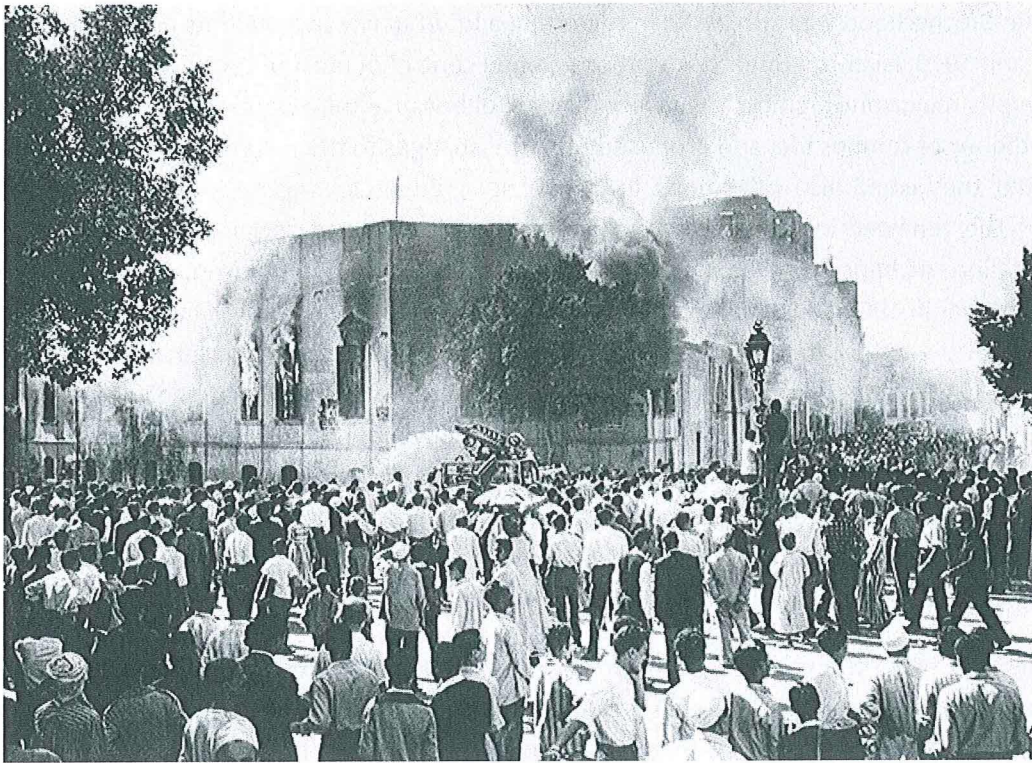


Figure 6 A crowd gathers by the Muslim Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo after setting it on fire in retaliation for the assassination attempt on Gamal Abdel Nasser in October 1954

When Nasser died in 1970, he was replaced by his vice president, Anwar al-Sadat. Sadat embraced religion as the main source of his regime's legitimacy, thereby trying to consolidate his authority and marginalizing the Nasserist and leftist opposition. He gave himself the title of 'the believer president' and used the Egyptian media to establish an image of personal piety. Sadat also initiated a small attempt to democratize his regime, as part of his realignment with the West. The regime abandoned its practice of assigning a single umbrella political party and allowed a limited form of political pluralism – but the National Democratic Party still dominated the political scene, 'sometimes merging with the state bureaucracy and parts of the business community and utilizing instruments of the state to maintain its monopoly on power'.⁸⁶

Sadat faced enormous opposition, and he needed an ally to counterbalance their influence. Therefore, he 'legalized' the Brotherhood. In the early 1970s political prisoners, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, were freed, to the extent that in 1971 no more than 140 Brothers remained in detention.⁸⁷ Although the Muslim Brotherhood could still not become a political party, it was allowed to resume some of its activities. Sadat authorized the Brotherhood to publish its periodical *al-Da'wa* (*The Call*), which rapidly achieved a circulation of over 100,000 copies.⁸⁸ The Brotherhood supported

⁸⁵ Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy*, 34-36. Hesham al-Awadi points to the fact that most of the releases were the result of international pressure from Arab and Muslim countries following the execution of Sayyid Qutb in 1966.

⁸⁶ Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 13.

⁸⁷ Al-Awadi, *In Pursuit of Legitimacy*, 35.

⁸⁸ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 445.

Sadat – until his peace initiative with Israel in 1977 – because they hoped to win from Sadat the right to function openly.

In the 1970s, the Brotherhood was successful in recruiting a lot of university students and graduates. Between 1974 and 1979, Islamic student associations gained control of most of the student organizations within Egypt's major universities. They were successful because they were able to identify the unsuitable conditions of campus life, and proposed practical changes to them within an Islamic frame of reference. But they could also offer hope for university graduates whose occupational futures looked bleak.⁸⁹ The renewed attention for Islamic values of justice and social order was in part caused by the failure of imported ideologies: Nasser's so-called 'socialism' had not prevented the humiliation of the war in 1967 and Sadat's encouragement of capitalism and his reliance on the West were not leading to the anticipated improvements either. The journey of Sadat to Jerusalem on November 20, 1970 made him even more unpopular. Many could not believe that the president of Egypt, the major Arab military power, flew to the Knesset to proclaim the acceptance of peace with Israel, thereby ruining the relationship of Egypt with other Arabic countries. Oil-producing countries cancelled their subsidies, which made Egypt economically more dependent on the West – especially on the United States. This was a source of discontent, which found its primary outlet in the formation and growth of several Islamic opposition movements.

When Sadat decided that the Brotherhood became too outspoken in its criticisms and the revolutionary groups too daring with their anti-regime violence, he tried to repeat what Nasser had done in 1954. In September 1981, Sadat ordered the arrest of over 1500 people, of which 90 percent were Islamic activists – but also some Christian militants.⁹⁰ Again, the regime and the Islamic movements entered a new phase within the battle for legitimacy. *Al-Jihad* responded to the repression by opening machine-gun fire during a military parade on October 6, 1981, killing the president. But contrary to the expectations of the group of radicals who planned the assassination of Sadat, the Egyptian people showed no interest in making a popular Islamic revolution, and Sadat was replaced by his vice president, Hosni Mubarak. The former air force general continued the political project of Sadat and started to arrest hundreds of people who were suspected of plotting against the regime.⁹¹ Mubarak also continued Sadat's political and economic liberalization while systematically extending the state of emergency that gave him extraordinary powers.

During the 1980s, there was a greater degree of press freedom and regular (but flawed) multiparty elections. The regime released some political prisoners, including some Muslim Brothers, and the Brotherhood could start with building up the organization. They succeeded in turning the organization into a major player within the Egyptian political scene. Most of the active students during the 1970s started to enter the labor market, and the Brotherhood continued their work through professional unions. They became more and more a civil society organization, renouncing the use of violence.⁹²

In line with his predecessors, also Mubarak was not able to take away the dissatisfaction within the Egyptian society. Although the United States rewarded Egypt for its participation during the Gulf War

⁸⁹ Ibid., 446.

⁹⁰ Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian politics*, 20-21.

⁹¹ Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World*, 66.

⁹² Barry Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood. The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement* (New York 2010) 43.

by canceling half its debt and rewarding them with an annual \$2.3 billion aid package, Mubarak could not deliver to 'his' society what it expected of him. Egypt's productivity stayed low, the gap between the incomes of rich and poor grew, and unemployment rose steeply. The popular resentment over the economy was mixed with frustrations over the limited opportunities for political participation under Mubarak. The (albeit very small) liberalizing tendencies of his early presidency were again put aside more and more in favor of one-party, one-man rule.

The two ways of revolution and reformism to give voice to growing dissatisfaction in society were still in place: on the one hand there were the radical minority groups, who were responsible for an estimated 1400 killings in Egypt during the 1990s.⁹³ An attempt of an Egyptian Islamic *jihad* group to kill Mubarak in 1995 failed and the government responded with the imprisonment of 20.000 members and sympathizers of radical Islamic groups. The horrific attack in 1997 at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Luxor which killed 71 tourists provoked widespread disgust within the Egyptian society.⁹⁴ Despite the attention for all the violence within Egypt, the militant trend was far less influential and pervasive than the more moderate Islamic movements. This gradualist, nonviolent trend was responsible for spreading political Islam within broader segments of society.

The Islamic revival reached its peak in the early 1990s.⁹⁵ More Egyptians started to go to the mosque, and more women started to wear the veil.⁹⁶ Also, 'in 1994, more than a quarter of all books published were religious, a 25 percent increase since 1985, and Islamic books constituted 85 percent of those sold during the 1995 Cairo book fair.' Egyptian society was influenced by the Islamist movements, and in 1992 the Egyptian interior minister publicly announced that all laws were based on the *sharia*, thereby denouncing the notion that Egypt was a secular state.

Election year	Seats contested	Seats won
1976	1 (as independents)	0
1979	2 (as independents)	0
1984	18 (under the New Wafd party list)	8
1987	40 (as part of the Islamic Alliance, with the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Liberal Party)	38
1990	0	0
1995	160 (as independents)	1
2000	70 (as independents)	17
2005	150 (as independents)	88

Table 1.1 Source: Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics* (Washington 2010) 46.

⁹³ Asef Bayat writes that in 1993 alone, confrontations between Islamists and government forces left 1.106 killed or wounded and resulted in 17.191 arrests. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 32.

⁹⁴ Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World*, 70.

⁹⁵ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 33.

⁹⁶ Asef Bayat writes that by the early 2000, 'veiled women constituting a staggering majority of over 80 percent. (...) This certainly was not the Cairo of 1969 when, as Janet Abu-Lughod observed, "One rarely sees *jalabiyyah*... Almost no women are veiled.'" Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 147.

1.5. Participation in elections

The Brotherhood, once the spearhead of Islamic militancy, transformed itself into a representative of this moderate, centrist Islamic political movement. Although the regime never granted the Brotherhood any legal status and prohibited any religious organization from becoming a political party, it was possible for some members of the Muslim Brotherhood to run as independents for seats in the parliament. In most elections since the opening up of the system in the 1970s, the Brotherhood participated in an intentionally non-threatening manner, by contesting a limited number of seats. As is clear from table 1.1, they only put forward one or two candidates in the 1970s. With the elections in 1987, they won a relevant amount of seats for the first time, but not enough to be of any danger for the existing order.



Figure 7 Obsequious opposition? Muslim Brotherhood deputies voice their objection to state of emergency being renewed in April 2006, wearing black sashes reading 'No to Emergency'

At the same time, their participation in parliament did not result in an obsequious opposition. The Muslim Brotherhood used parliament as a platform for challenging the ruling party and the government by questioning state ministers, especially the minister of interior. As Mohammed Hafez puts it, they were 'relentless in demanding respect for democratic freedoms and human rights, an end to mass arrests and torture in detention centers, and electoral reforms to ensure a fair and effective democratic process'.⁹⁷ He points out that the Muslim Brotherhood justified its use of the parliament on the grounds that it allowed them to influence the rulers and disseminate their own message to a broader public:

⁹⁷ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims rebel: repression and resistance in the Islamic world* (Boulder and London 2003) 49.

The fact that the MB was allowed to raise issues of utmost sensitivity – application of the *sharia*, torture in prisons, the lack of real democracy – and that many parties began to modify their political programs to appeal to the MB gave added credence to the claim that participation in parliament, limited as it was, was better than waging war in the streets against the formidable forces of the state.⁹⁸

Although the opening up of the political arena gave the Muslim Brotherhood more room for maneuver, the state continued to deny Islamists substantive access to the levers of power. With the elections of 1995, the government returned once again to harsh measures: prior to the elections, the state carried out a wave of arrests against hundreds of representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood. Not only did the state try to prevent the Brotherhood from running an effective election campaign, it also blocked the group from putting forward candidates altogether. As a result, ‘only one of the 150 MB candidates made it to the People’s Assembly, and he was removed in 1996 for being a member of an illegal organization’.⁹⁹

With the elections of 2005, the Brotherhood agreed to limit their work to a level that did not threaten the National Democratic Party. Although they made sure that they would not win a majority in the elections, the Brotherhood won 88 out of 444 seats and might have won more if there had been no official manipulation and intimidation during the election.¹⁰⁰ Following the now familiar cycle of allowing some political space followed by harsh repression, the government harassment increased after the elections of 2005, and lots of Brotherhood activists got arrested. Their political space was yet again restricted, which led to intense debates about the role that the Brotherhood should play within society: should it be a political party, or a religious organization which works within society?

The Brotherhood nowadays represents a relatively mainstream Islamist organization, which has renounced violence and tries to change society through electoral politics and through *da’wa* – missionary work. At the same time, the Egyptian state has also changed by the various Islamist forces. Asef Bayat describes how the Islamist movement has influenced the Islamization of the ‘secular’ state of Egypt:

At its height, the Islamist movement had not only captured a large part of civil society, but also significantly influenced the state, conditioning it to share and further appropriate religious discourse. It *socialized the state* to the society’s prevailing sensibilities, and by penetrating the state apparatus helped create a kind of ‘secularreligious’ state.¹⁰¹

The Egyptian state and the Muslim Brotherhood have been in a constant battle with each other, in which they repel and attract each other. In this, the Brotherhood has overcome many difficulties. It has managed to place itself in the middle of political debates following the popular uprising by adopting a public role as a viable opposition movement that can attract a new generation of activists. Furthermore, it has managed to appear as a serious and trustworthy political force. Finally, it ‘weathered a difficult post-September 11 international environment, convincing some international observ-

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹⁹ Hafez, *Why Muslims rebel*, 53. In his book, Hafez speaks about 150 Muslim Brotherhood candidates for the 1995 elections, while Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy speak about 160 independent candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood. A possible explanation is that in 2003 it was not yet clear that some independent candidates were affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood.

¹⁰⁰ Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 13-16.

¹⁰¹ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 166.

ers that it is not linked to al-Qaeda, and that it may even be the sort of Islamist movement that the West can safely engage.¹⁰²

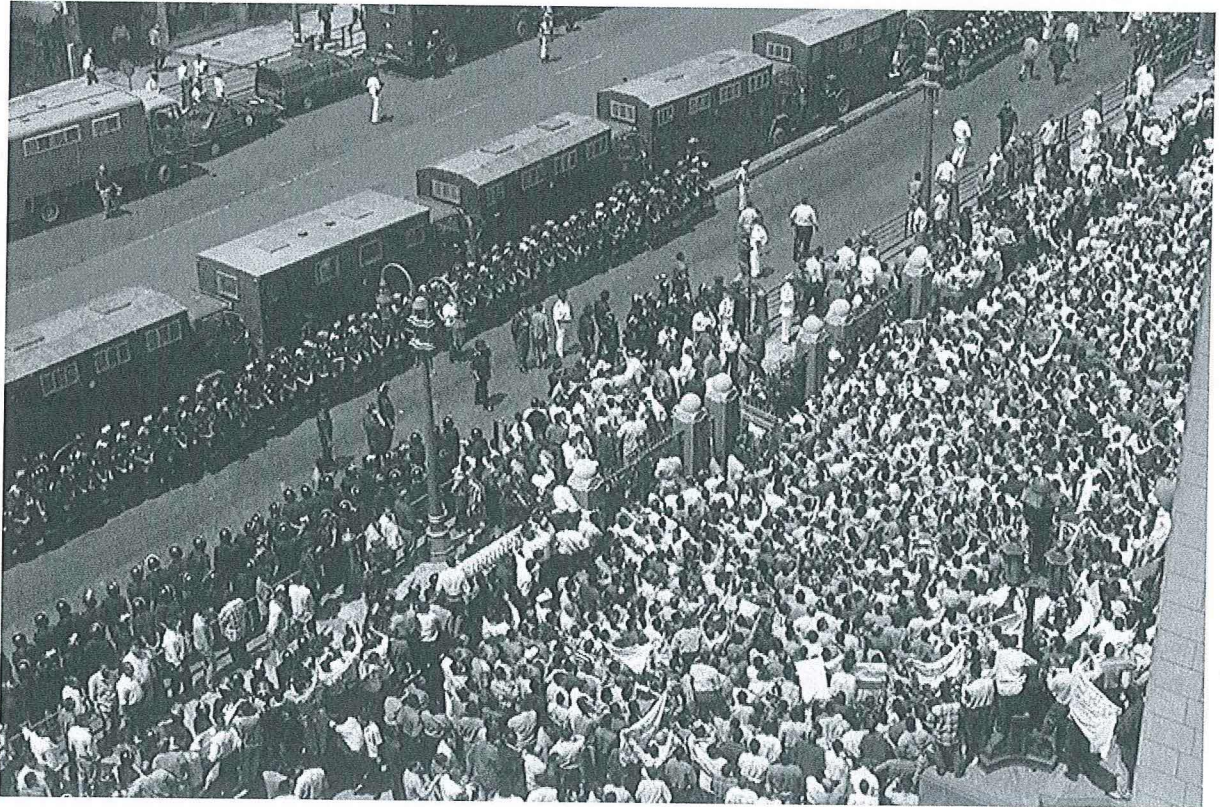


Figure 8 Police surround Muslim Brotherhood protesters outside the al-Fateh mosque in Cairo in the run-up to presidential elections in 2005

¹⁰² Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 44.

Chapter 2. The Brotherhood and the Internet: the search for a voice within the public sphere

As I have argued in the introduction, it is important to be sensitive to the specific nature of the media landscape in Egypt. As mentioned above, one-third of the Egyptian population can neither read nor write, and only 21% of the population had access to internet.¹⁰³ Egypt is also a country where political dissent is often suppressed by dispersing demonstrations, harassing human rights activists, and detaining journalists and bloggers who criticize government policies and expose human rights violations.¹⁰⁴ But Egypt's famous record of censorship and a lack of freedom of expression was shaken by the rapid growth of satellite television and the Internet. Before analyzing Ikhwanophobia.com, I will first take a closer look at the media landscape in Egypt. How did the authoritarian Egyptian regime deal with the media in Egypt, especially since the development of the internet? How does the Muslim Brotherhood use the media to get their ideas heard within society? And last, what role did Abdelrahman Ayyash, the editor of Ikhwanophobia.com, play in this strategy?

2.1. Free speech and an authoritarian regime – Egypt's control over the media

The pre-revolutionary Egyptian regime tried to control and influence the media in Egypt in various ways. In the past this was relatively easy, especially with the written press. Although this media branch is very diverse in Egypt, with over 500 newspapers, journals and magazines, they were almost all (partly) owned by the government. For example, the editors of the three major daily newspapers in Egypt – al-Ahram, al-Akhbar, and al-Gumhuriya – were appointed by the president, and it was widely understood that their loyalty lay with the state. Also, until recently it was extremely difficult to publish an independent newspaper in Egypt, not only because of the high costs but also because one had to be cleared by all main security and intelligence agencies in order to receive a state license. As a result, many Egyptian publications registered in nearby countries, thereby circumventing several restrictions. However, publications coming from outside Egypt were screened carefully as well.¹⁰⁵

Censorship and control were also extended to television stations. There was a relative opening of freedom of expression under Mubarak in the 1990s – partly under pressure of the United States and organizations such as the World Trade Organization – resulting in the licensing of privately owned newspapers and TV-stations for the first time. Nevertheless, it remained very difficult to start a

¹⁰³ Internet World Stats, *Egypt Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports*, <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/af/eg.htm>. Literacy is defined as all persons 15 years and over who can read and write. <http://data.worldbank.org/country/egypt-arab-republic>.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch Report 2011* (2011), 517-520. <http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2011>.

¹⁰⁵ Not only newspapers, but also books are monitored by the state. Asef Bayat gives an example of how far this can go. He wrote that all the books that were ordered by the American University in Cairo (AUC) for library or instructional use had to be approved by an official censor: 'Over 40 percent of the seventy-seven books reviewed by the censor in December 1999 were either banned or confined to "restricted use" in the library.' Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 248n144.

newspaper or a TV-station in Egypt. This not only required the backing of the High Council for the Press, which was headed by president Mubarak, but also that of the council of ministers and the different branches of the security services.

With the launch of the by now iconic satellite TV station *al-Jazeera* in 1996, the nature of news coverage in the Arab world changed substantially. *Al-Jazeera* was a news driven channel that differed greatly from the traditional state-controlled television channels, because it was able to bring unprecedented criticisms of Arab rulers, as well as lively debates on controversial issues. The existence of such a relatively independent media outlet changed the expectations of the wider public, influencing also the way the state-media was viewed. It was forced to change its broadcasting strategy – for example, the state-run media started to cover more areas that were once seen as taboo.¹⁰⁶

The growth of new media such as satellite television posed a challenge to the Egyptian government. On the one hand, it needed to keep pace with global changes and new communication technologies. On the other hand, new media could be used by citizens as a means of undermining the control of the regime. One of the solutions the Egyptian government and their security forces chose was to shut down offices of satellite channels, arrest reporters and their cameramen, and revoke licenses of operators.¹⁰⁷ The government also retained the power to simply pull the plug on a network all-together, a means employed very actively during the recent uprisings in January 2011.

While satellite television dominates the new media in terms of audience reach, nowadays the Internet poses the biggest challenge in terms of undermining the authority of the regime. Since 1998 private ISPs (Internet Service Providers) were permitted to build their own infrastructure in Egypt. In 2002 the Ministry for Information and Communication Technology provided people access to the Internet through the existing telephone lines. The Egyptian Internet users increased slowly, from a 0,7% penetration in 2000 to a 21,1% penetration in 2010, with almost 17 million regular users.¹⁰⁸ Although the penetration rate is relatively low, because of Egypt's huge population of 80 million it means that in absolute terms the country has the highest number of Internet users in the Arab world.¹⁰⁹

With the severe restrictions on press freedom, the Internet has become an important location for attempts to stretch the limits of freedom of speech. In Egypt today there exists a vibrant and influential community of bloggers, who use the Internet to express themselves about nearly everything. Typical for Egypt's blogosphere is that Egyptian bloggers are often connected to political movements and actively engaged in politics – instead of merely discussing politics. While only 20% of the blogs in Egypt were political in nature, they succeeded in attracting popular and official attention.¹¹⁰ Daniel Hardaker writes that

¹⁰⁶ Courtney Radsch, 'Core to Commonplace: The Evolution of Egypt's Blogosphere' in *Arab Media & Society* 6 (2008) 2.

¹⁰⁷ David Hardaker, 'Putting the Genie Back in the Bottle: Ruling Regimes and the New Media in the Arab World', *Low Institute for international policy* (2008).

¹⁰⁸ Internet World Stats, *Egypt Internet Usage and Telecommunications Reports*, <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/af/eg.htm>.

¹⁰⁹ Hardaker, 'Putting the Genie Back in the Bottle', 5.

¹¹⁰ Bruce Etling, John Kelly, Robert Faris and John Palfrey, 'Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture, and Dissent', Berkman Center Research Publication No. 2009-06, 15.

[A] 2008 Egyptian government study estimates that there are 80.000 active blogs in the country. The same report estimates that 10% of these blog are read by 50.000 people or more. This is roughly the same number who read one of Egypt's national daily papers, *al-Masry al-Youm*.¹¹¹

These 'citizen-journalists' often have a bigger impact than their professional journalist counterparts. Writing a blog in Egypt means being at the frontline of journalism, instead of just blowing off steam about the world. The blogs often serve as a key source of news for journalists who are not working for the state-run media and human rights workers, who use the information from the blogs for their coverage of the military tribunals to which they cannot get access themselves.

With the increase of Internet users, the Egyptian government also became more interested in the Internet. Reporters without Borders write in their latest report on Egypt:

Out of concern for its image abroad, Egypt decided long ago not to block websites. (...) Since the start of 2007, the government has stepped up Internet surveillance under the banner of the fight against terror, under the supervision of a special department within the interior ministry. Facebook is monitored rather than blocked so that militants can be watched or arrested. The authorities monitor their citizens' emails and tap their phones without any judicial decision under the telecommunications law that forces service providers to allow them the necessary surveillance services and equipment. (...) Surveillance is evident in cyber-café's, which are widely used by Egyptians. The authorities often put managers under pressure to provide personal details of Internet-users that interest them.¹¹²

Thus, instead of limiting the access to certain websites as some countries do, the internet in Egypt is heavily monitored in order to track down 'rotten apples'. Political activism of the opposition is closely monitored in particular, especially when they have the capacity to mobilize public support.

The combination of satellite television with the Internet and the use of mobile phones makes the new media a force to reckon with. One of the most famous examples of recent years were the workers' strikes in the Misr Spinning and Weaving factory in the central Delta city of Mahalla-al-Kubra, a public-sector firm employing more than 25,000 workers.¹¹³ The factory is one of the most organized factories in terms of workers movement, and has a long history of strikes and political demands. One of their strikes intensified severely when Israa Abd al-Fattah – 'Facebook girl', one of the co-founders of the April 6th youth movement – gathered more than 70.000 members on her Facebook who supported the strike in the Nile Delta. Because of the use of Facebook, the event got a lot of media attention in the mainstream press. Egypt's security forces were caught off guard, and although they restricted *al-Jazeera's* cameramen from moving into certain conflict areas, several bloggers used their mobile phones to film the protests from behind the scenes and posted the pictures later on their blogs. During later television interviews, they could refer to these pictures and movies, thereby changing television from a passive into a more interactive medium.

¹¹¹ Hardaker, 'Putting the Genie Back in the Bottle', 6.

¹¹² Reporters without Borders for Press Freedom, *World Report – Egypt*. <http://en.rsf.org/report-egypt,149.html>.

¹¹³ The Solidarity Center, *Justice for All. The Struggle for Workers Rights in Egypt. A Report by the Solidarity Center* (2010) 37.



Figure 9 Women on strike in the textile factory of Mahalla, 2007

In the years preceding the revolution, however, the Egyptian government became more aggressive with security crackdowns on Internet political activists, during which the Brotherhood was targeted most. Human Rights Watch reported that more than 1,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood were detained between March 2006 and March 2007.¹¹⁴ But the arrests only increased the use of personal narratives by Muslim Brothers: many of the younger bloggers are the sons and daughters of Muslim Brothers who got arrested, 'thus giving the Brotherhood a human media face set against the backdrop of accounts of suffering under the Mubarak regime'.¹¹⁵ The Internet proved a vital method to attract the media attention the Muslim Brotherhood could not get through the mainstream and state-run media.

2.2. The Muslim Brotherhood and websites

The Internet has increased the possibilities for the Muslim Brotherhood to spread their political message. Due to their illegal status, the use of the Internet serves as a means to bypass authoritarian restrictions, and the use of the Internet is part of a conscious and necessary strategy for reaching the public. Since only legal political or social institutions were allowed to apply for newspaper licenses in Egypt, the Brotherhood most of the time was forced to use the newspapers of their allies, such as the neoliberal *al-Wafd*, the socialist *al-Sha'ab* and the leftist *al-Ahrar*, to address the public. But after their success in the parliamentary elections of 2005, the license they used at that moment – *Afaq*

¹¹⁴ Pete Ajemian, 'The Islamist opposition online in Egypt and Jordan', in *Arab Media & Society* 4 (2008) 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

Arabia – was cancelled and the Brotherhood was yet again without a newspaper.¹¹⁶ The step into the World Wide Web was not difficult to make, and nowadays the Muslim Brotherhood has a sophisticated web presence, both in English and Arabic, with modern websites using combinations of text, pictures and audiovisual materials. But also in the online world, the Brotherhood has to fight with the Egyptian regime for the possibility to get its voice heard.

In 2002, the Brotherhood created the Arabic website *ikhwanonline.com*. It was initially meant to support short-term political objectives like election campaigns.¹¹⁷ In 2004, before the elections, the website was blocked and its offices were raided by the police. After the attacks, the Brotherhood installed proxy servers to bypass possible future regime restrictions. Under Mahdi Akif, the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood from 2004 to 2010, the movement actively started to use online media. After the Egyptian regime closed down the official website of the Brotherhood in September 2004, the Brotherhood decided to decentralize their website and created eighteen separate websites, to promote individual candidates during the run up to the presidential elections of 2005. It combined the websites with an Internet radio station to promote the websites to a wider audience. Because the Muslim Brotherhood was not allowed to appear on official television or terrestrial programs, it tried with its online campaign to counter the control of the Egyptian Information Ministry and Television Union.¹¹⁸

Apart from the mobilization during electoral campaigns, the Brotherhood used their websites to criticize and publicize examples of election tampering. On their official website they showed videos of ballot box tampering at several polling stations, shot with hidden cameras.¹¹⁹ They also used their websites to draw attention to the arrest and detention of several Muslim Brother candidates before the elections. Because of the neglect of news about the Brotherhood in the governmental media, the websites of the Brotherhood served as an 'inter-media agenda setter' for private media such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Masri al-Youm*.

The Brotherhood not only has Arabic language websites, they also publish in English. Their main English language website, *ikhwanweb.com*, is specifically focused on an international audience. Next to its regular websites, the Brotherhood also tries to use new media trends. In 2007 it launched *ikhwantube*, a website where Brotherhood supporters can share videos. They also created *Ikhwanbook*, their own version of Facebook. This website is more concerned with concepts such as privacy and security, topics that often come into question with the regular Facebook. The Brotherhood also launched its own versions of Wikipedia (*IkhwanWiki*) and Google (*IkhwanSearch*).¹²⁰ But arguably one of the most interesting developments within the usage of the Internet by the Muslim Brotherhood is its entrance into the blogosphere. This has created new opportunities and challenges to the organization, because the use of blogs can give the Brotherhood more media attention, but it also gives younger members a platform to openly discuss and question the choices of the party. This is a major break with the normally strictly hierarchical organized Brotherhood, where disagreements within the party generally remain between four walls.

¹¹⁶ Carola Richter, 'Virtual Mobilisation: The Internet and Political Activism in Egypt', in *Orient I* (2010) 19-21.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹⁸ Ajemian, 'The Islamist opposition online in Egypt and Jordan', 3-4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁰ See for the websites: www.ikhwantube.org, www.ikhwanbook.com, www.ikhwanwiki.com and ikhwansearch.com.

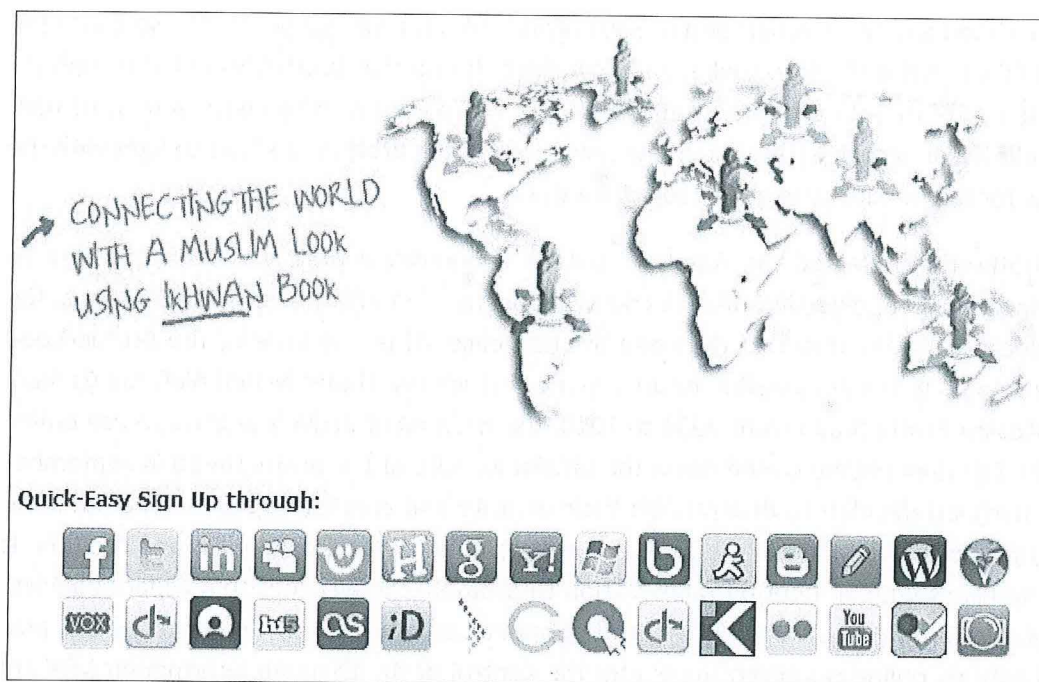


Figure 10 The front-page of Ikhwanbook, the Facebook of the Muslim Brotherhood

2.3. The Muslim Brotherhood and blogs

Until quite recently, the Arab political blogs were dominated by liberal political activists, who were often writing in English. Until the late 1990s, publishing in Arabic was technically quite difficult, but this changed at the start of the 21st century. *BlogSpot*, one of the most popular blogging platforms, enabled Arabic script in its blogs so that even people without much technological knowledge now can create a blog in the language they choose.¹²¹ Although the Muslim Brotherhood created one of the first Egyptian student websites in 1999 and participated in the web publication of *Islam Online*, it took a while before young Muslim Brothers joined the blogging trend that engulfed the politicized Egyptian youth throughout 2005.¹²² Khalil al-Anani writes:

The voices of Mohamed Hamza, Magdy Saad, Abdel-Moniem Mahmoud, Abdel-Rahman Ayyash, Somiya el-Erian, Ibrahim el-Hudaiby, Abdel-Rahman Rashwan and an unknown number of others previously went unheard before the advent of blogging. But almost overnight, these bloggers have risen from oblivion to become virtual stars, and shining examples of a new Brotherhood generation making its mark and using new tools to pursue its goals. (...) They are a phenomenon aiming to break taboos that have been in place for more than 80 years, and they are buttressed by the organizational values and discipline of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹²³

¹²¹ Radsch, 'Core to Commonplace', 2.

¹²² Marc Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', in *Middle East Report* 37 (2007) 5. Available at <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer245/lynch.html>.

¹²³ Khalil al-Anani, 'Brotherhood Bloggers. A new generation voices dissent', in *Arab Insight* 2 (2008) 30. Available at www.arabinsight.org.

Khalil al-Anani distinguishes three stages in the blogging of Brotherhood members, namely exploration, civil resistance and self-criticism. According to him, the first stage started in the autumn of 2006, when the first signs of a blogging movement among the Brothers could be discerned. In that period journalist 'Abd al-Moneim Mahmoud launched his now famous blog *Ana Ikhwan (I am a Muslim Brother)*. He was the first blogger who explicitly identified himself as a Muslim Brotherhood member on his blog. The other important blog during this period was of Magdy Saad, a student leader working in the private sector, who started the blog *Yalla, mesh mohem (Whatever, it doesn't matter)*.¹²⁴ Both started blogging after their arrest on March 3, 2006, along with 19 other Brotherhood leaders and members. The blogs helped to focus the media attention on the arrests.

In the spring of 2007, it is estimated that there were about 150 bloggers within the Muslim Brotherhood, men and women.¹²⁵ A few key leaders like Essam al-Erian and Khaled Hamza encouraged talented youth to start blogs.¹²⁶ A few leaders themselves have their own blogs. Courtney Radsh writes that several Brotherhood bloggers told her during her research that they 'felt compelled in many cases to freelance on the side of their studies because the organization does not have its own newspaper or channel.'¹²⁷ Somaya Badr, a Muslim Brotherhood blogger whose father had been arrested before, wrote: 'The media are the greatest power at this time and [we] need to have it tell about Islam and societies problems'.¹²⁸



Figure 11 Khayrat al-Shatir during his trial

The second phase, according to Khalil al-Anani, is characterized by civil resistance. The arrest of a number of Muslim Brotherhood leaders, including the Deputy Supreme Guide Muhammad Khayrat al-Shatir, and their transfer to a military tribunal in February 2007 brought the Internet activism of the Brotherhood youth out in full force. The goal of this phase was mainly to focus attention on the military tribunals, report on their development and to reveal their deficiencies for a local and international audience. Marc Lynch writes:

Brotherhood members launched an impressively coordinated, web based campaign seeking the release of Shatir and other imprisoned leaders. Organized by family members, with support from Internet-savvy members, these campaign blogs presented the human side of the Brothers, publishing family pictures, home videos and touching anecdotes aimed at softening the Brothers' stern image among Egyptians and abroad.¹²⁹

Other famous blogs of this period are *Ensaaf (Forget)*, structured as a news channel to follow the tribunal sessions, and blogs of children of detained fathers, such as the one of the children of Khayrat

¹²⁴ See for the blogs *I Am Brotherhood*: <http://ana-ikhwan.blogspot.com> and *Whatever, It Doesn't Matter*: <http://yallameshmohem.blogspot.com>.

¹²⁵ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace'.

¹²⁶ Radsch, 'Core to Commonplace', 7.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²⁸ *Idem.*

¹²⁹ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', 6.

al-Shatir, of the businessman Hassan Malek and of the frequently arrested Brotherhood leader Essam al-Erian, whose daughters Asmaa and Somiya created 'The al-Erian Daughters' blog.¹³⁰

Of course, not all the blogs are the same. A growing number of youth has started to write the sort of 'individual online journal' that youth everywhere can write, with references of their favorite songs, books and movies, as well as stories about their family, friends, religion and responses to world affairs. Also, the use of blogs can serve to create connections between young Brothers and other Egyptian youth. Marc Lynch writes:

Several bloggers (intriguingly, almost always women) said that their blogs were the first venue in which they had presented themselves to others as part of the Muslim Brothers. As several of the young bloggers explained in interviews for this article, most Egyptians (let alone Westerners) have never met a Muslim Brother in person and so often entertain stereotypes of programmed robots incapable of independent thought and slavishly devoted to religion. (...) Mahmoud described his blog as 'my message to myself, to the young Muslim Brothers and to society. I wanted to show that Brothers are humans who have the same dreams [as anyone else]. We have fun. We drink [tea and coffee]. We sit at café's. We go to movies. We demonstrate... and we blog for freedom.'¹³¹

Other bloggers use their blog to 'improve their position within the Brotherhood, or to draw attention of Brotherhood leaders to their talents and the role they could play'.¹³²

Khalil al-Anani points out that the third phase can be seen as a sort of 'self-criticism phase', in which the organization and its ideology are questioned. This proves to be a mixed blessing to the movement. On the one hand, it is considered positive that some topics can be discussed more openly. Blogs can be used to go against the top-down leadership structures. But on the other hand, the open discussion about internal affairs can destroy their 'unity of message', and is used against the Brotherhood by the media, who wrote sensational stories about schisms inside the Brotherhood after the open discussions of the party platform.¹³³ This opened up a discussion inside the Brotherhood: 'Should the Brothers be a secretive organization determined to present a united front to a hostile outside world, or an open organization determined to offer a window into its deliberations in order to reassure potential allies?'¹³⁴ This discussion was still ongoing when the popular uprising of January 2011 changed the political spectrum once again.

One thing is clear: the new generation of Muslim Brotherhood members wants to talk about politics. For them, 'listen and obey' is no longer an option. In the major controversies the last couple of years, the bloggers played a vital role. Broadly speaking, two groups of leaders can be distinguished within the Brotherhood: the conservatives and the reformists. Marc Lynch writes that 'when disagreements between the two groups emerge in public, the bloggers tend to choose the reformists' side.' In his article, he tells the story of al-Erian, the chief of the Muslim Brotherhood's political department in Egypt, who stated in an interview with *Islam Online* that

¹³⁰ Al-Anani, 'Brotherhood Bloggers', 31. See for the blogs 'Ensa' <http://ensaa.blogspot.com>, 'Khirat el-Shater' <http://www.khirat-elshater.com>, 'Free Hassan Malek' <http://freehassanmalek.blogspot.com>, and 'The al-Erian Daughters' <http://banatelerian.blogspot.com>.

¹³¹ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', 7-8.

¹³² Al-Anani, 'Brotherhood Bloggers', 32.

¹³³ Ajemian, 'The Islamist opposition online in Egypt and Jordan', 2.

¹³⁴ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', 10.

when the Brotherhood comes to power in Egypt as a political party, they would have to respect the Camp David Accords and 'deal with Israel based on a political reality that Israel does exist as a state'. The following day 'Akif, the General Guide, was quoted in *al-Hayat*, where he said that 'there is not something called Israel in our dictionary'. One of the reactions within the blogging scene was from Abd al-Rahman 'Ayyash, who said that although the Brothers would regard Israel as an 'entity ravaging Arab and Muslim land', he applauded the realistic stance of 'Iryan [al-Erian].¹³⁵

With the use of blogs, the Brotherhoods youth can criticize their leaders and draw attention to weak points within the movement. But they can also use their blogs to the advantage of the Brotherhood, by countering an unfavorable image of the organization. Another development that changes the conservative outlook of the movement, is the emergence of 'blogging sisters'. This is an unparalleled development for the organization, but also within the Egyptian society at large.¹³⁶ With the use of blogs, members have the chance to alter the image of the Brotherhood. They can give Egyptians a firsthand insight into the ideas of the Brotherhood, with their personal stories and the emphasis of the human interest side of their political plight.

2.4. Abdelrahman Ayyash

Abdelrahman Ayyash is one of the bloggers of the Muslim Brotherhood who became prominent in this period, writing his blog in both in English and Arabic. Ayyash has been an outspoken member of the Brotherhood's growing reformist movement, led by the younger generation. He is a representative of the group that gives substantive critiques of the Brotherhood's political decisions and ideology.¹³⁷ He was born on March 3, 1990 in Mansoura, a medium-sized city 120 kilometers to the north of Cairo. As the oldest of four children, he was born into a Muslim Brotherhood family – both his parents are members of the Brotherhood. When he was about thirteen years old, he began to attend weekly meetings of the Brotherhood. After he moved to Cairo to study computer engineering at the university at the age of seventeen, he started to attend organizational meetings as well. Next to his study and his blogs, he was a member of the media committee of the Muslim Brotherhood, and he has created at least three websites for the organization. During my research he was still a member of the Brotherhood, but some months after the popular uprising in January 2011 he decided to 'leave' the organization, due to political differences.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', 8-9. You can find the post of Ayyash on 'Israel: an entity to the brothers, a state to the party' on al-ghareeb.blogspot.com/2007/10/blog-post_20.html.

¹³⁶ Al-Anani, 'Brotherhood Bloggers', 36.

¹³⁷ Khalil al-Anani, 'The Young Brotherhood in Search of a New Path', in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9 (2009). See <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-young-brotherhood-in-search-of-a-new-path>.

¹³⁸ Ayyash explained to me that his prior membership is somewhat ambiguous: he emphasized he was a 'regular' member but not an 'organizational member' of the Brotherhood. He explained to me that the Brotherhood works with five 'degrees' of membership, in which it matters how old you are and how long you are working for the organization. Ayyash attained the third degree of membership, by some considered not to be full membership. The Egyptian police, however, definitely did see him as a full member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Ayyash started blogging in July 2006 on his Arabic blog *al-Ghareeb – the Stranger* – and in October 2007 on his English blog, *2-b-egyptian*.¹³⁹ His English blog starts with explaining who he is:

My name is "AbdelRahman", My Friends call me "Boudi", "Ayyash", or "Abdo". I'm just human. I wanna to be treated on the base that gathering us all .. HUMANITY. for those who wanna to know every thing. I'm Egyptian. Muslim. Moderate. Member og Muslim Brotherhood organization. Iam studying communication Engineering.

In this blog I'll try to express my self as an Egyptian guy, that wanna to show his pain and joy, suffering and happiness , hate and love ... etc. generally, I will try to open a gate of dialogue between me - as a moderate islamist egyptian blogger - and non-arabic readers. so, let us talk.¹⁴⁰

Ayyash is dedicated to starting the dialogue with people outside the Muslim Brotherhood, to show them what the Muslim Brotherhood is all about. Added to his first blog post is a YouTube movie of a young American man who explains in perfect English that he is a Muslim, and that he 'doesn't know how to ride a camel or to tight a turban', among other prejudices that he refutes.

Next to his blogs, Ayyash worked as a journalist and editor for the official English website of the Muslim Brotherhood *ikhwanweb.com* from June 2007 until February 2008. Ayyash also has created three websites for the Muslim Brotherhood. The first website was *ikhwanscope.net*, a website with articles on the Muslim Brotherhood but also on other Islamic movements. The website states that it is meant as 'an independent Muslim progressive and moderate non-profit site, concentrating mainly on the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement founded by the Imam Hassan al-Banna'. Further it is stated that the website tries to help researchers and scholars with information about the movement and wants to facilitate a forum to discuss Islamic movements.¹⁴¹

The second website Ayyash helped to create is the official website campaigning for the release of Khayrat al-Shatir, the then Deputy Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Shatir was accused of money laundry and terrorism by a military tribunal and received a seven years' prison sentence. During the uprising of January 2011, he was released from prison. During a personal interview, Ayyash told me how the campaign for the release of al-Shatir had a profound impact on him, not only because of the nature of the case and his close contact with several Muslim Brotherhood leaders and human rights activists during the campaign, but also because of his own arrest during this campaign. Although he was only 19 years old, Ayyash was arrested on the airport of Cairo on 21 July, 2009, after his trip to Turkey where he took part in a youth conference.¹⁴² He traveled together with Magdi Saad, the author of the widely read blog *Yalla Mesh Mohem (It's not important)*, who was also arrested. When they arrived at the airport in Egypt, they were held there for two days, and then transferred to the state security office in Mansoura. The main questions during his interrogation were about

¹³⁹ You can find his Arabic blog on <http://al-ghareeb.blogspot.com> and his English blog on <http://2-b-egyptian.blogspot.com>.

¹⁴⁰ Abdelrahman Ayyash, 'Start', http://2-b-egyptian.blogspot.com/2007_10_01_archive.html.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.ikhwanscope.net/main/about/>.

¹⁴² Their arrests came three weeks after another blogger, Wael Abbas, was arrested at Cairo airport on his return from attending a conference in Sweden. During this conference, he openly criticized the Egyptian government in the presence of members of the ruling National Democratic Party. Wael Abbas was held for a day at the airport on "national security" grounds. Reporters without borders for press freedom, 'Three Bloggers Freed' (July 27, 2009), available at <http://en.rsf.org/egypt-three-bloggers-freed-27-07-2009,34005>.

Khayrat al-Shatir and the human rights activists he had met in 2007. He was released after five days.¹⁴³

The third website Ayyash helped to create is www.ikhwanophobia.com, the website that is the focus of this thesis. The website is written completely in English, and is devoted to debunking myths in the West about the Brotherhood. 'It explains that we are not terrorists and that there is a moderate alternative to Egypt's regime', according to Ayyash. Ayyash created this website not under his own name but under the name of 'Omar Mazin', because he realized it would not be safe to use his real name.¹⁴⁴ Although the idea for the website was originally raised by Khaled Hamza, Ayyash sees the website as his 'own child'. He is very dedicated to the topic of how 'the West is looking to the political Islam. Now the political Islamist is responding to the West.' He believes that the website is vital in documenting the public opinions of Westerners and the opinions and responses of Muslim Brothers to these debates in the West.¹⁴⁵

The online activities of Ayyash make him a typical exponent of the generation of Muslim Brotherhood bloggers that came to the fore after 2005. The Brotherhood made active use of his talents in this field by involving him in setting up various websites for the organization. The website www.ikhwanophobia.com, however, did not start as an official party-website, although Ayyash was encouraged by different higher party officials to create it. Only several months after his departure from the party, Ayyash handed over the administration of the website to officials of the Muslim Brotherhood.

¹⁴³ Personal interview with Ayyash.

¹⁴⁴ Sarah A. Topol, 'Sibling Rivalries. As the protests in Cairo continue, the Muslim Brotherhood faces internal tension and a generational divide', in *Slate* (February 8, 2011). <http://www.slate.com/id/2284345/pagenum/2>

¹⁴⁵ Personal interview with Ayyash.

Chapter 3. The website ikhwanophobia.com

The Muslim Brotherhood is often portrayed in the Western media in a very stereotyped way. It is seen as a monolithic party, with only one mindset: extremist, conservative and violent. This stereotyped and generalized view has its impact on the party itself as well. Aware of the importance of their image in the West, members try to influence it and change it into something more positive. After their success during the elections of 2005 the Brotherhood actively tried to gain a good reputation within the Western media and among Western representatives in Egypt, as well as to gain their trust. In the previous chapter we already saw that the Brotherhood launched several English websites around the elections of 2005. After the elections, several leaders of the Brotherhood started the 'initiative for the renewed presentation of the Brotherhood to the West', during which they extensively discussed 'Western misconceptions about the Brotherhood'.¹⁴⁶ Two high-ranked senior members, for example, wrote an opinion piece in *Forward*, an American Jewish newspaper. Khayrat al-Shatir, at the time vice-president of the Muslim Brotherhood, wrote an article for *The Guardian* on November 23, 2005, under the title 'No need to be afraid of us. The Muslim Brotherhood believes that democratic reforms could trigger a renaissance in Egypt'.¹⁴⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood works actively to improve their image in the West. They are creating a 'foreign relations office' at the moment in Cairo, to be able to coordinate their relations with people outside Egypt. But they are also continuing their efforts on the Internet. In June 2010 Abdelrahman Ayyash, a young intellectual from the Muslim Brotherhood, started the website *ikhwanophobia.com*. On this website he reacts to what he perceives as the negative and stereotypical image of the Muslim Brotherhood that appears in Western – mostly American – media, and on events in the West that can be seen as anti-Islamic. The website is in completely written in English, not in Arabic, and focuses clearly on a Western audience. Also, the website is made with the newest technologies, and has links to Facebook, MySpace, Delicious and many other 'new (social) media'.¹⁴⁸

The website *ikhwanophobia.com* is the main focus of this thesis. Its discourse is a good example of how a young Muslim Brotherhood member responds to the influence of global mass media. Thinking about how the Muslim Brotherhood could gain influence in Egypt, he felt that the organization would need the Western leaders and therefore the Western 'public opinion' on its side. During an interview Abdelrahman Ayyash told me:

The Muslim Brotherhood will be in power very soon in Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood is the most organized organization in Egypt, the most influential political party in Egypt, and the most important political player in the region. Egypt is not a small country. It really needed to reach the West, and the Western leaders to tell them that: of course we are very effective, we are very powerful, but you can't consider us as terrorists, as al-Qaeda, or as extremists, as Salafists, or Wahhabi's in Saudi Arabia for example.

¹⁴⁶ Tarek Osman, *Egypte. Een geschiedenis van Nasser tot na Mubarak* (Antwerp and Amsterdam 2011) 118.

¹⁴⁷ Khayrat al-Shatir, 'No need to be afraid of us. The Muslim Brotherhood believes that democratic reforms could trigger a renaissance in Egypt', *The Guardian* (November 23, 2005). See www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/nov/23/comment.mainsection.

¹⁴⁸ The term 'social media' refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social media are media for social interaction, as a superset beyond social communication.

So we need to deliver a very different message. That the Muslim Brotherhood, yeah they will be in power very soon, and now we should tell this ensuring message for them, and tell them we are different. You should engage us. We are not a global organization who wants to dominate the world, we are not like that. We are very civilized, we are not using any kind of external...

The Muslim Brotherhood doesn't have this agenda, at all, against the West or against the Western people, so we need to deliver this assuring message, this reassuring message, to the West, because the Muslim Brotherhood will be in the front, very soon. It was before six years from now, I believe that the Muslim Brotherhood will be in the front, so we needed to deliver another message, and a different message, to tell them that the Muslim Brotherhood are not the stereotypes you made. [Italics mine]

Ayyash predicts that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood will be in power soon. Right after this statement, he adds that the Muslim Brotherhood 'really needed to reach the West': they need the West in their future plans for being in power in Egypt. The website is meant to deliver 'a very different message' to the West, one in which the Muslim Brotherhood is not violent, doesn't want to take over the world and has no anti-Western agenda. The message should be that the Muslim Brotherhood is 'civilized', and above all, the Western people should be reassured, so that they can stop being afraid for the Muslim Brotherhood.

In Chapter 4, I will analyze the main debates that Ayyash has chosen to cover, as well as his communication strategies and the self image that he tries to communicate. But before starting with the content analysis, I will first take a look at the organization of the website itself. What does the website look like, what kind of media are used, and how are the different topics organized? I will start by taking a closer look at the term 'Ikhwanophobia' and the mission of the website, as stated in their 'Vision & Mission'. Secondly, I will show which kinds of articles, topics and tags are most used on the website, to prepare for the deeper analysis in Chapter 4.

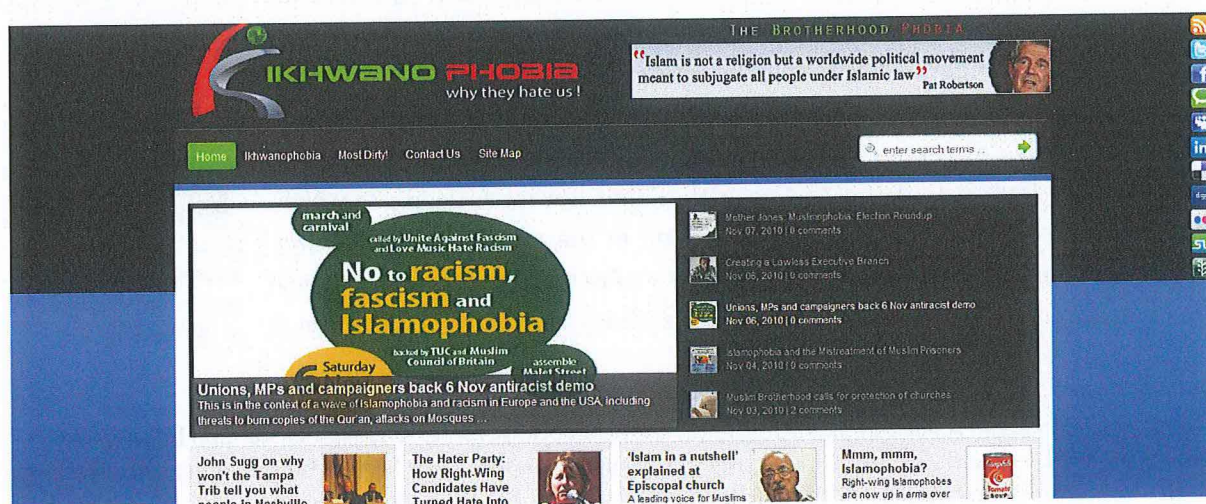


Figure 12 Home page of Ikhwanophobia.com (example taken on November 8, 2010)

3.1. What does the website look like?

Visitors of the website ikhwanophobia.com will first see the home page – as shown in figure 12. The homepage looks colorful and organized, with several different elements on the page. On the top left, you see the logo of the website in the colors red, green and grey. Under the logo is written: 'Why they hate us!'. On the top right 'The Brotherhood Phobia' is written in the same colors, probably to explain to the English-speaking visitors that 'Ikhwan' equals 'The Brotherhood'. Below this sentence a quote is given from Pat Robertson, a controversial American public figure who is used as an example of 'anti-Islamic bigots' on the website. The quote says: 'Islam is not a religion but a worldwide political movement meant to subjugate all people under Islamic law.'¹⁴⁹ This phrase refers to one of the biggest 'phobias' against which Ayyash wants to campaign: the existence of a worldwide political Islamic movement. Under these elements is a second row with five tabs: 'Home', 'Ikhwanophobia', 'Most Dirty!', 'Contact Us' and 'Site Map'. 'Home' refers to the home page as shown in figure 12. Behind the tab 'Ikhwanophobia' Ayyash explains the definition of the title of the website, as well as his 'vision and mission'. The third tab, 'Most Dirty!', contains a reference to a single website, 'Religion of Peace'. The website is discussed as an example of Ikhwanophobia. Although the tab was supposed to be filled 'with pages for the most Islamophobe bigots', after one year only this website is listed under the 'Most Dirty!' tab.¹⁵⁰ With the next tab 'Contact Us', it is possible to send an email to the 'chief editor', and behind the tab 'Site map' you find a list of all articles, categorized by page, category, month, or tag. On the right in the row, next to the five tabs, is the possibility to search on the website for key terms.

As you also can see in figure 12, the next item on the website consists of two parts. On the right side, you find the latest five articles that are posted on the website. On the left of these articles is highlighted, changing every seven seconds to the next of one of these five articles. The row under this item is filled with the four most recent articles after the five mentioned previously.

The next part of the homepage consists of two parts, for which you have to scroll down. On the left you see the six main categories of the website: 'Listen to the MB', 'Ikhwanophobia Watch', 'The Neutrals', 'Islamophobia', 'Meet the Smearcasters', and 'Under Seige' [sic]. For every category, you see the three latest articles (with an overlap with the newest articles in the section above this one). Under this part is a section with 'Other Recent Articles', in which eight articles are displayed. On the right side in the middle section of the homepage are several items. The first item is a subscription screen, with which you can stay up to date using RSS, email, Facebook and Flickr.¹⁵¹ The item is



Figure 13 Different ways to inform the audience about the updates of the website

¹⁴⁹ Pat Robertson is an American media magnate, television evangelist, ex-Baptist minister and businessman who is politically aligned with the Christian right in the United States. He is famous for his controversial claims, such as for example the statement that the Haiti earthquake in 2010 was caused by a pact the Haitians made with the devil in order to liberate themselves from the French slave owners during the 1790s.

¹⁵⁰ Quote from Abdelrahman Ayyash during a personal conversation on June 6, 2011.

¹⁵¹ RSS is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works (such as blog entries, news headlines, audio and video) in a standardized format. Facebook is a social networking service, on which users can create a personal profile add other users as friends, and exchange messages. Flickr is an image and video hosting website that allows users to share their photographs. It is widely used by bloggers to host images that they embed in blogs and social media.

accompanied by a picture saying 'Follow us!', emphasizing the need to stay in contact with the audience of the website. The second item shows how many people have clicked on the 'like' button on the Ikhwanophobia Facebook page, including their profile pictures. After six months since the launch of the website, 300 people had clicked the 'like-button'.

Under the item with Facebook, you can watch a movie showing part of an episode of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, a popular American satirical television show aired on *Comedy Central*. *The Daily Show* draws its comedy and satire from recent news stories, political figures and media organizations, thereby strongly focusing on politics and the national media. In this part of *The Daily Show* of August 10, 2010, Jon Stewart looks into the 'Ground Zero Mosque'-controversy.¹⁵² In six and an half minutes, he emphasizes that the mosque is not build on 'the "hollow ground" of Ground Zero' at all, and adds other examples of differences between the rhetoric and the behavior of conservative rightwing Americans. For example, he shows footage of people saying to be tolerant of Islam and mosques, followed by footage of people who are demonstrating against the building of mosques, taken from all over America.

After the recent uprisings in Egypt, Ayyash changed this short clip on the homepage into an item on the Egyptian revolution under the title 'Islam for Dummies', made by people from www.muhammad.org.¹⁵³ The movie is 'a step-by-step guide to seeing how ridiculous Islamophobia really is', in which also footage from *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* is used.¹⁵⁴ The voice-over points out that although America was supportive of the uprisings in Tunisia, in Egypt they have to support 'their dear dictator friend Mubarak'. It then focuses on the definition that American politicians have of democracy when it comes to Egypt, and on the American perceptions of the Muslim Brotherhood. It ends by stating:

These non-violent protests by millions of Egyptian Muslims have just proved how hypocritical and prejudiced the U.S. government and its media really are. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "The best *jihad* is that of speaking a word of truth to an unjust ruler." Had Islamic values not categorically rejected violent extremism, these protests would have been a lot different. How can anyone think Muslims are violent, when Egyptian Muslims, along with their Christian brothers, led to one of the most peaceful revolutions in history. Islam haters can't hide the truth anymore. Does this look like untapped Islamic rage to you?¹⁵⁵

The concluding words are accompanied by images of *Tahrir*-square, the main square of Cairo, filled with Muslims who are praying together. The short movie emphasizes that Muslims are not violent, that they deserve democracy, that the image of Egyptian Muslims that Americans have is quite distorted and that the U.S. government and media are 'hypocritical and prejudiced'.

¹⁵² The episode can be watched on www.thedailyshow.com/watch/tue-august-10-2010/municipal-land-use-hearing-update?xrs=share_copy.

¹⁵³ The website www.muhammad.org seems to be a website aimed at providing free Islamic software, books and video downloads.

¹⁵⁴ *The Colbert Report* is a spin-off show from *The Daily Show* with political humorist Stephen Colbert, a former correspondent for *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

¹⁵⁵ 'Islam for Dummies' is made by www.muhammad.org. The whole movie clip can be watched on www.youtube.com/watch?v=Om2lB2uiYnE&feature=player_embedded.

The fourth item in this section of the website is a ‘translator’, with which you can automatically translate the website into 48 other languages. If you click on one of these languages, the whole website is changed into that language, probably to connect with the worldwide audience it is aiming for.¹⁵⁶ The translator is followed by the fifth element of the sidebar, which consists of four tabs with menu’s to choose from: one with the four most popular articles, one with the categories of the website, one with the monthly archives and one with which you can sort the articles by tag (as shown in figure 15).

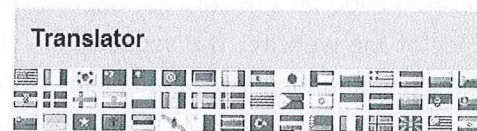


Figure 14 The translator translates into 48 different languages

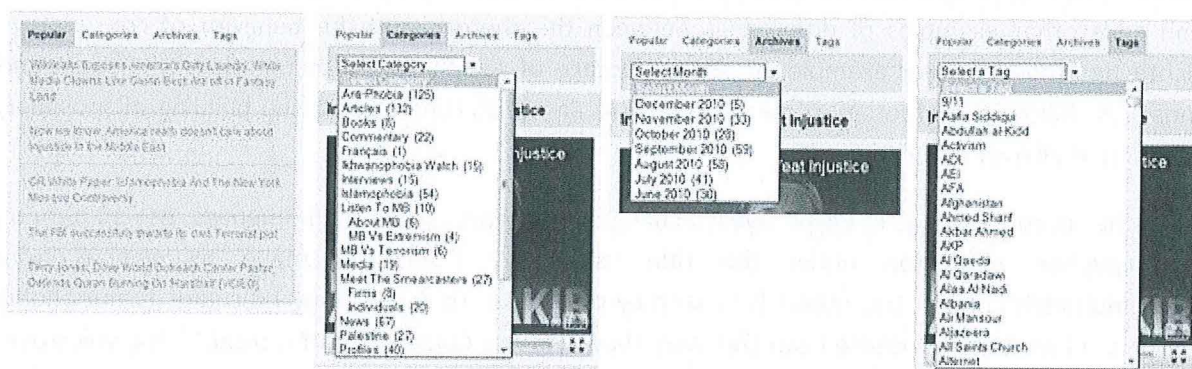


Figure 15 Four menus with which you can sort the articles on the website by different criteria (December 16, 2010)

The menus are followed by a YouTube movie, which is called ‘Injustice Cannot Defeat Injustice’. It was produced in 2010 by MPAC, the *Muslim Public Affairs Council*.¹⁵⁷ In plain English several men point out that there are people out there who call themselves Muslim, who use the Qur’an to justify the use of violence, but the Prophet Muhammad has said that Muslims should not kill innocent people. ‘Islam is a religion of peace, of building communities, not of tearing it apart’, says one of the men. They are calling for people to become active in the name of Islam, but not in a violent way. They have to ‘stand for justice, as decent human beings’. The main message of the video is to emphasize that Islam is a peaceful religion instead of a violent one, and shows how Muslims can be American, high educated and ‘civilized’.

The video is followed by three small menus. The first is an item with the ‘Latest articles’, which are exactly the same five articles as the five latest articles on the top of the home page. Under this item is ‘Ikhwanophobia Delicious’, a list of ten articles that didn’t make it to the website but still are interesting enough for a honorable mention. The last menu, ‘Recent Comments’, consists of the three latest comments on the website by visitors.

The column is closed with again a short clip from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, with the title ‘Jon Stewart On Islamophobia – Wish you weren’t here’. This time the video is from *The Daily Show* of

¹⁵⁶ The translation is done by an automatic program or website, seeing the many errors that are made in the translations.

¹⁵⁷ The Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) is a national American Muslim advocacy and public policy organization which was founded in 1986.

July 7, 2010.¹⁵⁸ It opens with a story on the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). NASA's administrator, Charles Bolden, has said on *al-Jazeera* that one of his goals within NASA was to reach out to the Muslim world, a statement that caused much hilarity on several news shows. After Jon Stewart made the joke: 'But I have to admit, the conservative network [Fox] makes a good point: What kind of presidential asshole would use the space program to build a bridge to peace?' you see footage from 1985, where Ronald Reagan is speaking about the ways 'American and Soviet citizens can cooperate fruitfully for the benefit of mankind. In science and technology, we can launch new joint space ventures...'



Figure 16 Jon Stewart on the comparison between Christianity and Islam by using quotations of the Bible. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*

The clip then continues from the item on 'Muslims in Space' into a 'Muslims in mosques' part, which shows news items of other news channels on 'growing outrage over plans to build more mosques and Islamic centers around America'. Jon Stewart makes fun of the arguments against the building of more mosques as a means to spread Islam, by using quotes from the Bible in which Christians are urged to spread their religion

and build churches. Secondly, he points out that one of the arguments used against Muslims is by commenting on *sharia* law, by showing that somebody on *Fox News* says: 'No other religion makes rules for people outside their religion. Islamic law does.' Jon Stewart answers this quotation by stating that 'some people would be very disappointed' by this new principle, showing footage of American right wing public figures claiming that the American law is based on the ten commandments and the Old Testament. And then he says: 'Wait a minute! Now I know why you don't want mosques popping up all over the place... Competition! Damn free market!'

The whole item focuses on the contradictions between the rhetoric about Islam and the behavior towards the religion of mainly conservative, rightwing public American figures. Just as with the other two video items on the homepage, the double standards of right wing conservative Americans and the hypocrisy of their media stations are central in this item. We will encounter this pattern of pointing out American double standards a couple of times more on the website.

Finally, at the bottom of the page there are two page wide menus. The first one gives an overview of the different categories (which is a repetition of the menu we have seen in figure 15). In the second one, two lists of things are given; first you see a list of websites that deal with Islamophobia – called 'Anti I-Phobia' – and second you see a list of the monthly archive (which is also a repetition of the menu we have seen in figure 15).

¹⁵⁸ 'Jon Stewart On Islamophobia – Wish you weren't here', *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (July 7, 2010). www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-july-7-2010/wish-you-weren-t-here.

To conclude, the last item on the home page is an overview of all the social media that you can use on this website, appearing in the upper right corner. It moves with you when you scroll down on the website, thereby always staying in your screen. The different options are:



- 'Subscribe' by using RSS
- 'Tweet this' by using Twitter¹⁵⁹
- 'Share it on Facebook'
- 'Share it on Technorati'¹⁶⁰
- 'Share it on Myspace'¹⁶¹
- 'Share it on LinkedIn'¹⁶²
- 'Share it on Delicious'¹⁶³
- 'Digg'¹⁶⁴
- 'Flickr'
- 'StumbleUpon'¹⁶⁵
- 'Newsvine'¹⁶⁶

It is striking to see that Ayyash makes use of a wide assortment of 'new social media' on the home page. He makes sure that you can follow the website by using a variety of programs, such as Facebook and Twitter, but also RSS, Newsvine, and StumbleUpon. Also in other ways the website makes extensive use of the many possibilities offered by the Internet, such as providing a translation of the website in 48 different languages. Ayyash probably wants to present the website as 'modern', organized and as user friendly as possible. There are so many possibilities to find the article that you are looking for, that several menus on the homepage even overlap. Also, at some points the possibility of using 'social media' is given on a level where it no longer seems to make sense. Although the website is intended as a platform for the dissemination of (news) articles on 'Ikhwanophobia' and comments on these articles, you can 'share it' on photo sites such as Flickr and on LinkedIn, a business-related social networking site, mainly used for maintaining business relationships.

3.2. Ikhwanophobia: definition of the term and mission of the site

Before we take a closer look at the articles on the website, it will be useful to investigate the intentions of the makers of the website. These are made explicit under the second tab on the homepage,

¹⁵⁹ 'Twitter' is a social networking and micro blogging service, which enables its users to send and read messages called 'tweets'. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user's profile page.

¹⁶⁰ 'Technorati' is an Internet search engine for searching blogs.

¹⁶¹ 'Myspace' is a social networking site, comparable with its main competitor Facebook.

¹⁶² 'LinkedIn' is a business-related social networking site, displaying information like educational background, work experience, and current job. It is mainly used for professional networking.

¹⁶³ 'Delicious' is a social bookmarking web service used for storing, sharing, and discovering web bookmarks.

¹⁶⁴ 'Digg' is a social news website. One of its functions consists of letting people vote news stories up or down.

¹⁶⁵ 'StumbleUpon' is a discovery engine (a form of web search engine) that finds and recommends web content to its users. Its features allow users to discover and rate web pages, photos, and videos that are personalized to their tastes and interests using peer-sourcing and social-networking principles.

¹⁶⁶ 'Newsvine' is a community-powered, collaborative journalism news website which draws content from its users and syndicated content from mainstream sources such as The Associated Press. Users can write articles, seed links to external content, and discuss news items submitted by both users and professional journalists.

'Ikhwanophobia'. Here we can read about the definition of the term Ikhwanophobia, as well as the 'Vision & Mission' of the creators of the website. About the definition of Ikhwanophobia the website states the following:

Ikhwanophobia: The Definition

Ikhwanophobia is a new term meaning the fear and or hatred of the Muslim Brotherhood members and their ideologies. It also refers to the unjustified intimidation by the people of the Muslim Brotherhood members

Ikhwanophobes are the factions who call for discrimination towards Muslim Brotherhood members and Muslims in general. They may be characterized by having the belief that all or most MB's are religious fanatics, with violent tendencies towards non-Muslims, and reject as directly opposed to Islam such concepts as equality, tolerance, and democracy

Ikhwanophobes always attempt to link Muslim Brotherhood to terrorism and violence.

Ikhwanophobia is completely linked to the Islamophobia term, where there are continued accusations of the Muslim societies and Islamic Centers in Europe or in the States of being affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Intimidation of the Muslim Brotherhood, of course, leads to many negative consequences that are contrary to basic human rights. It generates evident discrimination of the western Muslims who live in Europe and the US . This bias also forces public opinion and decision makers to reject many of the democratic choices of the Muslim and Middle Eastern peoples. Hence a set of negative assumptions are made of the entire group to the detriment of members of that group.¹⁶⁷

In the text above, we can read that the term Ikhwanophobia is defined as the feelings of fear and/or hatred that people have for members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their ideologies, as well as the unjustified intimidation of Muslim Brotherhood members. The text continues with the statement that Ikhwanophobes also call for discrimination towards Muslim Brotherhood members – and Muslims in general. Then, it sums up several prejudices that Ikhwanophobes are supposed to have:

- All (or most) Muslim Brotherhood members are religious fanatics
- They show violent tendencies towards non-Muslims
- They reject concepts such as equality, tolerance and democracy, concepts that they see as opposed to Islam
- Muslim Brotherhood members are always linked to terrorism and violence.¹⁶⁸

The last paragraph of 'Ikhwanophobia: The Definition' refers to the *effects* of 'Ikhwanophobia'. In this paragraph it is alleged that intimidation of Muslim Brotherhood members

- leads to infringements on 'basic human rights',
- generates discrimination of Western Muslims who live in Europe and the United States,
- forces public opinion *and* decision makers to reject many of the democratic choices of Muslims and people from the Middle East,

¹⁶⁷ 'Ikhwanophobia', www.ikhwanophobia.com/about/.

¹⁶⁸ In the text the connection between the Muslim Brotherhood and violence is made twice, first in relation to non-Muslims, and second as a separated sentence, emphasizing the attempts to connect the Brotherhood with violence and terrorism.

- causes disadvantages for members of the group, because of the set of negative assumptions ascribed to the entire group.

The fear and hatred towards members of the Muslim Brotherhood is connected to broader issues, such as discrimination of Muslims in the West in general, as well as negative consequences such as a rejection of democratic choices of people in the Middle East. It is clear that in this text, just as with the former quotation, the concepts Ikhwanophobia and Islamophobia are overlapping. Moreover, the limits of both the terms and the website itself are ambiguous. Not only articles about the Muslim Brotherhood are placed on the website, but also articles about Muslims in general. This ambiguity also became clear during an interview with Ayyash, in which he said:

I really want to republish *any* article about *any* violation against *any* minority in the world. Because the Islamophobia is not only about Islamophobia. Sometimes it is a violation against Islam. As a Muslim member, or as a human rights activist, I really want to say that we are not only the people who suffer from that, and we can also talk about the other people who suffer from discrimination because of religion, race... of because of ethnic... All of this stuff. [Italics mine]

Although Ayyash points out that he wants to talk and publish about *any minority*, the website nevertheless primarily focuses on members of the Muslim Brotherhood and on Muslims in general. However, the fact that the boundaries of the website are not clearly defined is also reflected in the 'Vision & Mission' on the website:

Vision & Mission

Ikhwanophobia.com was established in the middle of the year 2010. It is run by a group of Academic intellectuals who believed they should act positively and effectively in response to accusations and allegations that face the Muslim Brotherhood.

We at Ikhwanophobia.com are determined to shed light on the accusations and allegations against the MB illustrating to the world the true face of moderate Islamists.

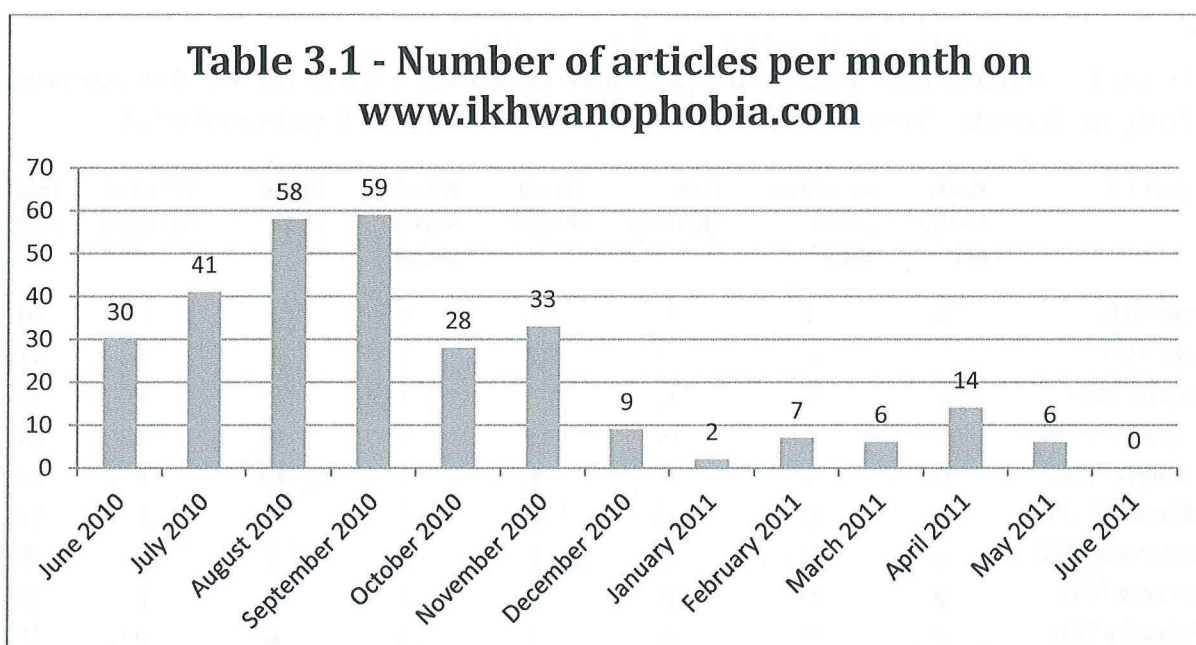
Ikhwanophobia.com is also concerned with exposing the claimants and Ikhwanophobes.

Ikhwanophobia.com aspires to open a new gateway for Ikhwanophobia victims encouraging them to share their sufferings. The website welcomes and encourages unbiased and impartial participation in defending the absolute values of justice, freedom and human rights.

In this short text, Ayyash presents the website as created by a group of academic intellectuals who want to 'act positively and effectively in response to accusations and allegations' that the Muslim Brotherhood faces. He also states that he wants to shed light on these accusations and allegations, thereby showing the world 'the true face of moderate Islamists'. He wants to expose the Ikhwanophobes and 'claimants', and in conclusion he states that the website should be a place where people can participate in defending 'the absolute values of justice, freedom and human rights'. Again, we see that the focus of the website is presented as broader than only the Muslim Brotherhood. It starts with a defense of the Muslim Brotherhood, but ends with a defense of 'the absolute values of justice, freedom and human rights' in general. I will say more about the definition of 'absolute values' in Chapter 5. In Chapter 4, I will analyze the communication strategies that are used to achieve the goals of the website.

3.3. General information about the articles on the website

The website ikhwanophobia.com was launched on June 17, 2010. During the first six months 254 articles were published. In the second half of the year, only 39 articles were published. This leads to a total of 293 articles for the first year of the website. Looking at the chart, a general trend in the number of posts can be distinguished.¹⁶⁹ After the launch of the website on June 17 2010, the number of articles rose to a peak of 59 articles during September 2010. Closer to the Egyptian parliamentary elections of November 2010, however, fewer articles were posted. After the elections, there is a clear decrease in the number of articles posted, with only two articles in January as its lowest point (posted on 11 and 21 of January). During the popular uprising in Egypt, starting on January 25, 2011, we see a small increase in numbers, with fourteen articles in April as the highest point, but after that, the number of articles decrease again, even to zero articles in June 2011.¹⁷⁰



There are a number of explanations for the difference in the amount of articles. First, the website was created in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2010. In the past, other English language website of the Muslim Brotherhood were also created some six months before the elections, such as ikhwanweb.com in 2005. Second, the odd decrease in articles in October can be explained by the harsh measures of the Egyptian government. Closer to the elections of November 28 and December 5, 2010, the government severely cracked down on the Brotherhood and took their websites off the air several times. The website ikhwanophobia.com was inaccessible during both election days.

Although the significance of the website seems to have decreased after the elections, the popular uprisings in January 2011 gave the website a new impetus. At the same time, Ayyash used also several offline strategies to achieve his intended purpose, for example by joining the demonstrations during the popular uprising and taking part of several political (youth) conferences. Moreover, Abdelrahman Ayyash was arrested by the Egyptian police during the uprising, which resulted in sev-

¹⁶⁹ The graph runs from June 17, 2010 – the day the website was launched – until June 16, 2011, so that exactly one year of data is displayed.

¹⁷⁰ In the graph the month June runs from 17 until 30 June 2010 and from 1 until 16 June, 2011.

eral days in prison – it goes without saying that during this period he was not able to update his website.

Now that the political situation in Egypt has changed profoundly, questions arise in which extent the website should be a priority. Ayyash has chosen to focus more on his offline political activities, such as campaigning prior to the elections. Also, already during the popular uprisings, Ayyash decided to ‘leave’ the Brotherhood due to political differences – although he still sees it as his mission to defend the Brotherhood against prejudices. But also factors of a more practical nature were influential in the decline of the number of articles posted: the university exams in June caused Ayyash to be occupied more with his daily life than with maintaining a steady pace of publishing.

3.3.1. Six main categories on the website

The articles on the website are divided into six main categories: Listen to the MB, Ikhwanophobia Watch, The Neutrals, Islamophobia, Meet the Smearcasters, and Under Siege (see table 3.2).

	Listen to the MB	Ikhwanophobia Watch	The Neutrals	Islamophobia	Meet the Smearcasters	Under Siege	Without Category	Total posts
June 2010	3	3	5	6	9	4	0	30
July 2010	2	4	14	12	1	7	1	41
August 2010	2	5	32	7	1	9	2	58
September 2010	2	2	19	19	3	10	4	59
October 2010	0	1	9	3	4	10	1	28
November 2010	1	0	12	6	8	5	1	33
December 2010	1	0	2	1	3	2	0	9
January 2011	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
February 2011	2	0	4	0	1	0	0	7
March 2011	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	6
April 2011	0	2	4	4	2	1	1	14
May 2011	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	6
June 2011	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total of articles	14	19	105	61	34	50	10	293

Almost every article that is posted on the website is placed into one of these categories. In general, the categories have the following purpose:

- **Listen to the MB**
Mostly written by the Muslim Brotherhood, in which official party positions are clarified on topics on which the organization is attacked.
- **Ikhwanophobia Watch**
A mixture of articles, but mainly responses on attacks on the Muslim Brotherhood.
- **The Neutrals**
Republished articles by other people (i.e. non-Muslim Brotherhood members), such as

(Western) journalists, academics, and citizens who take part in the debate about the Muslim Brotherhood and Islam in general.

- **Islamophobia**

A broad section with articles on attacks on Muslims in general.

- **Meet the Smearcasters**

In this category the 'Smearcasters' are exposed: people who are known for their anti-Islamic views such as Pat Robertson, Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, among others.

- **Under Siege**

Articles on 'cases' against Muslims in the West, such as the legal case concerning the Holy Land Foundation in the United States, but also articles on the 'Ground Zero Mosque' controversy and 'Burn the Quran Day' on September 11, 2010.¹⁷¹

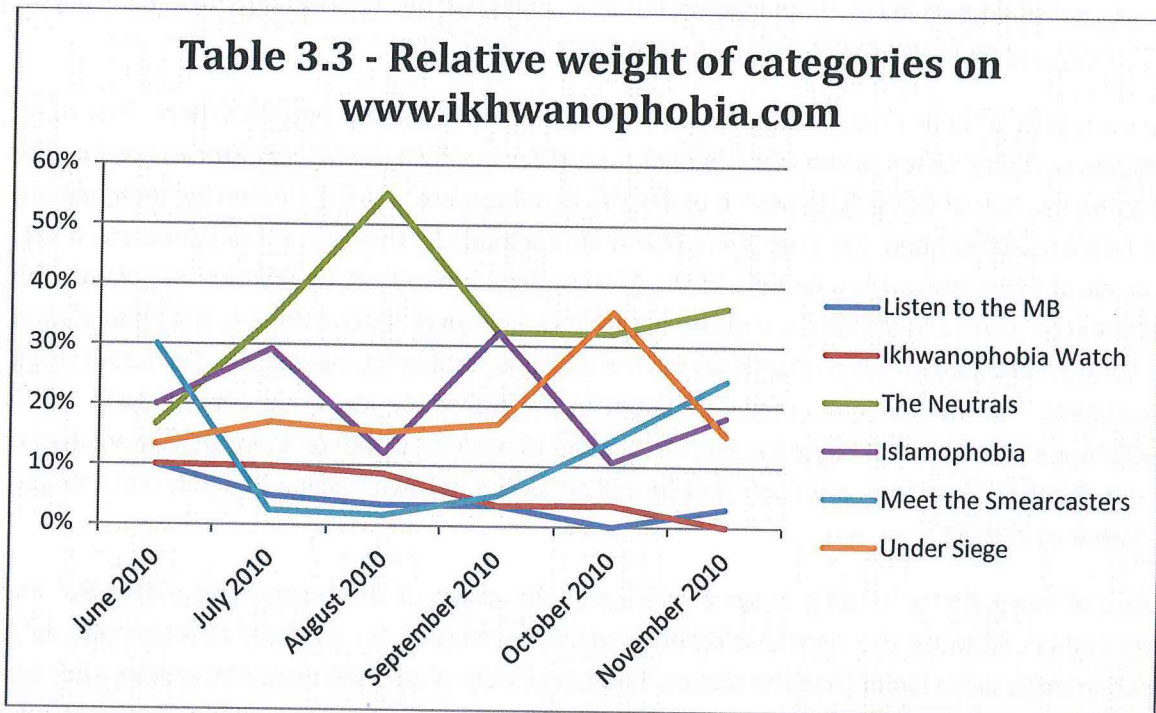
These categories are not clearly defined, and there is a lot of overlap between them. First of all, though the category 'Listen to the MB' is meant for articles in which the Muslim Brotherhood speaks for themselves, half of the articles posted under this heading were actually created by non-members of the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, a documentary made by the BBC is added, because it contains 'a lot of interviews with members of the Muslim Brotherhood'. At the same time, twenty-five 'commentaries' can be found on the website in which Ayyash gives his reaction on news items. However, these commentaries are scattered across the different categories, not only in the 'Listen to the MB' category – of the fourteen articles in 'Listen to the MB', only two are a commentary. This is probably due to the fact that Ayyash prefers to present himself as an independent thinker, instead of a Muslim Brother. Therefore, it is likely that he will represent his own opinion in a different category than 'Listen to the MB'.

The second thing that is striking is again overlap in the usage of the terms 'Ikhwanophobia' and 'Islamophobia'. Although the website is called ikhwanophobia.com, the category of 'Islamophobia' is more than three times larger than the section 'Ikhwanophobia Watch' (61 versus 19 articles after one year). And even in the 'Ikhwanophobia Watch' category, not all articles are related to the Muslim Brotherhood. Generally speaking, the articles are more often related to Islam in general than to the Muslim Brotherhood. When I asked Ayyash about the difference in coverage, he answered that in his view Ikhwanophobia has two aspects: 'One against Ikhwan as the terrorists and all of this stuff, and one against Muslims, that they are belonging to a worldwide political party.' He continues by explaining that the Islamophobes are:

considering Islam as a worldwide political movement. So it considers all the Muslims as a member of this party. Or, a political party, *of course he means the Muslim Brotherhood*. So I think that the Islamophobia here is not about Islamophobia but is about Ikhwanophobia also, but in another point of view. That political Islamophobes are considering Islam as a political movement, so, they are considering all Muslims as Muslim Brotherhood, so... It is some kind of Ikhwanophobia, but under the term Islamophobia. But I think that that is why I think these two articles are very low. [Italics mine]

¹⁷¹ During an interview Ayyash described this section as follows: 'The 'Under Siege' section is about to shed light on the cases against the Muslims in the West and how the Islamophobes affected the public opinion in the West to come with some violation against the Muslim and against Islam in the West.' It seems that he is stressing the importance of these cases in the formation of Western public opinion.

In his reasoning, Islamophobia equals Ikhwanophobia, because Islamophobes believe that 'Islam is a worldwide political movement'. He continues by stating that this political movement is *of course* the Muslim Brotherhood. The idea that all Muslims are member of a political movement and *thus* the Muslim Brotherhood is in the reasoning of Ayyash part of Islamophobia. With a sleight of hand, he thus equates the Islamic political movement as a whole with the Muslim Brotherhood, something he did a number of times during the interview. For example, when I asked him about the category of 'Islamophobia Watch', he answered: 'The Islamophobia section has a lot of things to do with discrimination against the Muslims, and they are belonging to... members of eh... or they are belonging to us, a worldwide political party.'



The third thing that is remarkable is the high number of articles in the category 'The Neutrals' – more than a third of all the articles on the website can be found in this section. As Ayyash explains:

The neutral section is very important. We are here saying that we are not alone: we are defending ourselves. We have very important internationals, they are with us, they are high politicians that don't see us as a danger or against the West. So the neutrals is one of the most important categories in the website.¹⁷²

Here, it is very clear how Ayyash uses the articles written by 'neutral' outsiders as part of a conscious communication strategy to convince people that the Muslim Brotherhood is right in their points of view. This is an important factor explaining the relative weight of this category over the other categories.

Graph 3.3 shows the difference in size of the different categories, expressed as percentages of the total number of articles of that month. As the number of articles plunges from 33 in November to only nine in December, and then drops even further to two in January, the graph shows only the relative size of the categories for the first seven months. You can see that the category of 'The Neutrals'

¹⁷² Personal interview with Ayyash on March 25, 2011.

clearly stands out – it is the largest category in five of the months, with 55% of the articles in August as its highest point.

Also, the graph shows that the categories ‘Listen to the MB’ and ‘Ikhwanophobia Watch’ remain at a constantly low level. Ayyash explains the difference in size with the other categories:

This is not an official site of the Muslim Brotherhood. And you can read the official statements of the Muslim Brotherhood on their official website. This is a better website, and this is very important to say that because I don't want to put all what the Muslim Brotherhood is saying here on the website. But we are only posting what we are thinking that will benefit the Western audience, and what we think that will give some good debate, between the Muslim Brotherhood and eh... and the other.

Ayyash's explanation is interesting, because it shows how he consciously targets ‘the Western audience’ in their selection of articles for different categories. Significantly, Ayyash claims that because of this, the website can be considered as a better website than the official website of the Muslim Brotherhood.

3.3.2. The most frequently used tags on the website

Every article on the website of Ikhwanophobia.com is not only placed under a certain category, but is also ‘tagged’. A tag is a kind of label that the creator of a website can use to characterize the articles. This makes it easier for the reader to search for articles with a certain topic, such as for example ‘Hamas’, ‘9/11’ or ‘Obama’. An article can have multiple tags, and the articles on Ikhwanophobia.com have between eight and nine tags on average. The procedure for the selection of tags remains to a certain extent arbitrary: editors of websites place the tags themselves, so that they can choose how an article is categorized. For example: although there are nine articles on the website in which the name of Geert Wilders occurs, only two articles are tagged with ‘Geert Wilders’. The name of Glenn Beck occurs in fourteen articles, but has received no tag at all. Even a term such as ‘extremism’, which occurs in 28 articles, has not been given a tag. The giving of tags can thus be seen as an indication of the themes that a web editor considers to be of greater centrality.

After the first six months the top ten of tags was as follows: of the 254 articles, 158 articles were given the tag ‘USA’, followed by the tags ‘Civil Rights’ (151) and ‘Islamophobia’ (146). The fourth theme is ‘Democracy’ (90), followed by ‘Ground Zero’ (83), ‘Moderate’ (83), ‘Cordoba Initiative’¹⁷³ (80), ‘Masjid’ / ‘Mosque’¹⁷⁴ (71), ‘September 11’ (70) and ‘Terrorism’ (64) (see table 3.4).

¹⁷³ ‘Cordoba initiative’ refers to the planned building of a Muslim community center to be located two blocks from the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan, New York. The building was initially called ‘Cordoba House’ to refer to Cordoba, Spain, which the initiators of the building called a ‘model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews’. Later on, the building was labeled the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ during a protest campaign of Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, although the building is neither located directly on the former World Trade Center site – Ground Zero – nor primarily a mosque. On Ikhwanophobia.com both words are used. Although the tag for ‘Cordoba initiative’ overlaps with the tag ‘Ground Zero’, there is a difference of three articles between the categories. Therefore, I have included them in the list as two separate tags.

¹⁷⁴ Although the words ‘mosque’ and ‘masjid’ are listed as two separate tags in the list on the website, I have combined them in my own list, since every article that is tagged with ‘mosque’ is tagged with ‘masjid’ as well. In Arabic, there is a distinction between the smaller *masjid* dedicated for the daily five prayers and the larger

The first thing to notice is the high number of articles with the tag 'USA'. More than half of the articles on the website are linked to the United States. For comparison: Europe was only tagged 23 times during the first six months of the website's existence, Egypt 22 times. Other tags that refer to locations are New York (52), Israel (32), Palestine (22), Turkey (10), and Florida (9). This confirms the proposition that the website is based mainly on American topics and articles. The high number of tags for the city of New York is due to the large amount of attention for the topic of the 'Ground Zero Mosque' / 'Cordoba Initiative' (see footnote 173).

Table 3.4 - Top ten tags during the first six months of the website¹⁷⁵

Tag	Number
USA	158
Civil Rights	151
Islamophobia	146
Democracy	90
Ground Zero	83
Moderate	83
Cordoba initiative	80
Masjid / Mosque	71
September 11	70
Terrorism	64

Table 3.5 - Top ten tags during the second six months of the website¹⁷⁶

Tag	Number
Democracy	28
Islamophobia	28
Civil Rights	27
USA	22
Egypt	16
Sharia Law	15
Muslim Brotherhood	13
Moderate	12
Ikhwan	12
Islam	10

The second thing that is noticeable about the table is the high number of articles tagged with 'Islamophobia' (146), especially in relation to the term 'Ikhwanophobia' for which simply no tag exists. There is a tag called 'Ikhwan', but after six months only twelve articles were labeled with this term. The tag 'Muslim Brotherhood' contained 48 articles. This confirms the previously observed difference between the usages of the words Ikhwan and Islam in the website's system of categorization.

High in the list are some terms that are central in the representation of the Muslim Brotherhood. We see the use of tags of the themes 'Civil Rights' and 'Democracy', two themes that are frequently emphasized on the website, as well as the tag 'moderate', one of the key words in Ayyash's representation of the Muslim Brotherhood to the outside world. Finally, the tags 'Terrorism' and 'September 11', refers to themes in the representation of the Muslim Brotherhood by others that Ayyash tries to counter.

In the second period of six months, only 39 articles were published. Although the number of articles is much lower, the shift in tag ratios still seems to be significant (see table 3.5). The themes 'Democracy' and 'Islamophobia' are with 28 articles at the top of the table, the 'Civil rights' tag number three with only one article less. The tag 'USA' is still high in the list but has dropped to the fourth place, just above the tag 'Egypt'. This suggests a shift in emphasis on articles which deal with Egypt instead of

masjid jāmi (مسجد جامع) where the five daily prayers and the Friday congregation sermons are held with a high volume of attendance. In English, however, we use the word 'mosque' for both prayer rooms.

¹⁷⁵ As we have seen, the first six months run from June 17, 2010 until December 16, 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Running from December 17, 2010 until June 16, 2011.

the U.S. The emphasis now lies more with internal issues instead of external ones. With the two key events of that period – the Egyptian elections on November 28 and December 5, 2010, and the popular uprisings after January 25, 2011, this is not very surprising. Another interesting point is the relatively large increase in number of articles tagged with ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ (13) and ‘Ikhwan’ (12). This also has to do with the two key moments in Egyptian politics. After all, within the coverage of the Egyptian elections and uprisings, the Western media focused quite a lot on the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷⁷

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter looks at the technical and organizational structure of ikhwanophobia.com. We have seen that Ayyash has paid much attention to creating an open structure, integrating modern social media applications to stimulate sharing his views in the debate on the Muslim Brotherhood and to build online (social media) networks. The website targets a primarily Western audience, and seeks to provide information and arguments that go against the ruling stereotypes of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ayyash uses categories and tags to organize the articles. Both categories and tags reveal conscious communication strategies, but these strategies are not free from ambiguities. The borders between the different categories often remain vague. One important example of this is that Ayyash sometimes blur the distinction between what he calls ‘Ikhwanophobia’, discrimination against Muslims, and even discrimination of ‘oppressed minorities’ in general – even though the latter do not really figure in the articles on the website.

The three central ‘phobias’ that Ayyash tries to counter on the website, is the idea that there is a global Muslim Brotherhood, that the Muslim Brotherhood has an anti-Western agenda, and that the Muslim Brotherhood is against democracy and preaches violence. He counters these views not by reproducing statements of the Muslim Brotherhood, but primarily by using the voice of ‘neutrals’ in the international debate, such as Western journalists and academics. During most of the period here examined the category ‘The Neutrals’ far exceeded the other categories in content. I will come back to this in more detail in the next chapter.

The tags show that especially in the first six months, the website had a strong focus on the USA. This changed during the second six months period, when the elections and the popular uprisings shifted attention towards Egypt itself. Popular themes that the tags related to were the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’, civil rights, democracy and terrorism. In the next chapter, I will provide a more thorough qualitative analyses of the debates that Ayyash wants to engage in, by presenting two case studies of texts in which Ayyash deals with perceived stereotypes of the Muslim Brotherhood.

¹⁷⁷ However, it is not unlikely that the researcher had some effect on this increase as well. During the interview with Ayyash on March 25, 2011, I asked Ayyash about the ratio ‘Islam’/‘Ikhwan’. It is possible that this caused a conscious correction by Ayyash, since during the first six months only 5% of the articles were tagged with ‘Ikhwan’, compared to 31% of the articles in the second part of the year.

Chapter 4. The main messages of Ikhwanophobia.com

In the previous chapter, we have seen that the mission of the website can be described as acting 'positively and effectively in response to accusations and allegations' that the Muslim Brotherhood is facing. Ayyash states that he wants to show the world 'the true face of moderate Islamists', as well as exposing the 'Ikhwanophobes'. He also states that the website should be a place where people can participate in defending 'the absolute values of justice, freedom and human rights'. In fact, in this way not one but four different aims of the website are formulated. To study how these aims are expressed in the content of the website, I have selected two case studies:

1. First, I have selected and analyzed all the articles of the section 'Listen to the MB'. Here, the texts are not defensive per se, but formulated in an active way. In connection to the fundamental aims of the website, you can say that Ayyash mainly is showing 'the true face of moderate Islamists' in this section.
2. Second, I have selected and analyzed all the articles that are categorized as 'Commentary'. In this section, Ayyash responds personally to accusations made in the Western media by so-called 'Ikhwanophobes', as well as on recent news events related to Muslims in the American media. Commentaries can be both defensive – 'the Muslim Brotherhood is not terrorist, violent, etc.' – as well as offensive – 'look at the way some US public figures act towards Islam'. This section connects to the two fundamental aims of 'responding to accusations' and 'exposing the Ikhwanophobes'.

Unlike other sections of the website such as 'the Neutrals', where only articles are posted originating from sources outside the Muslim Brotherhood, the categories 'Listen to the MB' and 'Commentary' consist mainly of articles written by Abdelrahman Ayyash or by fellow members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Both categories are presented as containing the opinion of the creator of the website. These cases can thus provide deeper insights into the main messages of Ikhwanophobia.com.¹⁷⁸ For both cases, I will try to answer three questions:

- What are the self-descriptions of the Muslim Brotherhood, used on the website ikhwanophobia.com?
- What are the main 'Western stereotypes' of the Muslim Brotherhood that are pointed out and criticized on the website ikhwanophobia.com?
- Which kinds of communication strategies does Ayyash use to present himself, the website ikhwanophobia.com and the Muslim Brotherhood to his intended (Western) audience?

4.1. Audience and communication strategies

Before I will examine the different communication strategies used on ikhwanophobia.com, it is important to clarify to which audience Ayyash is aiming his communication. In the interview of March 25, 2011 Ayyash explained that the website is primarily directed at American/Western political leaders, journalists, and Western activists interested in political Islam:

¹⁷⁸ A list of all selected articles can be found in appendix b.

So... I think that those we really address are the people who will be in touch with political Islam in the coming year. Maybe the journalists, maybe the researchers who are writing their papers on the Muslim Brotherhood, and on political movements in the Middle East. I think personally that this is very important because it clarifies the *real* Muslim Brotherhood for them, they will most the... For sure they will put the policies of the government so this will be very useful for us, to have, or for the government to have *the right view towards the Muslim Brotherhood*. [Italics mine]

In this way, Ayyash makes a direct connection between the effort to explain 'the right view towards the Muslim Brotherhood' to journalists and researchers, and the possibility to influence future policy. Apart from Western leaders, journalists and researchers, he also mentions a second group of people:

[W]e are aiming at the normal reader in the West, to read something else, that... than... I mean something different, this presented them, or this is represented at *Fox News*, or *Sky News*, and these media.

In this case, Ayyash formulates the very different goal of supplying the 'normal reader' with alternative information to that provided by *Fox News* and *Sky News*, two news channels that are considered to be conservative and right-wing. The two answers given by Ayyash to the question to which audience the website is primarily aimed show an ambiguity in his approach. On the one hand he wishes to reach the general public directly, on the other hand he wants to connect with researchers and journalist who have a stronger voice in Western public debates. As he emphasizes in the same interview:

You know, the most important thing for me is to connect with people. So... I try to contact people. When I started my website I mailed a lot of intellectuals around the world. One of the most important intellectuals I contacted was ... Noam Chomsky. I know, we are not that... And he replied me and he opposed the idea in a very good way, I also contacted professors and eh... most activists in the West, I contacted the website that we shared the info, I tried to make some good network, for my website.

Thus, Ayyash sees publishing as a means to build a network of intellectuals, academics and activists in the West. He sends out e-mails to let people know he has reposted their articles on the website as a way to make contact. This practice is related to his use of the category 'The Neutrals', that Ayyash sees as the most important section of the website. By incorporating the voice of 'very important internationals' he can show that he is not alone in his defense of the Muslim Brotherhood. Those voices have a weight in the public debate in the West that is larger than his own voice, even though they are mainly from a left wing and oppositional background.

Although Ayyash does not comment on the nature of the voices he selects, it is important to see that the intellectuals whose articles are reproduced are not chosen randomly. These public figures are mainly critics of the mainstream discourse which provides the intellectual background for the attacks on the Muslim Brotherhood. By referring to academics and journalists like Noam Chomsky, Robert Fisk, Jon Stewart and Juan Cole, Ayyash connects to a Western counter discourse that can be seen as progressive and politically left wing. That this is a conscious political choice also appears from the sentence that the website should counter the image that is created by conservative and right wing news channels such as *Fox News* and *Sky News*.

In addition to the use of social media in order to stir up the dialogue about the Muslim Brotherhood, Ayyash uses some other communication strategies. For example, he has decided to write only in English, not in Arabic, to reach a Western audience:

I am not working at all to make an Arabic version, on the contrary of that. I will make a Spanish version, to address the Latin American people, and Europe, so I think that it will be very important for us to reach as much as we can. To reach eh... in Europe, in America, in Mexico, in Latin America, those places are very important for me as a person, and they are very important in politics in general, so... I really want to make good contact with them, and to have a good support from them as much as possible.

At one point, Ayyash wanted to make a Spanish version of the website, because he believes that 'the Latin Americans are very influential in the foreign policy of the US'. Moreover, Hispanics are oppressed in America as well, he stated, so they will appreciate the message of Ikhwanophobia.com even more.¹⁷⁹ Although Ayyash stated that he has no wish to make an Arabic version of the website, after the uprisings of January 2011 he gave the idea more thought because of the rise in Ikhwanophobia in Egypt: 'The Ikhwanophobia is after the revolution is very high rated and a lot of people now is very afraid of the Muslim Brotherhood, so I think that we really or think about creating another Arabic version'. But when Ayyash says 'we', he means the Muslim Brotherhood, because he continues:

Really [I] don't want to contact with the Arabic people on this issue at all. They are very aggressive, very eh... naive against it, and the Muslim Brotherhood will address the Arabic people in a very different way than they address the Western leaders.

Ayyash states that you need to have another communication strategy for Arabic people and Western leaders. Arab people are characterized as aggressive and naïve towards the Muslim Brotherhood. This difference was also emphasized during another part of the interview:

You know, if you browse the Arabic website of the Muslim Brotherhood, ikhwanonline, it is very different from the English website. *Maybe we have the same ideology, but the Arabic website is very emotional, that is very unprofessional for me.* But the Ikhwan website is very important and they are addressing some people and *it knows how to talk, to those people*, and it knows how to address the audience, so I think that you will find a very or a big difference between those two websites, and it is part of...

The Arab people are very emotional, they are, you know... They don't know the details about anything and you can just give them general information and they know enough about it. So if we tell them that the Muslim Brotherhood has no problem for a woman to be president, they will say ok and go on to another issue. But the Western reader needs eh... some kind of evidence about that, and eh... articles who say so, and the neutral people, the Western people, who tell them the Muslim Brotherhood is not violent. All these issues are very important for the Western reader, but not that important for the Arab one. [Italics mine]

A couple of interesting things happen in this quotation. First of all, Ayyash again emphasizes that you need a different communication strategy for Arab people and Western leaders/readers/people: where Arab people need only general information, Western people need 'some kind of evidence'. Also Ayyash points out that there is a difference in the use of emotion. He states that the Arabic website of the Muslim Brotherhood differs from the English one: '*maybe we have the same ideology,*

¹⁷⁹ Personal e-mail conversation on June 24, 2011.

but the Arabic website is very emotional'. He is not sure if there is a difference in ideology (!), but one of the main differences in his view is the use of emotions, something that he considers as 'very unprofessional'.

It is striking how Ayyash contrasts the two groups of people. The Arab public is considered naïve, aggressive, emotional, as people who do not make evidence-based choices between different points of view. On the other hand, the Western public of the websites is characterized as needing some evidence, as non-emotional – and thus as professional – and as more easily influenced by the points of view of leaders. It is important to see that Ayyash focuses on a specific – and highly stereotypical – interpretation of 'the Western person' as the audience of the websites. He has adjusted his communication, so that the website does not feel too Arab, not too emotional, but professional, with evidence, 'real and serious', responding to the issues he feels are controversial for the Western audience he is aiming for.

Arguably, this difference in characterization is at least partly related to the position in society of Ayyash himself. He feels more connected to the academic world of researchers and journalists, that fits with his own academic background.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, because he has tried to reach out mainly to researchers and journalists, it makes sense that they are asking more for evidence – as opposed to the average 'man on the street', whether he lives in Egypt or in the United States. Although Ayyash speaks about the 'Western public' in general, it seems that he has a highly educated public in mind.

On the other hand, he has pointed out that he not only wants to build up a network with Western intellectuals, but also with the 'general public'. For this, other strategies are emphasized:

I am trying to take the controversial topics. You know, when I read something about Israel and the Muslim Brotherhood, I really want to publish it and I really want to comment on it. And a lot of issues like that, you know eh... Muslim Brotherhood and women, Muslim Brotherhood and Copts, these controversial issues are really important for me to take up. And I try to republish these articles and to comment on these articles. Through my original content on these issues *I am trying to make a good impression on the Western reader*, and to reach a wider hearing in the West. [Italics mine]

Ayyash points out that he tries to 'make a good impression on the Western reader' by choosing controversial topics and to comment on these articles. In the next section I will go deeper into what Ayyash considers as controversial, but in general there are three main areas in which he wants to address misconceptions. All three can be considered to approach widely-held prejudices among a non-specialized audience. The first theme addressed is that the Muslim Brotherhood is not a global conspiratorial movement for introducing radical Islam. As he explained during the interview:

Yes we are global, but not as an organization. We are the moderate Islam, and we really want to apply moderate Islam in the life. So, maybe other organizations will have the same thought as the Muslim Brotherhood, but that doesn't mean that they belong to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

The second theme is that the Muslim Brotherhood is not violent but promotes peace through democracy. It is clear that Ayyash wants to make a distinction between the Brotherhood and groups

¹⁸⁰ Moreover, he has a personal interest in building up a network with academics, because he wants to become a researcher abroad while doing his masters.

like Hamas and al-Qaeda. The third theme is that the Muslim Brotherhood does not have an anti-Western agenda. But it should be clear that not having an anti-Western agenda doesn't mean that you cannot criticize the West:

Of course we can talk about Israel, and we can also talk about Iraq and Afghanistan. They mention these three issues as some exception. But in Egypt, for example, in America, in the Netherlands, in all these places, the Muslim Brotherhood is considering themselves as a democratic teacher, or a freedom teacher. They just want to apply democracy and freedom, in these countries and they want to be active player in maybe the political life and the social life, without any anti-Western agenda, and without any anti eh... without any agenda that will harm the West and the Western people.

We are very... you know, I don't want to be apologetic, but I am saying that we are very peaceful. We are so peaceful and they just want to put the region on fire.

Through these three topics – the global movement, no terrorism but democracy and no anti-Western agenda – Ayyash tries to connect with the Western audience – leaders, intellectuals and researchers, but also the 'general' public. In the following two case studies, I will take a closer look at how these three topics are expressed on the website.

4.2. Case study 1: Main debates in category 'Listen to the MB'

The category 'Listen to the MB' contains fourteen articles, written between June 17, 2010 and June 16, 2011. Of these fourteen articles, nine were written in the first four months of the website (see table 4.1). The title of this category suggests that the articles are intended as 'the voice of the Muslim Brotherhood', but not all articles are written by the organization.

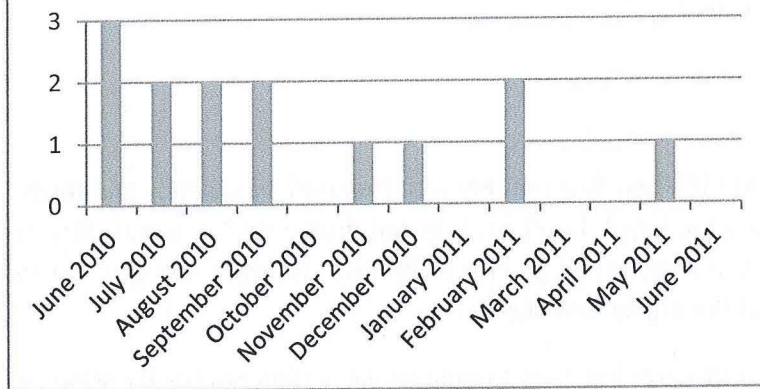
- Six articles are written by journalists from outside the Muslim Brotherhood. Two of them also contain links to documentaries: one made by the BBC – about the Muslim Brotherhood – and one made by PBS Frontline – about the Egyptian revolution.
- Six articles are originally written by Muslim Brotherhood members on www.ikhwanweb.com, the official English language Muslim Brotherhood website, and republished on this site. Of these six articles, three appear to be official documents of the Muslim Brotherhood, in which the Muslim Brotherhood clarifies its view on a certain topic:
 1. The position of women (their right to vote, be elected, occupy public and governmental posts and work in general)
 2. The future of democracy in Egypt
 3. The position of the Muslim Brotherhood on violence and terrorism, human rights and political pluralism¹⁸¹

I will come back to these three official documents extensively in Chapter 5, since all three documents are related to the topic of 'democracy'.

- Two articles are written by Abdelrahman Ayyash himself. One is his reaction on a comment made by a visitor of the website on the third 'Listen to the MB' article containing the view of the Muslim Brotherhood towards democracy. The other one is an article on the first phase of the Egyptian revolution.

¹⁸¹ This article is part of a testimony of the Muslim Brotherhood, written in 1994.

Table 4.1 - Listen to the MB



Although nearly half the articles in this section was not written by members of the Muslim Brotherhood but by people from outside the movement, I have included all of them in my analysis, since the articles are presented as the voice of the Muslim Brotherhood to which the audience has to listen. The selection is a lot smaller than the category 'The Neutrals'. It seems to have been a deliberate

choice to place the articles in this section and not in 'The Neutrals'. Also, an interesting difference with other parts of the website is that all articles in this section – except for the last one – deal with the Muslim Brotherhood instead of Muslims in general. This is also reflected in a typical difference with the rest of the website in terms of argumentation types: in the official documents in 'Listen to the MB' we find the use of Quran texts to support certain positions, a communication strategy that we do not find in other parts of the website. Other more familiar communication strategies that we see in these articles are the use of external authorities to defend the positions of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the use of different media such as documentaries.

A first noticeable difference between the articles written by members of the Muslim Brotherhood itself and articles written by 'neutral' outsiders are the terms used to describe the organization. The articles written by outsiders all describe the Brotherhood in nearly the same terms: 'the largest opposition group', the 'oldest and most influential Islamist movement' in the Middle East, 'banned by the government but politically tolerated'. The articles written by members of the Brotherhood itself, however, clearly emphasize one particular point: the Muslim Brotherhood is a *moderate* party that teaches *moderate Islam*. They position themselves as opposed to more extremist parties and groups like al-Qaeda, by repeating descriptions like:

- The Muslim Brotherhood renounces violence
- The Muslim Brotherhood rejects any form of violence and coercion
- The Muslim Brotherhood uses words as a weapon
- The Muslim Brotherhood wants peaceful reform
- The Muslim Brotherhood is involved in political life
- The Muslim Brotherhood has committed themselves to legal means and nonviolent methods
- The Muslim Brotherhood is in the forefront of those who respect human rights

The other terms frequently used in self-descriptions of the organization are 'honest', 'clear', and 'not ambiguous'. These are probably used as a defense against the accusation that the group has not clarified itself on certain political points, or has in the past repeatedly changed its point of views. The title of the Muslim Brotherhood testimony, article number 7 in 'Listen to the MB', is a clear example: 'Our Testimony, issued in 1994; in 2010, still true to our word.'

Within the section 'Listen to the MB', I distinguish five main topics: 'Violence, terrorism and extremism', 'democracy', 'the relation with "The West" and/or Christians', 'the relation with the Egyptian

state' and 'Islamophobia & the role of the media'. Although I will deal with these topics separately, these debates should not be seen in isolation of each other. It should be remembered that the topics are interrelated and have some mutual overlap.

Violence, terrorism and extremism

Of the fourteen articles in 'Listen to the MB', two deal entirely with the topic of violence and terrorism. The first article is titled 'Brotherhood to Egypt: Don't squeeze out moderates'. It argues that 'by pushing the Brotherhood out of politics, it may leave a gap for militants to fill and could lead to sporadic violence'.¹⁸² The argumentation of the article runs like this:

- a) The Brotherhood is not a terrorist party but tries to influence Egyptian politics by using the parliamentary system.
- b) However, the parliamentary system is not working properly because of the 'crack downs' of the Egyptian government.
- c) This will subsequently lead to a defeat for the Muslim Brotherhood during the parliamentary elections in 2010 (the article was written on June 19, 2010, five months before the elections).
- d) But the Muslim Brotherhood 'must be given the chance to teach Egyptian society to benefit the nation and its people', Mohamed Badie is quoted as saying. 'When we were prevented from playing the role of spreading moderate Islam, thorns sprouted in Egypt's soil and so did terrorism'.

Because of the repression of the Egyptian state, this line of arguing suggests, the moderate Muslim Brotherhood will be pushed out of mainstream politics, and militant terrorism gets a chance to flourish in Egypt. Thus, the government is responsible for the terrorism in Egypt, not the Muslim Brotherhood: the Brotherhood will even be a solution to this problem.

This kind of argumentation is also found in 'Our Testimony, issued in 1994; in 2010, still true to our word'. In this document the Muslim Brotherhood gives its point of view on three main topics, one of which is 'Muslim Brotherhood Stance on Violence and Terrorism'. In this section, the organization argues that the Muslim Brothers 'committed themselves to legal means and non-violent methods. Their only weapons are honest and truthful words and the selfless dedication to social work'. The document continues by stating that they reject 'any form violence and coercion as well as all forms of coups which destroy the unity of any nation', because with these actions, the masses cannot exercise 'their free will'.

Indeed, the present atmosphere of suppression, instability and anxiety has forced many of the young men of this nation to commit acts of terrorism which have intimidated innocent citizens and threatened the country's security as well as its economic and political future. (...) The Muslim Brotherhood's continuous policy has been one of urging the government not to counter violence with violence, to abide instead by the rules of law and jurisdiction, to exam-

¹⁸² Marwa Awad and Edmund Blair, 'Brotherhood to Egypt: Don't squeeze out moderates', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (June 19, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/06/brotherhood-to-egypt-dont-squeeze-out-moderates/.

ine the different aspects of the problem and not to be confined to the confrontation policies.¹⁸³

Again, the violence and terrorism in Egypt is linked to the actions of the Egyptian state. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, clearly distances itself from violent actions, pointing out it has always played by the rules of a democratic system: it has been 'committed to the laws and constitution and fought back using our only weapon, which is truthfulness and honesty', in contrast with the government, that does not 'abide by the rules of law and jurisdiction'.

The same kind of argumentation can be found in the last article, titled 'Fighting terrorism requires more than just killing Bin Laden', albeit in a slightly different form. In this article Khaled Hamza, the chief editor of Ikhwanweb.com, argues that he hopes that the killing of Osama bin Laden will improve the relations between 'the West' and 'the Muslim world', 'now that main goal of its campaigns to capture Ben Laden "dead or alive" and dismantle al-Qaeda network of terror seemed to have been accomplished'.¹⁸⁴ The main argumentation of this article is that fighting against terrorism will take more than the killing of just one man; the 'real reasons of terrorism' need to be addressed. Khaled Hamza also argues that the US has failed to 'make a distinction between legitimate military operations against occupation, and terrorism':

[G]lobal counterterrorism was directed against non-state actors such as al-Qaeda, while ignoring the main perpetrator of state terrorism committed by daily Israeli occupation forces against innocent Palestinians in the occupied territories in violation of International Law, UN resolutions, and outside the boundaries of laws of armed conflict.¹⁸⁵

Khaled Hamza urges the US to make a distinction between terrorism and 'legitimate military operations against occupation' – such as in Palestine. Secondly, the US should 'refrain from its blind and unconditional support to Israel, especially when the later violates international humanitarian law and agreements.' He continues by stating that the US should end 'its meddling in the affairs of countries in the Middle East, which is only aimed at serving the domestic interests of the US and protecting Israel regardless of the interests and rights of millions of oppressed people in the Middle East.' Concluding, Khaled Hamza states that by continuing these kind of policies – such as supporting Israel, staying in Iraq and Afghanistan while Bin Laden has been captured, interference with internal affairs in the Middle East – 'the US is risking its relations with the Muslim world, and keeping the door open for many other Ben Laden's to emerge, and the cycle of violence will never end.' Again we see the same type of reasoning: the Muslim Brotherhood rejects terrorism, and adds the point that the state – in this case, the American state – should realize that they contribute to a climate in which terrorism can emerge. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, is the legal, honest and moderate player that should be given a change to govern, thereby decreasing the risk of growing terrorism in the Middle East.

¹⁸³ Muslim Brotherhood, 'Our Testimony, issued in 1994; in 2010, still true to our word', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (August 24, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/08/our-testimony-issued-in-1994-in-2010-still-true-to-our-word/.

¹⁸⁴ Khaled Hamza, 'Fighting terrorism requires more than just killing Bin Laden', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (May 3, 2011). ikhwanophobia.com/2011/05/fighting-terrorism-requires-more-than-just-killing-bin-laden/.

¹⁸⁵ *Idem*.

Democracy

The second main debate within 'Listen to the MB' is about the concept of 'democracy'. Since I will deal with this topic more extensively in Chapter 5, I will just give a brief summary of the main arguments here. Of the fourteen articles, four deal entirely with topics related to democracy: two are official documents of the Muslim Brotherhood, clarifying their point of view on 'the future of democracy in Egypt' and 'women's right to vote, be elected, occupy public and governmental posts and work in general'. The third article is a reaction on three questions of a visitor, who wrote a comment on the website related to the document about 'the future of democracy in Egypt'. The fourth article is a statement written by Ayyash during the popular uprising after January 25th. In all articles, it is clear that the Muslim Brotherhood wants to present itself as a political party which is compatible with democracy.

As we have seen in the previous subsection, the Muslim Brotherhood presents itself as playing by the rules of the law and 'the system'. The articles in 'Listen to the MB' emphasize that the Muslim Brotherhood uses 'words as a weapon' instead of violence. They contrast this approach to the current political system in Egypt, which they perceive as oppressive. Not only do they emphasize that the people of Egypt should be the 'real source of power' – with statements like 'The nation is the real source of authority or power' and 'The people have the right to appoint' – but they also include various statements about how the system should be changed into something more democratic:

- The nation needs a written constitution
- The terms of presidency should be limited
- Rulers have a responsibility towards the people
- The state should not place restrictions on political parties
- The law should be applied through independent judiciary

It should be clear that the articles are limited to general statements about democracy, the state and the party, rather than giving deeply detailed political analysis.

The last topic that is addressed in relation to democracy is the popular uprising of January and February 2011, which is mainly characterized as organized by demonstrating youth without leaders, or an uprising made by the people. In the article included in this section, Ayyash emphasizes that the young demonstrators were not members of political parties, and that the Muslim Brotherhood was following the movement, not 'owing' it. These subjects will be considered more fully in the next chapter.

The relation with the United States

Several articles deal with the subject 'the relation of the Muslim Brotherhood with "The West"'. The article 'Ikhwanweb Archive: Truth about the Global Muslim Brotherhood' deals entirely with this subject, by explaining the 'relations' between the Muslim Brotherhood and several organizations in the United States. Following the controversy surrounding Mazen Asbahi – the Muslim American Outreach coordinator for the Barack Obama presidential campaign in 2008 who had to resign because of 'links with fundamentalist groups' – the article argues that the Muslim Brotherhood has no (formal) representation in the US:

The MB has repeatedly denied it has any representation in the U.S., nor does it maintain any links with any of the Islamic or charitable organizations in the U.S. We have previously clarified that *moderate and pragmatic Islamic thought* is not exclusive of the MB, however, there are many other Islamic movements and organizations throughout the world that have *the same mainstream principles* as the MB but not necessarily part of its organizational structure.¹⁸⁶ [Italics mine]

In this passage, the author manages to turn around the argument in his own advantage: he not only denies ties with Islamic organizations in the US, he also manages to present the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization with 'moderate and pragmatic thought' and 'mainstream principles', just like the organizations in the US which are accused of being fundamentalist and/or terrorist groups.

Later in the article the author uses the argument of a 'neutral' source to back up its statement, by referring to the Holy Land Foundation trial. During this trial 'most of the alleged ties between the MB and any of the U.S. based organizations were extensively scrutinized (...) and were found groundless by the juries in court case that ended in mistrial.'¹⁸⁷ The article ends by repeating that there is no 'global MB network'; this is a 'Hollywood fiction', created by people who want to scare the public. Therefore, it urges the public to look beyond the allegations and judge for themselves:

We call on the public to carefully examine any allegations spread by special interest groups in the U.S. to smear certain individuals or groups for political gain in a heated presidential campaign season. These radical special interest groups and lobbies are driven by extreme hate towards Muslims and feel that Islamic moderation and the presence of strong Islamic organizations in the U.S is a major threat to their extreme ideology of hate and evil.¹⁸⁸

Again, we see that the author creates a contrast between the *moderate* Islamic organizations and groups that have an '*extreme ideology of hate and evil*'. The argument is turned around: the people should not watch out for the Muslim Brotherhood, but for the radical interest groups driven by extreme hate towards Muslims.

This argument is also found in another article in 'Listen to the MB', titled 'MB: Burning Quran will increase anti-Americanism in the Muslim World'. In this article, Essam al-Erian, the media spokesperson of the Muslim Brotherhood, states that the 'Burn the Quran Day' 'would definitely fan Muslim hatred of the United States'. In this way, not Muslims, but the radicals in the United States are responsible for adding fuel to the fire. We already saw a similar thought in the article on the killing of Bin Laden, which pointed to the US as responsible for the relationship between the US and the Muslim world. The United States, or rather some individuals and groups in the United States, are singled out as the ones who are responsible for the bad relations between 'the Muslim world' and 'the US'.

¹⁸⁶ Khaled Salam, 'Ikhwanweb Archive: Truth about the Global Muslim Brotherhood', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (July 4, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/07/ikhwanweb-archive-truth-about-the-global-muslim-brotherhood/.

¹⁸⁷ The *Holy Land Foundation* was the largest Islamic charity in the United States. Its assets were frozen by the European Union and U.S., and it was shut down by the U.S. government following the discovery that it was funding Hamas. The first trial against the organization ended in mistrial because of a lack of evidence. The federal government began a retrial on August 18, 2008, during which the organization was found guilty. The trial is known for its alleged Islamophobic character. *LA Times* reported that juror Scroggins said: 'The whole case was based on assumptions that were based on suspicions. If they had been a Christian or Jewish group, I don't think [prosecutors] would have brought charges against them.' *Los Angeles Times, Weak case seen in failed trial of charity; Muslim relief group was shut based on charges that ended in mistrial* (November 4, 2007).

¹⁸⁸ Khaled Salam, 'Ikhwanweb Archive: Truth about the Global Muslim Brotherhood'.

At the same time, the US is presented as a country where Muslims can enjoy an atmosphere of freedom and prosperity, in contrast with the repressive regime of Egypt:

During the 1960s, many members of the MB have fled Egypt to escape persecution by the Egyptian regime. Most of them settled in European countries or the U.S. and benefited from the atmosphere of freedom and prosperity in these countries and continued to practice and promote moderate Islamic thought.¹⁸⁹

So, different views and opinions of the United States are used next to each other, both positive and negative. In general, we can say that the United States as a whole is described as very positive, while certain individuals and events are characterized negatively.

The relations with the Egyptian state

Inevitably, the relation of the Muslim Brotherhood with the Egyptian regime is also dealt with. As we have already seen with the topic of 'terrorism, violence and extremism', the Muslim Brotherhood points towards the Egyptian state as responsible for the social conditions in which terrorism can flourish. Part of these social conditions is the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood. The notion that the state places restrictions on political parties, prevents the Muslim Brotherhood to grow as a political party and frequently cracks down on the organization is repeated in several articles.

One of the articles in which this argument is particularly evident is 'Muslim Brotherhood calls for protection of churches'. Here, the Muslim Brotherhood urges the Egyptian state to protect Christian places of worship, because of the threats of an al-Qaeda group towards the Egyptian Coptic church. These threats were made during their attack on a church in Bagdad in November 2010.¹⁹⁰ The article is written by a journalist from www.thedailynewsegypt.com (an outsider), but cites a representative of the Muslim Brotherhood a couple of times. Firstly, the Brotherhood is cited as stating that the 'protection of holy places of all monotheistic religions is the mission of the majority of Muslims', and that it 'reject[s] all stupid threats against Christian places of worship in Egypt issued by anyone and under any pretext'. The author also quotes the representative calling upon the Egyptian state and people to 'protect holy places of all worshippers of monotheistic religions'.¹⁹¹ In these quotations, the state is shown to have failed in its protection of their citizens, and thus in its duties as a government. In the article the Muslim Brotherhood also contrasts itself with groups like al-Qaeda: instead of blowing up Christian holy places, it advocates the protection of Christians. The way of showing this contrast has a lot of overlap with the articles we have seen on the topic of terrorism.

¹⁸⁹ Khaled Salam, 'Ikhwanweb Archive: Truth about the Global Muslim Brotherhood'.

¹⁹⁰ There actually was an attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt on January 1, 2011. Although it goes too far to discuss here, it is interesting to see how the threat of the attack already played a role in the collective awareness of Egypt. During the demonstrations after the attack in January, the general sentiment on the street was anger towards the government because of their failed protection of citizens. The Western media and the Egyptian state television, however, presented the demonstrations mainly as riots between Muslims and Christians.

¹⁹¹ AFP, 'Muslim Brotherhood calls for protection of churches', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (November 3, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/11/muslim-brotherhood-calls-for-protection-of-churches/.



Figure 17 The famous pictures of Khaled Said, before and after his torture by the police

Within 'Listen to the MB', the role of the state is mainly presented as a force that is suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood. This sentiment is also expressed in the article written by Ayyash on the Egyptian revolution:

No one can say that the Egyptian revolution was inspired by any other revolution. This is Khaled Said's revolution, and it is owned by all those who were tortured to death by Mubarak's regime.¹⁹²

Khaled Said (January 27, 1982 – June 6, 2010) was the most prominent symbol of people tortured by the regime during the Egyptian popular uprising.¹⁹³ Khaled Said was a young Egyptian man who died on June 6, 2010 after being arrested by the Egyptian police. Pictures of his disfigured corpse spread throughout online communities and incited outrage over allegations that he was beaten to death by Egyptian security forces. Multiple witnesses testified that Khaled Said was beaten to death by the police: 'We thought they would just interrogate him or ask him questions. But they took him as he struggled with his hands behind his back and banged his head against the marble table inside here' and 'They dragged him to the adjacent building and banged his head against an iron door, the steps of the staircase and walls of the building...'.¹⁹⁴ By mentioning Khaled Said, Ayyash refers to a widespread anger over the abuses and torture of the police in Egypt.

Islamophobia & the role of the media

The fifth topic that is central in 'Listen to the MB' is the role of the media, often in relation to the topic of Islamophobia. Three sub-themes can be distinguished. The first thread is that the media is being misused by Islamophobes to deliberately depict Muslims in false colors, with dire consequences: 'The Western politicians and the media attempted to link Islam to terrorism, consequently Islamophobia has swept through the West, putting the life of many Muslims at danger by hate crimes often condoned by governments' actions.'¹⁹⁵ Another article points out that nowadays Muslims are often misunderstood, and that the media play a central role in the creation of a stereotype image of Muslims:

These phenomena have been increasingly enhanced by the world media whose role in its creation and spread is very significant. Muslims have been accordingly afflicted by an over-

¹⁹² Abdelrahman Ayyash, 'Why Is it Impossible to Call it "Islamic"?', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (February 21, 2011). ikhwanophobia.com/2011/02/why-is-it-impossible-to-call-it-islamic/.

¹⁹³ A prominent Facebook group called *We are all Khaled Said*, moderated by Wael Ghonim, brought attention to his death and contributed to growing discontent in the weeks leading up to the Egyptian Revolution of 2011.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Schemm, 'Egypt cafe owner describes police beating death', *The San Diego Union-Tribune* (June 13, 2010). www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/jun/13/egypt-cafe-owner-describes-police-beating-death.

¹⁹⁵ Khaled Hamza, 'Fighting terrorism requires more than just killing Bin Laden'.

whelming assault which has portrayed them as savage and primitive people devoid of sensitivity, rational capacity and practical experience of the means of development and progress and of denying others the right to life, liberty and freedom of thought. This depiction has caused the World to negatively suspect almost every Muslim “and “Islamic” person, institution, etc.¹⁹⁶

The first thread within this topic is thus the role of the media in inciting Islamophobia around the world. Because the media present Muslims as ‘savage and primitive people devoid of sensitivity, rational capacity and denying others the right to life, liberty and freedom of thought’ on a regular basis, Muslims more frequently are seen as suspicious. And therefore, there is a worldwide attack on Muslims, according to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The second thread that recurs within this topic is that the Muslim Brotherhood must actively engage in working on their image in the – Western – media. This statement is supported by both sources from outside the Brotherhood as by members of the Brotherhood itself. A typical sentence on the website itself is: ‘This reassuring message should be delivered to the West.’ But it is also pointed out by independent journalists, for example in the article *Meet Radical Islam’s Tech Guru*, written on December 29, 2010, which is particularly illustrating here. The article is written by Sarah A. Topol, a freelance journalist based in Cairo, and describes the way in which the Muslim Brotherhood uses the Internet:

‘Out of all the political groupings in Egypt, the Brotherhood has been one of the most aggressive in terms of... using the Internet as a platform to get their views across,’ says Shadi Hamid, research director of Brookings Doha Center who studies the group. ‘The Brotherhood has always been paranoid about how people view it. It’s an organization that’s very sensitive to outside criticism ... And they’ll use any means possible to try to shift public opinion more in their direction,’ Hamid said.¹⁹⁷

Hamid is talking about the Muslim Brotherhood in fairly negative terms. He argues that the Muslim Brotherhood is using the Internet in an *aggressive* manner, they are *paranoid* about how people are seeing the organization, and they use *any means possible* to influence public opinion in their favor. But apparently this negative tone is not a deterrent for placing the article in the category of ‘Listen to the MB’. One of the reasons for this might be that the article quotes Ayyash, using his old Internet nickname Omar Mazin:

One of the group’s newer sites, Islamophobia is dedicated solely to the task of debunking myths surrounding the Brotherhood and changing popular perceptions abroad. Chief Editor Omar Mazin explains its mission to “respond to the ‘bashers’ ... and to clarify the fact that Muslim Brotherhood is a moderate Muslim group, with no terrorism relations and with no anti-Western agenda.” And according to the Brothers, their campaign is working.¹⁹⁸

The Muslim Brotherhood is presented as an organization which works actively to influence the popular perceptions, in this case by ‘debunking myths surrounding the Brotherhood’.

¹⁹⁶ Muslim Brotherhood, ‘Our Testimony, issued in 1994; in 2010, still true to our word’.

¹⁹⁷ Sarah A. Topol, ‘Meet Radical Islam’s Tech Guru’, *Ikhwanophobia.com* (December 29, 2010). <http://ikhwanophobia.com/2010/12/meet-radical-islams-tech-guru/>.

¹⁹⁸ Idem.

The article of Sarah A. Topol is not the only article in which a journalist refers to the website of Ikhwanophobia.com. This also happens in 'BBC On Ikhwanophobia.com: MB is Fighting Back'. Here we see the same pattern: first the website is described by a journalist in somewhat negative terms – 'Through the Ikhwanophobia website, the Brotherhood's sympathizers *aggressively* attempt to refute criticisms of the group and to show the world what they consider to be "the true face of moderate Islamists"' [italics mine] – followed by an employee of an American think tank, and finally Ayyash himself.¹⁹⁹ The usage of negative terms by the journalists did not stop Ayyash from placing it on Ikhwanophobia.com, probably because the tone of the article which makes mention of the website is less important for him than the fact itself that he is cited in Western media. This is partly linked to the third thread within the topic of the role of the media. In the articles in 'Listen to the MB', the Western public is called upon not to follow the Islamophobes, but 'to decide for themselves'. Sentences like 'We call on the public to carefully examine any allegations spread by special interest groups in the U.S' are scattered through the articles. Western politicians are also called upon to think about their attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood.

To conclude, in the articles we see three related points: Muslims are portrayed negatively in the Western media, the Muslim Brotherhood should actively engage in the improvement of its image in the Western media, and members of the public should not believe everything they hear and see about the Muslim Brotherhood, but decide for themselves what they think about the organization.

4.3. Case study 2: Main debates in section 'Commentary'

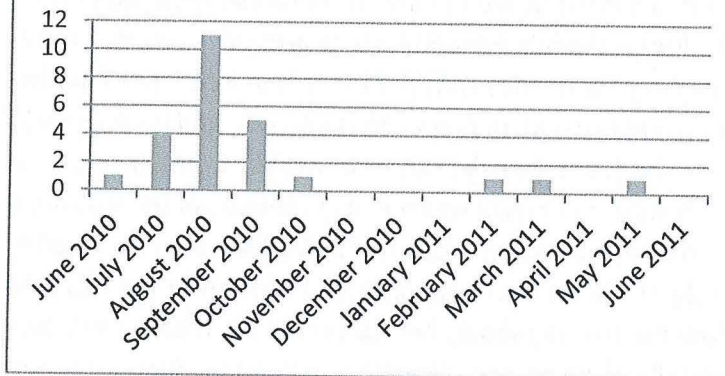
The section 'Commentary' consists of twenty-five articles, written between June 17, 2010 and June 16, 2011. Of these articles, twenty-two were written in the first four months of the website (see table 4.2). Three of the twenty-five articles are placed both in 'Commentary' and 'Listen to the MB' (see appendix b). Because of the nature of these articles, I have analyzed them already in the previous section.

As the title of this section of the website suggests, Ayyash himself provides comments on various news reports. Only in one article, he has copied the 'comment' directly from another website.²⁰⁰ The length of the commentaries varies from an entire page to only a single sentence. In fourteen out of twenty two cases the comments are not only about the Muslim Brotherhood, as in 'Listen to the MB', but about Muslims in general. In the list of articles in appendix b, an overview is also provided of the different types of commentary provided by Ayyash. Sometimes he gives a commentary – a substantive response on quotes from the article or the complete article. Sometimes he only makes a statement – a statement of political position without referring to a specific article. In some cases he agrees with someone else's statement, and provides an endorsement plus additional remarks.

¹⁹⁹ Muhammad Shukri, *BBC On Ikhwanophobia.com: MB is Fighting Back*, September 8, 2010, www.ikhwanophobia.com.

²⁰⁰ It was taken from the website LoonWatch.com – 'the mooslims! They're heeere!'. The web editors describe the website as 'a blogzine run by a motley group of hate-allergic bloggers to monitor and expose the web's plethora of anti-Muslim loons, wackos, and conspiracy theorists'.

Table 4.2 - Commentary



The articles discussed under this section fall under two headings. On the one hand, there are some articles defending the Muslim Brotherhood against accusations made in the American media, arguing that the Muslim Brotherhood is a worldwide group of extremists, anti-Semites and terrorists. Other articles are focused on turning round the debate, pointing towards negative attitudes of some Americans, characterized as

criminal and Islamophobic. Here, events such as 'Burn the Quran Day' and the controversy surrounding the 'Ground Zero Mosque' or the activities of 'racist' and 'neo-fascist' Americans such as Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer are discussed, stressing the message that it is not the Muslim Brotherhood but a section of American society that is radical and intolerant. Ayyash thus uses both an offensive and a defensive strategy. Furthermore, the call to 'ordinary Americans' and 'moderate public figures' to view 'both sides of the coin' is repeated here, in an effort to bridge the gap between Arabs/Muslims and Americans/Christians.

4.3.1. Defensive strategy: the Muslim Brotherhood is not...

In Ayyash' active defense of the Muslim Brotherhood, three general themes emerge. These themes have a great measure of similarity with the themes discussed under the section 'Listen to the MB' that were already discussed. First, there is the by now familiar theme of 'the Muslim Brotherhood has no anti-Western agenda'. New in the category of 'Commentary' is that this theme is linked with the statement that Muslims also live in America, which they see as 'their first and only homeland'. Ayyash points out that the Brotherhood encourages Muslims to engage in an active way in the American society, and that they 'won't think even once to do anything that will harm the United States or the American people.'²⁰¹ Within the commentaries, Ayyash is thus focusing on Muslims in the United States, and not on Egypt or the relation between the two countries.

A second theme that is repeated is that the Muslim Brotherhood has no organizational links with Islamic organizations in the US. Ayyash manages to repeat the rhetoric trick we have seen before in 'Listen to the MB', by arguing that 'the moderate form of Islam is the only thing common between the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic organizations active in the US.'²⁰² The theme of moderation is also repeated within the second topic. Ayyash rejects regular attempts to put the Muslim Brotherhood in the context of terrorism out of hand. Instead, he attempts to create a contrast between 'the

²⁰¹ Omar Mazin, 'Alienating Muslims and calling it Conservatism [sic] ... great.', *ikhwanophobia.com* (August 17, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/08/alienating-muslims-and-calling-it-conservatism-%E2%80%A6-great-2/.

²⁰² Omar Mazin, 'Emerson's Paranoid Approach Toward the Muslim Brotherhood', *ikhwanophobia.com* (September 30, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/09/emersons-paranoid-approach-toward-the-muslim-brotherhood/.

moderate Islamic movement like Muslim Brotherhood', 'resistance movements like Hamas en Hizbullah' and 'terrorist movements like al-Qaeda':

Gathering resistance movements like Hamas and Hizbullah, with Terrorist movements like al-Qaeda and moderate Islamic movement like Muslim Brotherhood in one phrase, is just hilarious and betrays a profound ignorance of the reality of the Islamic political map.²⁰³

The arguments are mainly given by firm statements of one or two sentences, without almost any in-depth arguments. Sometimes the statements follow each other like the repeating of a mantra:

It is well known that al-Qaeda was founded as a result of repression and oppression committed by the Egyptian government against the Islamist groups throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s. And the most moderate Islamic organization in Egypt is the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁰⁴

This moderateness of the Muslim Brotherhood is repeated time and again through all the articles. The last point in relation to this topic is that the Brotherhood 'promotes only peaceful and tolerant measures in their call for political reform.'²⁰⁵

The last defensive theme included under 'Commentary' is that Muslims have never been involved in the religious suppression of Jews and Christians. Ayyash states that 'Muslims didn't try even once to fight the ideas by sword! they always were trying to oppose ideas by ideas.'²⁰⁶ In one of the articles, Ayyash deals with the accusation that the Muslim Brotherhood is anti-Semitic, in which he gives some more in-depth arguments than in most other articles. Here, he first explains the attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood towards Jews:

The former Egyptian MB Chairman Mr. Mohamed Mahdi Akef argues that there is no conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jews, however he asserted that there are conflicts between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Zionists who, Akef asserted "are not Jews."²⁰⁷

A distinction is thus made between Jews and Zionists, and the Muslim Brotherhood has only problems with Zionists but not with Jews. Ayyash supports this statement by pointing out that the Brotherhood even 'enjoys affable relations with the Jewish intellectuals and academics'. He argues that he has contacted 'prestigious Jewish intellectuals' like Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, two famous American academics and critics of America's foreign policy, to help him with the promotion of the website ikhwanophobia.com – Ayyash said that both men have responded positively. This is used as an argument to point out that 'the MB encourage affiliation and cooperation with the Jews so long as they do not support the racist Israeli-Zionist agenda'.

In the same article Ayyash gives a second argument for the statement that the Muslim Brotherhood has no problems with Jews: he explains the attitude of Hamas towards Israel – although he of course

²⁰³ Omar Mazin, 'Commentary: Is Islam's Problem A Lack Of Modernity?', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (August 13, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/08/is-islams-problem-a-lack-of-modernity/.

²⁰⁴ Omar Mazin, 'Robert Spencer Supports Dictatorship in Egypt!', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (July 28, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/07/robert-spencer-supports-dictatorship-in-egypt/.

²⁰⁵ Idem.

²⁰⁶ Omar Mazin, 'Wahabi Imam to burn the Bible in Cairo!', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (August 1, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/08/wahabi-imam-to-burn-the-bible-in-cairo/.

²⁰⁷ Omar Mazin, 'Anti-Semitism!! Seriously??', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (July 22, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/07/anti-semitism-seriously/.

immediately repeats that the Muslim Brotherhood has no relations with Hamas, and that the suggestion of such a relationship is the 'compiling of imaginative and manipulative individuals'.

The MB believe that Hamas targets the Zionist occupational project, Hamas and as a liberating movement it does not have any prejudices against Jews, their struggle is against the racist Israeli occupation and their massacres committed against Palestinian people throughout 60 years of occupation.²⁰⁸

Again, Hamas has no problems with Jews but with Zionists and their occupation of Palestine. Ayyash concludes by stating that instead of talking about the attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood towards Jews – 'which is merely hearsay' – critics should focus on the racism of GMBDR²⁰⁹ and 'FSM'²¹⁰, two websites which are known for their Islamophobe sayings. This is a mechanism that Ayyash frequently applies in his articles: You can accuse the Muslim Brotherhood of x or y, but the actual party that we should take a closer look at and should blame is z – mostly American websites or public figures. When he applies this mechanism, Ayyash actually makes a transition from a defensive strategy to an offensive one.

4.3.2. Offensive strategy: ... but look at the racism of some Americans!

The other half of the articles chosen by Ayyash to comment on are articles serving as examples of the Islamophobia and racism of some Americans. One of the events central to his commentaries is the 'Burn the Quran Day'. The controversy arose in July 2010 when Terry Jones, the pastor of the *Christian Dove World Outreach Center* in Gainesville, Florida declared he would burn two hundred Qurans on the 2010 anniversary of the September 11 attacks. The *Dove World Outreach Center*, where the Quran burning was to occur, is a small congregation with approximately 50 members. The church first gained media attention in the late 2000s for its anti-Islamic and anti-gay messages.²¹¹ Although Terry Jones cancelled the planned event of September 9, 2010, stating 'We will definitely not burn the Quran. Not today, not ever', he held a 'trial of the Quran' six months later during which he burned the Quran after all.²¹² The controversy sparked protests in the Middle East and Asia, in which about 20 people were killed and many more were injured.

The first comment that Ayyash has published about 'Burn the Quran Day' is worth looking into. The article 'Wahabi Imam to burn the Bible in Cairo!' opens with:

²⁰⁸ Idem.

²⁰⁹ 'GMBDR' stands for 'The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Report' (globalmbreport.org), a website which claims to be created 'to fill a significant gap in the understanding of Islamic extremism.' The website aims at proving the existence of a 'Global Muslim Brotherhood' by posting articles about different Islamic organizations in the West.

²¹⁰ FSM' refers to the website of 'Family Security Matters' (www.familysecuritymatters.org). It writes about issues related to national security and the safety of American families. The website is a front group for the Center for Security Policy (CSP), a conservative Washington think tank.

²¹¹ Lise Fisher and Karen Voyles, 'Anti-Islam church sign stirs up community outrage', *The Gainesville Sun* (July 8, 2009). www.gainesville.com.

²¹² CNN Wire Staff, 'Florida pastor calls off Quran burning', *CNN* (September 11, 2010). edition.cnn.com.

See also: Chad Smith, 'Dove World denies it's responsible for violence over Quran burning', *The Gainesville Sun* (April 1, 2011). www.gainesville.com.

What if some Wahabi Imam in a mosque decided to burn the holy Bible after Friday prayer in Cairo . Let's imagine the headlines of the highly ranked newspapers, websites and dozens of bitter Islamophobes on their websites - truly they would have a field day.²¹³

Ayyash asks the question 'what if' and translates the event into a hypothetical story of a Wahabi Muslim who decides to burn the Bible. Then he gives the hypothetical reactions of newsagents such as *CNN* and *FOX*, Global Muslim Brotherhood websites such as *Daily Report*, *Family Security Matters* and *Jihad Watch*, and individuals like Pamela Geller, Sarah Palin and several others. After this, Ayyash states that it is very typical that Western media are not commenting on the 'Burn the Quran Day':

In a tilting of scales, it seems to be normal and acceptable to have a Church burn Quran Day but in the event of a Muslim burning Bible Day imagine the uproar and scandal.

The question is why didn't the western and most influential media comment on this racist and discriminatory incident? The diehard bigots and hypocrite racists who want to burn Quran and smear Islam are the real terrorists.²¹⁴

Under this sentence on the website, there is a hyperlink to a Wikipedia webpage: 'man bites dog', the phenomenon in journalism in which an unusual, infrequent event is more likely to be reported as news than an ordinary, everyday occurrence (such as 'Dog bites man').²¹⁵ With this hyperlink, Ayyash seems to argue that it seems to be normal and acceptable to organize a 'Burn a Quran Day' as a church. He concludes that 'this racist and discriminatory incident' shows who 'the real terrorists' are. It is striking that Ayyash uses the word 'racism' several times in these articles, instead of the term 'Islamophobia'. Racism is a more general term than Islamophobia, but with much more weight in Western discourse.

The second method that Ayyash uses is to compare Muslims with Christians. Already we have seen that he has stated that Muslims never have been involved in any religious suppression of Jews and Christians. He argues:

The burning of the holy Quran reveal some Christians' lack of tolerance to a different religion and culture exposing their true ignorance. Rather than discuss and engage in open dialogue with Muslims they chose to burn the Quran demonstrating pure hatred and animosity.²¹⁶

Not Muslims but some Christians are racist, intolerant, ignorant and above all, the 'real terrorists'. Instead of engaging in dialogues with Muslims, they have chosen the path of hatred and hostility.

The creation of a 'climate of hate' plays a major role in several articles, of which the article 'Pamela, Robert .. Congrats!!' is the best example. Ayyash wrote a commentary on two news articles, both about 'hate crimes' against Muslims. The first news article tells the story of a taxi driver in New York, who was stabbed by an American boy because of his religion. The second item is



Figure 18 Picture of the taxi-driver who was stabbed for being Muslim – as published next to the article on *Ikhwanophobia.com*

²¹³ Omar Mazin, 'Wahabi Imam to burn the Bible in Cairo!'.
²¹⁴ Idem.

²¹⁵ 'Man bites dog', *Wikipedia.com*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man_bites_dog_%28journalism%29.

²¹⁶ Omar Mazin, 'Wahabi Imam to burn the Bible in Cairo!'.
²¹⁷ Idem.

about vandalism around an Islamic center in Madera. Ayyash opens his own commentary with:

Two hate crimes against Muslims were reported within less than 24 hours. Obviously, this worrying hatred and racism were growing after the campaign run by Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller against Islam and Muslims in the United States.²¹⁷

Ayyash assumes a direct link between the anti-Muslim campaign of Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, making them accountable for the changing climate in America, about which he states: 'Geller and her companions are directly responsible for hate crimes and racism which is expected to increase in the coming period.' Ayyash continues with several quotes from Pamela Geller in which she attacks president Obama. Then:

Pamela Geller is not only against Muslims, *she is also against the American administration*, which mean[s] that it may be a matter of time for some extremist idiots to commit a foolish action *against the president Obama* or one of supporters who stood behind the right of Muslims to build their own cultural center near Ground Zero.²¹⁸ [italics mine]

It is interesting to see how Ayyash places Muslims on the same side as the American administration. He even uses the words of Condoleezza Rice against Robert Spencer, who 'has forgotten this important statement when he decided to write his new article on Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt'.²¹⁹

I always like to quote from Condoleezza Rice's 2005 speech in Cairo: 'The US pursuit of stability in the Middle East at the expense of democracy had "achieved neither", she admitted. "Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people," she said.²²⁰

With this quote Ayyash seems to argue that he – as a muslim – much better understands the concept of democracy than an 'Islamophobe' like Robert Spencer. By emphasizing the extremist character of Spencer and Geller, portraying them as nothing short of idiots, Ayyash can show that he himself is the moderate. As a Muslim Brother, he argues, he stands for the same principles as people like President Obama and Condoleezza Rice, embracing the same values such as justice, equality, tolerance and peace. The attacks on Muslims are not just seen as a form of racism that endangers the Islamic community in America, but in the eyes of Ayyash are also an attack on the United States itself:

Islam - like any other religion - is pushing life to peace and justice, and those who try to stereotype Muslims and 'enemize' Islam, are standing *against the states*, should be stopped. [italics mine]²²¹

²¹⁷ Omar Mazin, 'Pamela, Robert .. Congrats!!', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (August 26, 2010).

ikhwanophobia.com/2010/08/pamela-robert-congrates/.

²¹⁸ Idem.

²¹⁹ Omar Mazin, 'Robert Spencer Supports Dictatorship in Egypt!', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (July 28, 2010).

²²⁰ In the other article, he refers to the same quote but in slightly different words: 'For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region, here in the Middle East, and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of the people.' This quote is taken from the website of al-Ahram (<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/751/op8.htm>), while the other one links to the website of the BBC (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4109902.stm).

²²¹ Omar Mazin, 'Sharron Angle warns that Muslims have taken over American cities', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (October 8, 2010). *ikhwanophobia.com/2010/10/sharron-angle-warns-that-muslims-have-taken-over-american-cities/*.

Ayyash goes even further by stating that people like Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer are a threat for the 'civil peace' in America.²²²

More than one article is concluded with a call to *moderate Americans* to do something about the attacks, the growing hatred and racism. Also here, Ayyash characterizes these events not only as going against freedom and democracy, but as 'anti-American'.²²³ What he means by this becomes clear in the following statement:

It's the duty of the moderate Americans to stop these waves of hatred and racism, to return America to its glorious principles, to Justice, to Equality and to Tolerance.²²⁴

The call upon moderate Americans to return America to its glorious principles assumes that America once had these principles but has lost them somewhere along the way. In his comments Ayyash creates a difference between some actions of individuals, which he sees as negative, and his image of some form of ideal type of America. For him, America equals justice, equality and tolerance, but also freedom, democracy and prosperity. He concludes with the call for *moderate Americans* to take action against this 'bigotry and racism', because, Ayyash says: 'Minorities in American are still American! and they cannot be "enemized"!'

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that Ayyash has an audience in mind of American/Western leaders, journalists, academics and political activists interested in political Islam. However, he also states the wish to reach a broad public in the West, a focus that is not necessarily in line with the one stated previously. Also interesting is that in his attempts to reach a Western audience, Ayyash most of all connects to public figures from the left, that could be considered to be part of a counter-culture in the West as well.

Ayyash uses the website as a tool to network with journalists and academics that could help him to influence public opinion. He asks for permission for the reproduction of articles under the category 'The Neutrals'. By using this category, he tries to show the general public that he is not alone in his representation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Most of all, however, Ayyash uses the website itself to try and reach out. It is produced in English and uses the newest social media to enable viewers to contribute to discussions and share articles. The website is consciously designed so as not to look 'too Arabic' or 'too emotional', but businesslike and serious, evidence-based, and directed at subjects that according to Ayyash will be of importance to a Western audience.

The three main subjects that Ayyash sees as controversial and wants to provide a response to, are:

1. The Muslim Brotherhood is not a global movement
2. The Muslim is not violent but promotes peace through democracy
3. The Muslim Brotherhood does not have an anti-Western agenda

²²² Omar Mazin, 'Spencer, Anti-America again!', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (September 22, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/09/spencer-anti-america-again/.

²²³ Omar Mazin, "'Anti-Islamic' bus ads appear in major cities', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (September 3, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/09/anti-islamic-bus-ads-appear-in-major-cities/

²²⁴ Omar Mazin, 'Emerson's Paranoiac Approach Toward the Muslim Brotherhood'.

I have selected two categories of the website, to examine which topics Ayyash actively tries to tackle. The category 'Listen to the MB', that mostly contains articles explaining the official points of view of the Muslim Brotherhood, concentrates on three additional themes: 'the relation with the Egyptian state', 'Islamophobia' and 'the role of the media'.

The second category, 'Commentary', contains articles that comment on allegations towards the Muslim Brotherhood and Muslims in general in the Western/American media. These articles broadly can be divided into two groups. Some of the articles are mainly defensive in tone, again focusing on countering the accusations that the Muslim Brotherhood is connected to terrorism, part of a conspiratorial global network, or is an anti-Semitic organization. A second group under the category 'Commentary' rather takes the offensive, turning around the argument by pointing to the words and actions of some Americans that are characterized as spreading hatred, racism or aggressive behavior. These examples are often used to show that there is a double standard for judging Christians and Muslims. Ayyash agitates against what they describe as a 'climate of hatred', and call on *moderate Americans* to take actions against this. To do so, Ayyash presents an ideal image of American society, in which concepts as justice, equality, tolerance, freedom, democracy and prosperity play a central role. The actions of Islamophobe Americans, he argues in this way, are not only dangerous to Muslims but also to American society.

By emphasizing the extremism of some Islamophobes and placing himself on the same line as moderate American public figures, he can emphasize his own moderateness. The moderateness of the Muslim Brotherhood is by far the most important element of the image of the Brotherhood that is presented at the website. This message is repeated at many occasions in the articles. Other elements are that the Brotherhood is not violent, that it promotes democracy, works within the framework of the law, sees words as its only weapons, and strives for peaceful reforms. The Brotherhood is presented as honest, transparent, and unambiguous in its points of view.

Chapter 5. The 'absolute values' of democracy

One of the key topics on the website Ikhwanophobia.com is democracy. Several documents in 'Listen to the MB' were dealing entirely with this topic. Furthermore, the concept is not only central within internal discussions of the Muslim Brotherhood, it was also central in the recent popular uprisings in the Arab world. Moreover, the concept played a central role in the debates these events have evoked in the West. When I asked Ayyash how he sees himself, he answered: 'I consider myself as a Islamic democrat, or Muslim democrat, and sometimes I am calling myself a liberal Islamist.' During the interview, he also sometimes called himself a 'social Muslim'. He pointed out that the concept of 'liberal Islamist' was not accepted within the Brotherhood. He told me the reaction of Samer Ayyan, one of the members of the Guidance Bureau: When I told him I consider myself now I am a liberal Islam[ist], he did not like this at all, and he told me you cannot do so, it is nothing like that, you can't create something like that.'²²⁵

Tensions can exist between the concept of Islam and democracy. It is essential to see that the meanings of both Islam and democracy are shaped by the people who apply these concepts, and the circumstances under which they do so.²²⁶ In this chapter I will not analyze whether the Muslim Brotherhood and democracy go together. I will show how the concept of democracy is applied on the website Ikhwanophobia.com, and which problems arise while defending this interpretation. I then set these tensions against the background of current discussions within the Muslim Brotherhood on democracy. Finally, I will examine Ayyash's position within those discussions on the basis of a case that arose during the interview.

5.1. The concept of 'democracy' on Ikhwanophobia.com

One of the first articles posted on the website Ikhwanophobia.com was the document 'Muslim Brotherhood and Democracy in Egypt'.²²⁷ With 4000 words it is one of the longest articles on the website and it has a distinctly different character from the articles we have seen so far. The document was posted on June 21, 2010, just four days after the launch of the website. Although the original source is not listed, the article seems to be a copy of an article that was posted on June 13, 2007 on Ikhwanweb.com – the official English website of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not clear when the original document was written.²²⁸

The document starts by stating that there are actually three organized Islamic movements within Egyptian politics: the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafi Movement and a movement described here as 'the attitude of violence'. This 'attitude of violence' is defined as being completely against democra-

²²⁵ Personal interview with Ayyash.

²²⁶ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, xvii.

²²⁷ Omar Mazin, 'Muslim Brotherhood And Democracy in Egypt', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (June 21, 2010). <http://ikhwanophobia.com/2010/06/muslim-brotherhood-and-democracy-in-egypt/>.

²²⁸ I believe the original text was written some years before this date, since the history in the document stops after the year 2004. Also, nothing is written about the electoral victory of 2005. It is possible that the document originally was published in Arabic, since some crucial events are not explained the way that would be done for an international audience.

cy, and influenced by the Salafi Movement. The Salafi Movement itself is defined as divided into an anti-democracy and a pro-democracy group, but the article dismisses this movement by stating that 'this school does not represent a noticeable attitude in Egypt' [sic]. Both the Salafi Movement and 'the attitude of violence' are discarded as two forms of the 'Islamic Trend' which do not lead to democracy. The introduction of the article concludes: 'We are before a sole view on the future of democracy: the view of the Muslim Brotherhood'. The Muslim Brotherhood, as the article argues, is the only movement that strives for an 'Islamic-oriented democracy'. It is involved in politics 'in accordance with the codes of Islam that regulate all matters of life'. Moreover, the article emphasizes that the Brotherhood is pursuing democracy within the political and cultural field, as well as on the practical level.

After this introduction, the document is structured chronologically. The article starts with explaining how Brotherhood-founder Hassan al-Banna looked at the concept of democracy. It is argued that al-Banna has set a general rule for how the Muslim Brotherhood should deal with a new idea. It should above all be Islamic, which is defined as 'an integrated meaning that regulates all matters of life and sets an accurate rule for every issue'. Ideologies are assessed according to this general rule: 'What agrees with it is to be accepted, whereas what does not shall be rejected. We believe that our movement is general and integrated; as it includes all the reforming sides of all ideologies'. To illustrate this, the article recounts how al-Banna assessed the ideologies of nationalism and patriotism with this general rule in mind.

The article continues with al-Banna's ideas about democracy. It is emphasized that in his time democracy was not yet a dominant ideology over other ideologies such as nationalism and patriotism, but also that there were other comprehensive systems such as Nazism, Fascism and Communism. In his dissertation al-Banna calls democratic regimes 'colonial' and he does not seem very positive about democracy in general. He emphasized that he believes in Islam as a religion *and* as a governing system. The article continues:

Concerning the democratic practices, al-Banna had a vision on the constitutional and the parliamentary affairs, "The Muslim Brotherhood believes that the main source of their edicts is the Qur'an and the Sunnah to which if the Muslims adhere, they shall never go astray. Moreover, most genres of knowledge that are related to Islam carry the seal of the age they were created in, and the people they were made up by. Therefore, the Muslim countries should resort to that kind of pure system. We should also approach Islam in the same manner as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), his companions, and the early Muslims did. We shall not restrict ourselves with any idea that is not set by Allah, for Islam is a religion for all humans."

Thus, the quote emphasizes the scriptural basis for Muslim Brotherhood policies, while at the same time acknowledging that most genres of knowledge in relation to Islam are shaped by the time in which it was created, as well as by the people who created it. Thus, it seems to allow some space for different interpretations of the sources, but it does not become clear what this means in practice. The text continues:

According to the golden rule that encompasses both originality and modernity, al-Banna managed to put an end to the debate around one of the thorniest issues of democracy, which is the constitutional and parliamentary ruling regime. He said, "Indeed, brothers, upon perceiving the principles of the constitutional regime, which are based on personal freedom,

consulting the people, the responsibility of the ruler before his people, and illustrating the limits of each authority, it becomes crystal clear that all these principles emit from the creed of Islam. That is why the Muslim Brotherhood conceives this ruling system to be the closest to Islam, and they do not see any other system equal to it.”

Here, it is stated that the principles of a constitutional government are based on personal freedom and the consultation of the people. For the author of the text it is ‘crystal clear’ that this ruling system is the closest to Islam as a governing system.

The ideas outlined above contain an obvious contradiction: on the one hand they state that personal freedom and the consultation of the people are central within a democracy, but on the other hand they state that everything should be measured against Islam and the sources of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. It seems that democracy will be accepted as long as it does not go against Islam. Asef Bayat illustrates this point with a telling example from a personal interview with Essam al-Erian, one of the ‘younger’ leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood:

‘What if in a Muslim society citizens decide to follow secular laws?’ I asked ‘Asam al-Eryan. ‘Good true Muslims cannot and will not ignore Shari’a,’ he presumed. The Muslim Brotherhood assumed religious authority would safeguard society over people’s own judgment of themselves.²²⁹

Bayat concludes that for the Brotherhood the value of democratic principles lay more in procedures which will serve to implement sharia than in expressing a form of government based on the will of the people.

The article on the website highlights another controversial point of view of Hassan al-Banna: he rejected the plurality of political parties. The article is quick to note that the Muslim Brotherhood changed this point of view already in 1994. Moreover, the author of the article explains this position in the context of the British occupation of Egypt at that time. Different political forces had to be united to fight the occupation. But in this point, we see a similar assumption as the one quoted previously. Al-Banna is quoted as saying:

Temporary solutions can no longer be acceptable; there is no way but to dissolve all these parties, and to gather all the powers of our nation in one party to achieve our independence and to set the general reformation rules. Then, circumstances will allow people to take the way of regulation and renaissance in the shade of the unity created by Islam.

By uniting all the forces within one party, Egyptians will not only be able to free themselves from their British occupiers. It would also create a renaissance ‘in the shade of the unity created by Islam’. Again the unity through Islam is the ideal, not the expression of the will of the people, however diverse.

After the section in which the points of view of al-Banna are explained follow sections on ‘The Muslim Brotherhood after al-Banna’ and ‘The situation from 1975 to 2005’. The emphasis in this chronological summary lies on the continuous battle of the Muslim Brotherhood against the regime, and the repression faced by the movement. Negative events that can be connected to the Muslim Brotherhood are not avoided, such as the assassination of judge al-Khazindar and the prime minister an-Nuqrashi Pasha, as well as the Brotherhood’s connection to the coup of the ‘Free Officers’ of 1952.

²²⁹ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 177.

The section concludes with a short summary of the attitude of the Brotherhood towards democracy:

The attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood supports democracy since its beginning *although* the movement completely adopts the Islamic bases, and tries hard to create an Islamic-oriented renaissance. The reason for this is the flexible view of the movement concerning two important issues:

1. The sources of the Islamic Jurisprudence and thought, and putting the Islamic heritage into consideration with an analytical sense.
2. The flexibility while looking into the productions of the human civilization as a whole, as some are to be accepted, while others are not. [italics mine]

The Brotherhood states to support democracy *although* it adopts the Islamic bases. Once again, we are left with the question of how this will work out in practice.

According to the article, participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in parliamentary elections of 1984 and 1987 heralded a new phase, which 'affected the views of the Muslim Brotherhood on democracy and its culture, mechanisms and means'. The Brotherhood issued two papers in April 1994, in which it explains its stance on 'the mutual consultation and political plurality in the Muslim society' and 'the Muslim woman in the Muslim society'. On political plurality the article states that the Brotherhood '*admitted and emphasized* what was declared by the movement in its early stages', such as:

- The comprehensive *approval* of the constitutional and parliamentary regime.
- *Emphasizing* the fact that the nation is the source of all powers.
- *Stressing* the importance of the impartial elections, as a peaceful means to rotate power. [italics mine]

It is striking that the author chose words like 'to admit', 'to emphasize', 'to stress' and 'to approve', words that signal that the author feels he should already defend the commitment of the Brotherhood towards democracy. The article ends with a summary of the actions that in the eyes of the Brotherhood should take place to reinforce democracy:

1. Abolishing the emergency law immediately, and releasing all the political prisoners.
2. Allowing all practices of freedoms, especially the freedom of speech and the freedom of forming parties.
3. Impartial elections that do not suffer from the governmental interference.
4. Giving the upper hand to the independent judicial authorities, and passing a law that asserts their independence.
5. Reconsidering the constitution to cure its defects in an immediate manner, and ratifying a new constitution after the political reformation.

It is clear that the focus of the document is on the commitment of the Brotherhood towards democracy. The document outlines what kind of actions and procedures the Brotherhood wants to implement in order to put democracy into practice in Egypt. However, the reader is left with the question what their concept of democracy exactly implies – or, if we take a look at the last quotation, what exactly 'allowing all practices of freedoms' means. With vague explanations like these, there are several interpretations possible, something that many critics have pointed out before. How problematic this proved to be for the Brotherhood will be discussed in the following sections.

5.1.1. Comment of a reader on the website Ikhwanophobia.com

On July 15, 2010, a certain 'Michael Topp from Berlin, Germany' wrote a comment under the article 'Muslim Brotherhood and Democracy in Egypt', the article discussed above.²³⁰ In his comment, he asks four questions:

1. About the rejection of al-Banna of the plurality of political parties
2. About the implementation of democracy in the time of the prophet and the early Muslims
3. About the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the basis for democracy
4. About free press and foreign investment

The next day, on July 16, 2010, Ayyash posted these questions as a new article on the website, under the sections 'Commentary' and 'Listen to the MB', and provided his own answers.²³¹ Their 'dialogue' about the Muslim Brotherhood and democracy illuminates some of the central problems for the party position on democracy as a whole, and therefore will be examined at length.

The introduction to the post on the website describes the comment from Michael Topp as a 'very important issues that related to the MB and Hassan Al Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood who was assassinated in 1949.' In response to the first question on al-Banna's rejection of a plurality of parties, Ayyash writes:

It is clear that the Egyptian political environment during Hassan Albanna's presence was very unclear. Most of the parties existing during this time were struggling against each other and working in favour of the British occupation. Hassan AlBanna did not criticize the "concept" of parties; he criticized the situations, attitudes and policies of the mainstream parties. In fact in 1994, the Muslim Brotherhood explained their attitude towards plurality (Link: Arabic).

The Muslim Brotherhood believes in democracy. They have participated in numerous elections including parliamentary, Shura, trade union, teaching clubs and student elections. The MB condemns all forms of violence promoting only tolerant and peaceful methods in their call for reform

Here, Ayyash makes a distinction between the 'concept' of multiple parties and the everyday practice – although the original document states that al-Banna 'condemned the *concept* of plurality of the parties'. Then Ayyash shows that the Muslim Brotherhood has changed its attitude towards this point, and uses everyday practice as an example. Finally, Ayyash adds to his answer that the Muslim Brotherhood in any case condemns all forms of violence – although violence is of course not necessarily the alternative of democracy and/or the plurality of political parties.

The second question is about the role of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and the comparison that is made with the way in which the prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims dealt with politics. Ayyash answers to this question as follows:

One of the Muslim Brotherhood's main goals is to promote moderate Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood perceives Islam as a sustainable source of ideas and policies. It believes that Is-

²³⁰ Although according to the German telephone book there really lives a 'Michael Topp' in Berlin, it cannot be verified if this is the same person.

²³¹ Omar Mazin, 'Commentary: Muslim Brotherhood And Democracy'.

lam has no identified shape of authority, *Khilafah*²³² was the nature of its ages, and Muslims will develop their own style of leadership. When the Muslim Brotherhood calls for the return of the *Khilafah*, they are referring to their call for the concepts of justice, unity and equality.

The Quran and Sunna are the holy texts for Muslims to guide them in practicing their religion and living their lives. The texts do not force any regime or political regulations on the Muslims.

Ayyash opens with the previously mentioned mantra that the main goal of the Brotherhood is to promote moderate Islam. But then he proves to be creative, by stating that the Qur'an and the Sunnah function as guides for everyday life, but *not* as prescriptions what political life ought to look like, nor the nature of authority. Islam is the source for ideas and policies, but Muslims will have to develop their own form of leadership. Ayyash thus creates the freedom for different interpretations of the sources. Also, he puts the concept of *khilafa* into the context of its time and translates the term into concepts like justice, unity and equality.

The third question continues this subject. Topp states that if Islam and/or the Qur'an are a guide for living, you will not need a parliament anymore. In his reply, Ayyash states that the Qur'an and the Sunnah provide the answer to 'millions of problems' and at the same time offer a sort of general guidelines:

Generally, Quran and Sunna offers some kind of life assurance. They have answers for millions of problems and issues, they dealt with the lives of Muslims throughout the last 14 centuries. Islam offers a lifestyle with no limitations. The holy texts simply manage the general guidelines of laws. The Muslim Brotherhood does not make its decisions solely from the Quran and Sunna; rather they are inspired by the "Maqased"²³³ or purposes of Sharia!

Sharia law is concerned with managing peoples' lives by managing the purposes of their decisions. This is what the Muslim Brotherhood believes in.

According to Ayyash, the Qur'an and the Sunnah offer on the one hand the answer to almost all questions, but on the other hand the Muslim Brotherhood is not basing itself purely on the texts; they rely on the inspiration of the underlying goals and intentions of the texts. He seems to say: everything will be ok, as long as we follow the intentions or goals of the general guidelines of the law. In the second part of his answer, Ayyash explains how this view is to be reconciled with the concept of democracy:

With regards to theocracy, the Muslim Brotherhood has confirmed numerous times that they are not aiming to reach a theocratic state, they clearly want a civil state, theocracy has no affiliation with the Islamic philosophy. The Muslim Brotherhood does not force people on anything even issues mentioned in Quran or Sunna. This is the function of the legislative council and parliament, the passing of or rejection to the laws and bills.

However, how this rejection of theocracy is related to the Qur'an and the Sunnah functioning as a guide for rule does still not become clear. Again, it seems possible that the paradox mentioned above by Bayat serves as an underlying assumption; the people will follow the – intentions of – the Qur'an, Sunnah and Islam in general, also within a 'civil state'.

²³² *Khilafa* (خلافة) is the Arabic term for caliphate.

²³³ 'Maqasid' is the Arabic word for goals or purposes. In Islamic context, it can refer to the purposes of Islamic faith, *zakat* (charity tax), pilgrimage or of the Qur'an's and Sunnah's text.

Finally, Topp mentions that he missed references to a free press and foreign investment in the document on the Muslim Brotherhood and democracy. Ayyash answers:

This is a very important point; the Muslim Brotherhood has a permanent stance in its call for promoting the freedom of expression. The Muslim Brotherhood may refuse some of the theses by intellectuals and academics, but they would never ban them from writing or publishing, especially since the Muslim Brotherhood understands well the effect of repression, being the most targeted opposition group.

The Muslim Brotherhood has united in solidarity with journalists who were referred to courts because of their opinions. They have also supported the arrested Bloggers and victims of free speech. including Kareem Amer.

Ayyash strongly advocates freedom of speech. To strengthen his case, he argues that the Muslim Brotherhood has even supported Kareem Amer. Kareem Amer is an Egyptian blogger and former law student from Alexandria. He was arrested by the Egyptian police because of the content of his blog, which was considered to be anti-religious and insulting to then President Hosni Mubarak.²³⁴ On February 22, 2007, Amer was sentenced to four years of imprisonment for defaming the president of Egypt and insulting Islam, but also for his 'atheism'. It was the first time that a blogger had been prosecuted in Egypt.²³⁵



Figure 19 Kareem Amer

The second point that Michael Topp asks more information about, foreign investment, is not covered by Ayyash. This is in line with the document itself – the concept of democracy seems to be defined as standing completely apart from the economy. Throughout the document the word 'economy' is mentioned just once, with reference to the demands the Brotherhood lay down one week after the coup in 1952. Sixth in their list of demands is 'economic reformation', without a word of explanation about what this 'economic reformation' should mean in practice.

To conclude, in this section we have seen how Ayyash tries to show that the Muslim Brotherhood and democracy go hand in hand. The official document he has posted on lkhwanophobia.com tries to show the same point, by using a lot of rhetoric about democracy and pointing out procedures to implement democracy in Egypt. However, the document does not really show how democracy will work in practice. The answers of Ayyash to questions of Michael Topp on the document show that where the latter sees contradictions between concepts, Ayyash believes that the concepts are in line with each other. I will come back to this in section 5.2. Finally, it is significant that the concept of democracy is seen as separate from the economic system. It does not become clear what type of economic system the Brotherhood has in mind, nor the amount of control the people will have over it, even when this is explicitly asked.

²³⁴ See for his blog karam903.blogspot.com.

²³⁵ As 'proof' of his atheism one of his blogs was used, titled 'There is no God except Human beings' – in Arabic لا إله إلا الإنسان. See: karam903.blogspot.com/2006/09/blog-post.html. See also: 'Egypt blogger jailed for "insult"', *BBC.com* (February 22, 2007). news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6385849.stm.

5.1.2. Ikhwanophobia.com on the position of women and Copts

There is a short reference to the position of women and Copts in the document 'Muslim Brotherhood and Democracy in Egypt'. There is only one paragraph on Copts, in which it is stated that the Brotherhood has redefined its position:

[T]he relationship between the residents of the same country is based on the concept of citizenship regardless of their religion, races, or ideology. This citizenship means complete equality in both rights and responsibilities before the law of the land with no violation to the rights of the minorities concerning their personal affairs.

Here, it is stated in very general terms that Christians are seen first of all as citizens. They have the same rights and responsibilities under the law, in a way that will not be harmful to their personal affairs. But how this is related to the earlier paragraphs in which Islam is seen as the basis for the state is not explained.

We can find more in the document about the proposed position of women within a democracy.

The complete equality between men and women in the political and civil freedoms with no violation to the Islamic Shari'ah. Women have the full right to receive an education, to work, to occupy public positions, to vote, and to be candidates in the parliamentary elections and all other constitutional institutions.

It is argued that there should exist a complete equality between man and women in political and civil liberties. It is stated that women have the right to education, employment and public positions. However, it is mentioned that these equal rights should be in accordance with sharia. The document on democracy refers to a paper about the position of women in an Islamic society, written in April 1994. This document is also posted on the website, under the category of 'Listen to the MB'.²³⁶ The post mentions that this is a translation of an official document of the Muslim Brotherhood. Not only in terms of length – the document is about 5000 words long – but also in content it differs greatly from most other articles.

The first 3500 words deal with the topic of 'the status of women as defined by Islam', which describes the role of women in society using citations from the Qur'an. The woman is defined as mother, sister, daughter and wife. The document emphasizes that men and women are equal before God, and that they have the same responsibilities regarding their own faith. It is also stated that there is nothing in the sharia about women being 'inherently evil or impure'. However, God gave men and women different characteristics and qualities, which makes them more suitable for different tasks and roles. The main task of a woman, therefore, is motherhood, which brings extra responsibilities:

The woman's nature as the mother means that there are certain virtues which Allah has made specific to her such as the protection of her honour and the honour of her offspring. For example, religious texts ordained that the woman's body, except for the face and the hands, should be covered in front of all except those who are a mahram (those she is forbidden to marry). And that a woman should not sit in private with a man who is not mahram.

Mahram are, as the text explains, people whom it is forbidden to marry, such as one's father, brother or son ('blood *mahrams*') but also one's father-in-law, son-in-law, stepfather and stepson ('in-law

²³⁶ Omar Mazin, 'The Role of Muslim Women in an Islamic Society', *Ikhwanophobia.com* (June 21, 2010). ikhwanophobia.com/2010/06/the-role-of-muslim-women-in-an-islamic-society/.

mahrims').²³⁷ The importance of the use of a *mahram* will soon become clear. The text continues by stating that motherhood is an important task that should not be underestimated. By taking care for her children, the human race will not go extinct. Also, the woman is 'the *lord* of the house and it is her task to care for the family and prepare the home as a place of comfort; her role is a huge responsibility and noble mission that must not be in any way neglected or underestimated.' The text continues by stating:

These characteristics, duties and rights which have been allocated to women by Allah are in balance with the duties she has towards her husband and her children. These duties must be given precedence over other responsibilities and they are necessary for the stability of the family which is the basic cell of the society and the cause for its cohesion, strength, and efficiency. However, the husband has a right to permit his wife to work. This right is to be regulated by an agreement between the husband and the wife. Such rights should not be regulated by law and the authorities should not interfere with them except in some rare cases.

The text makes very clear that the woman initially has the duty to be a mother and a wife. If a woman wants to work, this is considered secondary to these tasks. Still, the woman has a 'right' to work, as long as it is permitted by her husband.

After the first part, in which it is explained what the position of the woman is according to Islam, the text continues with the part on 'the woman's right to vote, be elected and occupy public and governmental posts'. With only 1000 words, this part is more compact than the first part. It starts with the right of electing members of representative councils. The answer is brief: 'We are of the view that there is nothing in Shari'a to prevent women from taking part in these matters', followed by two quotations taken from the Qur'an. On the second question, women's membership in representative councils and similar bodies, the article states: 'We are of the view that there is nothing in the Shari'a texts to prevent this either. The views we cited earlier concerning their right to vote applies to their right to be elected as well.' The article continues with four possible arguments against this proposition. First, it argues, some people say that 'women lack the knowledge of practicing public affairs'. These people are wrong:

This argument is refuted by the fact that an ignorant woman is like an ignorant man. Not all women are ignorant and not all men are educated or experienced in public affairs. We are dealing with the basic right, not with the conditions that must be present in every candidate whether they be male or female. This is quite another issue.

A distinction is made between having a right and the conditions under which this right can be used. The article goes on to say that the Muslim Brotherhood calls for education for both men and women, as this is an important goal required by sharia.

The second argument that people could use against the right of women to hold a position in representative councils according to the text is the fact that women menstruate and become pregnant, because this 'may hamper their performance'. The article states as a counterargument that 'men also may be subject to misjudgement [sic] or illness which may impair their performance'. Also, women holding these positions generally have reached a certain age:

²³⁷ See for example the article on Wikipedia, '*Mahram*'. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahram>.

In most cases, when a woman is around the age of forty, she will have completed her burdens of child-bearing, and would have attained to a phase of mental and psychological maturity, as well as emotional stability. It is unlikely that a person in the minimum age limit can gain a seat in the representative office because this requires long experience for many years in the exercise of public office.

With this formulation, the article is able to go along with the statement that being pregnant and menstruation could affect the performance of women, as well as arguing that women can be a part of representative councils. A possible third counterargument mentioned is the possibility of 'immodesty and intermingling'. The article states that the Muslim Brotherhood is not in favor of this, but sums up a list of possible practical solutions for this problem given by the sharia, such as 'abide by the Islamic dress code', 'set aside election centres [sic] for women' and 'women should be allocated special places in the representative councils so that there will be no fear of crowding of intermingling'. Again, the objections are refuted by relying on the sharia.

Finally, the fourth possible counterargument that is suggested, is that a woman might have to travel abroad when she is chosen as a member of a representative council. The article answers that she does not need to travel *alone*: a woman of course can bring her *mahram*: 'She need not be in a situation without secure company nor in any situation which is not within the boundaries of the Sharia.'

The last point that is covered by the article is whether a woman can hold a public office, including the presidency. On the latter, the article states: 'As for judiciary office, the jurists have differed over women's holding of it.' Different legal experts are cited, some arguing in favor of women becoming president, others prohibiting it. The text concludes by stating:

As long as the matter is the subject of interpretation and consideration, it is possible to choose from these opinions in accordance with the fundamentals of the Shari'a and to achieve the interests of Muslims at large as governed by the Shari'a controls and also in accordance to the conditions and circumstances of society. As for other types of public office the woman can accept them as there is nothing in the Shari'a to prevent her from doing so.

In short, since there are different interpretations possible, one may choose from the different legal opinions and choose what is in the interest of Muslims at large.

The text seems to offer quite some space for the right of – older – women to be part of political life. The authors try to show that the sharia is at the basis of their point of view and that one should follow the sharia at any time. At the same time, the underlying thought is that having a right does not mean that one should make use of that right. The duties of a woman are in the first place taking care of the household and having children. This becomes even more evident in the concluding paragraph, entitled 'general remark':

We, The Muslim Brotherhood, wish to draw attention to the need of distinguishing between a person's having a right and the way, the conditions, and the appropriate circumstances for the use of that right. Thus, if today's societies have different social circumstances and traditions it is acceptable that the exercise of these rights should be gradually introduced in order for the society to adjust to these circumstances. More importantly, such an exercise should not lead to the violation of ethical rules laid down by the Shari'a and made binding by it.

It seems that in this way, the text tries to placate people who advocate certain political rights for women as well as people who argue that women are not suitable for political functions. There re-

mains an internal contradiction between the rhetoric of certain rights and remaining faithful to a conservative interpretation of Islamic traditions. We can find this internal contradiction also with Ayyash himself.

The two documents analyzed above show how the Muslim Brotherhood is presented on the website as a democratic force. The attempt of combining democratic principles with a rather conservative interpretation of sharia proves to be riddled with contradictions. Whether we should take this commitment to democracy serious or not, the articles provide us with an insight into the way Ayyash presents an image of the Muslim Brotherhood to his intended Western audience. Although both texts were probably not written by Ayyash himself, he is the one who has chosen and republished these texts on his website. However, as argued in the Introduction, there are many tensions and uncertainties in the way in which Ayyash creates this image. His attempt to meet 'Western expectations' contains elements of translation, both in terms of what these 'Western expectations' are and in terms of the ways Ayyash chooses how to present the Muslim Brotherhood - emphasizing some aspects and pushing others into the background. A third set of tensions arises from the clash between these two images, both part of the process of making the website, and the off-line political realities under which Ayyash operates. As will become clear in the next section, the Muslim Brotherhood itself is internally divided, and the views defended by some fractions are more easily brought in line with dominant discourse among Western audiences than the views of other fractions.

5.2. Current debates within the Brotherhood on democracy

So far we have looked at the interpretation of the concept of democracy as expressed in two important official documents of the Muslim Brotherhood on the website *ikhwanophobia.com*. These documents were written in 1994 and – probably – in 2004, which would mean that both documents were written *before* the big victory of the Muslim Brotherhood during the elections of 2005. In that year the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 out of 444 seats in parliament – almost 20% of the seats. This new development has caused the Brotherhood to change its attitudes towards electoral politics and democracy. Critics increased their pressure on the organization. Vague ideas and political generalizations would no longer suffice. The Brotherhood had to respond to this changed situation.

Within the Brotherhood, there always existed an internal discussion whether to change society by means of electoral politics or by operating within society and 'Islamize it from within' – called *da'wa* or 'religious outreach', aimed at cultivating pious and committed Muslims through preaching and social services.²³⁸ In the time of al-Banna, there was an explicit disdain for party politics, but participation in electoral politics was not rejected in principle. The debate how much emphasis should be put on the electoral path, however, was usually taken over by reality, in which the Brotherhood was firmly suppressed by the Egyptian regime.

The Brotherhood participated in the parliamentary elections of 2005 through independent candidates. It was clear that the Brotherhood did not attempt to gain a majority within parliament – the

²³⁸ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, 'The Muslim Brotherhood After Mubarak. What the Brotherhood is and how it will shape the future', in *Foreign Affairs* (February 3, 2011). <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67348/carrie-rosefsky-wickham/the-muslim-brotherhood-after-mubarak#>

number of candidates was such that even if all had won during the elections, they would have controlled only one-third of the parliament. Their goal was to increase the voice of the Brotherhood in political debate, not to rule the country. But despite these precautions, the Brotherhood won 88 seats, 'and might have won a score more if there had been no official manipulation and intimidation'.²³⁹ Because of their unexpected large victory, the movement had to face the question whether they should form an official political party once again. Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy state that the Brotherhood seemed 'to have changed its objection to forming a party from the realm of principle to that of practice. When asked about their intentions on the question of forming a party, leaders refer only to the political and legal roadblocks, not their ideological hesitations.'²⁴⁰

Although their ideological objections seem to have diminished, their election victory brought the organization again in trouble with the regime. Its success demonstrated the political weight of the movement, as well as its status as the most important opposition actor in Egypt. This was considered a major threat by the regime of Mubarak, and they used different strategies to restrict the movement's freedom of maneuver once again. They began with renewed force to arrest and intimidate members of the Brotherhood. Several publishing houses belonging to the Brotherhood were closed, as well as its headquarters in Alexandria and its newspaper *Afaq Arabiyya*. The regime also started a media campaign against the Brotherhood, in which it was presented as a danger for society.²⁴¹

The second strategy used by the regime was to transform the political system, by introducing new laws and amendments that would harm the Brotherhood. First, the state of emergency, introduced at the time of Sadat's assassination, was extended, thereby extending police powers, suspending constitutional rights and legalizing censorship.²⁴² More importantly, the constitution was modified so that 'conducting any political activity or founding any political parties based on any religious reference or religious basis' became illegal in 2007.²⁴³ Moreover, it was also modified that individuals not associated with a political party could gain access to the ballot – the only other way members of the Brotherhood could gain votes in the parliamentary elections. The hope of establishing an official political party evaporated once again.²⁴⁴

Discussions which road to follow continued to come to the surface. In May 2007, for example, the influential moderate Islamist Muhammad Salim al-Awa called upon the Brotherhood to end its political activities and return to its *da'wa* activities such as education and social work. In this way, it could build an Islamic society from below. He argued that the time was not right for political work when the regime is this corrupt and repressive. But the leadership of the Brotherhood rejected these kinds of criticisms. They argued that political work was the best way to reform and insisted that the Brotherhood should try to be part of electoral politics wherever possible.

²³⁹ Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 16.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴¹ Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 51.

²⁴² Technically, the emergency law in Egypt was first enacted in 1958, as Law No. 162 of 1958 and has remained in effect since 1967, except for an 18-month break in 1980. The emergency was imposed during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and reimposed following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat.

²⁴³ Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy, 'The Draft Party Platform of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: Foray Into Political Integration or Retreat Into Old Positions?' *Carnegie Endowment Middle East Series* 89 (January 2008) 11. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/cp89_muslim_brothers_final.pdf.

²⁴⁴ *Idem.*

Internally, there were still doubts with respect to pursuing the political route, but the leadership of the Brotherhood chose the path of electoral politics. However, because of the confrontation with the regime after 2005, the organization was again forced into a defensive and reactive mode. This was contrary to the years before the elections, in which the Brotherhood was able to put pressure on the regime with their demands for democratic reforms. It was able to do this by forming alliances with different civil society organizations, as well as other opposition groups. But also within these alliances, the Brotherhood came under attack. The party was accused of 'cheap talk but little action'. Within broad coalitions such as *Kifaya* ('Enough') the Brotherhood participated in demonstrations and the like, but according to the other opposition groups it was too cautious: the Brotherhood did not want to risk everything in a confrontation with the regime. Another criticism was that, although the Brotherhood claimed to be in favor of political reform, it would only use it to establish an Islamic state. Their slogan *A civil state with an Islamic frame of reference* was not explicit enough to be reassuring for the other opposition forces.

Although it was not able to establish an official political party, the Brotherhood was challenged to elaborate its points of view because of their 88 seats in parliament and the growing criticism by other opposition parties. To reassure the broader public about its intentions, as well as to seize the initiative, the Brotherhood drafted a new party platform. Since establishing an official political party was clearly out of reach, the document does not function as an actual party platform, but more as a way to show what kind of party the Brotherhood would be if it would ever become a political party. The document is very long and detailed, and 'few observers doubt that the platform represents a substantial effort to address all the questions put to the movement by its supporters and critics in recent years.'²⁴⁵ But for all its specificity, it does not answer all the questions, and has sparked many new controversies. The document therefore provides an interesting glimpse of how the Brotherhood thinks and reacts to the different controversies – controversies we already encountered in the documents on democracy on the website *ikhwanophobia.com*.²⁴⁶

5.2.1. The Draft Party Platform

The Brotherhood has issued statements and even detailed party platforms before, but always with specific elections in mind. This time, however, its leadership drafted a more 'general' document, in which they try to work out some contradictions and 'grey zones' in their thinking. Questions that they tried to answer were for example how their support for the sharia will be translated into political practice, and what kind of political rights all Egyptian citizens would have – most importantly women and Copts. Both questions, however, proved to be more difficult to answer than those drafting the platform thought, and caused new controversies. Halfway through the year 2007, the authors sent the first draft of their party platform to a group of about fifty intellectuals and analysts. It was intended as the beginning of an intellectual discussion with people from outside the movement – the document was not finalized yet and remains in draft version until today. The document leaked to the press, which meant the beginning of heated debate. The two topics that evoked most uproar were

²⁴⁵ Brown and Hamzawy, 'Draft Party Platform', 2.

²⁴⁶ Since the document was written in Arabic, I will base myself mainly on the important paper by Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzawy, titled 'The Draft Party Platform of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: Foray Into Political Integration or Retreat Into Old Positions?' *Carnegie Endowment Middle East Series* 89 (January 2008).

exactly the relation between sharia and the authority of the people, and the position of women and Copts.

Throughout the document it is emphasized that the religious views of the Brotherhood correspond with democratic concepts such as civil society, the constitution and other legal concepts. But the document does so while remaining within the same parameters that we already encountered in the document on democracy on Ikhwanophobia.com. The Muslim Brotherhood states that the people are the highest authority *and* that the Quran and the Sunnah are 'the source of their edicts' at the same time. Critics pressured the Brotherhood to explain how this emphasis on sharia translates into their views on practical political and legal issues.

Until that moment, the Brotherhood managed to maintain a balance between its members who demanded a firm position on Islamic issues and the broader public. The Brotherhood explained before that in its view God's words should be the foundation on which Muslim are ruled. Muslims have the freedom to legislate laws that are not found in the Islamic tradition through *ijtihad* - legal innovation or independent judgment. With this position, the Brotherhood distinguishes itself from the more radical forces in Egypt, who see democracy as heresy: it puts the will of the people on par with the will of God. The Brotherhood explicitly rejects this view: 'Islamic law has given Muslims the freedom to innovate on its basis'.²⁴⁷ Compared to the more radical movements in Egypt, the Brotherhood seems to put a lot of effort into blending democracy with an Islamic worldview. In recent years the Brotherhood spoke increasingly about an 'Islamic frame of reference' (*marja'iyya*) and less about implementing sharia law, which reassured some critics as well.

With its use of rhetoric respecting the constitutional institutions and sees the people as the source of authority, the Brotherhood was moving more into the mainstream of Egyptian politics. At the same time, this move alienated supporters who demanded a firm stance on Islamic issues and the Brotherhood had to make a choice: either to stick to a general and vague approach, thereby trying to keep both groups of people happy – but still drawing criticism on their vagueness – or to use a more explicit and specified approach, taking away criticism but also entailing new risks.

The authors of the document still wanted to have both. In the document the emphasis lies on the compatibility between their religious agenda and the existing legal environment. But in one, small passage, they put a bomb under this compatibility: in just a few sentences, it is proposed to create a council of religious scholars. They would be elected by the full consent of religious scholars, and 'advise' the legislative and executive branches in matters of religious law. If this council would merely have an advisory role, it would not have been so controversial, but the passage also seems to suggest that

the new body might have the authority to comment on a wide variety of legislative and executive acts, and that its word would be binding – not merely advisory – on matters in which it felt the *shari'a* rule at stake was definitive and not subject to divergent interpretations.²⁴⁸

The implementation of a religious council that has the final word on legislative and executive power would entail a theocracy, and not a democracy: its opinion would be above the voice of the people.

²⁴⁷ Hafez, *Why Muslims rebel*, 55, 175. Quotation is taken from a document of the Muslim Brotherhood, titled *al-hujum ala rumouz wa qiyadat amal al-islam*.

²⁴⁸ Brown and Hamzawy, 'Draft Party Platform', 4.

The passage on the erection of a religious council seems to have been added at the last moment, and caused a storm of protest, not only outside the Brotherhood but also among its members. The proposal seems to be a concession to the 'apparent pressure from the movement's more ideologically committed foot soldiers that it not abandon *shari'a* behind anodyne formulas, as well as the insistence of some senior leaders to make *shari'a*-based rules a viable restriction on rulers.'²⁴⁹ Opponents of the proposal stated that it was an 'illegitimate privileging of some interpretations of *shari'a* over others', and emphasized that it was not an established position of the Brotherhood and that the position needed to be firmly discussed internally.

To conclude, it seems that the Brotherhood simply saw no contradiction between the two proposals. Again, it seems that the Brotherhood assumes that there exists no clash between the will of the people and the authority of the sharia. Instead of providing clarity on this point, the Brotherhood has caused much more controversy. Although leaders of the Brotherhood have emphasized that they will leave out this passage when the final version of the party platform is written, they will have to pay a heavy toll for their specificity: not only do people have the feeling they have seen the 'true' undemocratic face of the Brotherhood, the Brotherhood itself cannot fall back very easily on vague explanations and more general statements such as 'a civil state within an Islamic framework'.

The other heated debate the draft party platform generated was about the position of women and non-Muslims. The party platform clearly states that women and non-Muslims cannot hold senior positions within government. Some members of the Brotherhood stated that this is exactly the kind of issue in which the Muslim Brotherhood simply has to follow the sharia. Other members argued that the Brotherhood followed an old-fashioned interpretation of the sharia. In today's society, they argued, you should not apply the traditional explanation in such a mechanical way. Within a democracy a ruler does not hold all power, so someone's religion or gender will not have a lot of impact. After all, the ruler is heading a whole state apparatus, which entails clear procedures and legal constraints, so this old way of thinking does no longer make sense in a modern society. Some people argued there was also no need to exclude people from high positions by law: in a deeply religious society such as Egypt, with a majority of Muslims, the chance a non-Muslim would be chosen for a leading position would be very small anyway. Hamzawy and Brown write that:

Some went so far as to say that they were fully comfortable with the implications of their more liberal position by stating that they would prefer a qualified and righteous Christian or woman over many members of Egypt's current corrupt and autocratic governing elite.²⁵⁰

The issue caused quite a tumultuous discussion within the Brotherhood. Some members accused the more liberal members of violating clear sharia-based principles to have short-term political gains, an accusation that was perceived as severe.

5.2.2. Debates after the draft party platform: different movements within the Muslim Brotherhood

After the draft party platform was leaked to the press, heated debates arose within Egypt, not only outside the movement, but also inside the Muslim Brotherhood. The document was drafted and

²⁴⁹ Brown and Hamzawy, *Between Religion and Politics*, 20.

²⁵⁰ Brown and Hamzawy, 'Draft Party Platform', 5.

released at a time in which many moderate leaders were in prison, such as al-Shatir, al-Erian and others, which 'tipped the internal balance of power temporarily toward the conservatives. By some accounts, the rank and file of the MB were unenthusiastic about the earlier drafts, which struck them as too liberal, too political, and insufficiently religious.'²⁵¹ Because of the high level of details in the draft party platform, the leadership was more divided than ever.

Moreover, contrary to disagreements in the past, this debate was largely fought out in public. Traditionally, Muslim Brotherhood members are somewhat reluctant to show their internal differences to the outside world. This time, however, it was clear to the outside world that internal tensions had arisen. Several members have actively tried to seek the media in their attempts to find a stage for their protest, or for their defense of the party platform. Not only did members fight out their disagreements on television and in newspapers, some members even opened online discussion on matters related to the Brotherhood.

The two biggest controversies – on the position of women and Copts, and on the relation between the sharia and the power of the people – were discussed in public by different leading figures within the Brotherhood. For example, Mahmud Ghuzlan, member of the Guidance Bureau, accused the Muslim Brotherhood youth of breaking away from the roots of the Brotherhood and falling under the influence of 'liberal' ideas. Mahmud Ezzat, Secretary-General, said that people who did not agree with the point of view in the party platform on women, Copts and the council of religious scholars were against sharia law – a severe accusation. On the other side there was a group of Brothers, including Member of Parliament Gamal Hishmat and Essam al-Erian, one of the most prominent members of the middle generation and the official in charge of the political office, who argued that the Brotherhood should respect the Supreme Constitutional Court as the supreme legislative body. The Brotherhood should abide by the Egyptian constitution in which political equality is guaranteed – no exception can be made for the presidency. Hishmat even went so far as to state that the way the authors of the party platform dealt with different opinions within the Brotherhood was comparable with the wider oppression in Egyptian society by the regime.²⁵²

While the leaders were fighting over different point of views in the media, several younger members started to create blogs on which they expressed their own criticisms. In the spring of 2007 there were about 150 members with a personal blog – one year before there existed practically no single personal blog created by a Muslim Brotherhood member. When the party platform was leaked to the press in autumn 'the bloggers discussed the documents aggressively, parsing the details and openly debating the value of the initiative.'²⁵³ This was unprecedented, especially since the Brotherhood is always occupied with its public appearance.

One of the things that the discussions in the media made clear for the larger audience is that the Brotherhood is not monolithic but is made up of people with different points of view and ideas. But instead of creating an image of a movement that can be taken serious in its democratic aspirations, the Brotherhood created an image of a confused and divided movement, without clear ideas about its strategy. The ideological differences between the various currents within the movement became

²⁵¹ Marc Lynch, 'The Brotherhood's Dilemma', in *Crown Center for Middle East Studies Middle East Brief 25* (January 2008) 6.

²⁵² Brown and Hamzawy, 'Draft Party Platform', 8.

²⁵³ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', 9. Marc Lynch points out that when political disagreements surface in public between reformists and conservatives, the bloggers generally take the reformist's side.

more clear-cut, although it is still not easy to make a simple categorization – the different discussions and point of views intermingle and overlap. Carrie Wickham roughly distinguishes three groups:

1. **The 'da'wa faction'**

This group is characterized by Wickham as ideologically conservative. It is strongly represented in the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau and local branch offices. Because of its control over the socialization of new recruits it has mainly cultivated loyalty among – rural – youth.

2. **The 'pragmatic conservatives'**

The second faction that she distinguishes is the group's mainstream section. Wickham states that this group 'combines religious conservatism with a belief in the value of participation and engagement. Most of the Brotherhood's members with legislative experience, including such long-time parliamentarians as Saad al-Katatni and Muhammad Mursi, fall into this category.'²⁵⁴

3. **The 'reformers'**

The final faction is a group of reformers, who advocate a 'progressive interpretation of Islam'. They choose to stay within the Brotherhood and not break off. According to Wickham they are weakly represented in the Guidance Bureau and do not have a large following 'among the Brotherhood's rank and file'. 'Abd al-Mun'em Abu Futuh is one of the most important reformists and she describes him as 'an important model and source of inspiration for a new generation of Islamist democracy activists - inside and outside the Muslim Brotherhood.'²⁵⁵

Other Muslim Brotherhood experts also make a distinction in terms of conservative/reactionary and reformist, such as Brown, Hamzawy and Lynch. Moreover, they point out a struggle is going on between different generations – although many young members refine it by stating that the generations are not divided because of their age but because of their 'attitude towards public argument and new ideas'.²⁵⁶ In his article from 2009, 'The Young Brotherhood in Search of a New Path', Khalil al-Anani roughly distinguishes four generations. The first generation – sometimes called the 'Old Guard' – was mainly formed by their suppression during the years of Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s – many of its leaders were imprisoned. Most of the members who belong to this generation are now between sixty and eighty years old. Anani describes them as the most conservative members of the organization in terms of ideology, politics and religion. Also, he states:

Their primary objective is the movement's survival and the institutional preservation of the Brotherhood as a cohesive organization, and this makes them intellectually rigid and closed. Partly as a consequence of their historical experiences, this generation tends to put more weight on underground missionary work and other forms of ideological outreach rather than on political action.²⁵⁷

In general, they resist the more reformist ideas to transform the organization into an official political party. Examples of this generation are Mahdi Akef, Abdullah al-Khatib, Muhammad Habib and Mahmud Ezzat.

²⁵⁴ Wickham, 'The Muslim Brotherhood After Mubarak'.

²⁵⁵ Idem.

²⁵⁶ Lynch, 'Young Brothers in Cyberspace', 3.

²⁵⁷ Al-Anani, 'The Young Brotherhood in Search of a New Path'.

Anani describes the second generation as the 'pragmatists'. Members in this generation are now in their fifties, and have developed themselves during their membership in a freer climate during which President Sadat released many Brotherhood members from prison. 'They are pragmatic realists who engage in politics with a high degree of professionalism and skill, and they seek to integrate the Brotherhood into the nation's political life.' Important names from this generation are Essam al-Erian, Abd al-Moneim Abu al-Futuh, and Muhammad Saad al-Katatni.

The third generation somewhat looks like the first generation – Anani calls them the 'neo-traditionalists'. These members, now mostly in their forties, grew up during the Brotherhood's clashes with the regime of Mubarak during the 1990s and the military trials of some of its leaders in 1995. Like the oldest generation they are ideologically and religiously conservative, and they dominate the organization's various administrative bureaus and mid-level leadership positions in the provinces. They favor underground work and *da'wa* – political action is mostly seen as ineffective and undesirable.

Finally, the fourth generation exists of today's youth. Most of them are in their twenties and early thirties and come from urban areas such as Cairo, Alexandria and Mansoura. Anani describes them as

much more intellectually curious and open than the elder Brothers. This is partly due to the fact that this younger generation has not undergone the rigorous ideological indoctrination and organizational grooming that former generations of Brothers underwent, and also because the Brotherhood has tended to become more involved in political action than religious outreach over the last decade.

Abdelrahman Ayyash belongs to this last generation. When I asked him to tell me a bit more about the different generations within the Brotherhood, he gave almost the same division in generations as Anani. About his own generation, he told me:

And the fourth generation is us, the youth, those who were born in the 1980s, and they are very different, or most of them have very different views than the other generations. And they are very opposed to the generation close to us, they have very pragmatic and very applicable views for a lot of issues, and we really admire this eh... plurality within the Brotherhood.

These internal differences between the older generation and the younger members became even clearer during the popular uprising of January and February 2011. Since the beginning of the revolution on January 25th, the younger members of the Brotherhood were part of the protests. The leadership, however, stayed in the background. The Brotherhood's initial position was that its members were free to demonstrate as individuals but that the movement as a whole would have no role. However, after a few days the pressure from the younger generations on the leadership increased to such extent that the leadership decided to provide support for the protests.

This did not mean the tensions between the youth activists and the official leaders ended. To the members of the younger generation, who had fought with great intensity in the streets with the state police and the supporters of Mubarak, the meeting between Suleiman – director of the General Intelligence Service and famous for his role in torture – and their leaders under a large photograph of Mubarak was scandalous. At the same time, the meeting made clear that the different forces within the Brotherhood also have different interests. Not only are there differences between reformists and conservatives within the organization, the movement also consists of members with very different

social backgrounds. The Brotherhood comprises sections of the urban bourgeoisie, sections of the traditional and modern petty bourgeoisie – drawn from students and university graduates – and large sections of the poor – employed and unemployed. When society is undergoing a transformation on the scale that is occurring in Egypt today, it is not easy to unite the different and often conflicting social interests under one broad but vague message.

Now the Brotherhood has a real chance of taking part in a democratic system for the first time, the movement starts to come under serious centrifugal pressures. During the uprisings it already became clear that the leadership of the Brotherhood often has shared interests with the economic elites of the country. For example, although the revolution was strengthened by a wave of strikes, the Brotherhood leaders took the same position as the government and the Military Council by calling for a return to work ‘to save the Egyptian economy’ and opposing the strike movement. Among the younger activists, however, there were very different sentiments. Many of them were fighting for a total change of the system, and were not willing to settle for anything less.

The different shadings in political color that existed within the Brotherhood came to the fore when people started to establish political parties. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood operate within several political parties. The official party of the Muslim Brotherhood, called ‘Freedom and Justice Party’, is situated on the right of the political spectrum. The party is part of an Islamist Alliance, together with other Islamic parties, almost all established by members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Next to this alliance we see Islamic parties on both the left and the right side of this alliance.

Ayyash himself is an example of the way this political differentiation can affect previously active and loyal members of the Brotherhood. Already during the popular uprisings, Ayyash left the Brotherhood due to political differences. During the election campaigns at the end of 2011 he has campaigned for al-Tayyar, which he describes as a ‘young and revolutionary party, established by very smart intellectuals’.²⁵⁸ Most of the founding members are (former) members of the Brotherhood, but it is not in the Islamic alliance with the Brotherhood. Al-Tayyar is located at the left of the political spectrum and is part of an alliance with several revolutionary parties. It is interesting to see that Ayyash’s liberal attitudes have lead him to a leftwing alliance – a move that perhaps was already prefigured in the way Ayyash connected to a Western *counter discourse* that can be seen as progressive and politically left wing.

When I asked Ayyash about the internal differences within the Brotherhood, he answered that the Brotherhood is indeed very pluralistic. However, the fact that four generations can be distinguished inside the Brotherhood does not mean that every generation is characterized by just one opinion or point of view:

We have very different views within ourselves, the youth. For me, I am supporting the women and Copts to be president, for example. A lot of youth of the Muslim Brotherhood are opposing that. They are following the leadership ideology, the leadership thought. And that is banning the women and Copts of being president.

I think that the generations in the Brotherhood are very plural. We have a lot of generations in the Brotherhood, and we have also a lot of schools of thought. There are three main school of thoughts that are very different from each other. And to be honest, the website

²⁵⁸ Personal conversation on December 4, 2011.

[Ikhwanophobia.com] is saying that [it is showing] the real face of the Muslim Brotherhood, I am not talking about the school of thoughts of Sayyid Qutb, for example, and I don't want this school of thought to be dominating the Brotherhood ideology. Because this school of thought is not working at this time. I really want the school of thought of Hassan al-Banna to be dominating or to be ruling the Brotherhood, and truth... for the West to understand this ideology.²⁵⁹

Next to the generations, Ayyash distinguishes three 'schools of thought', with the earlier mentioned currents of Qutb and al-Banna as the two most important. During the interview, I asked him if he did not see a paradox here: on the one hand Ayyash sees that there are different views within the Brotherhood, different generations and different schools of thought, but on the other hand he wants to show 'the true face' of the Brotherhood. Ayyash answered:

This is not a big problem, because I think that the *real* school of thought is the thought of the founder, Hassan al-Banna. So... I am not lying when I'm saying that the Muslim Brotherhood is not opposing the... or when I'm saying that the main principles of the Brotherhood are democracy and justice and equality. Now the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood may oppose *some applications of these principles*. Like for the woman and Copts for example.

What I'm saying in the website, that is of course the Muslim Brotherhood is not one entity. The other thing is that the main principles or the main ideology, of Hassan al-Banna, should be the main ideology of the Brotherhood right now. So when I'm saying that the Muslim Brotherhood is against terrorism, of course I am not lying about that. This is true, and this is what the leadership thinks, and this is what Hassan al-Banna is saying. The second generation suffered a lot eh... oppression, and they had their own thoughts in prison, so we can't consider them as the *real* intellectuals of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the *real* leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yes, maybe, some of them [are] now in power, in the Muslim Brotherhood, but this (..) led for a long time and they will also develop their own thoughts about eh... these controversial issues, but just in freedom, just we will remember...

And you know? To be honest, when I am talking about to the Western... any Western researcher, or any journalist, I want to put him in front of the two sides.

This example shows how Ayyash translates the internal differences within the Muslim Brotherhood to one, 'real' image of the movement. Ayyash starts by stating that this is not really a problem. Ok, he seems to say, there are different schools of thought, but just one school of thought is the 'real' one, and that is the one of Hassan al-Banna. He emphasizes that all schools of thought have the same main principles, that of democracy, justice and equality. If this seems not to be the case, as for example in the example of women and Copts becoming president, it is caused by the different *application* of these principles. The reason some of the leaders of the Brotherhood are on the wrong path is because of their suffering in prison, 'so we can't consider them as the *real* intellectuals of the Muslim Brotherhood'. Ayyash concludes:

So... I think that the *real* grassroots of the Muslim Brotherhood is not following the extreme side of the Muslim Brotherhood, they are following the reformist side of them, so... I think that the majority will be on the reformist side of the Brotherhood. That.

In the eyes of Ayyash there seems to be no paradox: despite all the differences, only one school of thought represents the real one and this is the Muslim Brotherhood he wants to show to the West.

²⁵⁹ Personal interview with Ayyash.

5.3. Ayyash torn between his Islamic roots and Western expectations – the issue of defending ‘absolute values’

In the previous two sections we have seen how Ayyash deals with the concept of democracy on the website, and how this relates to the broader discussions within the Muslim Brotherhood. One of the things that stood out in the discussion between Ayyash and the commentator on the website was that where Topp saw a contradiction – it is not possible to have both the people as the highest authority within a democracy *and* see the sharia as the basis for everything – Ayyash seemed to argue that these two sides are not mutually exclusive. This is notably in line with the broader debate within the Brotherhood. But the difficulty to bridge the two became very apparent at one stage of the interview, which provides a good example of the way in which Ayyash struggles to reconcile both ends of the debate.

The example starts with a question asked during the interview. Under the section ‘Vision and Mission’, it reads: ‘The website welcomes and encourages unbiased and impartial participation in defending the absolute values of justice, freedom and human rights.’ Pointing to this sentence, I asked Ayyash what the concept of ‘absolute values’ means for him. Initially, he started his answer by stating that the website should defend other victims of discrimination apart from the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Palestinians, Afghans, Iraqis and Sikhs, victims from Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. However, this seems to leave open a lot of ambiguity, so I asked him again, explicitly: ‘What is an *absolute* value?’ Because Ayyash did not seem to understand the question, I asked him to reflect on the following case: ‘I know about an academic article in which a member of the Muslim Brotherhood said: “Yes I am for human rights, but for me as a Muslim, the rights of homosexuals are not human rights, but something that is invented by the West.”’ In this example, I told Ayyash, you can see that you can have different opinions about what is justice, what is human rights and what is freedom. So I asked him again: ‘What do you mean by the *absolute* values of justice, freedom and human rights?’ After a long pause, he answered:

Yeah... This is very important, you know. To redefine the absolute values. For me, here... (he sighs). This is a very important point. Because when I introduce myself as a liberal Islamist, this is the first question that I get: ‘What do you think of homosexuals, what do you think about lesbians?’ You know all these questions jump into the mind of anyone when I tell them I am a liberal Islamist. What do you mean by liberal Islamist? Yeah... (pauses).

But I, I, I will tell you something. I think that... (sighs) Yeah... I believe in personal freedom. And I... Personally, I am... of course I am opposing homosexuality and opposing a lot of things like that. But I can’t prevent someone who wants to do so, from doing so. And I also... but *to be honest* (sighs). I won’t defend him, but... (sighs). This is hard... A difficult question for me. Now let me think about that... [italics mine]

Ayyash has clear difficulties with the question. On the one hand he states that he believes in personal freedom. At the same time he states that he is *of course* against homosexuality. However, he does seem to have the feeling that this is not ‘right’, because he states that he *has to be honest* with me he will not defend homosexuality. He presents his answer as a confession to me, instead of something that he stands for wholeheartedly. Also, he states that it is an important topic, because it is the first thing people ask him when he calls himself a liberal Islamist. It seems that the reason why it is an important topic for him is not that it is a point of discussion within the Brotherhood or in Egyptian

society, but because he needs to formulate a reply to people from the West who ask his opinion about this topic.

Since it is clear that he has trouble with the question about homosexuality, I tried to offer him a way out by stating that we do not need to talk about homosexuality; I only used it as an example to talk about the definition of *absolute* values. Ayyash agrees and returns to the topic of absolute values:

Absolute values... I think that the absolute values are not different from any religion than the others. I think that the absolute values is under the moral values, you know. The moral values are very important also... so... I think that (sighs)... If homosexuality won't harm the other part of the society, of course this is ok with me. I don't... or I won't punish anyone because of being homosexual... of because of doing something I am refusing. Of course I won't oppose that and I won't punish him for that. But, *to be honest*, I think that I won't defend him also. Because this is not very... eh... I don't think that there is a great discrimination against them. Maybe I will say that it is ok for me to... eh... Yeah to let him do what he wants because I am not hurt by what he is doing at all. But on the other hand, I know that in our society... (sighs)... it is very important to... keep our morals and keep our... religious values too... but the absolute values... oh... [*italics mine*]

Again Ayyash struggled to find the right words and sighed a couple of times during his answer. Although he starts by explaining how he sees the concept of absolute values, he quickly returns to the topic of homosexuality. He argues he rejects homosexuality in principle, but he will not punish anyone for it. Also, he states that it is important to preserve moral and religious values. Here, it is tangible that Ayyash notices an internal conflict within his reply. Again he states that he *has to be honest* with me, which signals he has the feeling that he should confess something, as if he assumes that I require him to defend gays. Once stuck in his line of arguing and after finishing with a meaningful 'oh...', he starts to laugh and tells me:

You know, I talked with our website consultant for this, I talked with dr. Omazin about this. It is very important, yes, this is true. And I will make a response to you later about that, because it is very important for me to know it *principally*. Because I think that we have different definitions for the absolute values, yes. You are talking about justice and human rights, and I am also talking about justice and human rights, but I don't think that... eh...

Ayyash tells me that he will come back to this discussion, because he needs to think about it more. After this comment, he tries to downplay the importance of the discussion. We saw this already in the quotation above, in which he tries to get out of the discussion by stating that he will not defend gays, not because he accepts homosexuality but because he thinks '*there is no great discrimination against them*'. This statement is repeated in different words:

You know, I can tell you something, that our website... Of course, we are believing in the absolute values of human rights and justice, but our scoop of attention is eh... not containing these issues, or eh... the issues that are conferring with eh... the Islamic values or the religious values at all... and the moral. Whatever these morals are. Are this convenient for you? – Yeah... – Yeah I don't know. But anyway I will respond to you later insha'allah.

He argues that the authors of the website *of course* believe in *the absolute values* of human rights and justice, but simultaneously this is not the main focus of the website. Again, he states he will come back to this issue later, because he is unable to formulate a coherent answer.

To placate Ayyash, I bring up a lighter subject. However, after concentrating on side-issues for some time, Ayyash himself returns to the previous discussion. He tells me the story of a journalist from NBS News who interviewed an African president. The president was married with six women, and the journalist was asking about this. Ayyash tells me:

And when she asked him about that, he told her: 'It is not opposing our traditions, it is not opposing our religion. It is opposing yours. So you should redefine your values, not our values.' And that's it, you know. Every... every society, every community, every... maybe, country, *has their own values* and their own... eh... *absolute values*. So... as an Egyptian, or as a Middle Eastern or as a Muslim, I think that the absolute values of justice, human rights and freedom, that... (silence)... yani... For example, I am sure that a lot of people in the West are opposing homosexuality and they are opposing abortion. [italics mine]

Ayyash uses this example to say that every society, community and maybe country has their own values, something he then calls *absolute values*. Philosophically a *contradictio in terminis*: an *absolute value* is philosophically absolute and independent of individual and cultural views, as well as independent of whether the value is apprehended or not. If Ayyash states that every society and community can have their own values, he refers *by definition* to relative values.

When Ayyash tries to finish his sentence on relative absolute values, you can see that he gets stuck again. But then he comes back with a reverse argument, by stating that he knows for sure that enough people in the West are *also* against homosexuality – and abortion. He seems to want to defend himself by saying it is not a typical Islamic thing to be against homosexuality. After this statement he tells me he has read somewhere that the legal age for girls to marry in the Netherlands is fourteen years old, and asks me if this is true. I tell him this is not correct, to which he replies that he was amazed when he read it, because 'people always argue that Muslims marry children'. Also with this question he seems to say that the argument is only used against Muslims, while people in the West think exactly alike – an argumentation we have seen before on the website. After my assurance that fourteen year old girls cannot marry in the Netherlands, he finishes the conversation:

Yeah... ok for this. Anyway, I will talk with you after that about the absolute values, but in a political... You know (he laughs), *I am trying to reach it from a political point of view*, you know. But until now, what I believe in, that *every region in the world has their absolute values*. And I think that there is no difference between the absolute values, I am thinking about justice and freedom, from all over the world... But maybe the personal freedoms, and how... it will affect the whole society, maybe this will be a problem for some people. And here in Egypt, of course, we find a problem when you talk about homosexuals and about some controversial issues like that. But again, the different values are against our traditions and this also, Islamic values, so I think this will be very difficult, to take up that point, from a lot of aspects. But I am trying to respond to you in a very different way, insha'allah.

In this last quotation it becomes clearest why Ayyash has trouble answering the question. He argues that he tries to answer the question from a *political point of view* – but this is obviously clashing with his personal beliefs. When he tries to solve the problem of the absolute values for the last time, he argues that *every region in the world has their absolute values*. Again, the word absolute is defined as something shaped locally. At the same time, he argues one sentence later that there is no difference between the absolute values of justice and freedom *all over the world* – strikingly enough he has suddenly left out the concept of human rights. To offer himself a way out, he brings forward the concept of 'personal freedom', under which he seems to endorse homosexuality. In the end homosexu-

ality is described as something that goes against Islamic traditions and values, so it will be 'difficult to take up'. He concludes by saying – probably with the website in mind – that he will come back to this problem, but *in a very different way*.

The reason to elaborate on this example is not to show that Ayyash 'did not think through' his concept, but on the contrary, to show that he tries very hard to unite these concepts in such a way that he can at the same time accommodate my expectations as a Western researcher, his own ideas and identity as a 'liberal Islamist', and Islamic values and traditions. Of course this does not mean that Ayyash does not know what he is talking about or that he is somehow 'schizophrenic'. Although he says that he will have to think this through more thoroughly and wants to formulate a principled political response, for him there is not a real internal contradiction in his explanation. On the one hand, he wants to fight for absolute values, values like freedom and justice that he sees as universal. On the other hand, he recognizes that it is possible to have different interpretations of these concepts. Certainly in the example of human rights for gays, it is clear that he feels that different interpretations are possible.

Ayyash feels that he has to be positive about homosexuality if he wants to connect to what he sees as the expectations of the West – or at least of me as a researcher. At the same time he wants to *be honest* about his own rejection of homosexuality, and stay faithful to his Islamic norms and traditions, in which according to his opinion homosexuality is not accepted. In this example you can see that Ayyash employs the same strategy as on the website: he tries to meet 'Western expectations' as far as possible by presenting his opinions as a Muslim Brother in the most favorable terms possible. Together the quotes form a balancing act between his anticipation of my expectations as a Western researcher, his own ideas and identity as a 'liberal Islamist', and his Islamic values and traditions.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the endorsement of the terms of democracy and human rights, first on the website of Ikhwanophobia.com and second within the Muslim Brotherhood at large. The goal of this chapter is not to show if Ayyash – or the Muslim Brotherhood – 'really' believes in democracy, but to show the different discussions and internal contradictions in the way they adapt to democratic discourse. My contention is that, irrespective of the 'truth' of the arguments, the arguments themselves account for an aspect of their attempt to see Islamic texts and concepts in different, more 'modern' light.

The articles on the website show a major commitment to democracy in terms of rhetoric. Ayyash takes great care to show the Muslim Brotherhood is not a violent terrorist organization but wants to change society by political means. This dedication is also seen within the Brotherhood at large. At the same time it is clear that this use of modern political vocabularies by the Brotherhood has some serious limitations. It seems that democracy is acceptable, as long as it does not contradict with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. As was already concluded by Asef Bayat, the value of democratic principles seems to lay more in the procedures of government, not in expressing the will of the people to govern itself.²⁶⁰ Or, so it seems, it is strongly believed that Egyptians, as 'real good Muslims', will always

²⁶⁰ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 177.

follow the sharia so that no conflicts between democracy and a strict adherence to Islamic law will ever arise.

With the writing of the draft party platform, the Brotherhood increasingly appeared to be internally divided on key points relevant to the democracy question. Although in recent years a more pragmatic coalition exists within the Brotherhood's leadership, that argues for using electoral politics as a means to change society, it does not yet amount to a set of convictions fully internalized by the organization as a whole. As Marc Lynch writes on the debates following the party platform:

The controversies surrounding the MB over the last few years should be viewed as evidence of its own internal confusion as it struggles to grapple with a rapidly changing domestic and international political arena, as well as of the incompatibility between some of its deeply held ideas and more liberal conceptions of democracy.²⁶¹

The last example discussed in this chapter on 'absolute values' shows how Ayyash is struggling with a similar incompatibility between a deeply held Islamic idea and his more liberal conception of democracy. It is clear he is on the reformist side of the Brotherhood – for example he argues that women and Copts can become president. His website emphasizes his commitment to equality, freedom and human rights. But when I ask him about a specific interpretation of a possible freedom within a democracy – human rights for gays – we see he gets stuck, which makes him conclude eventually that 'every society has *their own* absolute values'. With this 'solution', he creates a space in which he can argue that he as a Muslim Brother stands for the same values as his Western audience, and at the same time can retain his loyalty to an organization opposed to these values on the basis of the possibility of different interpretations.

²⁶¹ Lynch, 'The Brotherhood's Dilemma', 3.

Conclusion

The post-revolutionary Muslim Brotherhood is facing unprecedented challenges. For the first time in its many decades of existence, the movement can join the corridors of power. Since the start of the revolution, the Brotherhood maneuvered itself through the popular uprising – on the one hand trying to keep Mubarak's old allies as friends, on the other keeping the demonstrators satisfied. However, during such transformative times, it proved difficult to unite the different and often conflicting social interests that the Brotherhood contains. Since Muslim Brotherhood members were banned from joining other parties than the now established party of the Muslim Brotherhood – the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) – many members cancelled their membership and joined one of the newly established political parties. One of them was Ayyash. Following the January 25 uprising, he felt the Muslim Brotherhood had 'failed the revolutionaries (...). The Muslim Brotherhood only participated in the mass protests 'symbolically', but did not throw its full force behind the demonstrations that called for bread, freedom and social justice.'²⁶²

The revolution raised many questions about the role that social media play in such transformative processes. My thesis is a case study of this intersection between online activism and offline political power relations. Although online Ayyash defended an image of the Muslim Brotherhood in line with the expectations of the West as he perceived them, living through the revolution let him to decide to focus completely on his offline activism. Although Ayyash is still active in the movement for democratic reforms and a continuation of Egypt's revolutionary process, he stopped updating the website *ikhwanophobia.com* in the summer of 2011. A couple of months later, he handed over the administration of the website to the Muslim Brotherhood. In almost the same form – including the name Omar Mazin – it now updates the website on a daily basis, showing the importance it attaches to the project.

The central question of this research was: How does the creator of *ikhwanophobia.com* cope with the tensions between reaching out to a primarily Western audience through the Internet, and maintaining his loyalty to the policies and identity of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood? To answer this question, I have first sketched the broader context against which the website should be viewed. I have shown that since its foundation in 1928 the Muslim Brotherhood has been in constant battle with the Egyptian regime. Especially since the military coup of 1952, the regime and the Brotherhood followed a cyclical pattern that usually began with an accommodation or an alliance, and ended with confrontation. The movement has responded to repression through constructing a broad and vague message that guaranteed wide social support, reflecting a decision to compromise ideological clarity for the sake of organizational existence. The Brotherhood nowadays represents a relatively mainstream Islamist organization, which has renounced violence and tries to change society through electoral politics and through *da'wa* – missionary work.

The power struggle between the regime and the Brotherhood also took place within the media. The Mubarak regime tried to suppress political dissent by dispersing demonstrations, harassing human rights activists, and detaining journalists and bloggers who criticized government policies and ex-

²⁶² Heba Fahmy, 'Former MB youth leaders slam nomination of Al-Shater, support Abol Fotoh', *Daily News Egypt* (April 6, 2012). <http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/egypt/former-mb-youth-leaders-slam-nomination-of-al-shater-support-abol-fotoh.html>

posed human rights violations. It also tried to deny the Brotherhood a voice in the public debate, by closing down its publishing houses and websites. However, the internet made it easier for the Brotherhood to present its own views to the public. Although bloggers were still frequently arrested in pre-revolutionary Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood managed to reach a broader audience by presenting itself on different websites and blogs created by Muslim Brotherhood members.

Against this background, Ayyash created his website. In Chapter 3 and 4, I have looked at the main self-descriptions and debates that he employed on the website *ikhwanophobia.com*, as well as the kinds of communication strategies that Ayyash used to present himself, the website and the Muslim Brotherhood to a wider audience. I argue that on the website the Muslim Brotherhood is mainly described as a *moderate* party that teaches *moderate Islam*. Ayyash positions the movement as opposed to more extremist parties and groups like al-Qaeda, by repeating descriptions about how the party renounces violence, only uses words as its weapons, how it strives for peaceful political reform by legal means and nonviolent methods and how it is in the forefront of those who respect human rights. The other terms frequently used in self-descriptions of the organization are 'honest', 'clear', and 'not ambiguous'. These seem to be directed against the accusation that the group has not clarified itself on many political points, or has in the past repeatedly changed its points of view.

These self descriptions are related to the main debates Ayyash chose to engage in. In the section 'Listen to the MB' five topics are central: 'Violence, terrorism and extremism', 'Democracy', 'The relation with "The West" and/or Christians', 'The relation with the Egyptian state' and 'Islamophobia & the role of the media'. In the other section, the category 'Commentaries', Ayyash employs both defensive and offensive strategies to respond to criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Western media. Among the articles that can be described as defensive, three arguments play a central role:

- The Muslim Brotherhood has no anti-Western agenda
- The Muslim Brotherhood is not involved in terrorism, but works within the legal system using democratic means
- The Muslim Brotherhood is not against Christians or Jews

The articles that can be characterized as using an offensive strategy mainly concentrate on examples of Islamophobia and racism within American society. These articles focus on how double standards are used when dealing with Muslims and Christians. Facing stereotypes that portray Islam as a danger to American society, Ayyash frequently turns around the argument, stating that Muslims are not the real danger to democracy or an open society, but particular groups of Christians or Americans who create a climate of hate in which Muslims are oppressed. By emphasizing their extremist character Ayyash can show himself to be the moderate. As a Muslim Brother, he argues, he stands for the same principles as people like President Obama and Condoleezza Rice, embracing the values like justice, equality, tolerance and peace they allegedly share – placing Muslims on the same side as the American administration. Ayyash calls upon *moderate Americans* to come in action to return America to its 'glorious principles' of justice, tolerance and equality – assuming that America once upheld these principles but has lost them somewhere along the way.

Ayyash consciously employed a number of communication strategies to convey its messages. First of all, the website is directed at a Western audience: apart from the fairly obvious strategy of using the English language, Ayyash states that the website should not feel 'too Arab' or too emotional, but is intended to look professional, with evidence, 'real and serious'. Moreover, his choice of subjects is

geared towards diffusing prejudices on issues that Ayyash thinks are most controversial with a Western audience. Finally, he makes extensive use of 'neutral' voices in the debate, to show that he is not alone – people in the West, outside the Muslim Brotherhood, affirm his description of the organization, so they must be true. It is striking that most of these people have a left-wing or liberal background, including Noam Chomsky, Robert Fisk, Jon Stewart and Juan Cole. The people that Ayyash chose to criticize, however, are mainly coming from rightwing and conservative circles. Although Ayyash claims to use neutral voices in his defense of – his vision of – the Muslim Brotherhood, he connects to a discourse that in the West will be seen as 'counter discourse' as well. Partly using online methods for off-line goals, Ayyash aims to build up a network of journalists and academics – including those whose articles he has reposted – in order to come into contact with people who are better able to influence public debate or policy making.

In Chapter 5, I have focused on one topic that is of particular importance: the concept of democracy. On the website Ayyash argued that democracy is one of the main characteristics of the Brotherhood. However, the two documents on the website in which the commitment of the Brotherhood towards democracy is explained, show there are some stark internal contradictions in their thinking on this subject. The most important of these is the question what is the supreme source of authority within a democracy: the people, or the sharia. Ayyash seems to imply on the website that both go together: the sharia lies at the heart of the lives of Muslims, and they will make their choices within a democracy on this basis, hereby discarding the possibility that the people would democratically choose to organize society in whole or in part on a purely secular basis.

I have set the contradictions within the two documents against the background of the ongoing discussions within the Brotherhood in recent years. The possibility of having very different interpretations of the sharia, even within the Brotherhood itself, became apparent by the widespread discussions caused by the Draft Party Platform of 2007. Great internal differences came to the fore on such crucial themes as the position of women and non-Muslims within the state. More conservative figures within the Brotherhood argued that this is a typical example in which the sharia is quite clear: the head of state should be a man. Other, more reformist figures argued that modern institutions make it possible to allow for a woman or a non-Muslim to become president. These controversies raged in full force in the media, making it clear to a larger audience that the Muslim Brotherhood consists of different movements and ideas. Furthermore, the differences within the leadership of the Brotherhood were also increased by these debates. Although the organization never was monolithic, due to the detailed discussions on the draft party platform the differences between party leaders became more pronounced.

Despite the exposure of internal differences in the Egyptian media, Ayyash decided to create an ideal image of the Muslim Brotherhood in which the internal differences have been brushed away as much as possible. Since the focus of the website is mainly on the defense of the Muslim Brotherhood and the dispelling of prejudices, Ayyash created a kind of 'counter-image' of the organization. Ayyash tried to bring this image in line with what he thinks people in the West would like to hear. However, sometimes internal conflicts arose between these two images. In this thesis we have seen several examples of such tensions, of which the last theme discussed in Chapter 5 is perhaps the best example. On the website, Ayyash wants to show that he is fighting for the same 'absolute values' as other activists in the world, such as freedom, democracy, equality, and human rights. But when I asked him how he sees these values as *absolute* values – concretized in the example of human rights for gays –

Ayyash began a balancing act between his anticipation of my expectations as a Western researcher, his own ideas and identity as a 'liberal Islamist', and his Islamic values and traditions. Ayyash clearly felt that he had to be positive about homosexuality in order to connect to the perceived expectations of the West. At the same time he wanted to *be honest* about his own rejection of homosexuality, and stay faithful to his Islamic norms and traditions, in which according to his opinion homosexuality is not accepted. In this example Ayyash employed the same strategy as on the website: he tried to meet 'Western expectations' as far as possible by presenting his opinions as a Muslim Brother in the most favorable terms possible.

The tensions that arose between both poles were pushed into the background by the revolution. Ayyash has changed his form of activism: instead of trying to oppose the prevailing definitions of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West from an oppressed position, he stopped updating his website, resigned from the Brotherhood and now focuses on forms of activism that are much more directly aimed at changing his local surroundings. This example underscores my argument that the political trajectory of which the making of the website Ikhwanophobia.com was part cannot be properly understood by only focusing on the linguistics of available texts. My research question could not have been answered without ethnographic methods – notably through the intensive interviewing of Ayyash, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of him as a person. The research question could also not have been answered without taking into consideration the ways in which political realities shaped the content of the website. The contexts of the specific time and space, seen from the perspective of a globalizing world, were essential here.

In the introduction, I raised the question to what extent social media were essential for the Egyptian revolution. In the end, I argue that Facebook and YouTube are just tools - and tools alone cannot bring about the changes the world has witnessed in the turbulent year of 2011. Besides many other important lessons that the Egyptian revolution has taught us, it showed the limitations of social media – after all, the internet as well as telephone lines were completely shut down during the first week of the popular uprising – and the possible force of demonstrating. During our interview on March 25, 2011, I asked Ayyash what the revolution would mean for the goals of the website. He answered: 'After the revolution, all these misconceptions should be refuted by the Muslim Brotherhood themselves, in action!'

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Overview of the different images used in this thesis:

- Front page: Photo of Tahrir Square, which states in Arabic 'We are the men of Facebook'
http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/j/MSNBC/Components/Photo/_new/pb-110206-facebook-shulman.photoblog900.jpg
- Figure 1: Photo of Alexandria after the bombardment and fire of 11–13 July, 1882
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/c/c7/Alexandria_after_bombardment.jpg
- Figure 2: British soldiers with their desert helmets line up for inspection in Cairo, 1911
<http://www.theegyptianchronicles.com/History/BritishOccupation02.jpg>
- Figure 3: Hassan al-Banna
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/41/Hasan_El-Benna_.jpg
- Figure 4: Sayyid Qutb from behind bars
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/9/9e/Sayyid_Qutb.jpg
- Figure 5: Hassan al-Hudaybi
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1a/Hassan_El-Hodabi.jpg
- Figure 6: Fire in the Muslim Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo, October 1954
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gallery/2011/feb/08/egypt-muslim-brotherhood-in-pictures>
- Figure 7: Muslim Brotherhood deputies, April 2006, wearing black sashes
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gallery/2011/feb/08/egypt-muslim-brotherhood-in-pictures>
- Figure 8: Police surround Muslim Brotherhood protesters outside the *al-Fateh* mosque, 2005
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gallery/2011/feb/08/egypt-muslim-brotherhood-in-pictures>
- Figure 9: Women on strike in the textile factory of Mahalla, 2007
The Solidarity Center, *Justice for All. The Struggle for Workers Rights in Egypt. A Report by the Solidarity Center* (2010) 37. http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/pubs_egypt_wr.pdf
- Figure 10: The front page of Ikhwanbook
<http://www.ikhwanbook.com/>
- Figure 11: Khayrat al-Shatir during his trial
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/elhamalawy/401251778/in/photostream#/photos/elhamalawy/401251778/in/photostream/lightbox/>

- Figure 12: Homepage of Ikhwanophobia.com, November 8, 2010
<http://ikhwanophobia.com/>
- Figure 13: Different ways to inform the audience about the updates of the website
<http://ikhwanophobia.com/>
- Figure 14: The translator
<http://ikhwanophobia.com/>
- Figure 15: Four menus with which you can sort the articles, December 16, 2010
<http://ikhwanophobia.com/>
- Figure 16: Jon Stewart in *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*
<http://ikhwanophobia.com/>
- Figure 17: The famous pictures of Khaled Said, before and after his torture by the police
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Khaled_Mohamed_Saeed.jpg and
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Khalid-Saeed.jpg>
- Figure 18: Picture of the taxi-driver who was stabbed for being Muslim
http://ikhwanophobia.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Cab_Driver_Stabbed.jpeg
- Figure 19: Kareem Amer
<http://www.freekareem.org/gallery/>
- Figure 20: Map of Egyptian political parties, November 12, 2011
<http://www.arabist.net/storage/uploads/Map%20of%20EG%20Political%20Parties%2012.11.2011.pdf>

Appendix a. Schedule for the interview with Abdelrahman Ayyash on March 25, 2011

I will start the interview with thanking Abdelrahman Ayyash for the opportunity to interview him. Then I will ask him and explain to him the following points:

- The **goal** of the interview: I am researching the first six months of the website Ikhwanophobia. Therefore I will have to try to minimize the influence of the uprisings on my research. I chose this website, because it is an interesting and innovative way to deal with stereotypes. I am interested in the views and opinion of Omar Mazin/Abdelrahman Ayyash on the website, being the chief web editor. Also, I hope he will be able to give me some more information about the website.
- **Revenues:** the results of the interview will serve my master thesis, which will be completed end 2011. Also, I will write an article about the website for an international congress in Cairo in November, 2011.
- **Expenses:** the interview will take between 1,5 and 2 hours. I will record the interview, so that I will be able to listen to it afterwards and stay as close as possible to his own words. After the completion of my thesis, the recordings will be destroyed. Also, I need to talk about being anonymous: does he want to be mentioned in the article and thesis? If so, under what name?
- **Tasks:** I will ask the questions that he can answer. I will hold the following structure:
 - Ask about Omar Mazin/Abdelrahman Ayyash
 - Ask about the goals of the website
 - Ask about the practical features of the website
 - Ask about the broader relation with the Muslim Brotherhood
 - Ask about the intrinsic features of the website
 - Ask about his view of the future.
- Ask if he has any questions before we start with the interview

About Omar Mazin/Abdelrahman Ayyash

- Can you tell me a bit more about yourself (social background, school, job)?
- What is your position within the Muslim Brotherhood?

Goals

- Why did you decide to make this website?
- Why did you decide to make the website now?
- What are the main goals of the website?
- If ... is your goal, what do you think are the best ways to achieve this goal? How do you do this on the website?
- Do you use other means to achieve this goal?

About the website – practical side

- Who is writing the articles for the website? (On the website is stated: 'It is run by a group of academic intellectuals who believed they should act positively and effectively in response to accusations and allegations that face the Muslim Brotherhood.')
- Who decides what articles will be placed?
- What are the conditions that an article must meet, before it is posted on the website?
- Audience: do you have numbers and background information about the visitors and the countries that they are from, the traffic, etc?

About the website –relation with the Muslim Brotherhood

- How did people from the Muslim Brotherhood respond to your website?
- On the website, the articles sometimes refer to different generations of Muslim brotherhood members. Can you tell me a bit more about this?
 - To which generation do you consider yourself?

About the website – content (initial research questions)

- Who is your intended audience?
- Why did you choose to address this audience in particular?
- With what communication strategies do you try to reach this audience?
- Did you use different strategies to address this audience in particular?
- How would you describe the Muslim Brotherhood yourself?
- What are the main debates that you would like to criticize?
 - How do you see ...?
 - How do you see...?
- On the website you state that 'The website welcomes and encourages unbiased and impartial participation in defending the absolute values of justice, freedom and human rights.' What do you mean by this?
- The website is divided in six parts:
 - Listen to the Muslim Brotherhood (10)
 - Ikhwanophobia Watch (15)
 - The Neutrals (93)
 - Islamophobia (54)
 - Meet the Smearcasters (27)
 - Under Siege (46)Can you tell me something about this division? Why did you choose for these six categories?
- The category neutrals is the biggest category with 93 articles, then Islamophobia with 54 articles. The two categories on the Muslim Brotherhood are the smallest (10 and 15). Can you explain this difference in size of the categories?

- In the part of Listen to the MB, you write about the testimony that was issued in 1994. You posted a part of this testimony, on Muslim Brotherhood Stance on Violence and Terrorism, Muslim Brotherhood and Human Rights and Muslim Brotherhood and Political Pluralism. Why these three?
 - Do you have the complete testimony for me, in digital form?

Future

- How long are you planning to work with this website?
- What do you want to achieve with the website? When have you achieved your goal with this website?
- Do you think the revolution in Egypt will change something for your website?

Finishing up

- Did you expect questions that I didn't ask? Which ones?
- Do you want to add something to the interview?
- Do you have any more questions?
- Thank him for the interview
- Informal: ask about his twitter name: why did he choose for Chomsky?

Appendix b. Overview of the articles in the section 'Listen to the MB' and 'Commentary'

In this appendix, you can find the overview of the website articles in the sections 'Listen to the MB' and 'Commentary'. The articles are organized by date, with the first article being the article that first appeared on the website. For every article, the main topic is described, as well as the original source. Also, I have analyzed if the article contains contributions of Muslim Brotherhood members, as well as to what extent the article deals with the topic of 'Muslim Brotherhood' or with Muslims in general. By analyzing the original source, I have added the different ways of responding to the parts which originate from outside the Muslim Brotherhood, thereby differentiating between:

- Commentary: substantive response on quotes from the article
- Reaction: substantive response to the article in general
- Statement: statement of political position without referring to a specific article
- Endorsement/concurrence: agreement with someone else's statement, plus extra remarks
- Reprint: the article on the website is only a reprinted article from another source, without any reaction or comment

Overview of the articles in 'Listen to the MB'

	Date	Title of article on the website	Main topic of the article	Original source	Own contribution?	Muslims or MB?
1	June 19, 2010	Brotherhood to Egypt: Don't squeeze out moderates	If you 'squeeze Egypt's biggest opposition group out of politics', it would 'leave a gap for militants to fill and could lead to sporadic violence'.	Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com , but written by journalists from Reuters	No	Muslim Brotherhood
2	June 21, 2010	The role of Muslim Women in an Islamic Society	Clarification of the standpoints of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding 'women's right to vote, be elected, occupy public and governmental posts and work in general'.	Official document of the Muslim Brotherhood. Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com	No, but written by MB	Muslim Brotherhood
3	June 21, 2010	Muslim Brotherhood and Democracy in Egypt	Clarification of the standpoints of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding 'the future of democracy in Egypt'	Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com	No, but written by MB	Muslim Brotherhood
4	July 4, 2010	Ikhwanweb Archive: Truth about the Global Muslim Brotherhood	The Muslim Brotherhood does not have any representation in the US. The only connection is that these organizations and ideologies 'represent mainstream moderate Islamic thinking'.	Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com , written by Khaled Salam	No, but written by MB	Muslim Brotherhood
5	July 16, 2010	Commentary: Muslim Brotherhood and Democracy	Reaction on three questions of a visitor's comment on the website: 1. On party plurality, 2. On the role of the religious sources, 3. On democracy vs. theocracy, 4. On free press and foreign investment	Commentary of Ayyash on the comment of Michael Topp following the third article in 'Listen to the MB'	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood

6	Aug. 18, 2010	Media: BBC Documentary ²⁶³ ; the Brotherhood ep. 1	Documentary on 'whether we should be worried about the group's intentions', in which several people are interviewed about the Muslim Brotherhood – members of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also public figures and political analysts.	Republished article of www.bbc.com , together with the link to their documentary	No	Muslim Brotherhood
7	Aug. 24, 2010	Our Testimony, issued in 1994; in 2010, still true to our word.	Clarification of the standpoints of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding 1. Violence and terrorism, 2. Human rights, 3. Political pluralism	Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com	No, but written by MB	Muslim Brotherhood
8	Sept. 8, 2010	BBC On Ikhwanophobia.com: MB is Fighting Back	Article of the BBC on the website Ikhwanophobia.com	Republished article of www.bbc.com	No	Muslim Brotherhood
9	Sept. 8, 2010	MB: Burning Quran will increase anti-Americanism in the Muslim World	Statement of Essam al-Erian, the media spokesperson of the Muslim Brotherhood, regarding the 'Burn the Quran Day'. He predicts it will increase the hate of Muslims for the United States.	Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com	No, but written by MB	Muslim Brotherhood
10	Nov. 3, 2010	Muslim Brotherhood calls for protection of churches	Muslim Brotherhood urges the Egyptian state to protect Christian places of worship, after the threats of an al-Qaeda group towards Egypt's Coptic church	'By AFP', republished article of www.thedailynewsegypt.com	No	Muslim Brotherhood
11	Dec. 29, 2010	Meet Radical Islam's Tech Guru	Interview with the director of the MB's Internet committee. The article's base line: 'The Muslim Brotherhood's web geeks are transforming Egypt's Islamist group from a shadowy organization with power bases in mosques and charities to a media-savvy machine.'	Republished article of www.thedailybeast.com	No	Muslim Brotherhood
12	Febr. 21, 2011	Why is it impossible to call it "Islamic"?	The popular uprisings were started by the Egyptian youth. The 'traditional' opposition followed later. The Muslim Brotherhood is not dominating the protests.	Abdelrahman Ayyash	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
13	Febr. 25, 2011	PBS FRONTLINE: Revolution In Cairo, The Brotherhood	Documentary on the April 6 youth movement and on the Muslim Brotherhood during the revolution	Republished article of www.pbs.org , together with the link to their documentary	No	Muslim Brotherhood
14	May 3, 2011	Fighting terrorism requires more than just killing Bin Laden	The death of Osama bin Laden will not put an end to terror and violence if the real reasons are not addressed. The US must end its occupation of Afghanistan and withdraw from Iraq now they have captured Bin Laden, their 'main goal'.	Republished article of www.ikhwanweb.com	No, but written by MB	Muslims

²⁶³ Misspelling in original.

Overview of the articles in 'Commentary'

	Date	Title of article on the website	Main topic of the commentary	Original source	Own contribution?	Muslims or MB?
1	June 23, 2010	Commentary: Reading list ties sponsor of proposed large Tennessee Islamic facility to global MB	There is no worldwide Muslim Brotherhood organization. The distortion of facts is an unjust violation of human rights.	Reaction on article of ABC News	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
2	July 04, 2010	Ikhwanweb archive: truth about the global Muslim Brotherhood	Same article as article 4 in the 'Listen to the MB' section.	-	-	-
3	July 16, 2010	Commentary: Muslim Brotherhood and democracy	Same article as article 5 in the 'Listen to the MB' section.	-	-	-
4	July 22, 2010	Anti-Semitism!! Seriously?	The Muslim Brotherhood is not anti-Semitic. Also, it has no relations with Hamas.	Statement with use of article of Steven Brooke and Robert S. Leiken	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
5	July 28, 2010	Robert Spencer supports dictatorship in Egypt!	The Muslim Brotherhood is moderate and condemns violence. By ignoring the causes of extremism, more groups like al-Qaeda will emerge.	Commentary on Robert Spencer	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
6	Aug. 1, 2010	Wahabi Imam to burn the Bible in Cairo!	The acceptance of 'Burn the Quran Day' shows the hypocrisy and hate of some American Christians.	Hypothetical news article / statement	Yes	Muslims
7	Aug. 13, 2010	Commentary: Is Islam's problem a lack of Modernity?	The moderate Muslim Brotherhood is not the same as terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and resistance movements like Hamas.	Commentary on article of Daniel Greenfield	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
8	Aug. 15, 2010	Arnold Friedman – ADL's mosque stand flawed	ADL's standpoint on the 'Ground Zero Mosque' is wrong: Muslims too died at Ground Zero. Muslims, Christians and Jews should stand together against racism.	Endorsement of the statement by Arnold Friedman	Yes (but only two sentences)	Muslims
9	Aug. 15, 2010	Gingrich, Bolton, Breitbart team up with far-right Muslim basher Geert Wilders for 9/11 rally	Moderate Americans should react to the 'neo-fascists' who want to intimidate Muslims with their rally at 9/11.	Commentary on news article from thinkprogress.org.	Yes	Muslims
10	Aug. 17, 2010	Neo-Fascism and mosques!	American people should stand behind their 'moderate' leaders and protect the right of having a place to worship like Cordoba.	Commentary on article of Bryan Fischer	Yes	Muslims & Muslim Brotherhood
11	Aug. 17, 2010	Alienating Muslims and calling it conservatism... great.	The article on hotair.com argues that Fischer is wrong in arguing that <i>all</i> mosques are under the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood and <i>all</i> Muslims are ruled by a 'subversive ideology'. Ayyash adds that the MB doesn't have an anti-Western agenda.	Endorsement of commentary on hotair.com on the article of Bryan Fisher	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
12	Aug. 19, 2010	CBS: Howard Dean: NYC Mosque a "real affront"	Howard Dean contradicts itself by saying that Ground Zero belongs to all Americans and all faiths and at the same time refused the building of the	Reaction on CBS article about the position of conservatives	Yes	Muslims

			Islamic community two blocks away from the site.	Howard Dean and Ted Olson		
13	Aug. 23, 2010	What's so bad about being Muslim?	Article questions Obama's statement that he is 'not a Muslim' by wondering why calling someone a Muslim constitutes a smear.	Republishing of article by Shadi Hamid	Yes (but only one sentence)	Muslims
14	Aug. 24, 2010	Commentary: The real debate is among Muslims	Reaction on the statement that 'the debate is among Muslims' by replying that Muslims always have debated, but that they expect the Americans to show a larger amount of understanding	Commentary on article of Peter Skerry	Yes	Muslims & Muslim Brotherhood
15	Aug. 26, 2010	Pamela, Robert.. Congrats!!	The hate and racism towards Muslims is growing. Pamela Gellar and Robert Spencer are contributing to this hate. Therefore, they are responsible for the hate crimes.	Reaction on the news of two hate crimes against Muslims	Yes	Muslims
16	Aug. 31, 2010	Terry Jones, Dove world outreach center pastor, defends Quran burning on 'Hardball' (video)	The burning of ideas will not lead to anything but more provocation towards Muslims	Reaction on the video with Terry Jones	Yes	Muslims
17	Sept. 03, 2010	'Anti-Islamic' bus ads appear in major cities	The advertisements on busses by Pamela Geller are used as 'the start of hate crimes and bigotry aggressive actions', to call for Americans to stop the 'anti-American actions'.	Republished article of the website of 'The Christian Science Monitor'	Yes	Muslims
18	Sept. 10, 2010	Commentary: Building mosque vs Burning Quran	Reaction on the news that pastor Jones made a deal with imam Rauf, saying that one is preaching hate while the other is preaching peace	Commentary on news article on the website of 'NY Daily News'	Yes	Muslims
19	Sept. 22, 2010	Spencer, anti-America again!	Robert Spencer tries to link the Muslim Brotherhood to several terrorist attacks. His lying is a threat to civil peace in the US.	Commentary on an article of Robert Spencer	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
20	Sept. 25, 2010	My name is Dr. Terry Jones.. Help me to fight Islam	While Terry Jones first said not to fight against moderate Muslims, he now stated that he needs money in order to 'continue the fight that we have started against Islam'. American people should stop his racism.	Reaction on email message of Terry Jones	Yes	Muslims
21	Sept. 30, 2010	Emerson's paranoid approach toward the Muslim Brotherhood	It is wrong of Emerson to link the American organizations like ISNA and CAIR to the Muslim Brotherhood, which in his words has created Osama bin Laden	Commentary on article of Steven Emerson	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood
22	Oct. 08, 2010	Sharron Angle warns that Muslims have taken over American cities	Angle seems to say that sharia law has taken over in two American cities. It's the role of the people of Nevada to act against this bigotry.	Endorsement of article of Alex Pareene on www.salon.com	Yes	Muslims
23	Febr. 25, 2011	PBS Frontline: Revolution in Cairo, the Brotherhood	Same article as article ... in the 'Listen to the MB' section.	-	-	-
24	March 26, 2011	Spencer's radicalized mosque claim gets debunked	No comment is made. The article is about Spencers claim that 80% of American mosques are radicalized	Republished article from LoonWatch	No	Muslims
25	May 02, 2011	Commentary: Senator Lindsey Graham on the Muslim Brotherhood	Senator Lindsey Graham seems ignorant about the political life in Egypt. Instead of 'listen about' the Muslim Brotherhood, Graham should 'listen to' them	Reaction on YouTube video of senator Lindsey Graham	Yes	Muslim Brotherhood