

Chapter Title: The Muslim Brotherhood's 'Virtuous society' and State Developmentalism in Egypt: The Politics of 'Goodness'
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Book Title: Development As A Battlefield
Book Editor(s): Irene Bono, Béatrice Hibou
Published by: Brill. (2017)
Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h2fv.16>

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The Muslim Brotherhood's 'Virtuous society' and State Developmentalism in Egypt: The Politics of 'Goodness'

Marie Vannetzel

Abstract

The rise of Islamists in Arab countries has often been explained by their capacity to offer an alternative path of development, based on a religious vision and on a parallel welfare sector, challenging post-independence developmentalist states. Taking the case of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and building on ethnographic fieldwork, this chapter aims to contribute to this debate, exploring how conflict and cooperation were deeply intertwined in the relationships between this movement and Mubarak's regime. Rather than postulating any structural polarisation, or—in contrast—any simplistic authoritarian coalition, the author argues that the vision of two models of development opposing one another unravels when we move from abstract approaches towards empirical studies. On the ground, both the Muslim Brotherhood and the former regime elites participated in what the author calls the politics of 'goodness' (*khayr*), which she defines as a conflictual consensus built on entrenched welfare networks, and on an imaginary matrix mixing various discursive repertoires of state developmentalism and religious welfare. The chapter also elaborates an interpretative framework to aid understanding of the sudden rise and fall of the Brotherhood in the post-2011 period, showing that, beyond its failure, what is at stake is the breakdown of the politics of 'goodness' altogether.

1 Introduction

Islamists' momentum in Arab countries has often been explained by their capacity to offer an alternative path of development, based on a religious vision and on a 'shadow and parallel welfare system [...] with a profound ideological impact on society' (Bibars, 2001, 107), through which they challenged post-independence developmentalist states (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999). In Egypt, which has been considered a model for both state developmentalism and Islamism, members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) used to be analysed

as counter-elites, building on this parallel Islamic welfare sector to advance their own politico-religious agenda (Wickham, 2003). Their legitimacy would then derive from their ability to provide for a counter project to the state's failure in development terms, and from the mobilisation of Islamic values against the regime. Yet, in the Egyptian case as in others, a contrasting explanation holds that the MB was granted space to expand through welfare activities, in the frame of tacit cooperation with the incumbent regime in order to maintain so-called stability. Accordingly, they were therefore said to be part, though unofficially, of the authoritarian coalition leading the former regime before Mubarak's fall in 2011.

The sudden rise and fall of the Muslim Brothers in the course of the Egyptian revolution has given a new actuality to this debate. The MB's dramatic trajectory began with their victory in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2011/2012 and, after one year in office, ended in the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi by the then General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's military coup, following mass mobilisations in June-July 2013. This fall has been variously interpreted as the result of the structural polarisation opposing the MB to the elites of the former regime (including the military), or as the breakdown of the long-standing coalition between them.

This chapter aims to contribute to this debate, exploring the tension between the conflictual challenge and the authoritarian coproduction that the MB at once embodied under Mubarak's rule. The chapter also elaborates an interpretative framework with which to understand the MB's trajectory during the current revolutionary process. Rather than postulating any structural polarisation, or—in contrast—any simplistic coalition, I argue that conflict and cooperation were deeply intertwined in the relationships between Mubarak's regime and the MB, and that the vision of two models of development opposing one another unravels when we move from abstract approaches towards empirical studies. On the ground, both the MB and the former regime elites shared similar beliefs and practices with which to develop society. They participated in what I call the politics of 'goodness' (*khayr*), which I define as a conflictual consensus built on entrenched welfare networks, and on an imaginary matrix mixing various discursive repertoires of state developmentalism and religious welfare. The politics of goodness was therefore a competitive, yet common, ground for the MB's vision of a 'virtuous society' and for the Egyptian state's mythical representation as the main agent of social development.

First, I will show how the myth of state developmentalism has been transformed in the course of the neo-liberal period, and how it has been relocated in different welfare practices. Second, building on an ethnographic study

conducted in Cairo between 2005 and 2010,¹ I will reflect on the Muslim Brothers' imaginary of 'virtuous society' and explain how it entrenched into state-promoted practices and beliefs. Finally, I will put forward an explanation of how this conflictual consensus turned to open conflict in the post-2011 period. I will show that beyond the confrontation between the MB and former incumbents, deeper changes have transformed, and challenged, the politics of goodness in the new socio-political configuration.

2 The Paradoxical Imaginary of State Developmentalism in Neo-Liberal Times

Central to Western societies, where it was born and consolidated, the belief in development has strongly shaped the political economy of Middle Eastern societies—and how they have been studied. As Myriam Catusse points out, the emergence of the 'developmentalist scheme' in the 1950s framed 'the formation of Arab states and their organisation around a model of auto-centered development, designed as a tool for decolonisation and for state (and nation) construction' (Catusse, 2006, 218, author's transl.). The state was conceived as the 'architect of structural transformation' (Richards and Waterbury, 1996, 234), whose purpose was to reshape society and fight the multiple features of 'backwardness', hence closely binding economic, social, cultural and political issues as facets of a same fundamental problem. Nasser's Egypt (1952–70) was emblematic of this state-led model of development, for the newly independent regime engaged in well-known socio-economic reforms (agrarian redistribution, import-substituting industrialisation, growth of the public sector, enlarged access to education ...). Yet, neither Sadat's *infitah* policies of economic liberalisation (1970–81), nor the neo-liberal turn witnessed during Mubarak's era (1981–2011), in the post-Washington Consensus context, came to terms with the representation of the state as being charged with the development of society—in spite of the economic shift from the public to the private sector from the 1990s onwards, cutbacks in state expenditure and declining state welfare provision (Harrigan and El Said, 2009; Abdelrahman, 2015).

The imaginary of state developmentalism, together with the ongoing perception of Arab countries through the lens of the 'developmentalist scheme' (see for example Achcar, 2013; Farah, 2009), actually survived the progressive

1 I mostly investigated the southern, working-class suburb of Helwan and the middle-class district of Madinat Nasr. Supplementary fieldwork was carried out in December 2012, December 2013-January 2014, summer 2014 and November 2015.

disappearance of Nasser's developmentalist state. Three factors account for such a discrepancy, which itself paves the way for the politics of goodness. First, institutional legacies from the state-led industrialisation of the past continued to characterise the Egyptian economy through to the first decade of the twenty-first century (Soliman, 2004; Adly, 2013): the growth pattern remained dependent on oil and natural gas exports, over which the state still held a quasi-monopoly.² Hence, the state kept being a main provider in the economy, drawing its own revenues from external rents, which were used to subsidise constituencies among business elites and other social groups. The second factor, related to the first, concerns the practices of patronage. On the one hand, the state nurtured a 'crony capitalism' (Sadowski, 1991) made of alliances with big capital holders (helping them to build oligopolies) and arbitrary control of business activities (Gobe, 1999; Sfakianakis, 2004). On the other hand, packages of public subsidy were made highly visible, keeping alive the image of the redistributive state personified in the presidential figure, although the actual beneficiaries lay significantly outside the advertised social targets. Energy subsidies, which amounted to about 18 per cent of total state expenditure in 2000–10, were a disguised means of rewarding big private industries as major recipients of this policy (Adly, 2013, 110). As for food subsidies, they decreased through the 1980s and 1990s, and were moreover considered to be missing many of the poorest Egyptians. However, Mubarak's regime wisely handled this policy, employing gradual contractions and allowing sudden increases when needed (as was the case a little over a decade ago, when inflation rates and international food and energy prices rose) (Adly 2013, 208). The National Housing Program (NHP) also offers a good example of these illusive social packages—especially as the building of infrastructure was long seen as the hallmark of Mubarak's regime. As researcher Yahia Shawkat shows, two ambitious, publicly subsidised housing schemes were launched as Mubarak's personal promises to Egypt's youth and the needy—*Iskan Mubarak lil-shebab* (1996–2005) and *Iskan Mubarak al-qawmi* (2005–12). But, relying 'on a legal definition of low income that completely ignored economic data', the NHP actually 'excluded all those who have informal jobs, and embedded middle-income government employees, [National Democratic Party (NDP)] parliamentarians, and governors into the allocation system—allowing these regime supporters to profiteer as middlemen between those who did not meet NHP criteria'. The policy was therefore 'deceiving the public into believing that the NHP was affordable to the poor': 'pictures of Mubarak,

2 The public Authority of Petroleum controlled around 85 per cent of total production (Springborg, 2012, 11).

governors and other officials handing over deeds to beneficiaries filled the front pages of newspapers for a few years and kept up the hopes of hundreds of thousands families for affordable housing' (Shawkat, 2014, paras. 63, 64, 67). Finally, the hope and belief in state developmentalism were maintained by the virtual upholding of a 1964 law that provides all graduates of vocational secondary and university degrees with employment in the public sector—a provision still perceived as a 'right' (Beinin and Duboc, 2014) but which had come to a complete halt by the 1990s, when most public enterprises started to be privatised.

Both factors explain why the myth of state developmentalism was still vivid in spite of the neo-liberal turn induced by twenty years of the International Monetary Fund-sponsored Structural Adjustment Program. As shown by the NHP example, a third factor must be underscored, though it is too often ignored by studies in political economy. Nasser's model of the state as an architect of development also redefined the notion of politics. In 1952, the dissolution of all political parties and voluntary associations was not only aimed at containing any kind of opposition; it also related to the vision of politics as a divisive threat to the nation, a threat that had to be replaced by the direct and fusional relationship between the leader and the nation, the corporatist and functional organisation of society, and the active role of the army in national protection and social modernisation (Waterbury, 1983; Bianchi, 1989; Fahmy, 2002). In this context, political institutions, such as the parliament, were subsumed by the developmentalist mission of the state. Former political elites, most of whom were notables and big landowners, were partly deprived of access to elected assemblies, and new strata of state bourgeoisie were promoted as Members of Parliament. Yet, rather than being political representatives of the nation—which the supreme leader alone was entitled to be—they were defined as middlemen between the state and society, their role being to redistribute public resources among local populations (Ben Néfissa and Arafat, 2005). Hence, the notion of politics was both broadened—the state and political institutions would now belong to the whole nation—and dissolved in the idea of public 'services' (*khidma pl. khadamat*).

Since then, the definition of the good representative—a member either of parliament or of the local council—as 'the one who serves people' (*elli beyekhdem al-nas*) has been strongly anchored in the political imaginary. While this can be classically described as a clientelistic pattern of political exchanges, not unique to Egypt, the public and collective dimension of these exchanges seems quite specific and compliant. MPs are expected to deliver, above all, services that will benefit a whole community, and not just individuals (building

a school or dispensary, having an area connected to the electricity supply or sewage system ...) and to rely on public resources rather than private wealth. Therefore, when traditional notables got back into parliament under Sadat's rule, or when wealthy businessmen showed up in politics in the first decade of the twenty-first century, they had to comply with these requirements—which Patrick Haenni rightly summed up as 'the spirit of services' (*l'esprit de service*) (Haenni, 2005a)—in order to secure legitimacy. This is how Mubarak's NDP attracted aspirant political elites, as NDP membership was a necessary condition to having access to state resources. However, with the contractions of state expenditure, even NDP elites were urged to find other sources to be redistributed, all the while sticking to the public and collective requirements of the spirit of services. This is how many became involved in various local structures of what Egyptians call 'public work' (*al-'amal al-'amm*): either state-sponsored organisations such as 'community development associations' (*gam'iyyat litanmiyyat al-mugtama'*), youth centres, social clubs, solidarity cooperatives in the workplace (*gam'iyyat ta'awuniyya*) and labour unions, or societal organisations such as voluntary charitable associations (*gam'iyyat khayriyya*), popular justice assemblies (*sulh*), and mosque-linked *zakat* committees (in charge of collecting Islamic alms).

Far from being a detail, this micro-level spirit of services framed, for large parts of the population, their everyday relationships with the state, which they encountered in the form of elected representatives, perceived as administration intermediaries and agents of the state's developmentalist mission. The perception of 'who serves' (*beyekhdem*) and 'who does not serve' (*mabeyekhdemsh*) stood as a determining criterion in the popular judgement of political elites. These judgments were often expressed in the moral terms of goodness (*khayr*), which the regime encouraged as it boiled down politics to public work, service, and even charity—a breeding ground for deconflictualisation and for responsibility discharge onto the local state intermediaries. The politics of goodness thus appears as the low-cost version of the developmentalist myth: keeping alive, through these local encounters, the image of a state in charge of development, while effectively 'relocating welfare' (Ismail, 2006) in charitable actions and individualised relationships.

In this process of welfare relocation, the network of Islamic social institutions largely intertwined with the regime's own networks. While the Muslim Brothers mobilised Islamic values to promote a model of 'virtuous society' through their welfare practices, this model did not stand as a counter-project of development. It was embedded in a matrix of mixed imaginaries to which the regime largely contributed.

3 The Muslim Brotherhood's 'Virtuous Society': A Pious Road *Inside* the State³

The entrenchment of MB and regime networks first relates to the historical conditions of the Brotherhood's re-emergence starting from the 1970s, when its leaders were gradually released from jail after Nasser's era of repression.⁴ How Sadat's policies contributed to this re-emergence, incidentally or not, is well documented. While the MB never recovered its legal status as an organisation, it was informally granted margins of tolerance within which to redevelop its activities. Drawing from the register of religious legitimacy, the regime encouraged the expansion of Islamic social institutions to alleviate the effects of economic liberalisation. Egyptian entrepreneurs who had migrated and made a fortune in the Gulf, some of whom were Muslim Brothers,⁵ were urged to invest in the country, especially in real estate. They were granted tax privileges provided they reserved parts of buildings they constructed for the creation of private mosques, run by charitable associations and often hosting social, health and education services. Such large 'Islamic complexes' multiplied exponentially (Ben Néfissa, 1995). MB businessmen coming back from Gulf countries relied on the support of important 'brokers'⁶ inside ruling economic circles.⁷ Pro-MB brokers were found, as well, inside the prestigious institution of al-Azhar, comprising the major mosque in Egypt, a large university, and several other bodies that exert authority on religious affairs. While this institution represents state Islam, some of its influential *ulama* profited from Sadat's emphasis on religion

3 This refers to Utvik (2006).

4 The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood was initially founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna as a charitable association, but it soon became a mass political movement. It supported the Free Officers Movement and coup in 1952, and briefly benefited from special treatment, escaping the dissolution that was to be the fate of all other groups, associations, and parties. However, the relationship with Nasser deteriorated quickly, and in 1954 the regime cracked down on the Brotherhood and dissolved it, arresting and sometimes condemning to death its leaders and numbers of activists.

5 Between 1954 and 1970, many members of the Brotherhood escaped repression by fleeing to the Arabian Peninsula's states. Saudi Arabia welcomed the MB refugees, with whom the Saudi royal family shared a common enemy—Nasser and pan-Arabist socialism. These favourable conditions enabled many Muslim Brothers to start what later became flourishing businesses.

6 On the notion of *passseurs de scène* or 'brokers' in the context of Islamists' relationship to the state, see Camau and Geisser (2003).

7 Examples include multimillionaire 'Uthman Ahmed 'Uthman, and the al-Sharif and Mar'i families (al-Awadi, 2004).

to become vocal and push for increased social and legal re-islamisation (Zeghal, 1996). Al-Azhar also operates a huge network of primary and secondary schools situated all over the country, which welcomed some of the now numerous MB teachers. Additionally, the regime favoured the development of 'Islamic clubs' (*gama'at islamiyya*) in universities, in order to counter leftist movements. A generation of young activists, placing reference to Islam at the core of their discourse and practices, emerged and gradually connected with the Brotherhood's released leaders. During the 1980s and 1990s, the movement recreated a broad, cross-class social base, pursuing its actions through universities and charities, but also through the professional syndicates of doctors, engineers, pharmacists, etc., which the generation of young activists came to lead. This social involvement sustained the MB's—unofficial but important—participation in legislative and local elections under Mubarak's rule. They achieved electoral gains in the 1980s and, most importantly, in 2005 when they managed to win 88 out of 444 seats in parliament—that is, around 20 per cent.

The Islamic social sector was thus anything but detached from the state: it lay at the centre of the regime's economic and political policies of welfare relocation. While the MB's implantation into this entrenched Islamic sector was effective, this does not mean that the regime's supporters were not also present there. Many pious local NDP notables founded and ran Islamic charitable associations, or ran the boards of mosques, *zakat* committees and so on. Moreover, a large number of charitable organisations or government-affiliated community development associations (CDAs), although not centred on a mosque or not claiming explicit religious motivations, would offer Islamic activities such as readings from the Koran. In fact, religious activities permeated many spaces: for example, every administrative unit or public company would have its own *zakat* committee or pilgrimage association. Conversely, my fieldwork among the lower- and middle-ranked members of the Brotherhood showed that many of them were active inside state-sponsored public work structures, such as youth centres, CDAs or solidarity cooperatives in the workplace. This was especially the case of the MB candidates in elections, in line with the spirit of services defining the role of the elected representative (Van-netzel, 2016).

During their 2005–2010 mandate, the MB Members of Parliament promoted as their motto: 'Together, we bring goodness to Egypt' (*ma'an, nahammal al-khayr li-Misr*). This encapsulated both the MB's compliance to the idea of the spirit of services defining the role of Members of Parliament, in line with the regime's strategies, and the pivotal role of religion in the politics of goodness, hence showing how the imaginary of state developmentalism was, in its turn, influenced by the MB's discursive repertoire.

This is not to say that the Muslim Brothers were spared from repression. Following their 2005 electoral success, they were subjected to a campaign of arrests, asset seizure and military trials. And this was not the first time their relationship with Mubarak's regime had significantly deteriorated. Earlier, in the 1990s, the government had intended to contain the MB's rising profile, which was at the time especially supported by the vocal professional syndicates. These syndicates were officially 'frozen' (i.e. not dissolved but internal elections and several activities were forbidden) and the regime cracked down on prominent figures of the movement who were tried in military tribunals. The regime also strengthened its control over charitable associations, dismantling some of those that appeared to be obviously affiliated to the Brotherhood. Around 1,400 assumed Brotherhood members, ranging from national leaders to local activists, were arrested during the 1995 legislative elections. From then on, illegality and semi-clandestinity increasingly shaped the complex mechanisms of the movement's social embeddedness.

Paradoxically, these constraints furthered the entrenchment of local social networks. As long as the MB's presence was not *that* visible, it was tolerated—although the margin of visibility allowed varied in time and space. MB activists would then participate as mere members with no leading responsibilities, in 'normal' associations (i.e., those not obviously affiliated to the MB), explicitly Islamic or not. In some cases, they reportedly acted as informal leaders alongside associations' official boards run by non-MB individuals who could be sympathisers, friends, relatives or simply neighbours. Boards could also include, among their 'non-MB' members, low-profile activists, not known to be Muslim Brothers by either the security services or by the people around them. Another strategy consisted in setting up charitable endeavours without a legal framework, such as 'medical caravans' (groups of physicians present in an area for a day or two and providing medical consultations for free in the rooms of a friendly association, mosque, or school ...) food distribution programmes during religious festivities, the provision of clothing or school supplies, or collecting *zakat* in the neighbourhood, outside of any formal structure.

All of these activities were implemented without explicit mention of the term 'Muslim Brotherhood'. Only very rarely did activists declare that they were MB members. Usually, they were active in such structures without being *directly* identified as Muslim Brothers by the people they worked with (even if the security services knew of their affiliations, they would let them work as long as they kept a low profile). This enabled the MB to connect with many local figures who were also active in the charitable sector, including figures who might happen to be NDP members. They could then, for example, participate together, as colleagues, in the *zakat* committee or pilgrimage association of

their workplace. An association could be run by local notables, more or less close to the NDP, and include among its members one or several MB activists. A businessman wishing to give alms to the poor could go to a neighbour, known for his or her involvement in charitable work—guessing or not that he or she was a member of the MB—who would play the role of intermediary, selecting needy families and transmitting to them the gifts of their generous benefactor. In fact, the pervasiveness of the Islamic social network, which permeated many spheres of life in Egypt, and the low-profile nature of 'MB identity' made connections easier between Muslim Brothers and pious individuals willing to share (for reasons of personal interest or not) in *khayr*—that is, in goodness. Most of the time, people would just identify a MB, at first, as a good person, serving people and God, doing *khayr*.

The sector of *khayr* was, then, a diffused network of blurred identities and crossed cleavages.⁸ However, it was clearly not immune from conflicts, which we can analyse through two patterns: *repression by uncertainty* on the one hand, and *imputation struggles* on the other. Apart from episodes of direct violence, such as the 1992–95 and 2006–08 waves of arrests, repression was usually exerted through indirect, non-systematic and unclear means, as is often the case in authoritarian contexts (Hibou, 2006). The margin of tolerance granted to the MB was continuously renegotiated at national and local levels alike. For example, submitting associations, whether linked to the Muslim Brothers or not, to a 'pending registration' status for many years was a well-known means to prevent them from securing their activities: it gave authorities the legal right to dissolve them at any time. In spite of their legal position as elected representatives, MB deputies were themselves confronted with uncertainty on a daily basis when they organised social activities in public: 'Sometimes the state security forces come at the last minute and take away all the chairs and the material we have set up in order to prevent the event from happening', explained one member of a local team, 'then we have to quickly find another solution, like using the deputy's office, even if it is too small'.⁹ Punctual detentions also constituted a permanent and arbitrary threat: I recall how the son of a deputy was arrested in the street, just in front of his father's office, for no obvious reason, while the latter was left to freely do his job—even if parliamentary immunity could easily be removed. In summer 2007, two MB deputies had their parliamentary immunity rescinded and were indicted for trying to reconstitute

8 The current difficulties that Marshal al-Sisi's regime is meeting in response to its efforts to eradicate the MB's social services is further evidence of this situation of entrenchment (Brooke, 2015).

9 Interview, July 2009, Helwan, Cairo.

the forbidden organisation of the Muslim Brothers. But the conflicts were not limited to the predatory practices of the security apparatus. *Repression by uncertainty* took place against the background of wider *imputation struggles*—that is, the competition to be perceived as ‘the one who serves’ and to enjoy the symbolic benefit of social actions. While the MB activists I met repeated at length that ‘we have no problems if the NDP tried to imitate us and steal our ideas’, they strove to distinguish themselves in the manner in which they delivered their own services. Although they could not say, for reasons of security, that they were Muslim Brothers, they deployed great efforts to let beneficiaries understand, or believe, that the aid came from the MB—even when it actually came from the budget of an association in which a Muslim Brother was only active as an individual. Reciprocally, in local associations where both MB and NDP notables were active, the latter would deny that any of the members was a Muslim Brother (Vannetzel, 2016).

Two cases illustrate perfectly the various combinatorial modalities of the conflictual consensus framing the politics of goodness. The first is the Islamic Medical Association (IMA), founded in 1977 by certain well-known Brothers, which ran 22 hospitals and several specialised medical centres, considered as *khayri* because low-cost fees or even a policy of free care were applied for low-income patients. While the association was obviously affiliated with the MB, it was spared dissolution because the government could not afford to deprive the population of such a range of medical services. However, in spite of the tolerance granted at the national level, the MB were eager, at the local level, to include many who were not MB members as members of staff or of the boards of the hospitals and health units. In al-Hadi hospital of Helwan, in a southern suburb of Cairo, only 5 per cent of the staff were Brothers, some doctors were NDP members, and the board included non-Brothers, according to its director: ‘This is because the Brothers don’t just want to mix with each other; on the contrary they want to cooperate with all the elements of society [...] There is nothing inside the hospital that would suggest it belongs to the Brothers. But people know this doctor or that is a leader of the Brothers, because they saw him during the elections.’¹⁰ Hence, the IMA was both a vector of entrenchment and of gratitude imputation for the MB. The second case is that of the Sharia Association (*Gam’iyya al-Shar’iyya*, GS), one of the oldest and biggest Islamic charitable associations and active throughout Egypt. Sarah Ben Néfissa shows how, under Sadat’s regime, this association had become a para-public organisation and how the regime instrumentalised it in order to implement ‘the new social policy [of] charity “on behalf” of Islam’ (Ben Néfissa, 2003, 222, authors’

10 Interview, August 2009, Helwan, Cairo.

transl.). The MBs were allowed to deeply integrate into the regional and local offices of the association, until 1990. In that year, their victory in the elections to the central board led to a change in the attitude of the regime towards this situation, and the board was suddenly dissolved. However, many MB activists remained active in the numerous local branches, and were often among the founders. But far from being reserved exclusively for the MB, the GS was also a place for local figures, including those close to the NDP, who sought to prove their spirit of service. It was, then, a place for interactions that cut across political identities.

The GS example is also illustrative of the second argument I would like to make here: namely, that the MB's model of 'virtuous society' is embedded in an imaginary matrix of faith-based developmentalism to which other groups and institutions, including elements of the state, contribute. The relationship between the visions of development promoted by the MB on the one hand and the regime on the other should, then, not be analysed being as extraneous, but as being 'intertextual' (Bayart, 1985, 355).

4 The Intertextuality of Faith-Based Developmentalism

One of the most famous programmes run by the GS, which accounts for much of its popularity, was established under the leadership of the Muslim Brothers: the 'Orphan project' (*Kafalat al-Yatim*). It consists in identifying people ('godfathers') who wish to sponsor one or more orphans in their neighbourhood. The 'godfather' pays a monthly sum to the GS, which passes it on to the mother or guardian of the child, who must know nothing of the sponsorship. As Ben Néfissa explains, quoting from internal documents of the association: 'This sponsorship is a form of contract between the [GS] and the godfather [...]. The aim is "to correct the relationship between the orphan and his or her entourage. Instead of having relationships with individuals who assist him, he must have a relationship with Muslim society at large, which becomes directly responsible for him". The unknown godfather is therefore a kind of "symbol" or representative of this Muslim society' (Ben Néfissa, 2003, 244, author's transl.). To complement this sponsorship, the GS also contacts members of the local community, asking craftsmen, merchants, doctors of all specialisms, pharmacists, bakers, hairdressers, butchers, etc. to provide—according to their means—food, care, medicines, school supplies, clothes, etc. to the orphans. The project's presentation document states that 'the project is in itself an act of preaching, a link between members of society, rich and poor, and a vitalisation of solidarity and mutual aid as explained by Islam [...] the project's goal is not

only to support the orphan but to involve people in this support' (Ben Néfissa, 2003, 245, author's transl.).

A similar pattern was at work in other charitable projects run by the Muslim Brothers, such as 'medical caravans' or collective weddings for poor or orphaned youths who could not afford to marry. Local physicians, citizens and merchants were solicited to help with gifts and services, according to their means and to 'their conscience and conviction' (Ben Néfissa, 2003, 245, author's transl.). In these three examples, the GS and the MB sought to act as the *organisers* of local mutual aid, solidarity and individual conscious involvement, which should define—from their perspective—'virtuous Muslim society' (*al-mugtama' al-muslim al-salih*). In this model, conveyed through daily practice and talks, which I observed during my fieldwork, the individual is defined by his inner moral 'positivity' (*igabiyya*), which is latent in each person of faith. Every Muslim will possess—because of his or her faith—the seeds of positivity, which may grow. The individual is responsible for developing this latent disposition to virtue through the accomplishment of virtuous acts (*a'mal salih*). Virtuous acts are the product of this inner strength, but it is also by engaging in virtuous acts that one manages to develop this strength. This personal striving for moral transformation is seen as the cornerstone of social reform and development. The role of the MB is therefore to detect individuals and encourage them to become positive elements in society. Programmes like the 'Orphan project', 'medical caravans' or collective weddings are not only aimed at relieving poverty, they also urge individuals to fulfil their roles as 'virtuous citizens' (*muwatinin salihin*), responsible for the social, economic and political order. This was, ultimately, the meaning of the traditional slogan of the Brotherhood, 'Islam is the solution'.

This model of 'virtuous society' is, of course, directly inspired by the MB's ideological corpus. According to Hasan al-Banna's text of reference, quoted at length by the activists and in the Brotherhood's publications even today, the 'MB method' (*al-minhag*) consists in shaping the Muslim individual, then the Muslim family, then Muslim society and finally the Islamic government, state, caliphate and nation (*umma*). This method, referred to as the 'guidance of society' (*irshad al-mugtama'*), assumes that the moral transformation of the self, thanks to faith and piety, is instrumental in building a good, sound and strong society, which, in turn, ensures the moral preservation of human souls. Hence, it is claimed to be a method for successful social development, to be applied in every domain of human life, with a focus on both individual behaviours and collective, institutional frames (Utvik, 2006).

If this model of development owes much to Hasan al-Banna's heritage, the idea of 'virtuous society' should not be isolated from other discursive

repertoires to which it refers, and which add various layers of significance. We have already seen its centrality in the GS tradition. Saba Mahmood, in her ethnographic study of the mosques movement in Egypt—a movement of female preachers and pious women, which has emerged since the 1970s, with no organisational link to the Brotherhood—also showed how the notion of ‘virtuous acts’ was core to the conception of piety promoted by the movement (Mahmood, 2005). To these women, faith lay, first and foremost, in the daily performance of virtuous acts. They referred to the doctrine of al-Azhar *‘alim*, Shaykh Sayyid Sabiq (who had been both a companion of Hasan al-Banna and a minister under Nasser) whose *Fiqh al-Sunna* stands as an authoritative *vade mecum* for virtuous actions. More generally, al-Azhar actively disseminated the conception of Islam as a virtuous behaviour that should be accomplished in all human activities. During my fieldwork, I often noticed that sympathisers of the Muslim Brothers had attended the Azhari school system, and they even used to draw an explicit link between the ‘Islam they had learnt from al-Azhar’ and the ‘Islam promoted by the MB’. One of them expressed it in the following way:

‘The Muslim Brothers seek for goodness (*khayr*) and I love *khayr*, I strive for *khayr*. They are virtuous citizens, and I hope to be a virtuous citizen as well. I am not a member of the Brotherhood, but I am just like them, I love Islam and I understand Islam like them. [...] Since primary school, I was in the Azhari system. And al-Azhar’s thought is the same as the MB’s thought. We have learnt the correct comprehension of Islam. Islam, religion, is a behavior (*mu’amala*).¹¹

The emphasis on virtuous behaviour has also found a new and powerful formulation since the late 1990s. Indeed, the mantra of ‘Development through faith’ has been praised by Egyptian preaching ‘superstar’ Amr Khaled,¹² and his association ‘Life Makers’ (*Sunna’ al-Hayat*), which has dramatically spread throughout Egypt and across the MENA region. Calling on ‘Muslims to become pious and entrepreneurial subjects’, Khaled ‘uses management science and self-help rhetoric to promote entrepreneurial activities as religious, with an emphasis on the role that voluntary work plays’ (Atia, 2012, 809). Khaled’s vision has built likewise on the idea of piety as a source of social positivity,

11 Interview, August 2009, Madinat Nasr, Cairo.

12 Amr Khaled is one of the ‘new preachers’ (*al-shuyukh al-gudad*) who have gained momentum in Egypt since the late 1990s and who have created a new form of preaching, focused on inner spirituality, self-fulfillment, individual emotions and efforts to ensure a successful life (see Haenni, 2002).

but compared to the MB's 'virtuous society' it has focused much more on the values of productivity, efficiency and economic success. As Patrick Haenni underlines, this rhetoric has resonated perfectly with the model of 'pious neo-liberalism' (Atia, 2012, 81) directly inspired by the United States' 'compassionate conservatism' and promoted by the neo-liberal 'new guard' of the NDP (Haenni, 2005b).

As such, despite its various formulations by state Islam's official institution (al-Azhar) and by the neo-liberal wing of the NDP, the discourse on 'virtuous individuals' exhibiting 'good behaviour' as a positive element for *khayr* and the development of society could be interpreted as a counter-narrative to the state developmentalist myth. However, it was actually close to a model that had been actively promoted by Mubarak's regime as part of the politics of goodness: the model of '*al-maghud al-dhati*'—literally, '*effort on oneself*'. It was propagated from the 1980s onwards, when the state began cutting social service provision. This was also the time when international development agencies were shifting their focus to poverty alleviation, which was embodied, in Egypt, by the establishment of the Social Fund for Development in 1991: the fund embraced microlending as a main strategy, behind which 'stands the supposition that devolving development down to "the people" is not only a good thing but also a moral imperative' (Elyachar, 2002). In 1988, the notion of '*al-maghud al-dhati*' was introduced into law through a reform of the state local-level administration (Law No. 145 of 1988): in order to compensate for weak local taxes and a decrease in budget allocation, the law indicates that administrative units have to appeal to the 'spontaneous' efforts of local populations in order to fund public projects, such as the building or repairing of post offices, police stations, medical centres, youth centres, public parks, and the state's local service departments, etc. (Ben Néfissa, 2009). Local communities often have no choice but to participate in such endeavours. Hence, the *maghud al-dhati* appears as a constraining 'spontaneous' effort, closely organised and controlled by the state. In fact, the Muslim Brothers directly referred to this notion as well, when they were charged with political mandates as Members of Parliament or while sitting on local councils. It was actually coupled with the notion of 'virtuous society', and reframed as a faithful endeavour in which the MB would be in charge of organising 'positive efforts', not against the state but, more often than not, in tacit cooperation with it.

In Helwan, there were many examples of cooperation between the MB Member of Parliament and local administrative units, for the funding of certain projects in the name of *al-maghud al-dhati*. These examples illustrate how imaginaries—from *al-maghud al-dhati* to virtuous participation as in the

'Orphan project'—framed both a competitive and a common ground on which actors evolved. One member the MP's staff explained:

The officials of the Ministry of Education came to see us to ask if we would finance the furnishing of a new office space they were given. As a teacher, I know them a little so I was in charge of the case. I suggested that the deputy could make an official request to the governor, but they refused. They didn't want it to be so visible—they wanted hidden cooperation, they wanted us to find them private donors, using our network as members of the Brothers. I will help them because I can't let them sit on the floor, they don't even have chairs! We will go to see the furniture merchants we know, ask for some chairs from one, shelves from another ... They will give them to me if they can, because they know I am not doing this for myself; it is voluntary work, and they may want to make a donation. Normally though, there should be a budget for this, since it is not always possible to count on the *maghud al-dhati* ...

Asked why the MP's staff would cooperate with representatives of the regime, this activist answered:

Our role is to give them ideas so they can find solutions to problems. Our goal is to cooperate in helping to reform the country, because it is our duty, according to Islam, to our morality, and to our love for the nation. [...] What is important is that work be done. Maybe we, as Muslim Brothers, won't benefit from this work; but it is done and it serves people, and this is part of our religion. Serving people is like praying and loving God. Our prophet (Prayer of God be upon him and peace) said that if on the Day of the Last Judgement you find a seed, you must plant it. This is a core value of Islam.¹³

'Doing *khayr*' is supposed to be an act that one is engaged in for moral motives, for the service of the people, and for the development of the country, not for political reasons. Politics were burdened with the delegitimising picture sketched by Nasser's regime. It was considered a potential source of instability. The combination of *khayr*, development (*tanmiyya*) and stability (*istiqrar*) was central to the regime's rhetoric for limiting political opposition (Makram-Ebeid, 2012). However, it was also nurtured by the MB itself. The activists I met insisted that their aim was that, 'services be provided and good actions done,

13 Interview, January 2009, Helwan, Cairo.

no matter who did it'. They also refrained from engaging in open clashes with the regime, claiming that 'clashes provoke instability, which is not good for the country'. However, this was not only a strategy with which to protect themselves from repression; and nor was it obvious proof of their involvement in the authoritarian coalition. It was more deeply in line with their vision of politics as the *moral reform of behaviours*. As one member of a MP's staff, put it: 'I cannot lump together all the members of the NDP or the representatives of the regime; I don't judge the institutions, I judge each one's behaviour. I cannot say "this institution is not good", I say "this behaviour is not good".'¹⁴

Therefore, the politics of goodness distanced itself from clashes and favoured a steady but subtle battle to put forward one's ability to be of service and one's moral exemplarity. While political conflicts were regarded as damaging to development and stability, moral distinction was understood, by the MB and the regime alike, as a 'positive' way of achieving goodness. This euphemistic form of politics was heavily undermined during the 2011–2013 period.

5 'Goodness' in Dire Straits: The Breakdown of Local Politics and the Radicalisation of Conflicts

The politics of goodness under Mubarak's rule had, to summarise, three defining features. It was, first, a relocation of the state developmentalist myth into the micro-level of the spirit of services, placed on the shoulders of local elites. Second, it was a configuration made of overlapping networks of public work and charities, in which political identities were often blurred. Lastly, it was a conflictual consensus in which political antagonisms were understated. My argument is that the three components of this politics of goodness were challenged after Mubarak's overthrow in February 2011. Although such an argument does not account, alone, for all the dynamics of conflictual radicalisation that the period 2011–2013 witnessed, I will begin by focusing on the local level, which has been less commented upon.

The foundations of local politics were upset by the revolutionary turmoil. Parliament and local councils were dissolved, as was the NDP, following an order issued by the Supreme Administrative Court in April 2011. The reach of these dissolutions went far beyond the spectacular burning of the former governing party's headquarters in downtown Cairo. In concrete terms, it meant that tens of thousands of local elites were deprived of their positions. Many of them, fearing prosecution, also suspended their public work activities and

14 Interview, January 2009, Helwan, Cairo.

opted to adopt a low profile for several months. These local elites therefore stopped acting as the everyday interfaces of the state. The micro-level spirit of services broke down and ceased to play the role of a substitute for state intervention. This was cruelly felt by large parts of the population who suffered from growing poverty and who now even lacked informal access to patronage, adding to the fact that many state administrative units had ceased functioning. While local councils remained dissolved with no elections in sight, high expectations were placed on the parliament that was to be elected at the end of 2011. For many people, struggling on a day-to-day basis for survival, the return of parliament meant the return of a potential source of material aid, which—although seemingly negligible—did matter in this economy of survival.

It came as no surprise when the Muslim Brotherhood, followed by the Salafis, both perceived as being able to meet these expectations (Masoud, 2014), won the 2011 parliamentary elections, while those parties that embodied the spirit of the revolution did not do well. However, it seems that MB Members of Parliament turned their backs on local services and charities, and—rather—tried to dedicate themselves to legislative work: work that most of them were not used to conducting and for which they certainly lacked the requisite competences. Moreover, the chamber was caught up in an institutional battle, as the High Constitutional Court, supported by the interim military government, threatened to dissolve it—eventually succeeding. Anticipating this dissolution, MB deputies were eager to pass laws securing their presence in the Constitutive Assembly that was to be formed. They also focused on passing the Political Isolation Law, which banned officials who had served in top posts under Mubarak from running for election. Although the law was eventually suppressed when the chamber was dissolved, a related article was later included in the Constitution that Morsi introduced in late 2012.

This move from *khidma* to legislation allegedly led to much disgruntlement among voters, who deplored the MB's neglect of local demands. It also sparked anger among former NDP notables who considered the Political Isolation Law a potential threat, while many expected the MB to be as cooperative as it had showed itself to be towards the military and high-ranking businessmen of the Mubarak era. A fear of the 'Brotherhoodisation' of all institutions—whether reasonable or not—became rampant. Former NDP notables worried especially about local councils—which used to be their sanctuaries—the elections for which were constantly postponed while parliament drafted a new law with which to govern them. Many believed this to be a sign of MB manipulation, an effort to assert complete hegemony, and began mobilising against the Brotherhood (Hamdy and Vannetzel, 2014). Hence, the blurred local environment of overlapping networks and identities unravelled and gave way to sharpening

cleavages. A dramatic shift in the local landscape added to this growing polarisation: while the NDP disappeared as a structured organisation, conversely, the Muslim Brothers suddenly appeared more prominently in the public sphere leaving their clandestinity behind. At this time, many people suddenly discovered who in their entourage was a member of the MB. As one inhabitant of Helwan, where the MB was deeply rooted, put it: 'Before, the Muslim Brothers were like fish under the water. And then suddenly they came to the surface. My neighbour, my relative ... We discovered that they were Brothers. They showed themselves, saying "we are here; we are strong"'.¹⁵

The breakdown of former local politics—that is to say, the rupture of patronage and the increasing dissociation and conflictualisation of political identities and cleavages—intersected with several national and international dynamics and temporalities of radicalisation. Among them, two contributed to undermining the legitimacy both of the politics of goodness and of the Muslim Brotherhood.

First, the 2011 uprising, and before and after it the thousands of social protests that have spread throughout Egypt in the last decade or more, indicate that *khayr* is contextually not enough to sustain the paradox of 'state developmentalism without a developmentalist state'. More precisely, though these protests are not a mere consequence of a so-called lack of development, they are moments in which the politics of goodness is variously questioned, criticised, and reinterpreted, and—at least partially—rejected. Protests shed a crude light on the contradiction between the developmentalism myth and the deregulation of social protection, and have made that contradiction, in Egypt as elsewhere (Catusse et al., 2010; Allal and Bennafla, 2011), obvious and unbearable for a growing proportion of the population. The last decade, indeed, has seen the conjunction of endless protests, the wide scale privatisation of public companies, a rapid rise in the precariousness of labour (even in what remains of the public sector) (Makram-Ebeid, 2012), and the vertiginous rise of food prices due to the international financial crisis that began in 2008 (for which abovementioned state subsidies were not enough to compensate). Meanwhile, the vocal, neo-liberal wing of the NDP, gathered around Gamal Mubarak whose longing to become president has caused much resentment (Hassabo, 2012) and has given a new face to the regime; a face that clearly fails to fit the image of the protective state, and thus has unmasked the aforementioned paradox. The relocation of welfare into goodness is thus strongly put in question, in these times of rising demand for genuine social justice ('*adala igtima'iyya*) and for radical change in distributional policies.

15 Interview, June 2014, Helwan, Cairo.

Second, in this context, social expectations of protection from the state are particularly high. They are incidentally supported by a currently powerful international trend, sponsored by political and financial organisations, which reasserts the need for strong state leadership, able to prevent the collapse of institutions and to eradicate the threat of 'terrorism' (Nay, 2013) while continuing to deregulate economies. In Egypt, social aspirations of security and welfare have focused on the two major symbols of historical Egyptian state developmentalism—that is to say, the army and the president. While the image of the president as *za'im* and saviour of the nation was being revived by those expectations of state protection, Mohamed Morsi was cast in this role and did not manage to fit in it. Some judged Morsi was a 'good man, but he was a loser' (*ragil kwayyes bes fashil*): he was unable to govern 'a state that is too big for him', as a former Morsi voter told me. Beyond his lack of charisma, the absence of an economic programme, or the neo-liberal agenda, all of which have been commented on and denounced at length, I argue that this is also because *khayr*, of which the MB was the local champion, just did not meet the renewed demand for genuine state intervention. Others considered Morsi a real threat to the Egyptian state: he was quickly depicted, in the media, as the puppet of the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership office—the 'Guidance Office'—which many feared would thus take control of the state. Behind the very irreverent nickname, '*al-kharouf*' (the sheep), given to him by the press, there was more than the politicisation of a body of journalists against the MB: there was the idea that the MB was weakening the autonomy of the state, submitting it to the will of their own organisation.

6 Conclusion. Conflicts and Consensus of Development in al-Sisi's Egypt

To conclude, what is at issue in post-Mubarak Egypt goes far beyond the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood. Neither can it be defined as a clash between two opposite models of society—that is to say, the Islamist model versus the legacy of Nasser's state. The common vision of a conflict of development in which Islamists would oppose regime incumbents, and would be relegated to a separate field of religious philanthropy, has been deconstructed. State- and faith-based discourses, beliefs and practices, aimed to 'develop' society, used to be deeply entangled. The biggest contradictory tension was to be found between the survival of the imaginary of state developmentalism and the effectiveness of neo-liberalisation. In the space created by this tension, the politics of goodness was deployed, involving actors from the former regime and the

MB alike. Behind the consensus around *khayr* as an illusive avatar of state developmentalism in neo-liberal times, those actors struggled to secure positions of power on both political and moral grounds. What we are now witnessing is the crumbling of this consensus. Not only have the former micro-networks of *khayr* been dismantled with the reshaping of local political elites (in 2015, inexperienced supporters of al-Sisi supplanted former NDP members in parliament; and the MB has, so far, not been granted any margin of tolerance); but the local and national dynamics of the politics of goodness—that is to say, the relocation of welfare in the spirit of services and the survival of the developmentalist myth—have broken down.

The radicalisation of conflicts during the revolutionary period has highlighted the contradiction of neo-liberal state developmentalism and, in the course of time, altered the equation of conflict and development. In emic and academic discourses alike, open conflict has widely been seen as a hindrance to stability, and stability has consensually been linked to development. Throughout 2011–2012, recurrent street demonstrations, organised by groups of young revolutionaries, were thus harshly dismissed by the political elites—the military, the MB, and all the so-called civil political parties—by the media, and by large parts of the population tired by a lack of security (*infilat amni*) and by economic paralysis. Demonstrations, seen as chaotic expressions of conflict, were more and more seen as damaging to the ‘wheels of production’ (*‘agalat al-intag*), a metaphor which became an overwhelming and formidable weapon that could be used to discredit anyone. Once elected, members of the MB were soon decried as the spanner in those wheels. While the struggle against incumbents to occupy positions of power intensified, they were accused of, and seen as, hurting the state itself, and consequently seen as breaking the motor of development from within. The revolt against Morsi, framed as a positive conflict with the goal of saving the state and relaunching the ‘wheels of production’, had the strong effect of refocusing expectations with regard to welfare on the state at the national level—away from local *khayr* practices.

The new consensus that emerged around al-Sisi was largely a consensus around this announced relocation of development to the state itself, with the army as guarantor. However, two years after Marshal al-Sisi’s election as president, it is clear that the new regime has advanced neo-liberalisation further by cutting energy subsidies and has relocated the *economy*, rather than development, into the military, rather than into the public, sector. Military holding companies now monopolise the benefits of al-Sisi’s policy of ‘grandiose projects’, causing much anger, both among private businessmen and among the working classes, who see no improvement in their conditions. Even the attempt to revive the glorious myth of state developmentalism with the pharaonic construction

of the New Suez Canal, entirely overseen by the Egyptian armed forces, seems unable to cope with the asymmetries of accumulation and their conflictualisation. As a precarious worker, employed in a private textile factory in Helwan, told me angrily, addressing al-Sisi one year after having voted for him: 'The Suez Canal—you did it for you, yourself! But what have you done for us, so far?' As consensus crumbles around al-Sisi and the army alike, conflicts—on the rise—might begin to be seen as the necessary formula for development.

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Chronology

- 2014 (28 May) Marshal al-Sisi elected President.
- 2013 (3 July) The military, headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, ousts President Morsi from power.
- 2013 (30 June) Massive demonstrations all over Egypt demand Morsi's departure, one year after he takes office.
- 2012 (17 June): Muslim Brother Mohamed Morsi wins the presidential election, while parliament is dissolved on the order of the High Constitutional Court.
- 2011 (December–January 2012) Parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party wins around 47 per cent of seats.
- 2011 (March) The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, in its role at the head of the interim government, organises a referendum on constitutional amendments, with the support of the Muslim Brotherhood.
- 2011 (25 January) Beginning of the uprising on Tahrir Square and in other places in Egypt, leading to President Mubarak's resignation on 11 February.
- 2005 In the context of an increasing number of social and political protests, and international pressure, Mubarak authorises the country's first direct and multi-candidate presidential election (and in August is re-elected); the Muslim Brotherhood wins 20 per cent of seats in relatively transparent legislative elections in November.
- 2003 A broad programme for privatising public companies is launched.
- 1992 Wave of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood. Implementation of the IMF Structural Adjustment Program begins.
- 1981 Hosni Mubarak becomes President following Sadat's assassination by a jihadi group, tolerating the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in legislative elections.
- 1973 President Anwar al-Sadat allows margins of tolerance for the Muslim Brotherhood, releasing its leaders from jail. Economic liberalisation begins; a multiparty system is allowed from 1978 onwards.
- 1952–1970 Nasser and the Free Officers seize power from the monarchy, establish important social reforms, nationalise most of the economy, and dissolve all parties and associations. Harsh repression targets the Muslim Brotherhood from 1954 on.