

Communication strategies of winning hearts and minds: The case of the Muslim Brotherhood's political communication campaign post Morsi's downfall

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Abstract

This article examines how social movements attempt to repair a tarnished image and win the hearts and minds of the public. It studies the Muslim Brotherhood's political communication campaign post-July 2013. A content analysis of a census of the Brotherhood's communiqués issued during a 5-year period was performed. Considering social movement theory, this case study reveals that strategic framing can be employed as a strategy to win the hearts and minds of the target audience and to repair tarnished images. It also argues that legitimacy is a critical moral resource that lies at the heart of Islamist movements' communication campaigns.

Keywords

Content analysis, Egypt, image restoration, legitimacy, Muslim Brotherhood, political communication, social movements, us versus them, victimhood, winning hearts and minds

Introduction

Winning the hearts and minds of public opinion is the overarching goal of political actors. In the political realm, political actors are increasingly deploying various strategies and tactics for the purpose of winning the hearts and minds of their target audience and convincing them that their goals, values and desires are similar to those of their audience. Political communication is also used to neutralize and change prevailing negative

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ideas about and distorted images of politicians. Strategies and tactics for winning the hearts and minds of the public undoubtedly vary depending on the context and the nature of the society in which specific strategies could be effective. Considering social movement theory, this article attempts to discuss the Muslim Brotherhood's communication strategies to restore its tarnished image and to win the hearts and minds of the Egyptians after it had been removed from power on 3 July 2013. Hence, this article is devoted to answering the following research questions:

RQ1: *What* image restoration and winning hearts and minds strategies did the Brotherhood deploy in its post-July 2013 political communication campaign?

RQ2: *How* does social movement theory help to explain the Brotherhood's deployment of such strategies?

By answering these research questions, the study bridges the gap between social movement theory and political communication studies by clarifying how social movements employ strategic framing as a technique to promote themselves and mobilize proponents. The case study argues that legitimacy is a critical moral resource around which political communication campaigns of social movements revolve. Legitimacy can shed crucial light on how social movements attempt to shore up this moral resource and the way they deploy it to frame themselves in a credible manner to enhance their image and win the hearts and minds of their target audience to fulfil their political desires.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Historical background and the context of the study

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in February 1928 by the Egyptian schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna. Before the Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood was acting mostly in the shadows of Egypt's political space. However, between 2011 and 2012, the movement was able to successfully lead itself to victory through democratic elections. Besides their sweeping victory in the parliamentary election, the Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi became Egypt's first democratically elected president. The Brotherhood's ability to communicate its points of view and socio-political messages, and thus its ability to attract growing numbers of Egyptians and influence them to gather around its ideology and political projects, demonstrates the value of a specific political communication strategy in its success. However, on 3 July 2013, Morsi was deposed and detained by the military. On 25 December 2013, the government declared the Brotherhood a terrorist group (*The Guardian*, 2013). On 14 August 2013, the military crackdown on the Brotherhood's sit-in protest undoubtedly constituted the most notorious and brutal public massacre in Egypt's modern political history. This took place at the Rābi'a al-Adawiya Square where the pro-Morsi sit-in and protests had been taking place since Morsi's removal. Egyptian security forces killed 817 protesters in their attempts to disperse the Brotherhood supporters over a period of 40 days (*The Guardian*, 2014). On 9 August 2014, the Egyptian High Court dissolved the Brotherhood and its political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) (Al Jazeera, 2014). On 16 May 2015,

Morsi and more than 100 others were sentenced to death (*The Guardian*, 2015). However, the death sentence was later overturned. On 17 June 2019, Morsi died while on trial on espionage charges. He was already facing decades in jail after being sentenced in three other trials (BBC, 2019).

Within this challenging context, this article attempts to discuss the communication strategies the Brotherhood deployed to influence a self-positive image in response to the Egyptian regime's attempts to demonize it and to win the hearts and minds of the Egyptian people.

Strategies for winning hearts and minds

The struggle between the Islamists and the Western intelligence agencies is rightly identified by scholars as a 'war of ideas'. As the leader of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, described it, 'We are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of Muslims' (Alexander and Kraft, 2007: 546). Based on the discussion of Gurman (2013) and other contributors such as Hack (2013) and Lanzona (2013), winning hearts and minds can be defined as a term sometimes articulated in the context of conflicts, political contestation, insurgency and counter-insurgency, in which a group attempts to prevail not by the usage of force, but by employing communicational appeals to influence target publics, advance the group's mission, and achieve its political goals. Accordingly, self-image management repair and winning hearts and minds are crucial parts of political communication campaigns. Self-image restoration and winning hearts and minds strategies are defined here as the most dominant communicational frames that the Brotherhood deployed to shape and influence a self-positive image in the political arena and sway supporters of their rivals to fulfill the movement's political desires.

Scholars that investigated image restoration relied on the theory of image restoration discourse, which includes five strategies: (1) denial, comprising simple denial or shifting blame; (2) evasion of responsibility, including provocation, defeasibility, accident and good intention; (3) reducing the offensiveness of the event, involving bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking the accuser, and compensation; (4) corrective action to solve the problem or prevent recurrence; (5) mortification through apology (Benoit, 1997: 179). Indeed, such strategies may constitute an approach that aims at analysing strategies that were followed to repair an image following a single event (Anagondahalli, 2013; Formentin et al., 2017; Walsh and McAllister-Spooner, 2011; Xifra, 2012), but seems to be a less than ideal framework to explore the strategies that were employed by a social movement over a long time span of a violent political scene. Therefore, a more comprehensive framework is required to answer the current research questions. The current study suggests that social movement theory provides an inclusive theoretical framework that allows a thorough investigation of the political communication strategies employed for repairing a tarnished image and winning hearts and minds.

Theoretical framework

This study relies on social movement theory as a theoretical framework. The analytical framework of the theory comprises three key approaches: resource mobilization,

political opportunity structure, and strategic framing. Resource mobilization researchers seek to explain how social movements mobilize successfully to pursue their desired goals (Edwards and Kane, 2014: 205). Strategic framing looks at how social movements frame relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists (Snow and Benford, 1988: 198). Political opportunity structures are the ‘specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others’ (Kitschelt, 1986: 58).

This article relies on the concepts of resource mobilization (focusing mainly on legitimacy) and strategic framing (as positive stereotyping) situated within social movement theory. The study argues that the legitimacy concept of social movement theory is useful for understanding how Islamist social movements attempt to present themselves to the public as legitimate actors. This article also argues that strategic framing works as a technique to restore self-image and win the hearts and minds of target audiences.

Methodological approach

To answer the research questions, a content analysis of the entire range (a census) of the Brotherhood’s Arabic language communiqués issued between 3 July 2013 and 2 July 2018 ($n=293$) was performed. A range of visual images was also used to support the analysis, not least because scholars have found that ‘the idea of visual framing continues to be underexplored’ (Cacciatori et al., 2016: 19). In particular, caricatures were extracted from the Brotherhood’s websites to show how non-textual images were used to bolster the group’s communication strategy. Visual communication is particularly important in supporting strategies as images exhibit superior recall and recognition of political information as compared to textual communication (Geise, 2017: 26), and they also attract an audience’s attention more effectively.

Organizing phase

In this study, I utilized MAXQDA 12 Analytics Pro software to enable the organizational aspects of structuring the research data. MAXQDA is a professional software for qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods data analysis. MAXQDA Analytics Pro is the most advanced version of MAXQDA as it integrates a module for statistical analysis of qualitative data. All documents were named according to the date of issue, then imported to the software and organized in chronological order.

Coding

In this research, an inductive approach to content analysis was used to create themes. I used the inductive approach as there was not enough former knowledge about the category, thus I had to create my own categories (Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2015: 210). This approach was deployed to investigate the frames that the Brotherhood assigned to themselves. This process included three phases: open coding, creating categories, and

finally abstraction (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008: 109). In each paragraph of the data set, the following two questions were asked:

- (1) How did the Brotherhood attempt to appear?
- (2) What are the frames assigned to them?

After reading each communiqué in detail several times to understand fully what was said, recurrent manifest and latent concepts were coded. I then created the various categories according to which the data could be classified on the basis of similarities and dissimilarities to reduce the number of categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008: 111). The classification was processed according to the meaning in the same context as ‘to understand and evaluate the classification one needs to understand and, to a certain degree, be part of the social context in which the classification is used’ (Mai, 2011: 721). The last step was abstraction, which involved a general description of the underlying data ‘themes’ that generated the entire discussion around the salient frames and the way the Brotherhood presented itself during the crises post-July 2013.

Reporting phase

After the coding level was finished, the full report was generated using the Smart Publisher service available in MAXQDA. The report contained all the codes and sub-codes with the coded segments and was used as the basis for the results and discussion section. All quotes translated in this study were cross-checked by a bilingual Arabic–English researcher.

Intercoder reliability

Using MAXQDA, the codebook and coding procedures were tested using a trained colleague coder who independently coded a random sample of the communiqués representing 10% ($n = 30$) of the whole data. The independent researcher coded the documents independently and deductively using the final codebook I had created. The measure of agreement was determined using Cohen’s Kappa. Cohen’s kappa coefficient κ ‘relates the number of concordant ratings to the number of discordant ratings while taking into account the agreement of ratings that could be expected by chance’ (Burla et al., 2008: 114). It is one of the most widely employed coefficients in social sciences and is the most frequently used in general (Von Eye & Mun, 2014: 1). The values of agreement between the coders were ($\kappa = 0.82$). According to Landis and Koch (1977: 165) measures of agreement between 0.00 and 0.20 are slight, between 0.21 and 0.40 are fair, between 0.41 and 0.60 are moderate, between 0.61 and 0.80 are substantial, and those between 0.81 and 1.00 almost perfect. Accordingly, the current strength of agreement between the coders is almost perfect.

Results and discussion

The article argues that the Brotherhood appears to have implemented a political communication campaign to manage its self-image and maintain its relationship with its

constituencies. This campaign included several strategies to reach and win the hearts and the minds of the public, mobilize people on their side, and improve their tarnished image post their removal from the helm of power in July 2013. These strategies include: appearing to speak on behalf of the people; portraying themselves as the revolution and representatives of the free; appearing to put the people's interests ahead of their own; appearing as a divine movement; and appearing as victims and innocent and encouraging positive stereotypes of the movement.

Appearing to speak on behalf of the people

As part of its strategy to win over hearts and minds and to legitimize itself in the eyes of the public, the Brotherhood frames itself as a grass-roots movement. One of the most prominent communication strategies that the Brotherhood uses to reinforce this identity is framing itself as speaking on the people's behalf. Instead of using 'the Brotherhood' in their statements, the group uses the word 'the people'. This helps the movement to appear closer to the people and reinforces its identity as a popular movement, which represents all Egyptians.

This strategy was a prominent feature in 59% of the statements examined in this study. For example, on 11 April 2014, the Brotherhood issued a statement to condemn the 'junta's second terror declaration against the movement.' Whilst the repeated designation was against the Brotherhood, it stressed that the regime would not intimidate or terrorize the 'Egyptian people' opposed to the government's 'illegitimate coup' and they would not 'succumb to their usurped authority and let them grab more power and wealth and wreak havoc across Egypt':

The Putschists must know that the people of Egypt, particularly the new generation, will not be terrified by these unjust court rulings. . . . The people of Egypt will not give up their freedom, dignity, and sovereignty. They will not live slaves to anyone anymore. They will live free, sovereign and dignified in their homeland, just the way they were born, whatever the price, whatever the sacrifices. (Brotherhood, 2014e)

The Brotherhood's use of this strategy aims at framing 'the anti-coup revolutionary rallies and protest events' as if they were 'carried out by the Egyptian people', and not by the movement itself, thus presenting them as popular and legitimate events. For example, the Rābi'a and al-Nahda protest events were presented as necessary actions to restore legitimacy and achieve the sovereignty of the people:

The Egyptian people took to the streets today to protest against the terrible massacre. . . of Rābi'a al Adawiyya and al-Nahda. . . the Revolution will continue until the elimination of injustice and falsehood until the junta is defeated and the coup is reversed, until legitimacy is restored and sovereignty of the people respected, and until retribution is exacted from the cold-blooded killers. (Brotherhood, 2013h)

The Brotherhood's strategy of framing rallies and protests as popular acts is easily recognizable in most of its discourse. The Brotherhood contends that by the suppression of these events, 'the coup commanders and collaborators' are seeking 'to establish a

military dictatorship, a police state, that kills innocent people, arrests honorable citizens, muzzles mouths, and drags the country back to dark ages of repression and fear' (Brotherhood, 2013j):

On the 30th of August, the Egyptian people from all the governorates of Egypt emerged in unprecedented numbers, even surpassing the revolution of January 25, to declare to all their categorical rejection of this criminal bloody coup. These revolutionists will not rest until this military coup regime falls. The Egyptians will not rest after 30/8 but will fill the squares and the streets every day. They will escalate their peaceful activism and will develop new peaceful means until the retrieval of the revolution. . . .Absurdly, Hazem El-Beblawi the puppet Prime Minister announces that the brutal killings are necessary operations justified in the transitional period. He then describes the relationship between the putschists and their opponents as one of enmity and open hostility, and likens it to the relationship between America and the Axis powers in World War II, and between America and Vietnam during their war. (Brotherhood, 2013j)

The Brotherhood uses this strategy to appear as if it is supported and legitimized by most Egyptians and can therefore represent the nation. By appearing to speak on behalf of the people, the group establishes shared experiences with the people to win them over through empathy. Creating this sense of common ground serves to gain trust and legitimacy. It might not yield an immediate outcome, but it can result in future gains (Shea and Brooks, 2003). The movement attempts to make the people feel that they are facing the same circumstances and that they share the same interests; they encounter the same repression and suffer from the same corruption imposed by the regime. Consequently, the movement and the people are united in sacrifice to get eliminate tyranny:

Despite all the oppression, terrorism, and corruption, the great Egyptian people still demonstrate every day and everywhere around Egypt, rejecting the tyranny of the bloody military coup, and presenting their sons and daughters as martyrs in order to stop military rule and its terrorism and dictatorship. (Brotherhood, 2013a)

It seems that the Brotherhood attempts to form a new frontier in the struggle against the regime through the deployment of the 'the people' as a collective concept. As Laclau (2005: 200–203) highlights, the notion of 'the people' as a collective actor exists through the construction of an antagonistic internal frontier, distinguishing 'the people' from power through the naming of demands.

In many cases, the Brotherhood's strategy of appearing to speak on behalf of the people operates on two levels mechanistically. First, it establishes a 'False Dilemma'. 'False Dilemma' is a type of logical fallacy that is a claim based on mistaken reasoning. It also contributes to a sense of joining the 'bandwagon', a form of 'copycat' behaviour (Koa, 2018: 591). In the following quote, the false dilemma is established in the claim that free people realize that the regime is the cause of the Egyptian nation's collapse, thus if anyone does not recognize this 'fact' then they are not free men. On the second level, if someone recognizes this 'fact', then they are free and, therefore, should jump on the bandwagon as every free man does and make sacrifices for the cause of destroying the tyrannical regime:

The free Egyptian people have realized, at their heart the youth, what all free people of the world realized; that allowing these blood-thirsty tyrants to survive is the secret behind the fall of nations. That is why the free Egyptian people have sacrificed their souls in this great revolution. One that has spawned a group of free people who have taken it upon themselves to end the authoritarian state forever. (Brotherhood, 2014b)

The Brotherhood framed the regime's repression of the movement as a repression of the Egyptian people to refute the government's frames of the group members as social and political outcasts and outlaws. This was clear through the Brotherhood's statement issued on 30 June 2018, the fifth anniversary of their removal from power in Egypt:

More active revolutionary and peaceful movement and more giving and struggle are required to save Egypt from the tyrannic platoon that has no sympathy or mercy for the homeland or for the people. Come back to your revolution again, restore its impetus, and correct its path until Egypt returns as it was: free, independent and safe. Allah is the greatest and free Egypt! (Brotherhood, 2018b)

In the above statement, the Brotherhood attempts to frame its deposition as 'a major conspiracy and deception' against 'the Egyptian people' instigated 'by a gang of generals, the deep corrupt state and the remnants of deposed President Hosni Mubarak, supported by regional forces, that have aimed at the liquidation of the January 25 revolution and all its gains' (Brotherhood, 2018b). With this, the Brotherhood tries to justify its failure in the government by invoking a conspiracy theory.

The movement's use of this strategy reinforces the argument of Van Dijk (1998) who suggests that many groups' ideological discourse uses the 'Us versus Them' trope. Discursively, the group presents 'Them' as the regime/its rivals and 'Us' as 'the people', making themselves symbiotic with the public and agents seeking to achieve the public's interests. This allows the group to claim representation of the whole public and to be viewed as a grass-roots movement that works to achieve the people's demands of 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice, and Human Dignity', key slogans of the 2011 revolution. The Brotherhood's discourse uses stark binaries embodied in basic 'Us versus Them' phrases that aim at framing the Egyptian regime as a pariah authority and presenting itself as a legitimized alternative force. The idea of presenting an opponent in stereotypical expressions has of course long been recognized and discussed in Edward Said's construction of the 'Other' (Said, 1978).

The Brotherhood's strategy of appearing to speak on behalf of the people echoes those of other movements operating in a contentious environment such as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement 'Fatah', the largest faction of the confederated multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). During the first Palestinian intifada (1987–1993), Fatah used to open all its communiqués with the same declaration, 'No voice can overcome the voice of the uprising, no voice can overcome the voice of the Palestinian people – the people of the PLO', in order to stress and reiterate its long-standing position that the PLO was the 'sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' (Hilal, 1995: 7).

As we can see from the above results, the Brotherhood's strategy of appearing to speak on behalf of the people aims at achieving legitimacy. Social movement theory considers legitimacy to be a critical resource for groups and movements to achieve their

goals (Edwards and Kane, 2014: 217). Social movement theorists argue that resources are a fundamental link between grievances or the desire for change and the ability to mobilize around that desire (Edwards and Kane, 2014; Mahoney and Tang, 2017; Zald and McCarthy, 2002). Thus the Brotherhood uses this strategy to reinforce its image as supported and legitimized by most Egyptians, and therefore representing the nation. These results corroborate the ideas of Hudson (1977: 2), who suggested that legitimacy is an 'indispensable political resource' for Islamist movements.

Appearing to represent the 25 January revolution and the free people

Egyptian people made great sacrifices to bring down the old corrupt regime in the 2011 revolution in the hope of building a new democratic civil state. The Egyptians hoped that the ideals presented in the use of new media during the revolution, such as freedom of expression, diversity of opinion, and human rights, would find expression in the new political make-up of the country after the overthrow of Mubarak on 11 February 2011. The popular revolt of 25 January represented the hope of the Egyptians for a better life in a democratic country that supported equal opportunities. Seeking to win the people's hearts, minds and support, and to restore their tarnished image, the Brotherhood employed the technique of appearing to represent the original revolution of 2011 and the free people. This strategy operated and emerged through numerous themes to accomplish its goal: (1) Claiming that the conflict between the Brotherhood and the regime is an extension of the 25 January revolution; (2) Claiming that the Brotherhood was sacrificing itself for the freedom of the country and the original revolution; (3) Presenting Morsi as the outcome of the revolution; (4) Appearing to speak on behalf of the revolutionists; (5) Appearing as the leaders of the revolution; (6) Presenting the Brotherhood's leadership as making sacrifices to this end; (7) Appearing as 'plain folks' who were committed to the revolution's goals; and (8) Exploiting the original revolution's slogans in its conflict with the regime.

The Brotherhood claims that its current conflict with the regime is a continuation of the original revolution of 25 January 2011 that deposed Muhammed Hosni Mubarak after 30 years of rule. Therefore, it is sacrificing itself for the freedom of the country and the achievement of the people's ambitions for a better life in a democratic country:

The Muslim Brotherhood confirms its adherence to the full rights of the Egyptian people, and that it will never relinquish efforts to restore the January 25th revolution, its constitutional gains, the democratic process, and retribution for the martyrs, detainees, the injured and the missing. The group will never give up fulfilling the goals of the revolution; better livelihood, freedom, social justice, and human dignity, as well as, saving the army and other state institutions from the risk of a bloody military coup. (Brotherhood, 2014c: Point 1)

The movement presents the election of Morsi as a product of the revolution, and thus pledges to continue the revolution until it achieves its outcomes fully:

President Mohamed Morsi is the outcome of the people's revolution, and he represents the will of revolutionaries who have not left streets or squares for 22 months and until today. He has the firm allegiance of every free Egyptian. (Brotherhood, 2015f)

As is clear from the above quote, the movement highlights the notion of revolutionaries and free people as the subjects of its discourse. The Brotherhood cannot credibly say that Morsi's election as president represented the will of 'every Egyptian', not least because of the narrow margins by which Morsi won. Therefore, it links itself to freedom, implying that the Egyptians who are free to choose and think are on its side. Moreover, it associates itself and its cause with those liberals who have also suffered under the repression of the Mubarak regime. At times they go so far as claiming to represent all real revolutionary activists as the following quote illustrates:

The revolutionaries will continue their revolution until the end of the coup its leaders held accountable and retribution is achieved for all martyrs of January 25th. (Brotherhood, 2014d)

The Brotherhood members present themselves as the leaders of the revolution and assert that they are working to recover the original revolution's gains:

We call everyone to continue sincerely in their revolutionary activity in order to achieve the goals of the revolution and to end the bloody coup, and get rid of the coup's disastrous effects on the present and future of Egypt. (Brotherhood, 2015d)

There are regional parallels here. It seems that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is imitating the popular revolutionary discourse of its Palestinian wing, Hamas. Hamas claims that its 'leaders are competing, but not for seats. They are competing for who dies as a martyr and gets into a coffin' (Hamilton and al-Mughrabi, 2012). Similarly, the Brotherhood also presents its leadership as sacrificing their souls at the forefront of the revolution. When four members of the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau were arrested on 2 June 2015, the movement seized the opportunity to show the people that its leaders were making sacrifices for the revolution and that the arrest of their leaders would not prevent them from advancing their revolutionary agenda.¹ Such associations help the Brotherhood to legitimize and frame itself as a popular movement with its leaders at the forefront of the revolution. Moreover, it depicts that its leaders make the sacrifices rather than its ordinary members:

The Muslim Brotherhood declares very clearly, that no matter what happens to its leaders and cadres from unjust arrests and oppressive sentences; this will never discourage the movement from continuing the path of revolution, resistance of injustice and the brutal and bloody military coup. (Brotherhood, 2015b)

Of course, the communication of sacrifice is particularly effective when coupled with actual repression. Again, this is typical of Islamist movements from the Hamas to the Hezbollah. As Matar (2014) persuasively argues, on 12 September 1997, the image of the Hezbollah's secretary general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah changed almost overnight when his 18-year-old son Hadi was killed in a military operation against Israel. Nasrallah's sacrifice of his eldest son placed him in the shoes of many ordinary people and Hezbollah's media armoury helped to present him as an Islamist model of selflessness, labelling him as pure, true and genuine (Matar, 2014: 160). In a strikingly similar fashion, the Brotherhood highlighted the sacrifice of the secretary general of the Freedom and Justice Party, Mohammed



Figure 1. Asmaa el-Beltagy (Facebook.com, 2013; Twitter.com, 2013).

el-Beltagy, who lost his 17-year-old daughter Asmaa during the August 2013 massacres (*The Telegraph*, 2013). A picture of the bereaved father mourning his dead daughter in her coffin was disseminated extensively on social media (Figure 1).

In the same event, Habiba, the 26-year-old daughter of the media advisor of Morsi, Ahmed Abdel Aziz, was killed and the Brotherhood's general guide, Mohamed Badie, lost his 38-year-old son, Ammar. Ammar was killed in violent clashes between security forces and protesters in Ramsis Square in downtown Cairo (Al Jazeera, 2013). The movement highlights the sacrifices of its sons and daughters to show the credibility of its leaders and to identify with its followers, the ordinary people or 'plain folk' who have made similar sacrifices. Consequently, the Brotherhood is highly successful in depicting itself as relatable to ordinary people from whom it wishes to attain legitimacy. Indeed, the emphasis on being 'plain folk' is key to the Brotherhood's public platform and a central persuasive technique deployed by the movement (Koa, 2018: 581). It allows it to claim a mantle of leadership in the original revolution of 25 January and to seem sincerely committed to its goals:

... we emphasize that we are members of the Egyptian people's revolution and of its true goals; life, freedom, social justice, human dignity, democratic outputs, retribution against murderers and the restoration of the rights of the oppressed. (Brotherhood, 2015e)

The revolutionary slogan in the above quote, 'bread, freedom, social justice and human dignity', was deployed in 17.5% of the analysed statements. By using this symbolic and emotive language, the Brotherhood attempts to bring the people's hopes to the forefront and make clear that the movement stands steadfast in support of any calls

seeking to restore these democratic gains of the revolution. The first three demands of the slogan – bread, freedom and social justice – were adopted from the 25 January revolution, and the Brotherhood added human dignity to it. The emotional appeals of the slogan are the real basis on which the Brotherhood's politics in the context of the revolution rests and by which it operates. These findings raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of the Brotherhood's exploitation of existing grievances to mobilize the Egyptian public. This idea is in accord with Melki and Jabado (2016), indicating that Islamist movements carefully contextualize and frame all their acts within widely accepted and legitimized grievances that the target publics share.

To bring this strategy to fruition, the movement uses a notion or a slogan ad nauseam till it starts to be conceived as the truth (Siebers, 1994). As Joseph Goebbels put it, 'if you tell a lie a thousand times it becomes the truth' (Preston, 2011: 84). The 'ad nauseam' technique was used in official Serbian propaganda during the 1995 signing of the Dayton Agreement to end the Bosnian war. The mechanism served to place Slobodan Milošević as 'the key factor of peace in the former Yugoslav region' (Sládeček and Džihana, 2009: 163). Milošević's most frequently quoted slogan was 'there is no alternative to peace' repeated ad nauseam (Sládeček and Džihana, 2009: 163).

The Brotherhood has used a similar approach. It tirelessly repeats the idea that it is continuing the 25 January revolution to achieve the demands of 'bread, freedom, social justice, and human dignity', while it seeks to restore the 'legitimate' Morsi to power. This technique is common in the Brotherhood's discourse, serving to position its ideas as the truth and beyond challenge. Scholars have found that such a technique is effective regardless of evidence to the contrary, though it is beyond the scope of this study to examine how successful the Brotherhood's strategic mechanisms have been in this regard (Koob, 2015).

To summarize, the Brotherhood's consistent attempts to appear to represent the original revolution of 25 January 2011 is a political communication strategy it uses to win the hearts and minds of the public, legitimize itself in the eyes of the people, repair its tarnished image, advance relationships with its target audiences, and influence a self-positive image in the political arena to fulfil its political desires. This strategy uses the ad nauseam technique to convince people that the movement represents the original revolution, in the hope that constant repetition will ensure that its audience accepts it as fact. This finding has important implications for developing social movement theory as it suggests that 'ad nauseam' may help us to understand how social movements attempt to assert their grievances or obtain legitimacy as an essential moral resource.

Appearing to care and put the people's interests ahead of their own

Love-bombing or 'affectively bombing' is a technique used to influence people via lavish and profuse demonstrations of kindness, attention and affection. The term was first applied in the 1970s as part of the recruitment techniques of the Unification Church of the United States where the group promoted an image of happy and comfortable people who aimed to support those with problems. It is an expression of interest, concern, fellowship and friendship (Richardson and Introvigne, 2004: 169–170). Nevertheless, some scholars consider it as a tool of psychological and emotional manipulation to produce unity within a group against another group or a society alleged as aggressive (Tourish and Wohlforth, 2000).

Singer and Lalich (1995: 114) believe that love-bombing or, as they call it, 'the offer of instant companionship', is used as part of a campaign for 'luring people' and that it 'is a deceptive ploy accounting for many successful recruitment drives'. Whilst this strategy is often used by cults for expansion and to influence a growing army of enthusiastic disciples, it is used by the Muslim Brotherhood as part of its political communication strategy to win over hearts and minds of people, repair its tarnished image and to legitimize itself in the eyes of its audience. The strategy is typically deployed for religious purposes; however, I argue here that it is being used as part of a political campaign strategy.

The Brotherhood adopted various forms of 'love-bombing' to win new followers and increase its popularity. It frequently frames itself as caring about the people and their interests, while presenting its rivals as only caring about their own vested interests. The theme of taking care of the people and their interests appeared in 33% of the analysed documents, while the theme that the regime leaders only have a vested interest in themselves appeared in 24% of the statements. The theme that the Brotherhood is keen on preserving the blood of Egyptians appeared in 16.5% of the statements, while the regime was presented in 21% of the analysed statements as not caring for 'Egyptians souls'. In addition, the Brotherhood framed the regime as criminals, dictators, with Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi being termed a mass murder and traitor. In contrast, it presented Morsi as a patriotic figure who symbolized the free will of the people. This shows the movement's quest to defeat the regime by discrediting it and aiming to appear as the more reliable political group that deserved the trust of the public. It is argued by Tourish and Wohlforth (2000) that love-bombing generates a feeling of unity within a cult *against* another group perceived as hostile. In the Brotherhood's case, this is usually done through comparisons between the Brotherhood and the regime (Figure 2).

Comparison as a persuasive means to convey an ideal image is a popular phenomenon within the Brotherhood's statements. It features in 31% of the public statements analysed here. For example, the movement issued a statement on 27 December 2015 on Egypt's water crisis. In this statement, they condemned the 23 March 2015 agreement of principles on Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam project, signed between the leaders of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. The Brotherhood claimed that fears that the Ethiopian dam would hamper the flow of the Nile were justified, and it compared the regime's position with that of Morsi. While they presented Sisi as conceding Egyptian rights and executing a Zionist policy of undermining the historic achievements of the nation, they presented Morsi as being ready to sacrifice his blood for the Egyptians:

Sisi continues to progress from one failure to another. Further revolutionary confrontations are coming, God willing, in order to save the country and stop the shameful and betraying concessions. We see clearly how simple peasants are paying the price of the water crisis, and all Egyptians and future generations will also pay its price.

The misleading Egyptian media celebrated the agreement signed by Sisi, considering it an achievement! Secrets of the agreement have now been revealed and have proven the extent of how much of the Nile has been conceded. The traitor Sisi is executing a Zionist policy of destroying the historic achievements of Egypt. Here, the world should hear the words of the legitimate President Dr. Mohamed Morsi: 'If the Nile water reduces by a drop, then our blood will substitute it'. (Brotherhood, 2015a)

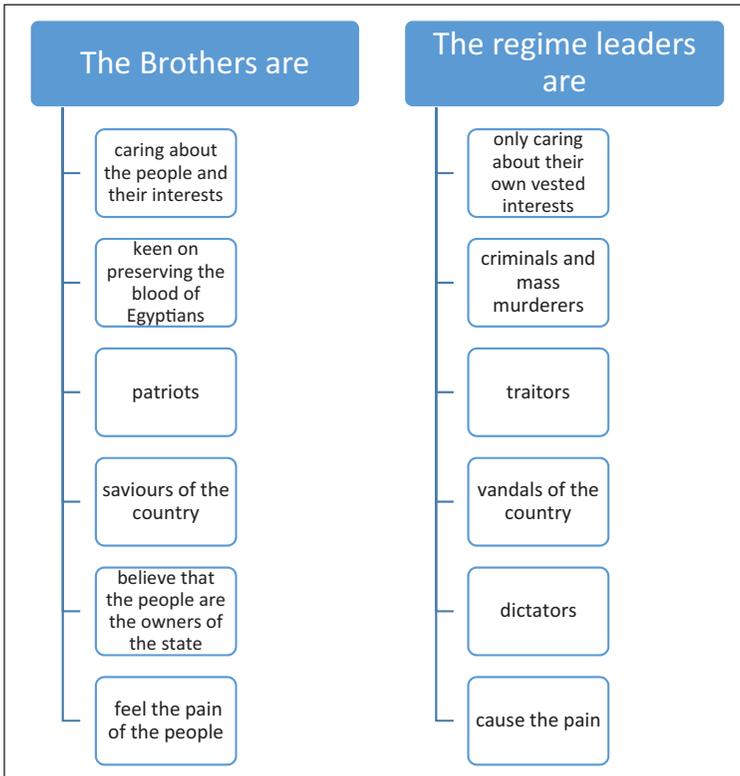


Figure 2. The Brotherhood's formation of comparisons between the movement and the regime to reinforce the idea that the Brothers care for the people.

To reinforce this message, the Brotherhood put out cartoons that showed Sisi transforming Egypt into a barren desert by ignoring the harmful effects of the Ethiopian dam (Figure 3).

This technique of comparison is discussed briefly by Abualrob (2014) in his Arabic book, *Religious Channels: Preaching or Marketing*. Abualrob argues that the discourse of the Hamas movement, the Palestinian wing of the Brotherhood, is based on binary opposites, such as faith and disbelief, good and evil, and right and wrong. This technique attempts to categorize the most common syntactic frames in which pairs of opposites are used in the same sentence, for instance, X not Y, or either X or Y (where X and Y are the oppositional pair) (Davies, 2007: 72).

This language is also clearly demonstrated in statements on Morsi's trial. For instance, on 30 November 2013, the movement alleged that it represented righteousness and right while the regime was immoral and evil:

The bloody terrorists [the regime] were not content with the abduction and hiding of the legitimate president, who represents the free will of the people and was elected by millions as



Figure 3. A cartoon portraying Sisi as transforming Egypt into a barren desert by ignoring the harmful effects of the Ethiopian dam. (EgytWindow, 2017).

the first civilian president. But rather, their tyranny took them to put him on trial on Monday, April 11, 2013, for fabricated charges. This is aggression against truth and an overturn of facts and circumstances. Disloyalty prosecutes honesty, dictatorship prosecutes democracy, corruption prosecutes reform and integrity, thugs and killers prosecute martyrs and victims, traitors prosecute patriots, and the bloody Putschists prosecute the will of the people. (Brotherhood, 2013c)

The Brotherhood asserts that loving people, caring about them and putting their interests ahead of their own, are values embedded into the movement. According to a statement issued on 6 November 2013, those values were established by the Brotherhood's founder, Imam Hassan al-Banna:

...And upon these principles, Imam al-Banna established the message of the Muslim Brotherhood saying about himself: 'I am a citizen who seeks for his homeland; dignity, freedom, stability and good livelihood under the pure religion of Islam. . .'. And regarding the organization, he said: 'we want our people to know that we love them more than ourselves. Our souls love that they are sacrificed in exchange for their self-respect, and pay the price for their glory, dignity, religion, and hopes. It is impossible for us to see what it is happening to our people and then surrender to humiliation or accept servility or succumb to despair. We work for the people, in the way of God, more than we work for ourselves because we work only for you, not for others, O loved ones, and we will never be against you at all'. (Brotherhood, 2013d)

This care for the people has concrete implications for the Brotherhood's conceptualization of the state and citizenship. In a statement entitled 'The Brothers and the Institutions of the State', the Brotherhood explained its vision of the state and the regulations that control the relationship between the people and these institutions. In the statement, the group focused on the citizen as the owner of the state:

The People are the real owners of this land and whatever is on it. They are the originators and owners of all its institutions and have the right to choose who occupies them or define these rules of selection and to put in place institutional regulations and methods of supervision. The people are the masters and the source of all authorities. From here, legislation is imposed and supervised on their behalf. The judiciary dispenses its rulings on behalf of the people. The government implements a programme acceptable to the people. The army protects the people and the land, and the police provides internal security and implements court rulings. Therefore, it is clear that all institutions are to serve the people within a system that respects the principles of specialism, independence and cooperation. (Brotherhood, 2014f)

In the above quote, the Brotherhood seems to deploy the technique of ‘superficial charm’ in which the communicator appears to be polite, charming and verbally facile (Hare, 1991).

Notwithstanding these failures, the group present themselves as saviours of the country, while their opponents are portrayed as vandals:

It is an illegal, coup government that has no legitimacy. One that has burnt and destroyed homes, mosques and hospitals and froze charity funds in order to starve the poor, displace the orphans, leave new-borns in incubators to die and prevent those with kidney-failure, on dialysis from their treatment. This is while the group constructs hospitals and schools; fosters the poor and the orphans and does good, offers free health care and education in all parts of the Republic. (Brotherhood, 2013f)

This discursive technique allows the Brotherhood to establish an emotional connection with the people. It uses times of crises to show the Egyptians that it holds the people’s interests in its hearts. In the following quote, it gives itself the common touch of the people by presenting itself as feeling for those who are in adversity:

The Muslim Brotherhood extends its sincere condolences to the victims’ families of the Dahshur train accident and to the Egyptian People. We also pray that the injured quickly and fully recover. We call for an urgent investigation to identify those responsible for the incident and to hold them accountable according to the law (Brotherhood, 2013b).

To sum up, while the love-bombing strategy was first used by the Unification Church for recruiting disciples, it appears to be an essential component of the Brotherhood’s discourse for political campaigning, not unsurprising perhaps, considering the group’s religious origins. The analysis of the Brotherhood’s statements shows that the movement uses the strategy of appearing to care and putting the people’s interests ahead of its own to win the hearts and minds of the Egyptian people and improve its tarnished image. To reinforce this idea, the Brotherhood draws comparisons between the negative practices of the Egyptian regime and the Brothers’ positive behaviour. Such comparisons help the Brotherhood appear as an ideal movement, and indeed often as divinely ordained. In the light of social movement theory, this can be understood through the quest of the Brotherhood for legitimacy as an essential moral resource. In addition, it could conceivably be hypothesized that love-bombing was used strategically to influence positive frames of the Brotherhood. This confirms the social movement theorists’

idea that framing is useful to understand how social movement actors can best shape their arguments and practices to win over supporters (McAdam et al., 1996).

Appearing as a divine movement

The Brotherhood attempts to present itself as a divine movement in over a third of its public statements. This lends its mission a sense of destiny but also makes it appear to be humble and trustworthy to those with stronger religious sensibilities. It provides ideological supporters and active members with the gratification and pride of belonging to ‘the right’ group. In other words, the concept of a divine movement is being used to instil a sense of purpose, legitimacy and empowerment:

Praise be to God who made the call of the Muslim Brotherhood a divine one that gathers the hearts, its progress something that pleases the sincere, and one that faithful scholars call towards. (Brotherhood, 2016c)

This serves as a form of deification discourse in politics. Deification makes an idea appear holy and sacred and, thus, beyond all law. Other opposing ideas that thereby appear as treason or blasphemy can even dehumanize a group (Shabo, 2008: 139). The strategy is often used in totalitarian regimes to deify the state or the leader (Gentile, 2006) and has longstanding historic origins. For centuries, kings have claimed that their power is God-given (Gosman, 2007: 40). According to Shabo (2008), by claiming some sort of divine mandate, political movements or leaders can justify almost any position or action.

The Brotherhood’s claim to be a divine movement is similar to claims made by extremist groups such as the Islamic State (IS). The IS claims that it is divinely mandated and that it enjoys divine credibility and, therefore, there is a theological imperative to join it (Rafiq and Malik, 2015; Winter, 2015). In addition, the Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite Muslim militant group, promises divine rewards for people who follow it and respond to its messages. This rhetoric offers a model of compulsion rather than obedience (Matar, 2014: 173). Likewise, the Brotherhood frequently asserts that it stands for the right in the fight against evil: ‘Cheer up, the victory of truth and the perishing of falsehood is soon’ (Brotherhood, 2014a). Thus, Allah will exact revenge for them:

The day of fair retribution will inevitably arrive. The decree of Allah will always take place and his verdict against those murderers and corrupt has already been issued (Brotherhood, 2015c).

The notion that the Brotherhood is always presenting itself as the right against evil is reinforced by Shurafa (2013) in his Arabic book, *Al-Jazeera and the Muslim Brotherhood: From the Power of Discourse to the Discourse of Power*. Shurafa claims that the Muslim Brotherhood uses religious discourse to lure the public to itself. Accordingly, religious symbolism is used to convince the audience that the Brotherhood is ‘the right’ and accordingly what comes from the right is right. Extending that argument, what comes from others is wrong. While Shurafa (2013) suggests that this theme is understood *implicitly* by the audience, I argue that the movement has *explicitly* portrayed its foes as evil to delegitimize them. For example, the Brotherhood presents Sisi

as someone who does not fear God as he continues his ‘crimes’ despite his attempts to present himself as a believer. A three-page statement was issued to list Sisi’s ‘crimes’, ending with a sardonic question:

Do such actions stem from a person who fears God as he has claimed repeatedly? (Brotherhood, 2013e)

Here the Brotherhood clearly attempts to transfer the prestige, respect and authority of Qur’anic verses to itself to legitimize itself and make its members revered and accepted and to win the hearts of the people. Between July 2013 and July 2017, this persuasive mechanism was found in 44.8% of the communiqués issued by the movement in attempts to establish itself as a legitimate political actor (Koa, 2018: 580).

But you, O members of the Muslim Brotherhood, we remind you of Allah’s words (Brotherhood, 2013i):

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

So do not become weak (against your enemy), nor be sad, and you will be superior (in victory) if you are indeed (true) believers. Qur’anic verse (3:139)

Religious discourse remains an important part of the Brotherhood’s persuasive strategy to achieve legitimacy. Indeed, the Brotherhood deployed 455 Qur’anic verses and 143 Hadith in the 293 communiqués I analysed. The intensive use of religious symbolism demonstrates the movement’s heavy reliance on religious discourse. More specifically, my findings indicate that the movement employs more religious discourse in statements that target its members and those that seek to educate people on a specific issue as opposed to statements that target human rights organizations or political powers. For example, on 8 December 2014, the Brotherhood issued a statement entitled ‘The Message of the Muslim Brotherhood: From the Laws of God in Maintaining Nations’, in which it employed 11 Qur’anic verses and seven Hadiths. The statement targeted members and supporters and aimed at educating them about the importance of justice. It argued that justice was key to the development of any nation. The Brotherhood used Qur’anic verses, historical stories and the Hadith to reinforce their ideas and earn legitimacy.

Religious discourse has been described as the ultimate instrument of political power (Cull et al., 2003: 342). It is influential because its existential and spiritual appeal is often able to overrule alternative considerations such as human or property rights, vested interests and political privileges. Many studies have stressed the influence of religious symbolism in politics (Bourdillon, 1984; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996; Iancu and Balaban, 2010; Koa, 2007; Nasr, 2001) to the extent that scientists at the University of Utah have deduced that religion could have a similar effect on the brain as taking drugs (Ferguson et al., 2018). The widespread use of religious symbolism in politics has led to what some scholars call the ‘politicization of religion’, that is, ‘(ab) use of religion as a political means to an end’ (Ognjenović and Jozelić, 2014: 1). Of course, this is precisely the accusation levelled at the Brotherhood from Egyptian liberals and regime narratives in the run-up to and aftermath of Morsi’s deposition. Hence,

Eickelman and Piscatori (1996: 11) argue that, on one hand, symbolism can be used as a tool of persuasion and, on the other, as an instrument of coercion.

However, when the Brotherhood targets an international audience or human rights organizations, it tends to avoid religious language. Instead, it focuses on terms it may perceive to be relevant to the target audience and appear to project a message that is coherent with how the movement wants international powers to perceive its identity and ideology. For example, on 25 September 2013, the Brotherhood issued a statement that targeted the General Assembly of the United Nations. The movement urged the Assembly to stop the visit of Nabil Fahmy, foreign minister in Egypt's transitional government after Morsi's deposition. The statement did not use any religious symbolism. Instead, the movement focused on condemning and explaining 'hideous' acts of violence and 'crimes against humanity' that were 'committed by the regime'. The Brotherhood claimed that Fahmy represented an 'illegitimate and invalid government' that had arrived at power through a 'coup', not through 'democratic and free elections'. Such language was clearly appealing to the discursive agenda of the United Nations.

The above analysis indicates that the movement may conduct 'audience segmentation' before targeting a specific group. Audience segmentation depends on in-depth analyses of the target audience's motivations, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Reichert, 2007: 747). A primary goal of audience segmentation is to increase the acceptance of a political idea or practice in particular target audiences. By audience segmentation, communicators can make appeals to specific groups. Strategists use the existing information about the target audience to their best advantage and audience segmentation is a central variable for a successful, professional communication campaign (Manheim, 2011: 52). The Brotherhood seems to engage common beliefs, principles and values accepted by its target audiences.

Of course, this practice is not specific to the Brotherhood. Jihadists from groups such as the Al-Qaeda and IS also conduct audience segmentation according to Corman and Schiefelbein (2006) and Winter (2015), indicating that these groups too pursue a sophisticated communication strategy. The use of audience segmentation is an indicator that the movement is conducting a professional, planned political communication strategy. It is clear from the content that the Brotherhood targets specific groups and that it uses a crafted language for different groups, using tones or messages that are easy to understand and that touch the hearts and minds of the target audience. Thus, while the Brotherhood has deployed religious discourse to influence specific target audiences, it also uses modern means to challenge the regime and reach a wider target audience.

Comparatively speaking, the Brotherhood's claim to be a divine movement is a strategy to improve its tarnished image and minimize the impact of the regime's attempts to demonize it. The Brotherhood's employment of such a narrative is similar to other religious groups such as the IS and the Hezbollah. However, whereas the IS is attempting to apply divine sovereignty by the sword, the Brotherhood chooses to follow a non-violent, peaceful approach in which it appears as victims and innocents. The Brotherhood uses Qur'anic verses, historical stories and the Hadith to reinforce its ideas and earn legitimacy. The divine strategy is being used by the Brotherhood to establish itself as a legitimate political actor. Accordingly, this study shows that social movement theory's concept

of legitimacy as a crucial moral resource has been central to the Brotherhood's communication strategy in the face of widespread demonization. Moreover, by framing itself as a divine movement, the Brotherhood uses the social movement theory's concept of strategic framing as a strategy to achieve legitimacy.

Appearing as innocents and victims of the regime

In the struggle between the Brotherhood and the Egyptian regime since 2013, both sides have been contesting the narrative space to gain popular support locally and internationally by applying different communication strategies and tactics to acquire legitimacy and acceptance. In this section, I argue that the Brotherhood has followed the strategy of victimhood as one – but not the only – strategy to convey a threefold message. First, the Brotherhood is being victimized at the hands of the military regime. This is to win the sympathy of the people and appeal to their hearts. The movement thus exonerates itself from the violent acts ascribed to it on one hand and delegitimizes the regime on the other hand. Second, the regime is criminal and violating the tenets of human rights and, therefore, should be prosecuted by the International Court of Justice. Third, the regime is the actual perpetrator of many violent acts allegedly committed by the Brotherhood. This is to present the regime as a criminal and devious 'gang', fundamentally unreliable and not worthy of being in charge or trusted with the nation's well-being. For example, on 6 March 2016, the Brotherhood issued a statement stressing its peaceful approach in contrast to the regime's 'plots'. It attempted to convey the message that its members are innocents and that allegations that the Brotherhood is involved in violence are simply fabrications of the regime and its media. In doing so, the Brotherhood exonerated itself from any violent acts perpetrated by individuals or splinter groups:

The Egyptian Interior Ministry and the coup media have repeatedly laid the charges and allegations of bombings incidents and murders on the Brotherhood to justify the Putschists' crimes and torture and to distract people from the severe crisis that the regime is suffering.

The Brotherhood has repeatedly announced and confirmed its rejection of all forms of violence and bloodshed and has denounced those who do this whoever they may be. The movement maintains a peaceful approach in its revolutionary activity and what the Interior Minister of the coup announced is false and void. (Brotherhood, 2016b)

The use of the victimhood narrative is common among Islamist groups. While the Brotherhood uses it to convey the message that its members are being murdered and victimized at the hands of the junta, Winter (2015) argues that this strategy has been used by the IS to convey the message that Sunni Muslims' are being victimized at the hands of a global war on Islam. According to Winter (2015), the IS uses the theme of victimhood in tandem with the brutality theme to provide justifications for its acts. The Brotherhood, however, uses the victimhood strategy to acquire sympathy, legitimacy and support while tarnishing the image of the regime, rather than for justification purposes.

The suffering of women has played an important and nuanced role in this narrative. According to Rosland (2009), sacrifice narratives were used as political weapons in the Easter Rising of 1916, as part of 'a cult of sacrifice' in Irish politics (2009: 295). She

argues, 'The traditional image of the grieving mother was an invaluable resource' (Rosland, 2009: 311). Likewise, the Brotherhood has paid special attention to the narrative of women's victimhood. In patriarchal societies where men are perceived as protectors of women, female suffering can provoke communities to act or to at least incite them against the regime. However, unlike the Irish case, the Brotherhood did not focus mainly on motherhood when depicting women suffering, but has in fact depicted women as *partners* in the struggle against the regime:

Egyptian women have made many sacrifices facing the brutal military coup. Since the coup, the total number of women martyrs to this day [March 6, 2016] has reached 123. Three hundred and four were subjected to beatings, abuse, and physical humiliation. The number of girls proved to have been raped and exposed to sexual harassment reached 72. Twenty-four were subjected to unfair military trials. The number of women who were sentenced in the unjust courts reached 248. Two thousand women were arrested; 56 of them are still in detention, while 1933 were released. The number of cases of enforced disappearances reached 111. . . . Five hundred and twenty-six female students were expelled from universities and 2.208.500 Egyptian pounds were paid as bail to release girls from custody. The persecution of the Egyptian women by the fascist military coup has continued in an unprecedented way and this has not even happened in a time of foreign occupation. (Brotherhood, 2016a)

The Brotherhood also attempted to appear as victims of the 'brutal' judiciary system: the security forces kidnapped its members and kept them imprisoned to extract 'confessions from them under appalling torture', and the 'flawed, invalid, and incorrect military judiciary' culminated these procedures with 'death sentences':

The military junta continues to murder the innocent youth of Egypt using the civilian and the military judiciary as a cheap machine to carry out the killings besides the almost daily killing of innocent people in the streets or inside prisons and enforced disappearances. Egypt had been witnessing a continuous massacring of its innocent youth while the World is watching, and complete disregard by the United Nations and all the forces that continue to boast and preach the World about respect for human rights. These innocent souls, which are murdered in such arbitrary and barbaric manner, outside the rule of law or the provision of fair trials, will never be wasted in vain and they will remain a curse on the ruling gang in this worldly life and on the Day of Judgment, it will be doomed to the most severe punishment. (Brotherhood, 2018a)

The victimhood narrative was also presented through cartoons released by the Brotherhood. To cite just one example, in the third memorial of the Rābi'a massacre, the FJP published a cartoon of Sisi in a bathtub. The bathtub was shaped like Egypt and filled with blood. The cartoon signified that Sisi was deluging the country with the Brothers' blood (Figure 4).

To sum up, through the victimhood strategy, the Brotherhood attempts to accentuate the oppression and suffering of its members and the public in general. By doing so, it attempts to: (1) mobilize people and gain support and sympathy; (2) discredit and delegitimize the regime; (3) provoke international human rights organizations to condemn the regime; (4) disprove regime 'fabrications' that the Brotherhood is behind violent attacks in an attempt



Figure 4. A caricature depicting Sisi in a tub shaped like Egypt and filled with blood (Freedom and Justice Gate, 2017).

to repair its tarnished image; and (5) label the regime with terrorism to discredit it in the eyes of major powers. While other groups such as the IS and Al-Qaeda also rely on a narrative of victimhood, this is often used to justify violence rather than rally support. The discourse of female victimhood is particularly interesting because women are often portrayed as equals rather than a vulnerable sex in need of protection. In relationship to social movement theory, the Brotherhood tries to create its form of victimhood as a mobilization resource by the constant accusations it hurls at the Egyptian regime. The victimhood narrative can be understood also as the Brotherhood's attempt to influence media frames outside its media, especially sympathetic media such as the Al Jazeera Media Network. Melki (2014) argues that conflicting parties set the news agenda through framing by highlighting specific events and ignoring others. In the current study, this is attempted by the Brotherhood by deploying the frame of victimhood. This frame conveys the message to the news media that the Brotherhood is being victimized at the hands of the military regime, which is criminal and violating the tenets of human rights.

Positive stereotypes and portrayals of itself

Stereotyping is a way to phrase judgements formed about other people. While the Brotherhood uses negative stereotyping to delegitimize and discredit the Egyptian regime, it conveys positive stereotypes of the movement itself to win the public's hearts and minds, improve its image and legitimize itself. To that end, the Brotherhood endeavours to assign positive qualities to the movement that can straightforwardly be prompted when the movement is named, as in the following examples:

- Mohammed Morsi is a devout believer.
- Mohammed Morsi is just.
- Mohammed Morsi is the first civilian president.
- Morsi's disposed government represents constitutional legitimacy.
- The Brothers are the nation's hope.
- The Muslim Brotherhood is an ideal movement.

Positive stereotyping of the movement and its leaders is the most commonly deployed strategy by the Brotherhood to extol the movement and win the hearts and minds of the people, especially in the context of the binary oppositions discussed earlier (Table 1).

In November 2013, marking Morsi's first public appearance since being deposed, the Brotherhood portrayed him as dauntless, steadfast, determined and confident. It claimed that despite his appearance in a cage in the courtroom:

President Mohamed Morsi's persistence, steadfastness, tenacity and confidence amazed the world. This was to the extent of him providing an enormous morale boost to his supporters who came out to strengthen his resolve, one that urged them to remain steadfast and continue in their pursuit of freedom, legitimacy and popular authority (Brotherhood, 2013g).

Justifying his strength, the movement portrayed Morsi as a 'devout believer', a 'memorizer of the book of Allah' and, thus, worthy to be followed and believed. Meanwhile, it has questioned Sisi's faith. This religious symbolism is used for political purposes such as gaining compliance, influencing the emotions of the masses, labelling opponents, and challenging non-religious parties:

Many people wonder what the secret is behind President Mohamed Morsi's steadfastness and confidence. To answer this question, we say: (1) His faith;. . . (2) his legitimacy;. . . (3) his genuine patriotism;. . . (4) his devotion and dedication to work, honesty and integrity;. . . (5) his belief that the truth is with him and that the accusations are false and fabricated. . . (Brotherhood, 2013g)

In the same statement, the Brotherhood labelled Sisi as horrified and fearful, and thereby in need of military protection:

When one [i.e. Morsi] feels that the truth is with him, -and the truth is far above power, rather even stronger than if he will not care about the power of armies or the fierceness of tyrants. The illegitimate one and the betrayer of trusts [Sisi] will shudder of horror, despite being heavily-armed and surrounded by the walls of soldiers. (Brotherhood, 2013g)

Table 1. Self-portrayal by the Muslim Brotherhood.

The institution	Portrayal	Frequencies
Ex-President Mohammed Morsi	The legitimate elected president	78
	Represents the free will of the people	23
	First civilian president	22
	Patriotic	15
	Courageous and steady	14
	Just/ideal	13
	The kidnapped Mr. President	11
	Saviour	8
	Devout believer	7
Morsi's government	Constitutional legitimacy	211
The movement itself	Divine movement	91
	Right in the face of falsehood	88
	Peaceful and non-violent movement	75
	Moderate movement	66
	Taking care of the people's interests	65
	Upholding and adhering to democracy and the civil state	53
	Keen on the blood of Egyptians	47
	Innocents	33
	Keen on national security	30
	Representing the revolution and the free people	27
	Protectors of democracy	23
	A key political player in the Islamic world	22
	Patriots	21
	Ideal movement	12
	Representing Islam and Muslims around the world	11
	Sacrificing for the freedom of the people	10
Revaluation protectors	10	
The nation's hope	9	
Representing democracy	8	

They continue in Hollywood-style depictions, framing the army as fearing the devout believer:

The Putschists kidnapped the president and even hid him from his family, sending him whilst masked to interrogators, after changing the venue of the trial the previous day, gathering more than twenty thousand troops to guard the venue of the trial venue as well as armored vehicles and aircraft, and were keen to keep the trials secret and off broadcast (Brotherhood, 2013g).

Such portrayals were reinforced by visual depictions. For example, on 6 May 2016, the Brotherhood published a cartoon portraying Sisi standing before Morsi in his army

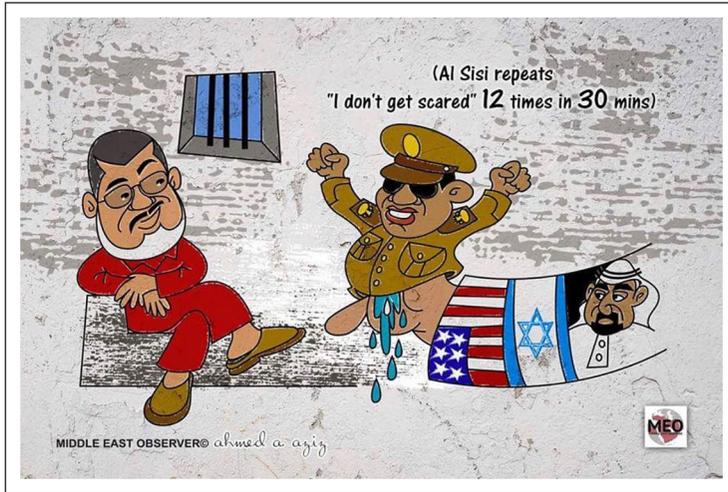


Figure 5. A cartoon depicting Sisi sweating in fear before a confident Morsi (EgyptWindow, 2016).

apparel, sweating with fear despite being supported by America, Israel and the Gulf states. In contrast, Morsi sits relaxed, one leg on the other, despite wearing the red prison garb that is given to those awaiting execution (Figure 5).

In Islamic and Arab countries, where religion remains an important cultural and social force, presenting politicians as faithful and pious implies that they should be obeyed. According to Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), politicians often deploy Islamic symbols in order to legitimize themselves and their rule and defend themselves against critics. This has precedents in modern Egypt as well. Anwar Sadat, for example, portrayed himself as a devout Muslim and called himself al-Ra'is al-Mu'min, 'the believing president', in a tactic to ensure the loyalty of Islamists and in order to legitimize his political hierarchy (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996: 12; Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999: 21). More broadly in the region, the king of Morocco, Hassan II, who ruled from 1961 until his death in July 1999, used to refer to himself as 'Commander of the Faithful' (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996; Maddy-Weitzman and Litvak, 2003). According to Eickelman and Piscatori (1996), this served to legitimize the existing political hierarchy. Similarly, King Hussein of Jordan, while addressing his parliament, said that 'if they wanted to honor him, they should call him Sharif Hussein'. By this, he sought to affirm his descent from Prophet Mohammed and his great-grandfather who sought to achieve Arab union and defend Islamic holy places (Layne, 1994: 37).² This cultural symbolism has also been a prevalent feature of Islamist movements and political parties. For example, Hassan Nasrallah, the third and current secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah, wears black garb and black turban to signify that he is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammed (Matar, 2014: 168).

Speaking to this spirit of deification, the Brotherhood has attempted to portray Morsi as a divine but pragmatic saviour who possesses a magic wand to solve Egypt's problems:



Figure 6. A cartoon presenting Morsi as the saviour of Egypt (EgyptWindow, 2014).

[Morsi] is the man who adores his nation and wants to pull it out from the sinkhole that the previous corrupt regimes threw it down. He sought to establish full constitutional institutions using the appropriate democratic mechanisms, respect for human rights and the provision of public freedoms. He planned for the establishment of giant national projects in order to support the economy, to eliminate poverty and unemployment to attract investment and expand production, to strengthen the army, to improve education and scientific research and to become self-sufficient in food, medicine, and weapons. [Through this] he sought to free the nation from dependence and that it treats all nations with respect, expanding its international cooperation so that Egypt regains its place in the world as a respected nation. (Brotherhood, 2013g: point 3)

This notion is reinforced through cartoons as well. To cite an example, the Brotherhood website, EgyptWindow, republished on 1 March 2014 a cartoon depicting Morsi as helping Egypt to flourish (Figure 6). Egypt is framed as a weak woman whom Morsi is helping to stand up. Morsi says, ‘Stand up Egypt, wipe your tears, everyone in the nation is enthused for your return.’ Figure 7 also depicts Morsi extinguishing fires fuelled by enemies of the country. This serves as a powerful metaphor for the internal problems created by the deep state to curb the Brotherhood regime and seeks to challenge the widespread narrative that the Brotherhood presided over a period of decline in Egypt.

Conclusion

Relying on social movement theory, this article sought to explain how the Brotherhood attempts to manage its image and win the hearts and minds of the Egyptian public. It also attempts to explain how the Brothers frame themselves in reaction to the post-July 2013 political crisis and the regime’s attempts to demonize them. The article argues that the

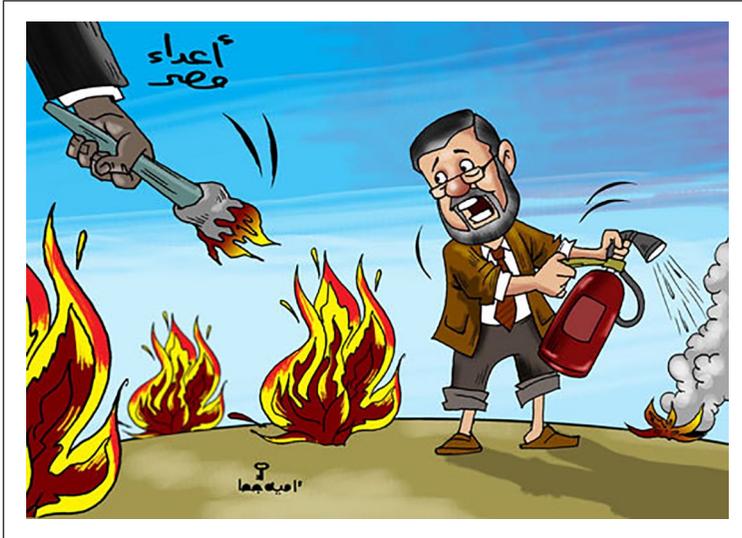


Figure 7. A cartoon depicting Morsi putting out fires fuelled by the enemies of the country (EgyptWindow, 2014).

Brotherhood launched a sophisticated political communication campaign to burnish its image after its fall in July 2013 and to win the hearts and minds of the public. This campaign deployed several strategies to increase public sympathy with the movement and maintain its relationship with local constituencies. These strategies include: appearing to speak on behalf of the people; portraying itself as an extension of the 2011 revolution and a representative of the free people; appearing to care and put the people's interests ahead of its own; portraying itself as a divine movement; depicting its members as victims of the regime; and employing positive stereotypes of itself. Using these strategies, the Brothers seek to depict themselves as close to the people and as appealing to their hearts and minds. In this endeavour, the Brotherhood has framed itself as a force of good against evil, playing to a familiar binary for social movements. To reinforce this idea, the Brotherhood draws comparisons between the negative practices of the Egyptian regime and the Brothers' positive behaviours. Such comparisons help the Brotherhood appear as an ideal movement and, indeed, often, as divinely ordained.

Considering social movement theory, the Brotherhood's deployment of the above strategies can be explained through the movement's quest for legitimacy as an essential moral resource. Social movement theorists consider legitimacy to be a critical resource for groups and movements to achieve their goals (Edwards and Kane, 2014: 217). They argue that resources are a fundamental link between grievances or the desire for change and the ability to mobilize around that desire (Edwards and Kane, 2014; Mahoney and Tang, 2017; Zald and McCarthy, 2002). The Brotherhood uses these strategies to appear to be supported and legitimized by most Egyptians and to underline that it can, therefore, represent the nation. Hence, the case study maintains that legitimacy is a critical moral resource for Islamist social movements that lies at the heart of their political communication campaigns.

Thus, the legitimacy concept of social movement theory sheds crucial light on how Islamist social movements attempt to shore up this moral resource and the way they deploy it to frame themselves to the public in a credible manner. These findings are consistent with that of Hudson (1977: 2), who suggested that legitimacy is an ‘indispensable political resource’ for Islamist movements.

Moreover, this case study reveals that strategic framing can be a technique to promote social movements, mobilize proponents, win the hearts and minds of the audience, and repair a tarnished image. This is obvious through the Brotherhood’s implementation of self-image management through which the movement applied positive stereotypes of itself. By framing itself positively, the Brotherhood uses the social movement theory’s concept of strategic framing as a strategy to achieve legitimacy. For example, while the Brotherhood uses Qur’anic verses, historical stories and the Hadith to earn legitimacy, it reinforces the idea by framing the Brotherhood as a divine movement. In other words, the Brotherhood uses strategic framing to establish itself as a legitimate political actor.

However, to influence self-positive frames, the Brotherhood deployed many influencing techniques such as the victimhood narrative, love-bombing and repeating messages ad nauseam. In accordance with the present results, Koa (2018) has demonstrated that persuasive techniques reveal the specific mechanisms through which the Brotherhood seeks to achieve its communication goals and frame its grievances.

The Brotherhood’s adoption of the first three demands of the 25 January revolution slogan, ‘bread, freedom, social justice’, into its own slogan shows how the Brotherhood has exploited existing grievances to mobilize the Egyptian public. This idea is in accord with Melki and Jabado (2016), who say that Islamist movements carefully contextualize and frame all their acts within widely accepted and legitimized grievances that the target publics share. In fact, the emotional appeals of the above slogan are the real basis on which the Brotherhood’s politics in the context of the revolution rests and by which it operates.

Finally, further research should be undertaken to investigate how far the Muslim Brotherhood was successful in setting the agenda and influencing media frames outside the movement.

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Notes

1. The leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood are Dr. Mahmoud Ghozlan, Dr. Mohamed Taha Wahdan, Dr. Abdulrahman Ber and engineer AbdulAzim Sharqawi.
2. Of course, the concept of divine leadership is not specific to the Islamic world. During the French invasion and occupation of Egypt (1798–1801), Napoleon Bonaparte used to begin his proclamation to the Egyptians with the typical Muslim invocation [In the name of God, the

Most Gracious, the Most Merciful], with the aim of gaining indigenous support (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996). One can argue that the source of the message plays a vital role in its credibility and its acceptance by the receivers. In other words, despite Bonaparte's attempt to use Muslim symbolism to show that the Egyptians and he believed in the same God, he failed because of the credibility of the source.

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