

Islamotopia: The Muslim Brotherhood's Idea of Democracy

Uriya Shavit

On February 18 of this year, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians assembled in Cairo's al-Tahrir Square to hear the 84-year-old Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Friday sermon. It was a historic moment: Al-Qaradawi, persecuted for his activities in the Muslim Brotherhood, left Egypt fifty years ago for an extended exile in Qatar. During that time, he spearheaded the pragmatic, lenient approach to religious law in the Arab world; his sermons are regularly published online, and broadcast by satellite into the homes of millions of believers worldwide. The Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), which he heads, has become the most important institution of its kind for Muslims in the West. Finally, he twice turned down invitations to serve as the supreme leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, aspiring instead to lead *all* Sunni Arabs.¹ Nonetheless, there was one achievement that had escaped al-Qaradawi, as it had all those who shared his Islamist worldview: the overthrow of the despised Egyptian regime. Now, however, as he stood in al-Tahrir Square, his dream appeared to be coming true at long last. Al-Qaradawi looked out at the expectant masses and, in a voice choked with emotion, proclaimed that the Egyptian revolution had

just begun. The youth had achieved the victory that God had promised his faithful, he declared. The army, which held the reins of power, must replace the provisional government with a civilian one.²

Just a few weeks earlier, yet another exiled leader of political Islam returned to his homeland. At the airport in Tunis, the city in which the great upheaval that would become the Arab Spring was first set in motion, thousands welcomed Rashid al-Ghannushi, founder of Tunisia's *al-Nahda* (Renaissance) Party. This, too, was a moment of closure: Twenty-two years earlier, in semi-free elections in Tunisia, *al-Nahda* had established itself as the only significant opposition to the despotic regime of Zayn al 'Abidine bin 'Ali. In the face of the subsequent threats on his life, al-Ghannushi had fled to London, where he had gained prominence as a brilliant author of Islamist indictments of both Arab regimes and the Western way of life.³ In newspaper interviews given just before his return, the 70-year-old al-Ghannushi declared that he harbored no political ambitions whatsoever. Secularists, Communists, Islamists—all had an equal share in the revolution, he declared, and went on to promise that his movement would support the establishment of a democracy that safeguards human rights.⁴

Both al-Qaradawi and al-Ghannushi's return from exile marked a turning point in the Arab Spring. At first, the mass demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia recalled the turmoil that brought down Communism in Eastern Europe. Indeed, no one could remain unmoved by the dizzying scenes of impassioned protesters who lacked a single guiding hand, yet fought alongside each other to topple regimes that, just a few weeks earlier, had been considered unshakable. Through the effective use of social networks and other advanced communication technologies, the popular revolution proudly raised the banner of democracy. All of its participants were united in their call for the establishment of authentic and freely elected representative governments in place of old tyrannies. Indeed, despite liberalism's decidedly poor track record in the Arab world in the twentieth century—not to mention the fierce resistance to George W. Bush's democratization policy at the beginning of the twenty-first⁵—it was clear that, in the Middle East

of 2011, democracy was still seen as the only legitimate alternative to those hereditary republics that purport to embody the spirit of the people, but instead become bastions of nepotism, corruption, and oppression.

Yet the return of two popular and charismatic Islamists raised concerns in the West—and with good reason. What at first seemed to be an Arab version of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 in Czechoslovakia, it was now feared, might turn into a replay of the 1979 revolution in Iran. The depth of the divisions within the liberal Arab camp, along with the organizational strength displayed by the Islamist opposition, did little to dispel these concerns.⁶ The rather absurd outcome of this state of affairs is that it is now the Arab liberals who are calling for a delay in the transition to democracy, even as their Islamist counterparts clamor for one.

To be sure, the Islamists have gone out of their way to persuade the people of their countries—and the West—that they have been portrayed unfairly. Al-Ghannushi, for example, has insisted that he is not the Ayatollah Khomeini's twin, while the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, announcing that it will participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections as the Freedom and Justice Party, has maintained that it will put up candidates for only half the available seats, and will sit out the first free presidential elections. Essays written by senior Islamists and their supporters have likewise sought to convince the West that the Muslim Brotherhood does not reject either democratic or liberal ideals. An article published in the *Washington Post* by 'Abd al-Mun'am Abu al-Futuh, a prominent representative of the movement's moderate wing, is just one example.⁷ Titled, "Democracy Supporters Should Not Fear the Muslim Brotherhood," al-Futuh explains,

The overwhelming majority of Egyptians demand the immediate ouster of Hosni Mubarak and his regime. Once this basic demand is met, we seek to share in the debate sweeping the country and to be part of the resolution, which we hope will culminate in a democratic form of government. Egyptians want freedom from tyranny, a democratic process and an all-inclusive dialogue to determine our national goals and our future, free of foreign intervention.⁸

The Islamists' growing power, combined with the rhetoric of democracy employed by their spokesmen, confronts U.S. decision makers with a difficult dilemma. The consensus in Washington and within the American intelligence community is that the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in the Arab world, and especially in Egypt, is a far from desirable scenario. The only question, then, is whether to negotiate with the movement or boycott it, and make clear that the Brotherhood's participation in a future government would lead to a suspension of U.S. foreign aid—assistance that the Egyptian economy needs desperately. In June 2011, after the Egyptian authorities declared the Muslim Brotherhood a legal movement, that question was answered: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the U.S. would welcome dialogue with the Brotherhood, just as it does with other non-violent parties in Egypt. She insisted, moreover, that such a development would not be a departure from the diplomatic course pursued by the administration so far. In its talks with the Brotherhood, she added, the U.S. would emphasize the importance of certain basic principles, particularly the commitment to nonviolence, the protection of minority rights, and the inclusion of women in the democratic process.⁹

A meeting between an optimistic American administration—which actively seeks a partner for dialogue among the ranks of radical Islam—and the Islamists themselves, who understand well the danger of burning bridges with the West, is likely to produce certain agreements. It is very likely, moreover, that the Muslim Brotherhood will tell American officials what they want to hear. But while both sides emphasize their deep commitment to “democracy,” each has something very different in mind. For in truth, an enormous gulf separates the basic assumptions underlying the Western democratic paradigm from the principles that underlie the Islamist worldview. Should the West overlook the depth of this abyss, or buy into the illusion that it can be overcome with a courageous leap of good will, it is apt to pay a heavy price.

The confusion evoked by the statements issued by Islamist leaders in Egypt and elsewhere befits the hybrid nature of the Muslim Brothers. On the one hand, the movement was founded as a reaction to modernity, liberalism, and Western hegemony in the Middle East. On the other hand, it has also adopted certain elements of the very phenomena it opposes. Indeed, the Brotherhood advocates the establishment of a government whose *formal* traits strongly resemble those of liberal democracies in the West—and yet, in practice, that regime would be fundamentally undemocratic, and anything but liberal.

The Brotherhood, a popular movement founded in 1928 in the city of Isma‘īliya by schoolteacher Hasan al-Banna, is the most prominent and important representative of what is referred to, alternately, as “Islamism,” “political Islam,” or “fundamentalist Islam.”¹⁰ While far from monolithic, Islamism, and most of the various individuals and groups associated with it, draws its inspiration from the Brotherhood’s founder, and is influenced by the inherent tension in his teaching—that is, the simultaneous attraction and repulsion toward the West.

The cure prescribed by Hasan al-Banna’s successors to the various ills of the Muslim world can be summarized by a single statement: “Islam is the solution.” The Brotherhood calls for the restoration of Islamic religious law to its rightful place as the organizing framework of every sphere of life, including the political realm; the re-establishment of the Islamic *umma* (nation) as the locus of identity for Muslims everywhere, as well as the platform for spreading the word of Allah throughout the world; and the abolition of Muslim society’s political, economic, and cultural subservience to the West.¹¹

From the Islamist’s point of view, everything that is wrong with Muslim societies can be traced back to the West’s pernicious influence. The historical narrative they put forward is a vast conspiracy theory in which the West plays the part of arch-enemy. The benighted Europe of the Middle Ages, the Islamists insist, enjoyed its scientific renaissance and the emergence of

political liberty on account of what it learned through its interactions with the enlightened Muslim world. Yet instead of showing gratitude to its benefactors, the modern West turned against them, and wove a sophisticated plot to deprive them of their religious faith, sow dissension among their ranks, and turn them into docile subjects. To this day, so the narrative goes, the West's all-out campaign against Muslim culture rages on, encouraging secular education, sending out missionaries, and using the mass media to spread corrupt norms. This attack has achieved its goal, condemning Muslim societies to an inferior and backward status. Only by checking and repelling the assault can Muslims bring about the long-awaited Islamic revival.¹²

While the main currents of Islamism seek to fend off Western influence, the strategies they employ to achieve this goal integrate traditional religious positions with modern liberal approaches. The first such synthesis combines eschatological anticipation with vigorous activism: Islamists believe that their expectations will be realized because the Koran and the prophetic tradition promise as much. At the same time, they seek the mobilization of the public, and hold that every believer has an obligation to win over more adherents. In this view, modern technology, and particularly mass media, affords Islam the necessary tools to mobilize the people and re-establish its empire.¹³

The second synthesis merges the concept of the religious and political umma with that of the modern territorial nation. Al-Banna and his followers see nothing wrong with national loyalties, so long as any patriotic sentiment remains subordinate to one's fundamental commitment to the universal Islamic umma.¹⁴

The third and perhaps most daring synthesis, rooted in the apologetic enterprise of the late Islamic modernists Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashid Rida, seeks to transplant Western principles into the Islamic lexicon.¹⁵ Although its explicit goal is a return to the "pure" and "original" form of Islam, the mainstream of the Muslim Brotherhood does not reject the West in its entirety. On the contrary, it emphasizes

the need to learn from Western science and technology, and even from Western forms of government and administration. To relieve the implicit tension between this rejection and acceptance of the West, political Islam proposes a *religious* interpretation of modern secular ideas and institutions. Its adherents find precedents in Islamic tradition for every Western achievement, and portray its qualified appropriation as merely a return to the sources, rather than a departure from them.¹⁶ From this perspective, then, the oft-made blanket identification of Islamism with fundamentalism is mistaken. Indeed, the term “fundamentalism” originally referred to an American Protestant movement that adopted a literal interpretation of the religious canon to support its *rejection* of modernism.¹⁷ Islamism, by contrast, advocates a creative interpretation of the Islamic text, such that it may *welcome* certain aspects of modernity.

This ingenious hermeneutic method allows political Islam to support the integration of the Koran and *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet) with certain aspects of modern democracy. Indeed, Islamists repeatedly proclaim that Islam mandates representative government and respect for individual freedom. This is not merely a tactical position; it has been a core tenet of the Brotherhood’s philosophy for the last nine decades (although renounced by ultra-conservative and Jihadist currents). It coheres with the very roots of the movement, which developed in an Egyptian society that, at least on paper, was democratic. Furthermore, this position reflects the Islamist’s belief that broad popular support will eventually carry them to power.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the Muslim Brotherhood openly declares that free and regular elections—the hallmarks of Western democracy—are the only legitimate way to establish a government. In their view, this is simply a version of the Islamic concept of *shura* (consultation), mentioned in the Koran and the Hadith. Over time, they concede, the Islamic world has discarded the political traditions of its glory days. But there is no reason not to revive the *shura* procedure, which evolved and thrived in the West even as it stagnated in its original environment.¹⁸ On the basis of this belief, the Muslim Brotherhood developed an essentially positive

attitude toward the democratic process, which only became more pronounced over the years. Hasan al-Banna, for instance, supported the existence of elected assemblies but opposed the multi-party system. Today, however, the movement's mainstream expresses no objection to multi-party democracy,¹⁹ and has even stated its willingness to participate in elections that are not run in accordance with Shari'a law.²⁰

Moreover, since Islamists hold that public accountability is a divine obligation of every elected government, they believe that a preference for democracy over dictatorship is in truth a religious injunction, in every sense of the word.²¹ The fact that citizens in the infidel West live in flourishing democracies, while the faithful suffer political, religious, and cultural oppression, is the source of no small amount of anger and shame. It is not unusual, then, to come across praise for Western regimes (including Israel) in Islamic writings; these regimes are described as political models from which Islamic societies should draw inspiration. For example, al-Qaradawi cites the legend that the prophet Muhammad learned the military art of digging trenches from the Persians as proof that Muslims are permitted to learn how to build democratic institutions from Westerners.²² But in an essay published some twenty years ago, Muhammad al-Ghazali, a prominent Islamist thinker of the second half of the twentieth century, lamented that no Arab general who held the reins of power would ever behave like Charles de Gaulle, who resigned from office after losing a nationwide referendum he put forward.²³ Elsewhere, al-Ghazali sought to explain the secret of Israel's success by analyzing the unique features of its democracy. Among other things, he expressed amazement at the criminal conviction of Aharon Abuhatzera, the minister of religious affairs; the resignation of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1977, following the exposure of a foreign-currency offense committed by his wife; the dismissal of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon for his failure to prevent the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in Lebanon, as recommended by the Kahan Commission in 1983; and Prime Minister Menachem Begin's voluntary resignation in 1983.²⁴

Likewise, the Muslim Brotherhood champions the protection of individual freedoms, another trademark of Western democracy. Free elections, freedom of expression, academic freedom, freedom of assembly, the right to a fair trial, and equality before the law—all these, in the Brotherhood’s view, are nothing less than divine precepts. Here, too, it has no problem with the adoption of practices that evolved in the West, and, as always, simply points to Islamic sources in support of its position. Al-Ghazali, for example, cites an interview in which President John F. Kennedy was asked by the journalist whether his wife’s trip to Europe had been funded by taxpayers. He then notes a similar verbal confrontation, many centuries earlier, between ‘Omar, the second caliph, and Salman al-Farisi, one of the *Sahaba* (companions, or first followers of the prophet). Al-Farisi wondered how the caliph had managed to acquire a long robe, a luxury that was out of his subjects’ reach. In response, the caliph asked his son ‘Abdallah to testify in public that the latter had given part of his own fabric allotment to his father, who was extremely tall.²⁵

The Islamist synthesis of modernity and tradition understandably holds a powerful attraction for Arab students and members of the liberal professions who are torn between the two worlds. The pervasiveness of this split is evident from the Facebook profiles of young Arab university students and graduates, who list the prophet Muhammad, Saladin, and Hasan al-Banna as their “heroes”—alongside Lady Gaga, Beyoncé, and Lionel Messi. Further proof of this strong internal conflict is the increasing number of young Muslim women who avail themselves of higher education and new occupational opportunities—advantages their mothers did not enjoy—while simultaneously donning the veil as a means of indicating their adherence to religious tenets. We also see this duality in the political inclinations of Arab societies. A survey by the U.S.-based Pew Research Center, conducted not long after Mubarak’s fall, found that 71 percent of Egyptians believe that democracy is the best form of government, even as a full 62 percent are of the opinion that the laws of their country should rigorously apply the provisions of the Koran. Seventy-five percent of the respondents expressed a “very

positive” or “fairly positive” view of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁶ Naturally, these Egyptian voters who are interested in both a democratic *and* Koran-based government will constitute the Brotherhood’s target audience in the coming elections.

There is a famous American saying, “If it walks like a duck, looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a duck.” Islamists, however, are an exception to this rule. The Muslim Brotherhood professes to be liberal and democratic, and sometimes behaves as if it were. But the bottom line is that political Islam is neither democratic nor liberal. True, the Islamist synthesis enables the Brotherhood to borrow ideas and values from the political lexicon of modernity. Yet its uncompromising commitment to a religious canon, as well as the place it assigns that canon in the political order, makes its political ideals very different from those of the West.

It is one of the inherent paradoxes of Western democracy that it is a stable and thriving form of government even as it rests on explicitly impermanent texts. Indeed, the only source of authority for Western constitutions—even in countries that are extremely religious—is the will of the people. The United States Constitution, for instance, one of the exemplary documents of modern liberal democracy, begins with the words “We, the People of the United States.” Nothing in the Constitution enjoys any eternal status. The principles it codifies do not derive from a divine command, a royal prerogative, a binding intellectual tradition, or a scientific truth held to be absolute. Rather, these principles are held to be valid solely because a majority of the people has ratified them, and a majority of the people still accepts and chooses to live by them.

Because no article in the Constitution is carved in stone, and because the composition and structure of the institutions charged with interpreting it are subject to change at any time by the country’s elected representatives—who are themselves subject to constant turnover—in theory, at least, American democracy could be abrogated if such were the majority’s

will. This majority could amend the Constitution, for instance, to forbid a particular minority from voting, or to grant the president absolute power. Now, to anyone familiar with the American reality, this scenario seems laughable: Amending the Constitution is an extremely complicated process, one that requires a broad consensus. Moreover, the American democratic tradition, like those of other Western countries, is so strongly ingrained in popular consciousness, and so fundamental a part of the country's educational system, that the enactment of radical anti-liberal laws is almost inconceivable. Nonetheless, this does not alter the fact that the enfranchisement of any particular group and the scope of presidential authority are not anchored in sacred and irrevocable rules, but only in the will of the nation.

The great irony, then, is that what appears to be a weakness of American democracy is actually the guarantor of its vitality. For undoubtedly, were the regime based on founding principles held to be either the word of God or some other absolute truth, sooner or later a gatekeeper would emerge to enforce them. A sacred scripture cannot exist without an institution or individual recognized as its overseer, and entitled to the last word. The mutability of the American Constitution and political system (and this applies even more so in those countries that do not have a constitution, or that lack a strong constitutional tradition) has therefore *prevented* the emergence of such a monopoly. Thus does the absence of an unalterable founding text—a lacuna that, at first sight, makes democracy appear fragile—actually serve as a bulwark against tyranny.

This is where the similarity between the Western and Islamic notions of democracy ends. According to the Islamist worldview, Allah has given mankind a complete and perfect doctrine of life: Islam. Democracy and individual rights follow from and are mandated by this doctrine—and are consequently subordinate to its divine injunctions.

Since Islamists believe that the legitimacy of the political order is founded on a divine decree, they utterly reject any possibility of rebellion, whether in the name of democracy or individual rights, against other

religious precepts. Hence, they would not allow a parliament to pass laws that contradicted the explicit commands of Allah, as conveyed to humanity through the Koran and the example set by the prophet. As al-Qaradawi and others have explained repeatedly, human beings cannot permit what Allah has forbidden, nor can they ban what Allah permits. For example, the Koran denounces abortion and the consumption of alcohol; consequently, a human parliament has no authority to grant them legislative sanction. Similarly, for particular offenses the Koran stipulates harsh penalties—capital punishment or amputation of a hand, for example—that no human legislator may repeal, nor may the prohibition of idol worship be overturned in the name of freedom of religion.²⁷

Of course, limitations on parliamentary power and civil liberties are not in themselves inconsistent with Western democracy. After all, every democracy subjects its elected officials to judicial oversight, and no democracy makes individual freedoms absolute. True, the restrictions that the Islamists would impose on these liberties may be more severe than the prevalent norms of Western countries, but this does not automatically turn these Muslims into enemies of democracy. Western societies do not have a uniform concept of the scope and limits of individual rights. Something that seems completely unacceptable to one Westerner, such as a ban on abortion, strikes another as perfectly natural. Moreover, even regimes with unimpeachable liberal credentials have proven capable of severe repression in times of crisis. The United States, for example, confined thousands of citizens of Japanese descent to internment camps during the Second World War, and France responded to the 2005 riots in immigrant neighborhoods by temporarily banning public assemblies and permitting the police to search houses without a warrant.

The essential difference between the Western and Islamist models of government therefore lies elsewhere. When the U.S. Congress expands or limits rights, and when the Supreme Court rules on the constitutionality of laws, they base their decisions on a *human* document, one that can be amended and modified. By contrast, the institutions of a country that

adopts the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, should one be established, would expand or limit rights and sustain or nullify laws on the basis of a divine document, endowed with eternal and unalterable validity.

Islamists take pride in this distinction: The divine roots of Islamic democracy, they assert, ensure a more stable and moderate system than its Western counterpart. Indeed, political Islam portrays the so-called Free World as a perverted, extreme, and immoral caricature of the democratic form of government that Allah intended for humanity, having originated in a revolt against the God-given authority of kings and clerics. Furthermore, since it is an entirely human enterprise, there can be no certainty that the freedoms it bestows today will not be revoked tomorrow.²⁸ Al-Ghannushi explains that the decisive advantage of the Islamic polity is that it subordinates conscience to faith, rather than to civil law. The religious value system, he asserts, guarantees civilized behavior among human beings, even in the absence of worldly incentives or sanctions. Western democracies, lacking such a system, are doomed eventually to regress to savage barbarism.²⁹

There would seem to be some truth to this: If the political and judicial order of the West is subject to human caprice, it is undoubtedly much flimsier than the Islamic model, which stands on the firm foundations of the divine word. But this theoretical assurance would be valid only if there were a broad and long-term consensus on the interpretation of that word. In Muslim societies, as in other societies grounded in religious scripture, no such agreement exists. Since Allah does not intervene in contemporary controversies about Shari'a, an Islamist democracy that draws its authority from a religious canon requires some sort of institution to determine whether decisions made by elected officials are compatible with scripture. And invariably, such an institution will exploit its role as the authoritative interpreter of the divine word, sooner or later turning into an agent of tyranny.

Islamist thought offers more than a hint that using the Koran as the foundation for earthly rule will pave the way to a theocracy like that which exists in Iran today. In one of his early works on the relationship between

Western democracy and Islam, al-Qaradawi maintains that candidates running in democratic elections must be both moral *and* religious individuals, with expertise in public affairs.³⁰ Muhammad 'Imara, a liberal on the Islamist spectrum, asserts that Islamic democracy enfranchises its citizens only within a very narrow framework, positioned in the middle ground between complete freedom and absolute dictatorship; an Islamic regime is therefore necessarily a "guided democracy."³¹ Another example is the draft platform of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, published on August 25, 2007. The document—the most detailed political manifesto it has issued to date—presents the movement's vision of the ideal Islamic state. It proposes a representative government, based on a multiparty system, and even endorses a free press. The parliament's authority is to be curbed by only one restriction: It may not enact legislation that contravenes the Koran. To ensure this, the people's representatives will be required to consult on every matter with an independent council of senior religious sages, themselves appointed by the clergy.³²

It is no coincidence that writings published by Islamists during the Arab Spring were vague on the matter of what role Islamic religious texts are to play in the new order, and who will hold the authority to interpret them. This caution undoubtedly stems from their acknowledgment that, for now at least, they need to tread lightly. But even so, one can feel the winds of modern theocracy blowing: In his *Washington Post* article, Abu al-Futuh explained that the Muslim Brotherhood could not possibly be an enemy of democracy, for four main reasons: (1) Establishing a governance based on Shari'a is not on its immediate agenda; (2) the formation of such a regime depends *a priori* on the support of a popular majority; (3) Shari'a promotes justice and the common good, and guarantees freedoms; and (4) because there is no central religious institution in Sunni Islam, there is no danger of its producing a theocracy. But al-Futuh does not, tellingly, say who *will* be the ultimate arbiter in the state he envisions.³³ The founding document of the Freedom and Justice Party, published in June 2011, defines Shari'a as the primary—but not sole—basis of legislation. However, it calls for religious

law to be implemented in every field of life, since it reflects Allah's wisdom and compassion, and is in any case what most Egyptians want. The authors write that Egypt will be "a civil state whose authority is rooted in Islam," without going into detail about what this might mean.³⁴ Al-Qaradawi, who used a similar phrase before the Arab Spring, makes clear that such a state will feature a supreme judicial authority, one that ensures that human legislation does not contravene Islamic law.³⁵ Commenting on this topic, Mohammed Mahdi 'Akaf, the Muslim Brotherhood's leader from 2004 to 2010, said that the movement would not reveal its complete platform until it had gained control of the state.³⁶

Western observers therefore miss the point when they wonder whether the Muslim Brotherhood supports free elections and civil liberties. To predict the character of the regime that the Islamists will establish, if and when they are given the opportunity, only one question is relevant: Will Islamic democracy take the Koran as its highest authority, with religious scholars as its sole authorized interpreters? An answer in the affirmative—whether clear or implicit—carries within it the unmistakable seeds of theological despotism.

An additional obstacle to the development of real democracy in any state run by Islamists has to do with the concept of the taboo. If it is easier for Western democracy to guarantee civil liberties than it is for other regimes, this is not only because of the structure of its political system. It is also a result of its pluralist spirit, which is open to innovation, originality, and defiance of convention. By contrast, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, which demands absolute loyalty to fixed and eternal rules, sets clear limits on both action *and* thought—thus inevitably suffocating philosophy, art, and research.

To be sure, the concept of taboo is hardly foreign to modern Western societies. Life in the West also follows certain norms, and breaching them generally leads to sharp social condemnation, and sometimes even criminal

sanctions. For example, every Western society sets a minimum age for sexual relations, defines those public spaces in which one may and may not appear in the nude, and stipulates permitted and forbidden forms of corporal punishment. Moreover, even though Western taboos may present themselves as the products of reason, they are not devoid of arbitrary coercion. Every Western country, for instance, considers polygamy to be a licentious deviation from social morality, and criminalizes it; in this regard, it makes no difference whether the man professes to love all his wives, or they him. But a married man who takes himself a mistress gets off scot-free—even if his lover was in it solely for the money.

But if the modern Western social order is arguably based on a long line of prohibitions, there is at least one area that is *not* constricted by taboos: the world of ideas. Indeed, in the absence of a binding canon, no ethical concept, social norm, cultural convention, or scientific consensus is accepted as absolute truth. Likewise, no taboo, no matter how self-evident it is held to be, is immune to criticism. For instance, while every Western country outlaws sexual relations between adults and minors, viewing such conduct as a monstrous perversion that merits harsh punishment, an intellectual who dares to call for a re-examination of “the myth of pedophilia” risks no more than fierce denunciation. He need not be concerned that someone, or some group, will file criminal charges against him.

The Western notion that those who pursue eternal and indisputable truth are doomed to failure bears within it a tragic dimension. Indeed, the same critical spirit that gave birth to modernity also made existential anxiety the permanent companion of knowledge. The disappearance of certainty in ever-expanding domains of human understanding generated profound dread regarding the future. No previous hegemonic civilization had ever been consumed by such deep doubts about the world and its place therein.

And yet, that incessant self-criticism was the very thing that protected the West from complacency and stagnation. It drove—and continues to drive—a hurtling train of scientific revolutions, technological breakthroughs, and achievements of staggering creativity. It should come as no

surprise that the intellectual pantheon of modern Western culture is largely populated by rebels, people like Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Immanuel Kant, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein, all of whom shattered dogmas and subverted sanctified beliefs. Generations of students, inspired by their example, internalized the idea that the key to excellence lies precisely in *criticism of accepted ideas*, and not in their blind acceptance.

Because Western taboos do not derive their legal status from a religious scripture, people tend to regard them with a measure of irony. Indeed, those who violate these prohibitions are often treated with indulgence. To Western eyes, certain taboos are likely to be as amusing as they are serious. After all, what seems unthinkable today may well be viewed by the next generation in a completely different light. As a result, Westerners feel free to tolerate—and sometimes even esteem—those who shatter idols and slaughter sacred cows.³⁷

The Islamist approach to taboos is altogether different. Political Islam came into being in a time of cultural crisis, when the spirit of criticism and skepticism was threatening to seize control of Egyptian intellectual life. For centuries, Egyptian Muslims believed in Allah and his Book of Truth as the indisputable foundations of government, culture, science, and law. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, however, these beliefs began to erode. The process reached its zenith in the 1920s; in the period that later came to be known as the golden age of Arab liberalism, many of Egypt's educated elites fell under the spell of progressive rationalism. In his memoirs, Hasan al-Banna describes his shock upon first witnessing this breakdown of belief and tradition among his people. Atheism and libertinism were the order of the day, wrapped in the cloak of freedom of thought and individual liberty. Academic research adopted the materialist *bon ton* of the West, encouraging transgression and heresy. The country was flooded with books, newspapers, periodicals, and intellectual salons aimed at dismantling religious authority. Having been raised in a devout rural family, al-Banna concluded that this paradigm shift could only be the result of a violent and carefully

planned Western assault on Islamic consciousness. It was this insight that turned him from a young schoolteacher into the leader of a religious movement.³⁸

The Cairo Trilogy by Naguib Mahfouz, the most prominent of the liberal intellectuals of post-liberal Egypt, offers a masterful literary depiction of the cultural turmoil that roiled Egyptian society of the time. Written in the 1950s, the books describe the disintegration of a patriarchal family in Cairo between the two world wars. The youngest son, Kamal, loses his faith, and becomes an ascetic teacher and confirmed bachelor. His heart is wholly given over to Western philosophy and science; he even publishes an article about Darwinism in a literary journal. To his horror, his father, the daunting and unwaveringly religious—yet morally corrupt—Ahmad ‘Abd al-Jawad, gets his hands on the piece. The father’s pride is deeply wounded, and he summons his son and orders him to recant his heresy. Darwin, says al-Jawad, is “certainly an atheist trapped by Satan’s snares.” He continues:

If man’s origin was an ape or any other animal, Adam was not the father of mankind. This is nothing but blatant atheism. It’s an outrageous attack on the exalted status of God. I know Coptic Christians and Jews in the Goldsmiths Bazaar. They believe in Adam. All religions believe in Adam. What sect does this Darwin belong to?

...You can rely on a fact that’s beyond doubt: God created Adam from dust, and Adam’s the father of mankind. This fact is mentioned in the Koran. Just explain the erroneous aspects of the theory. That’ll be easy for you. If it isn’t, what’s the use of your education?³⁹

This desire to restore taboos to their previous glory has been the driving force behind Islamism since its inception. Mainstream political Islam seeks to re-establish a society based on absolute religious faith. Its adherents, much like Mahfouz’s Ahmad ‘Abd al-Jawad, envision an immutable human order, one that never dares to doubt the existence of God, his grace, and the validity of the instructions he provided mankind in his holy book.

To resolve the seeming contradiction between their call for the reinvigoration of traditional taboos and their promise to generate a technological renaissance based on Western achievements, Islamists draw a distinction between “universal” science and “culturally dependent” science. In their view, some of the scientific theories and philosophical ideas that have emerged in Europe and America possess general validity, whereas others are merely a product of the particular history of the West. Whereas Western scholars, they insist, were forced to rebel against the oppressive spiritual authority of the Church in order to pursue their quest for knowledge, Islam has always been the friend and patron of science. And yet, this alliance has clear boundaries, as prescribed by the religious canon. ‘Imara, to quote one prominent Islamist, portrays Darwinism as a heretical and atheistic theory, whose percolation into Muslim thought is part of the Western conspiracy to break the spirit of faith. Similarly, he defines Hegelianism as Darwinism’s twin, since, like the theory of natural selection, it assumes that nothing in the world is stable, and everything is mutable. ‘Imara holds that evolution and dialectic are the fruits of the West’s dramatic transition from one extreme—that of ecclesiastical tyranny—to another, i.e., untrammled freedom of thought. Both excesses, insists ‘Imara, are equally foreign to the true spirit of Islam, which always prefers the middle ground.⁴⁰

Although the Muslim Brotherhood’s goal of establishing a canon-based regime has yet to be realized, its efforts to restore the luster of taboos have been remarkably successful. Thanks to the Brotherhood’s widespread educational activities, as well as the authorities’ recognition that they had no choice but to permit Islamists a certain breadth of action, Arab societies became more traditional over the second half of the twentieth century, exhibiting increasingly less tolerance for intellectual criticism of religious scripture. If, in the 1920s, Arab intellectuals could openly contemplate whether religious law still had any role to play in modern society, today any Muslim who voiced such doubts would be signing his own death warrant. And were this not enough, the export of Islamic taboo culture to the West

now threatens the lives of non-Muslims who dare question the principles of Islam, as well.

Two cases, several generations apart, point to the gradual retreat of Muslim societies into a scripture-based culture of taboos. In 1925, 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, a cleric affiliated with al-Azhar University, published an article asserting that the prophet Muhammad was not a political leader, and that Islam therefore possesses no firm doctrine concerning the ideal form of government. His claims set off a storm; even today, Islamists take them for fighting words. 'Abd al-Raziq lost his position as a religious-court judge and faced a barrage of condemnation. Significantly, however, he was not put on trial, nor was he in any danger of physical harm.⁴¹ By contrast, seven decades later, in 1992, the Egyptian journalist and intellectual Faraj Fuda dared to criticize his country's clergymen and mock their aspiration to impose Shari'a law on the country. This sealed his fate: Fuda was assassinated by assailants who accused him of heresy.⁴² At the trial of one of his killers, the defense called Muhammad al-Ghazali, one of the leaders of the pragmatic stream of Islamism (whom we have met before), to the witness stand. What, he was asked, is the appropriate punishment for someone who advocates replacing Islamic law with secular laws that permit the forbidden and ban the permitted? Al-Ghazali replied that such a person is a rebel against his religion (*murtad*), and is deserving of death. Were he permitted to live, his baneful influence would spread and poison the minds of others. Hence, the ruler must have him executed. This argument (which, it should be noted, did not save the murderer from the gallows) is favorably cited in al-Qaradawi's biography of al-Ghazali as an exemplar of a steadfast defense of religious principles.⁴³ This leaves little doubt as to the fate awaiting free-thinking intellectuals under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood: Societies in which someone who criticizes the tenets of Islam is liable to be murdered will invariably turn into societies in which heretics are tried as criminals and executed.

The synthesis of traditionalism and modernism on which Islamist thought is based allows the Muslim Brotherhood to assert that it can lead

the Arab world to technological and economic success, without condemning it to the spiritual emptiness and moral corruption that plagues the West. Yet this claim merely reflects the Brotherhood's misconception of the roots of Western achievement. Freedom from canonical taboos is not simply a side effect of scientific progress, but precisely its cause. One cannot restrict freedom of thought in one field and permit it in another, just as a university cannot ban any hint of skepticism regarding the historicity of prophetic stories on one side of its campus while expecting the development of new theories in physics or genetics on the other. Lacking the pluralism, tolerance, and irony that characterize Western democracies, Islamist regimes will inevitably perpetuate, and even worsen, the severe scientific and technological backwardness of today's Arab societies.

The challenge facing the Arab Spring can thus be summarized as follows: Democracy without the Muslim Brotherhood is impossible, but so is democracy under its leadership. There is no doubt that the Brotherhood enjoys broad support in every Arab country that has undergone democratic revolutions or uprisings in the last year. Elections in which the movement is not allowed to participate will therefore lack popular legitimacy. Moreover, the Brotherhood's liberal and democratic rhetoric will make it difficult for the legal establishment to disqualify the movement. The inevitable result of its electoral victory, however, will be the formation of a theocracy. It will not permit the scientific and technological revolution of which Arab societies are in such dire need. Simply put, the future of Arab democracy hangs by a thread: The Muslim Brotherhood must be permitted to run in elections, but not gain power.

What is the likelihood of such a scenario? Unfortunately, the Brotherhood is apt to win a majority in free elections in at least some Arab countries. The sad fact is, Islamists came out on top in the only truly free elections the Arab world has known in the last fifty years—in Algeria in 1991 and in the Palestinian Authority in 2006. It should come as no surprise

that in times of economic and ideological tumult, parties that offer a clear and simple platform, and one that promises metaphysical consolation to boot, enjoy widespread popularity. Moreover, in most Arab countries, the Muslim Brotherhood, despite internal divisions, is the best-organized political and social movement. This grants it a huge advantage over its liberal rivals, which are split into numerous factions and subfactions, as well as over the remnants of the old order, which no longer enjoys public legitimacy. The Islamists' ideological and organizational superiority will stand a greater chance of carrying the day if the emerging Arab democracies choose to adopt the plurality-constituency system, introduced—though in a spurious and meaningless form—by the authoritarian regimes that preceded them. In this system, employed in the United States and Great Britain, an organized and geographically decentralized political force can win an absolute majority in the legislature, even if it does not enjoy the support of a majority of the electorate. The Muslim Brotherhood, at least potentially, is such a force.

How can the West deal with the very tangible threat that Arab societies will be taken over by Islamist movements? If it confronts them, it will only confirm the Brotherhood's claim that the West conspires to undermine the religious identity of the Muslim world and seize control of it. If, however, the West sits on its hands, the nascent liberal camp will be doomed. This is the cruel and all-too-familiar Gordian knot of Arab democracy, in which the West is entangled as both liberator and conqueror, the solution and the problem.

Yet, however convoluted the knot may be, Western decision makers must not ignore the astonishing truth revealed during the previous year: Forces within Arab society yearn for genuine democracy, and understand that the Western form of government embodies a formula for human success and political stability. For democracy to strike real and lasting roots in the Arab world, the United States and its allies must free themselves of the influence of multi-cultural and post-colonial theories and determine—first for themselves, and then for others—the distinction between truly

enlightened regimes and their imitators. It is obvious that the West cannot coerce any electorate to vote against a traditionalist regime based on Islamic law. At the very least, however, it must make plain what it holds to be the essence of democracy, why the political ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood are incompatible with it, and, thus, why it cannot offer economic or diplomatic support to Arab states that follow the path of political Islam. The West needs to explain, to all who are willing to listen, that the conflict is not between the secular and the religious, the West and the East, the Christians and the Muslims. It is, quite simply, a clash between freedom and tyranny.

Uriya Shavit teaches Islamic history and theology at Tel-Aviv University.

Notes

1. On al-Qaradawi's life, career, and ideology, see, for example, Akram Kassab, *How al-Qaradawi Disseminates Religion* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 2006) [Arabic]; Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, "Yusuf al-Qaradawi and al-Azhar," in Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, eds., *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), pp. 27-53; Husam Tammam, "Yusuf Qaradawi and the Muslim Brothers: The Nature of a Special Relationship," in Gräf and Petersen, *Global Mufti*, pp. 55-83; Samuel Helfont, *Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Islam, and Modernity* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2009); Bettina Gräf, "IslamOnline.net: Independent, Interactive, Popular," *Arab Media & Society* 4 (Winter 2008); Uriya Shavit, *The New Imagined Community: Advanced Media Technologies and the Construction of National and Muslim Identities of Migrants* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), pp. 106, 127-132.

2. For al-Qaradawi's actual words, see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 19, 2011, as well as his personal website, www.qaradawi.net, February 20, 2011 [Arabic].

3. On al-Ghannushi's life, see Azzam S. Tamimi, *Rashid al-Ghannushi: A Democrat Within Islamism* (Oxford: Oxford, 2001).

4. Reuters, "Tunisian Islamic Leader Returns Home After 22 Years in Exile," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2011.

5. See Uriya Shavit, *The Wars of Democracy: The West and the Arabs from the Fall of Communism to the War in Iraq* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2008), pp. 19-37, 253-284 [Hebrew]; Uriya Shavit, "The Road to Democracy in the Arab World," *AZURE* 26 (Autumn 2006), pp. 34-62.

6. On the divisions among the liberal forces, as against the relative unity and organization of the Islamists, see, for example, Hala Mustafa, "The Egyptian Revolution: The Return of Spirit and Awareness," *al-Dimoqratiya* 42 (April 2011), pp. 6-14 [Arabic]. Mustafa, an Egyptian woman, is a prominent liberal intellectual and the editor of the journal *al-Dimoqratiya* (part of the *al-Ahram* group), which in recent decades has been one of the main forums of Arab democratic thought. On Mustafa's pro-democracy activity, see David Govrin, "Hala Mustafa and the Arab Liberal Predicament," *Middle East Quarterly* 17:2 (Spring 2010), pp. 41-52.

7. In June 2011, Abu al-Futuh was kicked out of the movement after announcing his intention to run for the presidency.

8. Abdel Moneim Abu al-Futuh, "Democracy Supporters Should Not Fear the Muslim Brotherhood," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2011.

9. Hilary Leila Krieger, "U.S. to Hold 'Limited' Contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood," *Jerusalem Post*, June 30, 2011. On the debate in the United States about the appropriate attitude toward the Brotherhood, see also Khalil El-Anani, "Not a Promising Dialogue," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, July 7-13, 2011.

10. There are also various movements on its fringes, which have either broken off from the mainstream or risen alongside it for tactical, geographical, or ideological reasons.

11. See al-Banna's most important letters: Hasan al-Banna, "Letter to the Light" (October 1936), in *Collected Letters of the Martyred Imam Hasan al-Banna* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1965), p. 192 [Arabic]; Hasan al-Banna, "Letter of the Fifth Assembly" (February 1939), in *Collected Letters*, pp. 244, 272, 277 [Arabic]; al-Banna, "Letter from Yesterday to Today" (1943), in *Collected Letters*, p. 225 [Arabic].

12. For this theory in Islamist literature, see, for example, al-Banna "Letter from Yesterday to Today," pp. 218-225; Muhammad Jalal Kishk, *The Ideological Attack* (Kuwait: Mafahim Islamiyya, 1967) [Arabic]; 'Ali Muhammad Jarisha and Muhammad Sharif al-Zaybaq, *The Methods of the Ideological Attack Against the Islamic World* (Cairo: Dar al-I'tisam, 1977) [Arabic]; Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The*

Cultural Attack Spreading in Our Vacuum (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998) [Arabic]; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Our Nation Between the Centuries* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002) [Arabic]; Muhammad Qutb, *Our Present Condition* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2006), pp. 182-185 [Arabic]; Muhammad Mahdi 'Akaf, "Commemorating the Martyrdom of the Martyr Hasan al-Banna," n.d., at www.ikhwanonline.com [Arabic]. See also the Hamas Charter, August 18, 1988, sec. 15 (English translation at www.theisraelproject.org/site/c.hsJPK0PIJpH/b.5086383/k.6148/Hamas_Charter__English.htm.) For a broader overview of the importance of the concept of "cultural attack" in Islamist thinking, see Uriya Shavit, *Islamist Constructions of the West: The Rise of Apologia and the Quest for Hegemony from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Early Twenty-First Centuries* (forthcoming), chs. 1-2.

13. See Hasan al-Banna's autobiography, *Memoirs of Spreading the Faith* (Dar al-Kitab bi al-Misr, n.d.), pp. 44-45 [Arabic].

14. Al-Banna, "Letter of the Fifth Assembly," pp. 279-294; Hasan al-Banna, "Spreading Our Religion in the New Stage" (August 1942), in *Collected Letters*, p. 73.

15. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and his disciple Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) sought to liberate Islam from the stranglehold of traditional dogmas and to demonstrate that there was no contradiction between the religious canon and scientific truth. The guiding principle of their belief system advocated a return to the original tenets of the faith as the key to prosperity and progress. Rashid Rida (1865-1935), one of 'Abduh's prominent followers, exerted profound influence on Hasan al-Banna, and particularly on the Muslim Brotherhood's perception of the West. The ideas of these apologetic modernists opened the door to the adoption of Western concepts, yet their main goal was to buttress the status of the religious canon as the guide for individuals in all spheres of life. Thus, their modernism was not essentially rational or liberal. For a survey of the ideas of al-Afghani, 'Abduh, and Rida, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London: Oxford, 1962), pp. 103-160, 222-244. On Rida's attitudes toward the West, see Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity: A Critical Reading of the Works of Muhammad Rachid Rida and His Associates (1898-1935)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

16. Al-Banna, "Letter to the Light," pp. 146-148; al-Banna, "Letter from Yesterday to Today," pp. 218-219. For similar ideas among contemporary Islamists regarding Islam's relationship to science and technology as they developed in the West, see al-Ghazali, *Cultural Attack*, pp. 34-35, 102-103; Muhammad 'Imara, *Cultural Independence* (Sixth-of-October City: Nahdat Misr lil-Taba'a wal-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 2007), pp. 128-164 [Arabic]; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Tapestry Tales of Our History* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2005), p. 108 [Arabic]. See also Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928-1942* (Reading, N.Y.: Ithaca, 1998), p. 76.

17. For a discussion of the roots and evolution of American fundamentalism, see, among others, Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1971); Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Re-awakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford, 1997); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980).

18. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *On the Religious Law of the State* (Cairo and Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 2001), p. 27 [Arabic]; Muhammad 'Imara, *Islam and Human Rights: Obligations, Not Rights* (Damascus and Cairo: Markaz al-Raya, Dar al-Islam, 2005), pp. 60-61 [Arabic].

19. See the remarks by al-Banna's disciple, al-Qaradawi, in his *On the Religious Law of the State*, pp. 151-160.

20. Rashid al-Ghannushi, "The Religious Law on Islamists' Participation in a Regime That Is Not Islamic," in Azzam Tamimi, ed., *Islamists' Participation in Government* (London: Liberty for the Muslim World, 1994), pp. 6-17 [Arabic].

21. 'Imara, *Islam and Human Rights*, p. 45; al-Qaradawi, *On the Religious Law of the State*, pp. 144-146; Hassan al-Turabi, *A Study of Political Religious Law* (Um al-Fahim: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Mu'asira, 1997), pp. 43-44 [Arabic]. Al-Turabi, born in 1932, is among the most prominent Islamist intellectuals of our time and the leader of political Islam in Sudan. He was a linchpin of Sudanese politics in the 1990s, but ran afoul of the dictator 'Omar al-Bashir in 2004.

22. Al-Qaradawi, *On the Religious Law of the State*, pp. 137-138; see also Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Unique Traits of Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahaba, 1977), p. 39 [Arabic]; Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Shura Crisis in Arab and Islamic Societies* (October 1990), p. 69 [Arabic].

23. Al-Ghazali, *Shura Crisis*, p. 41.

24. Al-Ghazali, *Cultural Attack*, p. 94.

25. Al-Ghazali, *Shura Crisis*, pp. 35-36. In another work, al-Ghazali wondered when the Muslim world would regain the freedom of expression customary in the West. See al-Ghazali, *Cultural Attack*, pp. 42-43.

26. Pew Research Center, *Egyptians Embrace Revolt Leaders, Religious Parties, and Military As Well*, Global Attitudes Project, April 25, 2011, <http://pewglobal.org/files/2011/04/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Egypt-Report-FINAL-April-25-2011.pdf>.

27. Al-Qaradawi, *On the Religious Law of the State*, p. 14; al-Qaradawi, *Unique Traits of Islam*, p. 33. On the limits of Islamic democracy in the wake of the Arab Spring, see al-Qaradawi's sermon "Democracy in Islam," June 11,

2011, posted on his website, www.qaradawi.net. See also ‘Imara, *Islam and Human Rights*, p. 61; al-Ghazali, *Shura Crisis*, pp. 42-46; al-Ghazali, *Cultural Attack*, p. 43.

28. Muhammad ‘Imara, *The Ideological Attack: True Vision or Delusion?* (Beirut and Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1997), pp. 126-180 [Arabic]; al-Qaradawi, *Unique Traits of Islam*, p. 87; al-Turabi, *Study of Political Religious Law*, pp. 43-44.

29. Rashid al-Ghannouchi, “Secularism in the Arab Maghreb,” in Azzam Tamimi and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), pp. 115-123.

30. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Imported Solutions and How They Have Harmed Our Nation* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risala, 1974), pp. 77-78 [Arabic].

31. ‘Imara, *Cultural Independence*, pp. 197-198.

32. See the third subsection of Article 3 of the draft platform of the Muslim Brotherhood, www.islamonline.net [Arabic].

33. Abu al-Futuh, “Democracy Supporters.”

34. “The Founding Statement of the Freedom and Justice Party,” June 1, 2011, <http://ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=28662> [Arabic].

35. For al-Qaradawi’s conceptualization of “a civil state whose authority is rooted in Islam,” see al-Qaradawi, *On the Religious Law of the State*, pp. 30-31.

36. David D. Kirkpatrick, “Egypt Elections Expose Divisions in Muslim Brotherhood,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2011.

37. It is no coincidence that one of the thriving genres of Western popular culture, situation comedies, is based on the tension between the existence of a taboo and its violation. John Cleese, a great artist at milking this type of tension, claimed that, in hindsight, one episode of the classic series *Fawlty Towers* was not up to the mark because it dealt with a relatively weak taboo—gambling—in contrast to episodes that focused on the abuse of corpses, social classes, and rats on a plate of cookies.

38. Al-Banna, *Memoirs of Spreading the Faith*, pp. 49-50.

39. Naguib Mahfouz, *The Cairo Trilogy*, vol. 2: *Palace of Desire*, trans. William Maynard Hutchins (New York: Knopf, 2001), pp. 891, 893.

40. ‘Imara, *Ideological Attack*, pp. 110-125.

41. ‘Ali Abd al-Raziq, *Islam and the Foundations of Government* (Cairo: Matba’at Misr, 1925), pp. 57, 72 [Arabic]. See the interview with ‘Abd al-Raziq in *al-Siyasa*, quoted in Muhammad ‘Imara’s attack on the former’s book: Muhammad

'Imara, *Islam and the Foundations of Democracy According to 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Arabiyya lil Dirasat wal-Nashr, 1972), p. 92 [Arabic].

42. See Meir Hatina, *Islam in Modern Egypt: Studies in the Writings of Faraj Fuda* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2000), pp. 48-165 [Hebrew].

43. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Sheikh al-Ghazali as I Knew Him* (al-Mansura: Dar al-Wafa l'il Tiba'a wal-Nashr wal-Tawzi', 1995), pp. 270-275 [Arabic].