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Facts & Findings

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What is the Muslim Brotherhood in the West?

Towards a commonly accepted framework

Lorenzo Vidino

- Security services and commentators have warned about the dangers posed by the activities of Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups to liberal democracy. Yet, a commonly accepted terminology and analytical framework to explain what is the Muslim Brotherhood in the West is lacking.
- The term Muslim Brotherhood refers to three, separate yet connected realities which are: core Brotherhood with nuclear units of a handful of activists, Brotherhood spawns, and organisations influenced by the Brotherhood.
- Organisations influenced by the Brotherhood are adopting an ideology that is influenced by that of the Brotherhood but they have no clear operational ties to the group. This makes their categorisation as "Muslim Brotherhood" a difficult one to sustain.
- While ties to branches of the Brotherhood in Arab countries are important, it is insertion in the European branches of the Brotherhood that constitutes the determining factor when assessing whether a European organisation belongs to the Brotherhood milieu.
- If European-based organisations connected to the Brotherhood acknowledged the existence of ties to the Brotherhood, it would allow them to be seen as more honest interlocutors, dispelling many of the accusations of duplicity and opaqueness.

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Introduction

Authorities are concerned about "non-violent" Islamist organisations.

Authorities and commentators throughout Europe are increasingly concerned about "non-violent" (or, using a German term, "legalistic," to differentiate them from terrorist and therefore illegal organisations) Islamist organisations and, in particular, offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood operating on the continent. The debate is particularly intense in Germany. German security services, in fact, have consistently warned about the dangers posed by the activities of Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups, arguing that they polarise society and undermine democracy.[1] "In the long run," warned the 2018 annual report by the security services of Nordrhein-Westfalen, "the threat posed by legalistic Islamism to the liberal democratic system is greater than that of jihadism."[2]

While some, in Germany like elsewhere, back these negative views, others adopt a less skeptical outlook. In substance, no European country has adopted a common assessment and engagement policy towards legalistic Islamism, of which Muslim Brotherhood-linked networks represent the model. The debate, which is often marked by strident tones, has important policy implications, considering the large influence that the small yet highly organised cluster of Brotherhood-influenced organisations in the West yields within Muslim communities and in the general discourse over Islam in the West.

Only few aspects of the Brotherhood are uncontested.

Yet, despite a presence in Europe that is more than half-century long, few aspects of the Muslim Brotherhood are clear and uncontested. Tellingly, difficulties arise even when it comes to the first logical step of any analysis: identifying what is the Brotherhood. European governments and commentators, in fact, have endlessly debated whether certain Muslim organisations or individuals can be termed as "part of", "linked to," or "inspired by" the Brotherhood. And while some critics tend to exaggerate said connections, Brotherhood-linked activists have traditionally gone to great lengths to downplay or hide them. In substance, it is unclear what one can mean by "Muslim Brotherhood" in the West. The issue is not without consequences from both a policy and legal point of view (the latter being particularly evident recently in Germany, given the various lawsuits filed against security services and critics by allegedly Brotherhood-linked individuals and organisations).

This paper attempts to craft a commonly accepted terminology, providing an analytical framework to explain what is the Muslim Brotherhood in Western countries.

The Brotherhood in the Muslim-majority world

The Muslim Brotherhood is the oldest and the world's most influential Islamist movement. Since its foundation, it has played a crucial role in political, religious and social developments in the Arab world. The Brotherhood's view of Islam as a complete and all-embracing system, governing all aspects of private and public life, has in fact shaped generations of Islamists worldwide, from those who seek to implement their vision through peaceful means to those who have departed from the Brotherhood's approach and make acts of brutal violence their primary modus operandi.

Secrecy as tactics to survive

Despite this enormous influence, few aspects of the organisation are uncontested. Views over its inner workings, ideology, and aims differ widely among scholars, policymakers and the general public, in the Muslim world as well as in the West. The group's proverbial secrecy is one of the main reasons for this confusion. As the Brotherhood was founded and operates mostly in countries where local regimes have enacted various forms of repression against it, the movement has understandably always seen confidentiality and dissimulation as necessary tactics to survive. Moreover, a universal assessment of what the Brotherhood is and wants is further complicated by the fact that, to some degree, the organisation's ideology and tactics have changed over time and vary from country to country.[3]

Even the very name of the organisation can be interpreted in various ways. Arguably the term is most commonly used to refer to the organisation founded by Hassan al Banna in 1928 in Egypt. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has gone through many phases since then, including several crackdowns on the part of various Egyptian regimes and, in the aftermath of the 2011 overthrow of president Hosni Mubarak, a brief moment at the helm of the Egyptian state. Still today, despite its deep crisis, the term Muslim Brotherhood is frequently used in reference to its Egyptian branch, the mother group from which all others originate.

But, since the 1940s, the Brotherhood's message and approach to mobilisation has spread to virtually all Arab and Muslim-majority countries. In each country, individuals embracing the group's worldview have established networks that mirror its structure and have adapted its tactics to local dynamics and political conditions. It is common to refer to these networks in each country as Muslim Brotherhood branches, even though the term should not imply an authority of the Egyptian mother group over them.

The term Muslim Brotherhood is often used with a third meaning, encompassing the totality of the national branches of the organisation and all the entities worldwide that adhere to al Banna's ideology and methodology. All these actors work according to a common vision but with operational independence, free to pursue their goals as they deem appropriate.

A global web of organisational, personal and financial connections

Despite this complete operational independence, the individuals and entities that belong to the so-called global Muslim Brotherhood perceive themselves as part of a larger family. Their ties go beyond just a common origin and a shared ideological foundation, and they constitute a global web of organisational, personal, and financial connections.

Finally, Muslim Brotherhood could also be used to identify a type of Islamist activism, a methodology of socio-religious-political mobilisation that, transcending formal and informal affiliations, is inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. The adoption of its mindset by non-affiliated groups has been seen positively by the "formal" Brotherhood, from its origins until today. Al Banna himself advocated for creating a global movement rather than a formally structured organisation, as he saw the Brotherhood "as an idea and a

creed, a system and a syllabus, which is why we are not bounded by a place or a group of people."[4] In 2005, Mohammed Akef, then *murshid* of the Egyptian branch of the Muslim, explained that "a person who is in the global arena and believes in the Muslim Brotherhood's path is considered part of us and we are part of him."[5] Other senior Brotherhood members have described the movement as a "common way of thinking" and "an international school of thought."[6]

The movement as a "common way of thinking"

The Brotherhood in the West

The first active presence of Brothers in the West can be dated to the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when small, scattered groups of activists left various Middle Eastern countries to settle in cities throughout Europe and North America. A handful of these pioneers, like Said Ramadan and Yussuf Nada, were prominent members of the Egyptian Brotherhood fleeing the crackdown implemented by the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser. In the following decades, Brotherhood members from other Middle Eastern countries similarly found refuge in the West.

The first active presence of Brothers in the West

Yet, the majority of Brotherhood-linked activists relocating to the West were students, members of the educated middle classes of the Middle East who had already joined or had flirted with the idea of joining the Brotherhood in their home countries. Settling in the West to further their studies, these students continued their involvement in Islamic activities in their new environments. The combination of experienced activists and enthusiastic students bore immediate fruits, as Brotherhood activists formed some of the West's first Muslim organisations – most often small student groupings.

The arrival of the first Brothers to Europe and North America was hardly the first phase of a concerted and sinister plot of the Muslim Brotherhood to Islamise the West, as it is sometimes portrayed.[7] They initially represented a small, disperse contingent of militants whose move reflected not a centralised plan, but rather personal decisions that fortuitously brought some Brotherhood figures to spend years or the rest of their lives in the West. Yet, the small organisations they formed soon developed beyond their most optimistic expectations. The Brothers' student groupings evolved into organisations seeking to fulfil the religious needs of the West's rapidly growing Muslim populations and their mosques – often structured as multi-purpose community centers – attracted large numbers of worshippers.

Starting in the late 1980s, the European Brothers began realising that their presence in the West was permanent and could have been an important asset for the movement worldwide. While still supporting in words and deeds their counterparts' efforts to establish Islamic states in the Muslim world, they increasingly focused their attention on their new reality in the West and aimed at introducing Western Muslim communities to their interpretation of Islam. Following al Banna's complex organisational model, they established an ever-growing constellation of overlapping organisations devoted to tasks ranging from education to financial investments, political lobbying and charity. The ample funds they received from wealthy public and private donors in the Arab Gulf allowed the Brothers to operate well beyond what their small numbers would have otherwise provided for.

Ever-growing, overlapping organisations.

Moreover, in many countries the Western Brothers have positioned themselves at the forefront of the competition to be the main interlocutors of local establishments. Although circumstances vary from country to country, when Western governments or media attempt to reach out to the Muslim community, it is quite likely that many, if not all, of the organisa-

tions or individuals that are engaged belong, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, to the network of the Western Brothers. It is not uncommon to find exceptions to this situation and things have changed in various countries over the last few years but overall it is apparent that no other Islamic movement has the visibility, political influence, and access to Western elites that the Western Brothers have obtained over the last decades. In light of these facts, it is fair to portray the competition for the representation of Western Muslims as the relative victory of a well-organised minority over other, less organised minorities for the voice of a silent majority.

Opinions split between optimists and pessimists

Assessments of the Western Brothers closely resemble those of the global Islamist movement, with opinions split between optimists and pessimists. More specifically, optimists argue that the Western Brothers are simply a socially conservative force that, unlike other movements with which they are often mistakenly grouped, encourages the integration of Western Muslim communities and offers a model in which Muslims can live their faith fully and maintain a strong Islamic identity while becoming actively engaged citizens.[8] Therefore, the optimists argue, governments should harness the Western Brothers' grassroots activities and cooperate with them.

Pessimists see a much more sinister nature of the Western Brotherhood. Thanks to their resources and the naiveté of most Westerners, they argue, the Western Brothers are engaged in a slow but steady social engineering program, aimed at Islamising Western Muslim populations and, ultimately, at competing with Western governments for their allegiance. The pessimists accuse the Brothers of being modern-day Trojan horses, engaged in a sort of stealth subversion designed to weaken Western society from within, patiently laying the foundations for its replacement with an Islamic order.[9] The fact that the Western Brothers do not use violence but participate with enthusiasm in the democratic process is seen simply as a cold calculation on their part. Realising they are still a relatively weak force, the Brothers have opted for a different tactic: befriending the establishment.

Should Western governments partner with them?

Opinions on the Brotherhood swing dramatically not just within the academic community but also within virtually every Western government. This leads to huge inconsistencies in policies, not only from one country to another but also within each country, where positions diverge from ministry to ministry, and even from office to office of the same body. Despite the difficulties experienced by all Western countries in doing so, determining what the Western Brothers' nature and aims are is hugely important, as it has important policy implications. For example, should Western governments partner with organisations linked to the Brotherhood, which often control a larger and better organised cadre of teachers than other Muslim organisations, to teach Islam in public schools? Should they be the partners of Western governments in training and selecting chaplains for the prison system, the military, and other similar bodies? Should they be made partners of a domestic counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation strategy?

These issues are deeply intertwined, making them even more complicated. It is apparent that the first step in determining cogent policies is to understand how the Muslim Brotherhood in the West, operates, what it believes and what it wants – and, before that, what it is.

A tripartite categorisation of Brotherhood entities in the West

Activists have downplayed ties to the Brotherhood.

As said, one of the most challenging aspects related to the Muslim Brotherhood in the West is identifying which organisations and individuals can be linked to the movement. Governments and commentators have endlessly debated whether the organisations founded by the Brotherhood's pioneers and their offshoots – established decades ago and increasingly guided by a second generation of mostly Western-born leaders – can be described as Muslim Brotherhood entities.[10] Complicating things, most Western-based, Brotherhood-linked activists, aware of the negative stigma that any possible link to the Muslim Brotherhood can create, have traditionally gone to great lengths to downplay or hide such ties.

The term Brotherhood refers to three realities

Terminology can indeed be deceiving and, as in the Middle East, the term Muslim Brotherhood in the West can mean different things. While other categorisations are certainly possible, it can, be argued that the term Muslim Brotherhood refers to three, separate yet highly connected realities which, in decreasing degrees of intensity, are: core Brotherhood, Brotherhood spawns, and organisations influenced by the Brotherhood.

Core Brotherhood

Non-public/secret networks

Core Brotherhood are the non-public/secret networks established in the West by the members of Middle Eastern branches of the Brotherhood. In all Western countries, in fact, the first generation of pioneers arriving from the Arab world set up structures that mirrored, albeit on a much smaller scale, those of the countries of origin. Establishing, de facto, a small Brotherhood branch in every Western country, they recreated the organisation's traditional system of selective recruitment, formal induction, fee-paying membership, and the pyramidal structure that goes from the usra, the nuclear unit of a handful of activists that meet weekly at the local level, to an elected leadership supervising the activities in the country in each. This structure is kept strictly secret and vehemently denied (or, in some cases, described as just a thing of the past) by the Western Brothers when brought up by critics. It still represents the cornerstone of the Brotherhood in the West.

The usra as the nuclear unit

Insightful details on this non-public structure are provided by Kamal Helbawy, a legendary figure in Islamist circles for more than 60 years and one of the most senior members of the Brotherhood to have ever operated in the West.[11] "There are different types of [Brotherhood] organisations in the West," explains Helbawy, "there are organisations purely for Ikhwan, and maybe no one will know about the name, or know about the essence." In describing the inner workings of the core, Helbawy paints a picture of formal structure that resembles, albeit on a smaller scale, how the Brotherhood works in Egypt or other Middle Eastern countries. "The first unit or block is the *usra*," explains Helbawy, "a group of five to ten people, either living in a neighbourhood or working in the same mission, orientation: engineers, doctors." Exactly like in Egypt, also in the West "ten usras come together under one leadership and they have certain programs. … And then you have the executive local unit that takes administration of that area, and then you have the, you can say the local *shura* of this region."[12]

Obviously, because the number of Brothers in Western countries is relatively small, this structure is not always perfectly replicated. Helbawy, who was a key clog in the U.K. Brotherhood system for decades, estimates that the individuals in Britain who are "active Ikhwan" – that is, sworn members who are inserted in the *usra* system – is somewhere between six hundred and one thousand. In many other Western countries the number is significantly lower.

Brotherhood spawns

Visible/public organisations

Brotherhood spawns, on the other hand, are visible/public organisations established by individuals who belong to the "core Brotherhood." As previously mentioned, over time Western Brothers established a wide web of entities devoted to a broad array of activities. None of these organisations publicly identifies as having links (if not, at times, in purely historical or ideological terms) with any structure of the Muslim Brotherhood. But, in reality, these organisations represent the other side of the coin to the core Brothers – the public face of the secretive network, and the part that advances the group's agenda in society without giving away the secret structure.

Binary structure

As said, Western Brothers replicated the secret structure adopted in Middle Eastern countries, but they also created a large web of heterogeneous organisations that they control but that do not publicly identify as being linked to the Brotherhood. The Brothers' decision to create this binary structure is largely dependent on to their understanding that organisations that cannot, in theory, be directly linked to the group are more effective at conducting the kind of engagement it seeks with Muslim communities and Western society.

Indicators to assess an organisation

Given the lack of formal affiliation and the conscious effort by the Western Brothers to downplay or deny their links to the Muslim Brotherhood, identifying an organisation as a spawn is a challenge. Nevertheless, there are a number of indicators that, while not conclusive and generally only if several of them are present, help to assess whether a certain organisation is a Brotherhood spawn. These include the history of the organisation; its founders' and main activists' consistent links to Brotherhood members and organisations in the country where it operates and in others; its consistent adoption of Brotherhood texts and literature; substantial financial ties with other Brotherhood structures and funders; and consistent formal or informal participation in transnational Brotherhood initiatives and organisations.

Organisations influenced by the Brotherhood

Adopting Brotherhood ideology, but no operational ties

Finally, organisations influenced by the Brotherhood are those that, while adopting an ideology that is clearly influenced by that of the organisation, have no clear operational ties to it. Traces of Brotherhood presence might be present, for example, in the composition of the board, the organisation's sources of funding, or some ideological influences. But, at the same time, organisations belonging to this third tier of the Western Brotherhood might have diverse memberships (including non-Islamists and even non-Muslims), might engage in progressive reinterpretations of classic Islamist thought, and might even try to emancipate themselves from Brotherhood tutelage.

Many activists are not Brotherhood members

"There are other organisations," explains Helbawy, "especially in the field of welfare and relief organisations, that are run by [the] Muslim Brotherhood … and can involve Muslim Brothers and non-Muslim Brothers." Many of the people involved in these organisations, even in senior positions, are not members of the Brotherhood and in most cases have no idea of – and would even strongly and sincerely deny – their links to the Brotherhood.[13] Yet, their relatively small numbers, according to Helbawy, does not diminish the Brothers' domination of these organisations, as they will always maintain sway by controlling the board and using other tactics. At the same time, the presence – often in very visible positions – of individuals who clearly are not Muslim Brotherhood members is advantageous to the Brotherhood, as it makes the accusation that these organisations are "Muslim Brotherhood" a difficult one to sustain.

Inevitably, this tripartite classification cannot encapsulate all the degrees of complexity that surround organisations linked to the Brotherhood. As Brigitte Marechal puts it, "[w]hat makes the Brotherhood so complex is that it consists of various types of superimposed

structures, some of them evolving out of the local European situation, while others trace their history back to the organisation's country of origin."[14] The movement's secrecy makes most efforts aimed at understanding it's and its spinoffs' inner workings challenging. By the same token, fluidity is another element that needs to be taken into consideration, as it is not uncommon for organisations and individuals to increase or decrease their levels of personal, structural and ideological connectivity with the Brotherhood and therefore shift position in the tripartition.

The secrecy makes analysis challenging

Despite these important limitations, this classification aims to provide some nuance and order to a debate that often becomes polarised along two "extreme" and simplistic positions: the "there-is-no-Muslim-Brotherhood-in-the-West-save-some-isolated-activist" approach and the "all-organisations-with-some-Brotherhood-trace-are-part-of-the-Muslim-Brotherhood" line of thinking.

Independent Western Brotherhood branches

Unfortunately, the debate about Brotherhood-linked entities often does not enter the realm of substance, but stops at the issue of identification. It is a common dynamic for critics to accuse an individual or an organisation of ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and for the accused part to reject the accusation, arguing it is unsubstantiated. It is not infrequent for this diatribe to move from the public realm to a court of law. And while defamation laws change from country to country and a myriad of factors influence the outcome of each legal challenge, the specific language the accuser used to allege a connection to the Brotherhood is a crucial factor.

The debate often stops at identification

More specifically, charges of connectivity to the Brotherhood can be placed on a spectrum. On one extreme, one can situate statements with which critics accuse a specific individual or organisation of a strong, direct linkage to the Muslim Brotherhood ("individual X is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood," "organisation Y belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood"). On the opposite end of the spectrum are more nuanced charges that allege simply a consistent connection with the Brotherhood without indicating some kind of formal insertion in it ("individual X has ties to the Brotherhood network," "organisation Y is part of the Brotherhood milieu").

Irrespective of how it is framed, the charge is often based on an alleged connection between an individual or an organisation operating in Europe and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. The issue of the connections between European-based networks and those in the Arab world is a complex one. On one hand, it is apparent that, when they established the first Brotherhood presence in the West, activists transplanted tout court – or subjected to only minor variations – many of the dynamics of how the Brotherhood operates in the East. Still today, when it comes to the core, the pure Brothers, the structure and inner workings of the Brotherhood in the West are almost identical to those of mother branches in the Arab world.

At the same, though, this replication of forms and structures does not imply subordination. While it is true that European Brotherhood networks are modelled on those of the Arab world, with time they have grown increasingly independent. It is obvious that European Brothers look up to the significantly older, larger and more developed Middle Eastern Brotherhood networks, with whom they are in constant communication and coordination. But that does not mean that European Brotherhood organisations regularly receive marching orders from the East on what strategy to adopt and how to pursue their goals. Rather, it is arguable that they are independent, junior members of a global family, but without any subordination.

A global family, but without subordination

This assessment has important implication for the issue of identification. It is arguable, in fact, that the debate over determining whether a European Muslim organisation "belongs to the Brotherhood" is often incorrectly framed. In many cases, in fact, an organisation's affiliation to the Brotherhood is assessed based on its connections to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or, more broadly, the Arab world. Those making the charge that a specific organisation is linked to the Brotherhood will, in fact, say that "it is part of the Muslim Brotherhood" or use similar expressions that denote a subordination to some branch in the Middle East. Those denying that the organisation has ties to the Brotherhood will emphasise said organisation's independence from Cairo or, more broadly, the Middle East.

Organisations are independent and autonomous.

It appears that neither analysis captures the reality of the Brotherhood in the West. Unquestionably, ties to the mother branch in the Middle East are an important indicator but they are not the key to determining whether an organisation can be determined to be "Muslim Brotherhood." Rather, evidence shows that, over the last few decades, in most European countries, a small cluster of Brotherhood members originally hailing from the Arab world (numbers for this group of core activists is in the low hundreds in most European countries) created independent Brotherhood structures, which mirrored those of the mother countries, albeit on a smaller scale. There is therefore a French Brotherhood, a Swedish Brotherhood, a British Brotherhood, exactly as there is an Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian Brotherhood.

The way to identify whether a public organisation based in a Western country belongs to the Brotherhood is therefore not necessarily by uncovering possible but, in most cases, feeble ties to any Middle Eastern country. Rather, that determination is better made by assessing whether they are a direct emanation of the Brotherhood branch of the specific Western country in which it operates. While it is often true, as Western Brothers say, that their organisations and structures are independent and do not "receive orders from Cairo," that fact in itself does not indicate that they are not Muslim Brotherhood.

This analysis is confirmed by many Brotherhood leaders themselves. In an interview, former Egyptian Brotherhood *murshid* Mohammed Akef clearly described how the Brotherhood transcends formalities such as official affiliation: "Nous n'avons pas une organisation internationale. Nous avons une organisation à travers notre perception des choses. … Partout, il y a des gens qui croient dans la pensée des Frères musulmans. En France, l'Union des organisations islamique de France (UOIF) n'appatient pas à l'organisation des Frères. Même si elle suit ses lois et ses règles."[15] Confirming the informality of the movement's ties, Akef elsewhere referred to the UOIF as "our brothers in France." Finally, in a 2005 interview, Akef explained that European Brotherhood organisations have no direct link to the Egyptian branch, yet they coordinate actions with them. He concluded the interview with a telling remark: "Ces organisations et institutions sont indépendantes et autonomes. Nous ne les contrôlons pas. Ce sont les Frères à l'étranger qui dirigent ces organisations. … mais nous avons tendance à ne pas faire de distinction entre eux."[16]

Conclusion

This paper sought to provide a common analytical framework and a nuanced terminological approach to the issue of Brotherhood-linked organisations in Europe. Its main findings are the following.

A clear labelling is problematic

Identifying individuals as Brothers is difficult.

The tripartite analysis ideally provides a benchmark upon which scaling the intensity of the connectivity to Brotherhood networks of individual organisations. It is apparent that identifying individuals as pure Brothers is something very difficult to do, given the firm tendency of European Brothers (unlike members of the Brotherhood in the Arab world, who are generally open about their affiliation) to identify themselves as such.

Therefore, unless one has solid evidence proving it, it seems unwise to call a specific individual a "member of the Muslim Brotherhood." This is not just because of a general rule that should require any allegation to be backed by proof, but, in the specific case, by the fact that many individuals who are active in Brotherhood-linked networks are not actually full-fledged Brotherhood members – a status that is, as seen, reserved to a small elite. It seems therefore more appropriate to use a vaguer terminology, such as referring to a specific individual as somebody with "(strong) links to Muslim Brotherhood milieus" or similar expressions.

Terminological accuracy is crucial

This is particularly true when it comes to organisations that belong to the second and third tier of the tripartite categorisation – Brotherhood spawns and organisations influenced by the Brotherhood. Calling them "Muslim Brotherhood" organisations, while in substance not a flawed assessment, is technically incorrect and potentially problematic. Assuming the organisation's argument meets the criteria outlined (strong and consistent organisational, personal and financial insertion in Brotherhood network), it seems more accurate to refer to it as an entity "close to Muslim Brotherhood milieus" or "with strong connections to Muslim Brotherhood networks."

Connections to the Middle East are not the determining factor

Ties to Brotherhood in Arab countries not the determining factor

While historical and current ties to branches of the Brotherhood in Egypt or other Arab countries are unquestionably an important element in assessing a European organisation, they are not the be-all and end-all. Today, there are branches of the Brotherhood in most European countries that replicate, albeit on a much smaller scale, those of the Middle East. Insertion in these former branches, rather than the latter, constitute the deciding element when determining whether a European organisation belongs to the Brotherhood milieu.

Honesty would foster a healthier debate

In conclusion, as an additional point, it could be argued that many of these issues could be surpassed if European-based individuals and organisations connected to the Brotherhood acknowledged the quite obvious existence of strong and historical ties to the Brotherhood, and became open about both the organisational and ideological depths of such connectivity. Unlike in several Arab countries, the Brotherhood is not considered a terrorist organisation in Europe – nor should it be.

Openness would allow them to be seen as more honest interlocutors.

Openness about their history and ideology would unquestionably open European Brotherhood networks to strong critiques – something that they are already facing anyways – but to none of the security issues they are confronted with in countries like Egypt or Syria. But, at the same time, it would allow them to be seen as more honest interlocutors by European establishments, dispelling many of the critics' constant accusations of duplicity and opaqueness that

start with their reluctance to acknowledge the obvious. And rather than on terminological and identification issues, the debate would switch to more important issues related to the substance of their message.

1 Burkhard Freier, "Die Gefahr der sozialen Spaltung," by Thomas Thiel, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, November 11, 2019.

2 Verfassungsschutzbericht Nordrhein-Westfalen, Jahresbericht 2018, 221.

3 In this regard, for an assessment of recent dynamics within the Egyptian branch of the Brotherhood, see Annette Ranko and Mohammad Yaghi, "Organizational Split and Radicalization Within Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," Policywatch 3089, Washington Institute for Near East Studies, March 4, 2019.

4 Cited in Hillel Fradkin, "The History and Unwritten Future of Salafism," Current Trends in Islamist Ideology (November 2007): 5–19.

5 Interview with Mohammed Mahdi Akef, Asharq Al-Awsat. December 11, 2005.

6 Yussuf Nada, interview with the author, July 2008, Campione d'Italia; Abd El Monem Abou El Fotouh, interview with the author, December 2008, Cairo.

7 Brigitte Marechal, The Muslim Brothers in Europe: Roots and Discourse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 56–82.

8 Olivier Roy, Secularism Confronts Islam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 94–98.

9 The expression is used, for example, by the British MP Michael Gove in his book Celsius 7/7 (London: Phoenix, 2006), 84–113.

10 See, for example, in Edwin Bakker and Roel Meijer, The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe (Oxford University Press, 2013); and Hakim el Karaoui, "La Fabrique de l'Islamisme" (report for the Institut Montaigne, September 2018).

11 Kamal Helbawy, interview with the author, May and December 2017, London. The interviews constitute the backbone of the chapter on Helbawy in the author's forthcoming book.

12 ibid.

13 Confirming this analysis, writes Petersen of Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid, a British-based charity influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami: "While the boards of trustees is by and large unchanged, and many first generation staff members have remained in the organisation, in recent years, both Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid have increasingly incorporated a new generation of staff. First of all, and contrary to the older generation, many of the new staff members have relevant development education and experience. Some have a degree in development studies, others in e.g. journalism, nutrition, politics, or sociology. Many people, in particular among country office staff, have previously worked in national, non-Muslim, NGOs such as BRAC, just like several move on to work in transnational development NGOs such as CARE, Oxfam or Save the Children. They work in Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid, because they want to work in a development NGO, not because they want to work in a religious organisation." Marie Juul Petersen, "For Humanity or for the Umma? Ideologies of Aid in Four Transnational Muslim NGOs" (thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2011), 196. She also adds that several staffers at Islamic Relief are non-Muslims.

14 Brigitte Maréchal, "The European Muslim Brothers' Quest to Become a Social (Cultural) Movement," in The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, eds. Edwin Bakker and Roel Meijer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 91.

15 Cited in Xavier Ternisien, Les Frères Musulmans (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 110–111.

16 Cited in Sylvain Besson, La Conquête de l'Occident (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 100.

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