

# The Rise of Islamic Society: Social Change, State Power, and Historical Imagination

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In January 1953, Sayyid Qutb declared that “historical models of Islamic Society” (*al-ṣuwwar al-tārīkhiyya li-l-Mujtama‘ al-Islāmī*) neither define nor encompass “all its possible forms.”<sup>1</sup> Qutb, who had recently joined the Muslim Brotherhood, made this claim in one of a series of twelve articles entitled “Towards an Islamic Society” (*Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islāmī*) that appeared in the affiliated *al-Muslimun* journal. In the January 1953 entry, this literary critic turned political theorist offered a sophisticated understanding of Islamic communal formation and maintenance and how to realize such a project in the future. Qutb is best known for his engagement with the challenge posed by authoritarian Muslim rulers, and the related call to form an exclusive vanguard (*ṭalī‘a*) to battle what he understood to be a broader sea of pre-Islamic barbarism (*jāhiliyya*).<sup>2</sup> As he wrote between August 1952 and December 1953,<sup>3</sup> however, a

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<sup>1</sup> Sayyid Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: Kayfa Nastawhi al-Islam,” *al-Muslimun*, Jan. 1953/Jumada al-Ula 1372, 43–50, at 46.

<sup>2</sup> On Qutb’s use of *jāhiliyya* broadly and his vision of a vanguard (*ṭalī‘a*), see William E. Shephard, “Sayyid Qutb’s Doctrine of Jāhiliyya,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35, 4 (2003): 521–45. The term *Jāhiliyya* was historically used to refer to the pre-Islamic age of barbarism in Arabia. On the translation of this term as barbarism rather than ignorance, see Ignac Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (n.p.: Halle a.S., Max Niemeyer, 1889), 225.

<sup>3</sup> See Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: al-Mustaqbal li-l-Islam,” *al-Muslimun*, Aug. 1952/Dhu al-Hijja 1371, 33–39; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: al-Mustaqbal li-l-Islam,” *al-Muslimun*, Nov. 1952/Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1372, 48–53; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: al-Mustaqbal li-l-Islam,” *al-Muslimun*, Dec. 1952/Rabi‘ al-Thani 1372, 32–35; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: Kayfa Nastawhi al-Islam,” *al-Muslimun*, Jan. 1953/Jumada al-Ula 1372, 43–50; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: Tabi‘at al-Mujtama‘ al-Islami,” *al-Muslimun*, Feb. 1953/Jumada al-Ukhra 1372, 31–37; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: Tabi‘at al-Mujtama‘ al-Islami,” *al-Muslimun*, Mar. 1953/Rajab 1372, 25–33; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: Mujtama‘ ‘Alami,” *al-Muslimun*, Apr. 1953/Sha‘ban 1372, 26–32; Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama‘ Islami: Mujtama‘ ‘Alami,” *al-Muslimun*, May 1953/Ramadan 1372, 38–43;

man whose later writing would inspire successive generations of Jihadists was focused on exploring the historical roots, legal basis, and future prospects of a broader Islamic Society and, by extension, the establishment of a mass social movement in Egypt.

Qutb's call for an Islamic Society did not emerge in a vacuum. Beginning in the 1930s and stretching through the 1970s, everyone from traditionalist scholars employed within state-controlled institutions to Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis of Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya<sup>4</sup> called for the replication and protection of a golden model ostensibly established at the dawn of Islamic history. Notwithstanding these claims to continuity, however, the precise contents of the concept of Islamic Society remained unresolved as ideologically diverse claimants to religious leadership argued for bottom-up and top-down approaches to religious change.

Neither is the focus on forming an ideologically-distinct society unique to the Islamic or Egyptian case. Whether T. S. Eliot's 1940 call for a "Christian Society" in the United States,<sup>5</sup> invocations of Hindu Society (*Hindu Samaj*) in British-ruled India,<sup>6</sup> or those of Soviet Society (*Sovetskoe Obshchestvo*) in the USSR,<sup>7</sup> the aspiration to form distinct societies was part and parcel of varied nationalist projects to define and regulate identity through social practice.<sup>8</sup>

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Qutb, "Nahwa Mujtama' Islami: Mujtama' 'Alami," *al-Muslimun*, June 1953/Shawwal 1372, 16–23; Qutb, "Nahwa Mujtama' Islami: Mujtama' 'Alami," *al-Muslimun*, July/Dhu al-Qa' da 1372, 14–18; Qutb, "Nahwa Mujtama' Islami: Nizam Rabbani," *al-Muslimun*, Nov. 1953/Rabi' al-Awwal 1373, 15–23; and Qutb, "Nahwa Mujtama' Islami: Nizam Rabbani," *al-Muslimun*, Dec. 1953/Rabi' al-Thani 1373, 21–24. These articles were later reprinted as Sayyid Qutb, *Nahwa Mujtama' Islami* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1982). Like many other of the sources analyzed in this article, they only included a Hijri date; I have estimated Gregorian dates based on publication on the first day of the Hijri month.

<sup>4</sup> Islamists seek to transform state and society along Islamic lines and use contemporary ideas and methods of mobilization to do so. While they embrace a particular theological approach—known as Ash'arism—theological views have little impact on their behavior. The Muslim Brotherhood is the most prominent, though not the sole, Islamist organization. By contrast, Salafis are distinguished by a particular approach to Islamic theology (a Neo-Hanbali view of God's names and attributes) and a commitment to deriving all law from the Quran and Sunna. In the Egyptian case, Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya is the premier claimant to Salafism. While Islamists adopt an ecumenical approach that seeks to bracket ideological disagreements with other Islamic movements when faced with an opportunity to shape state or society, Salafis take the view that agreement on matters of theology and law is a necessary precondition of cooperation.

<sup>5</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940).

<sup>6</sup> While this term originates in the 1880s with the Aryan Society (*Arya Samaj*) and is deeply shaped by global eugenics discourses, its twentieth-century usage was popularized by the National Volunteer Organization (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, established 1925) as part of a call to a Hindu-nationalist vision. See Christopher Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11–44.

<sup>7</sup> Oleg Kharkhdorin, "Reveal and Dissimulate: A Genealogy of Private Life in Soviet Russia," in Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 333–64, at 359.

<sup>8</sup> In his study of American nationalism, Michael Billig coined the term "banal nationalism" to describe "the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced ... these habits are not removed from everyday life.... Daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged,' in the

This article traces the conceptual history of Islamic Society (*al-Mujtama' al-Islami*) in twentieth-century Egypt. Historians of premodern Islam often use this term descriptively to denote the ideas and practices of Muslim communities living under Islamic political rule,<sup>9</sup> while scholars of Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood highlight this organization's commitment to forming such a collective while treating the concept as both fully-formed and *sui generis*.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, a turn to conceptual history casts light on the intellectual and social roots of an idea that is central to Islamic movements and states today, yet represents a departure from premodern reformist calls for a return to the model of the Medinese community under the rule of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, I therefore tell a story of how the concept of Islamic Society became both intellectually thinkable and politically meaningful, beginning in the

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lives of its citizenry... Nationalism ... is the endemic condition." See Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 6. On nationalism in the Middle East, see Fatma Müge Göçek, "Introduction: Narrative, Gender and Cultural Representation in the Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East," in F. M. Göçek, ed., *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 1–14, at 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 100, 105, 124; Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Yosef Rapoport, *Marriage Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Asef Bayat has criticized this usage among scholars and practitioners alike, arguing that it "becomes a totalizing notion which is constructed by others to describe Muslims and their cultures. It tells us the way others imagine how Muslims are and even how they should be. This worldview has been perpetuated by some Muslims such as Islamists, who likewise construct a unitary Islamic landscape." Asef Bayat, "The Use and Abuse of 'Muslim Societies,'" *ISIM Newsletter* 13, 1 (2003): 5.

<sup>10</sup> In his classic study of the Muslim Brotherhood, Richard P. Mitchell uses this term without pinpointing either its origins or acknowledging a dynamic process of formation: *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76, 237, 241, 283. Similarly, Khalil al-Anani notes that "creating an Islamic Society" is among the Brotherhood's "ultimate goals," but treats the term as essentially self-explanatory. See al-Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 80. Finally, Abdullah al-Arian notes that the Brotherhood aspired to an "ideal Islamic society," in *Answering the Call: Popular Islamic Activism in Sadat's Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 210. Also see Kiki Santing, *Imagining the Perfect Society in Muslim Brotherhood Journals: An Analysis of Al-Da'wa and Liwa' al-Islam* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2020). An exception to the broader trend can be found in a 1987 article by Eric Davis that states: "[E]fforts to gain a deeper understanding of Islamic political movements require a more systematic historical methodology and a more sophisticated understanding of social structure and ideology. The concept of revival or resurgence of Islam, and its attendant notions of fundamentalism and Islamic society, work against such an understanding due to their transhistorical nature." Eric Davis, "The Concept of Revival and Study of Islam and Politics," in Barbara Freyer Stowasser, ed., *The Islamic Impulse* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1987), 37–58, at 56.

<sup>11</sup> For a critique of the assumption that premodern revivalist movements engaged in fundamentally similar projects, see Ahmad Dallal, "The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750–1850," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, 3 (1993): 341–59, at 341–42.

1930s as Muslim thinkers, activists, and scholars in Egypt navigated the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule. In doing so, these groups sought to differentiate their projects not merely from colonizing powers but also from fellow Muslims whom they perceived to be either insufficiently pious or competitors for the mantle of piety (and sometimes both). Specifically, I argue that as competing claimants to Islamic authority began to consider opportunities and pitfalls of postcolonial rule in mid-twentieth-century Egypt, they invoked Islamic Society to articulate a vision of communal membership premised not simply on legal obedience but on sustained individual regulation as part of an abstract horizontal social collective. In the process, two models of Islamic Society emerged, one premised on bottom-up social change and propagated primarily by Islamic movements, and the other dependent on the top-down exercise of state power and promoted by state-aligned religious elites. In both cases, however, the legibility and appeal of the call to form and maintain an Islamic society reflected this concept's compatibility with state-sponsored projects of bureaucratic expansion and social transformation, as well as its capacity to signal both authenticity ("Islamic") and modernity ("society").

A history of a concept produced over half a decade through negotiation among ideological competitors requires an ambitious approach to sources. Accordingly, I draw on a wide array of Islamic print media published between 1898 and 1981,<sup>12</sup> including Muhammad Rashid Rida's (d. 1935) flagship journal (*al-Manar*, 1898–1935), multiple journals published by the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*), the Young Men's Muslim Association (*al-Shubban al-Muslimun*), the Lawful Society For Those Who Work Together According to the Quran and Sunna (*al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya li-Ta'wun al-'Amilin bi-l-Kitab wa'l-Sunna*, henceforth the *Jam'iyya Shar'iyya*), Proponents of the Prophetic Model (*Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya*, henceforth *Ansar al-Sunna*), the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (*al-Majlis al-A'la li-l-Shu'un al-Islamiyya*) within the Egyptian Ministry of Endowments, and the Islamic Research Academy at al-Azhar University (*Majma' al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya*).<sup>13</sup> Collectively, these periodicals reflect not

<sup>12</sup> In September of 1981, Anwar al-Sadat responded to political unrest by cracking down on both Islamist and Leftist movements, which included the shuttering of Islamist periodicals. He was assassinated the next month by an Islamist militant, Khalid al-Islambuli, who belonged to the Islamic Jihad organization.

<sup>13</sup> These periodicals include Muhammad Rashid Rida's (d. 1935) flagship journal (*al-Manar*, 1898–1935); multiple journals published by the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*); the Young Men's Muslim Association (*al-Shubban al-Muslimun*); the Lawful Society For Those Who Work Together According to the Quran and Sunna (*al-Jam'iyya al-Shar'iyya li-Ta'wun al-'Amilin bi-l-Kitab wa'l-Sunna*, henceforth the *Jam'iyya Shar'iyya*); Proponents of the Muhammadan Model (*Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya*, henceforth *Ansar al-Sunna*); the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (*al-Majlis al-A'la li-l-Shu'un al-Islamiyya*) within the Egyptian Ministry of Endowments; and the Islamic Research Academy at al-Azhar University (*Majma' al-Buhuth al-Islamiyya*). For the Muslim Brotherhood, I use *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (1933–1937, 1943–1948), *al-Muslimun* (1951–

only the diversity and dynamism of religio-political contestation in twentieth-century Egypt, but also provide a granular record of the ideological trends and tensions that define the relationship between Islam and politics in the Middle East more broadly.<sup>14</sup>

While scholars of conceptual history have recently emphasized the importance of transnational links,<sup>15</sup> I deliberately focus on a single country. Historians of Egypt such as Ilham Khuri-Makdisi and Florian Zemmin have previously documented how the diffusion of “Society” is linked to global colonial projects, whether French (*Société*) or British,<sup>16</sup> as well as its relationship to ideas of nationalism and political economy.<sup>17</sup> My focus, by complement, is on the second stage of this process: how a neologism was modified in the context of colonial and postcolonial rule, and reflected both a global story of the spread of nationalism and an internal Islamic debate over the role of religion in state and society.

The choice of conceptual history as a lens through which to explore religio-political change in Egypt proceeds from the centrality of calls to Islamic Society among both Islamic movements and states. While previous scholarship has documented the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in particular<sup>18</sup> and particular periods of religious revival,<sup>19</sup> a focus on this

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1954), and *al-Da'wa* (1951–1956, 1976–1981), and for the YMMA, al-Fath (1926–1943). The Jam'iyya Shar'iyya published *al-I'tisam* as an official mouthpiece of the organization between 1939 and 1960. Between 1960 and 1981, leading figures within the group continued to publish it as expressing “the principles of the Jam'iyya Shar'iyya.” See Muhammad Mansur Muhammad Hayba, *al-Sihafa al-Islamiyya fi Misr: bayna 'Abd al-Nasir wa'l-Sadat (1951–1981)* (Cairo: Dar al-Wafa' li-l-Tiba'a wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzi', 1990), 200. For Ansar al-Sunna, I draw on the full run of *al-Hadi al-Nabawi* (1936–1966) and *al-Tawhid* (1973–1981). *Minbar al-Islam*, on the other hand, was published in 1942 by the Mosques Division (Qism al-Masājid) within the Ministry of Endowments. With the establishment of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in 1960, it migrated to this new body (Hayba, *al-Sihafa*, 178). Finally, *al-Azhar*, initially known as *Nur al-Islam*, began publication in 1930 under the authority of the Grand Shaykh's Office of al-Azhar (*Mashyakh al-Azhar*). In 1933, its name was changed to *al-Azhar* (ibid., 160). Control over the journal shifted to the Islamic Research Academy in 1972. See ibid., 163.

<sup>14</sup> I use Egypt as a lens to examine broader regional religious developments due to both the significance of regional networks of Islamic reform, as well as the transnational spread of both Islamism and Salafism from Egypt across the region.

<sup>15</sup> For an example of this turn, see Kari Palonenn, “Translation, Politics and Conceptual Change,” in Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 171–90.

<sup>16</sup> Florian Zemmin, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition: The Concept of 'Society' in the Journal al-Manar* (Cairo, 1898–1940) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 44–47.

<sup>17</sup> Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, “The Conceptualization of the Social in Late-Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Arabic Thought and Language,” in Hagen Schulz-Forberg, ed., *A Global Conceptual History of Asia, 1860–1940* (London: Lickering & Chatto, 2014), 91–110, esp. 104–8; and Zemmin, *Modernity*, 177–96, 301.

<sup>18</sup> For example, see Mitchell, *Society*; and Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Line Khatib, *Islamic Revivalism in Syria: The Rise and Fall of Ba'thist Secularism* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

concept enables us to cut across both ideological and temporal periods to trace the roots and consolidation of a major idea that came to animate calls to piety over the course of the twentieth century. Crucially, the call to form and maintain an Islamic Society does not simply reflect shifts toward piety that are already underway, but also provides the language to help bring such changes about.<sup>20</sup> In line with Peter De Bolla's argument that we must move away from a focus on what a concept *is* to what it *does*,<sup>21</sup> this article traces the emergence of multiple projects of Islamic Society and the ways in which this concept's emergence reflected and facilitated competing projects of piety.

At the core of this article is a linkage between theory and method. In his study of early twentieth-century Egyptian political thought, Hussein Omar critiques an artificial separation between ideas and actions that is both reflected in and reproduced by an outsized reliance on "formal and abstract treatises over the fragmentary ideas embedded in newspaper articles, speeches, debates, diary entries and letters ... the assumption that political theory determines political practices and not vice versa ... has led historians to overstate the importance and influence of a few 'great men.'"<sup>22</sup> Far from unique to the history of political thought and action, this approach is mirrored by historians of Islamic law who, in their reliance on canonized texts, often miss the ways in which social and political competition shape interpretative method.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, this study brings together an ideologically diverse set of voices through a print media form consumed by middle class Egyptians. Just as importantly, the particular genre of the periodical has outsized value for the study of conceptual history: while a focus on books and pamphlets would highlight the prominence of a call to Islamic Society across ideological boundaries, the regular publication of periodicals makes it possible to trace the gradual process through which this concept was formed, the diverse ideological influences that shaped it, and the subtle intellectual and social linkages among competing claimants to define it.

<sup>20</sup> In this article, I follow Reinhart Koselleck's call to explore concepts as "both indicators of and factors in political and social life." See Melvin Richter and Sally E. Robertson, "A Response to Comments on the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," R. Koselleck trans., in Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter, eds., *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1996), 57–70, at 61. In this regard, my approach differs from that of Quentin Skinner, who is focused not on social change but rather on processes of "rhetorical redescription" by which the meaning of longstanding terms changes: "Rhetoric and Conceptual Change," in Margrit Pernau and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Global Conceptual History: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 135–48, at 141.

<sup>21</sup> Peter de Bolla, *The Architecture of Concepts: The Historical Formation of Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Hussein Omar, "Arabic Thought in the Liberal Cage," in Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi, eds., *Islam after Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 17–46, at 18.

<sup>23</sup> For this critique on the subject of Salafism and gender segregation, see Aaron Rock-Singer, "The Salafi Mystique: The Rise of Gender Segregation in 1970s Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society* 23, 3 (2016): 279–305, at 281.

I also intervene in three related historiographical debates, the first of which is the intellectual history of Islamism. Historians have long noted the ways in which Islamists implicitly accept the ideological claims and institutions of the nation-state even as they valorize a transnational Islamic community (*umma*).<sup>24</sup> By complement, a conceptual history of Islamic Society probes the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule and the ways in which such movements came to focus their energies on facilitating collective piety within, rather than beyond, both the borders and ideological framework of the nation-state.

This article also casts light on the development of religious nationalism more broadly. Scholars of Israel, India, Pakistan, Hungary, and Ireland have traced how this trend produces novel understandings of religious identity rather than replicating prior models.<sup>25</sup> The development of calls to Islamic Society reveals the ways in which religio-nationalist identity is linked to particular projects of religious practice. In doing so, this article shows how religious nationalism pivots, no less than its secular counterparts, on a project of self-regulating social practice.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, I explore the transformation of Islamic thought between colonial and postcolonial rule. Talal Asad has argued that colonial elites and Europeanized Egyptians in the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries transformed the Islamic tradition by producing a “distinction between law (which the state embodied, produced, and administered) and morality (which is the concern ideally of the responsible person generated and sustained by the family), the two being mediated by the freedom of public exchange....”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79–96; also see Leor Halevi, “Nationalist Spirits of Islamic Law after World War I: An Arab-Indian Battle of Fatwas over Alcohol, Purity, and Power,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62, 4 (2020): 895–925, at 897–98.

<sup>25</sup> On Israel, see Alexander Kaye, *The Invention of Jewish Theocracy: The Struggle for Legal Authority in Modern Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Nadav Shelef, *Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity, and Religion in Israel, 1925–2005* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), esp. 25–106. On India, see Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 11–66; and Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), esp. 66–89. On Pakistan, see Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); and Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), esp. 11–39. On Hungary, see Paul A. Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism and Antisemitism, 1890–1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), esp. 77–107. On Ireland, see John Coakley, “The Religious Roots of Irish Nationalism,” *Social Compass* 58, 1 (2011): 95–114, esp. 104–9.

<sup>26</sup> For an exception, see Gideon Aran, “Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism: The Bloc of the Faithful in Israel (Gush Emunim),” in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 265–344, esp. 308–13.

<sup>27</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 211, 235–36. On Egypt, see Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton: Princeton

Particularly significant is Asad's claim regarding the social order: contrasting *umma* and *mujtama'*, he argues that the conflation of the *Shari'a* with the family is premised on the creation of "the idea of a society made up of equal citizens governing themselves individually (through conscience) and collectively (through the electorate)." <sup>28</sup> The history of Islamic Society—which begins just as the historical period analyzed by Asad concludes—reveals the historical process by which such a collectivity was conceptualized, and how a powerful linkage between private and public was formed. In contrast to Asad's view, <sup>29</sup> however, this term's conceptual history cannot be limited to an emphasis on individual moral formation, whether through "embodied relationships," or through the internalization of the *Shari'a*. <sup>30</sup> Instead, the call to society, specifically an Islamic Society, also depends on public practices of self-regulation ("governance" <sup>31</sup>) to undergird the formation of a broader moral order defined primarily by competing visions of social change.

I will begin by tracing the growing prominence of the concept of "Society" (*Mujtama'*) generally and "Islamic Society" (*al-Mujtama' al-Islāmi*) specifically in early twentieth-century Islamic reformist circles, with a focus on the leading Islamic reformist periodical of this period, Muhammad Rashid Rida's *al-Manar*. Drawing on a recent study of the conceptual history of "Society" in this periodical as well my own analysis of it, <sup>32</sup> I will argue that in the first quarter of the twentieth century, calls to Islamic Society evoked a vague ideal of religious purity rather than a specific vision of religio-political community or subject formation. To analyze the period between 1926 and 1951, I will turn to journals published by two leading Islamic movements, the Young Men's Muslim Association and the Muslim Brotherhood, and chart early efforts to articulate a social vision through a call to legal obedience. In 1952, the Free Officers led by Muhammad Najib (r. 1952–1954) and Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir (r. 1954–1970) came to power. The article, in turn, transitions from colonial to postcolonial periods as 'Abd al-Nasir supplanted Najib and harnessed state religious institutions to articulate a project of pious subject formation dependent on the enforcement and expansion of state power, while Islamic movements grappled with the questions raised by significant repression. I conclude by examining the 1970–1981 period, during which Muslim Brothers and Salafis reemerged under the rule of Anwar al-Sadat, articulating an expanded concept of Islamic Society that built on the debates of the 1940s and early 1950s

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University Press, 2016). In contrast to Asad, who focused on the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, prior to the rise of Islamism, both Agrama and Mahmood's ethnographic research took place from the mid-1990s on.

<sup>28</sup> Asad, *Formations*, 230.

<sup>29</sup> While Asad acknowledges changing social practices, he privileges broader changes in reasoning and the ethical basis of self-governance. See *ibid.*, 232–33, 247–48.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 247–48, and 249–50, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>32</sup> Zemmin, *Modernity*.



and sought to establish both their place within the Egyptian national framework and their authority vis-à-vis state institutions. In the process, these ideologically diverse competitors produced a concept that linked communal identity with individual practice.

#### FROM UMMA TO A SOCIAL RELIGION

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935) confronted a problem alien to his premodern predecessors. Leading reformers of the eighteenth century, such as the Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (India, d. 1762), Muhammad b. Isma‘il al-San‘ani (Yemen, d. 1769), Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhab (Arabia, d. 1792), and ‘Uthman b. Fudi (West Africa, d. 1817), had articulated projects of revival and reform independent of the ideological and political challenge posed by Western European states.<sup>33</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, Islamic reformers were increasingly aware of European ascendancy<sup>34</sup> and, by the late nineteenth century, leading figures such as Rida’s mentors, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), could not escape the threat posed to the independence of Muslim-majority countries by colonial empires’ political, economic, and military might.<sup>35</sup> Although Rida’s political methods shifted repeatedly during the early decades of the twentieth century—he alternated between supporting the continued existence of the Ottoman Caliphate, Saudi rule, and the Indian Khilafat movement<sup>36</sup>—he was fundamentally concerned with a basic question: how to accomplish internal reform while simultaneously strengthening Muslims in the face of external challenges.

Based in Cairo, Rida wrote to a transnational print community that stretched to Calcutta. It was in this context that this Syrian émigré to Egypt employed the term *umma* to define the boundaries of the social collectivity. Traditionally used to refer to a transnational Islamic community,<sup>37</sup> Florian Zemmin argues that Rida used the term to denote a “moral community guided by religion.... This is not to

<sup>33</sup> Ahmad S. Dallal, *Islam without Europe: Traditions of Reform in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Islamic Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 67–102.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–60.

<sup>36</sup> Mahmoud Haddad, “Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā’s Ideas of the Caliphate,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, 2 (1997): 253–77.

<sup>37</sup> Cemil Aydin argues, “The pre-nineteenth-century notion of ummah was de-territorialized. It urged cross-tribal affiliation, shared legal practices, and a collective eschatological vision ... but demanded no specific government or place on the map. Members of the ummah neither lived in one land nor were subject to one political authority.” *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 16. Only in the nineteenth century did this concept shift to imply political alliance (*ibid.*, 65–98).

say that *umma* was then equivalent to ‘society’ but rather that Rida used *umma* to convey, within a moral-religious framework, notions of social order.”<sup>38</sup> Zemmin’s careful exploration of the concept of society in *al-Manar*, including in the changing usage of a longstanding term such as *umma*, reveals the process by which notions of social order that had originated in early modern Europe were grafted onto a longstanding category of Islamic community.<sup>39</sup> Alongside *umma*, authors in *al-Manar* also referred less-frequently to the “social order” (*al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya*) and *al-mujtama’*, which, like *umma*, denoted a slowly-congealing concept of society.<sup>40</sup> As Zemmin argues, “During the lifespan of *al-Manar*, no one Arabic term was established for conceptualizing society ... [but] *umma* was a major option to this end.”<sup>41</sup> In sum, a concept whose origins lay in Europe had yet to find a singular term in Arabic.

The question at hand for Rida and other Islamic reformers was not only one of linguistic usage or abstract identity but also that of practice: what did a member of an Islamic community *do*? As Secular-nationalists in Egypt articulated a particular model of masculinity, they posited public practice as paramount and explicitly gendered public space as male.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the lawyer-turned-nationalist activist Mustafa Kamil (d. 1908) emerged as a model for the nationalist effort to contest the colonial narrative that Egyptians were unable to govern themselves.<sup>43</sup> As Wilson Chacko Jacob notes: “First and foremost was ubiquitous talk of character formation, in which self-discipline was a grounding principle. Kamil was a model subject.... The character of the next generation was to be formed through moderation at school and proper upbringing at home, and upbringing would enable success at school.”<sup>44</sup> Such self-discipline was premised not merely on avoiding particular vices but on engaging in a set of “productive” actions, whether prayer, exercise, work, reading, or socializing.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, Islamic reformers had yet to take up an understanding of the social order that pivoted on the self-regulating individual who participated in an abstract (national) community, a premise that would be central to understanding of Islamic Society. Instead, the dominant understanding

<sup>38</sup> Zemmin, *Modernity*, 209–10. Zemmin also argues that Rida’s claims to the relationship between Islam and society responded to “the modern understanding of a self-sufficient, immanent social order, distinct from religion ... [by stressing] the Islamic principles underlying the progress or the order of *mujtama’*”. See *ibid.*, 279–80.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> On *al-hay’a al-ijtima’iyya*, see *ibid.*, 213. On *mujtama’*, see *ibid.*, 271, 275–91.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>42</sup> On the gendered dynamics of public space in early twentieth-century Egypt, particularly the unstable position of women therein, see Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 187–88.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 44–64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

of the communal order was that of a body in which different organs contributed to the broader whole in a manner that both reflected and reproduced a hierarchical political system.<sup>46</sup>

Neither was “Islamic Society” (*al-Mujtamaʿ al-Islāmī*) a common term in *al-Manar*, appearing a mere eighteen times from 1898–1935.<sup>47</sup> While Zemmin argues that “as early as 1899, Rida uses *al-Mujtamaʿ al-Islāmī* in the sense of an ‘Islamic Society,’”<sup>48</sup> these references say little about the role of individuals within an abstract horizontal Islamic collective. Indeed, calls for such a society in *al-Manar* frequently reproduced a traditional vertical model of communal purity whereby Islamic scholars (the *ʿulamāʿ*) served as guardians,<sup>49</sup> or defined such a society primarily in terms of an ostensibly self-explanatory Muslim identity.<sup>50</sup>

Rida’s reformist project, and the question of society, emerged out of not only internal debates among Muslim scholars and intellectuals over the nature of religious reform, but also the expansion of urbanization, access to print media, and political contestation in early twentieth-century Egypt. In his study of Egyptian nationalism, Ziad Fahmy argues that technological developments such as the growth of the railroad and postal systems and urbanization promoted the spread of Egyptian national identity, while enhancing the influence of key cities such as Cairo.<sup>51</sup> Just as important was the rise of mass politics during this period as Egyptians drew on varied methods of protest—ranging from petitioning the Khedive, to authoring editorials in newspapers and journals, to popular strikes that transcended class lines—to express their opposition to colonial occupation and to articulate contending visions of Egyptian nationalism.<sup>52</sup>

The 1920s, in particular, was an era of political tumult and action as the local order was redefined by the end of the First World War in 1919, the Egyptian revolution of the same year, and the 1924 abolishment of the Ottoman Caliphate. The following decade would be shaped not merely by semi-colonial rule in

<sup>46</sup> On the increasing use of the “social body” (*al-hayʿa al-ijtimāʿiyya*) from the mid-nineteenth century on, see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, “The Conceptualization of the Social in Late-Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Arabic Thought and Language,” in Hagen Schulz-Forberg, ed., *A Global Conceptual History of Asia, 1860–1940* (London: Lickering & Chatto, 2014), 91–110. The author specifically notes the influence of Ibn Khaldun’s highly hierarchical social vision on this concept: “The Conceptualization of the Social in Late-Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Arabic Thought and Language,” 96–97.

<sup>47</sup> Zemmin, *Modernity*, 248, also 296–98.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>49</sup> “Raʿi ʿAlim Azhari fi al-ʿUlamaʿ,” *al-Manar*, 7 Apr. 1905/1 Safar 1323, 8:110.

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Rashid Rida, “al-Hayra waʿl-Ghumma wa Munshaʿahima fi al-Umma,” *al-Manar*, 17 Feb. 1900/16 Shawwal 1317, 2:754.

<sup>51</sup> Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 27–29.

<sup>52</sup> Aaron Jakes, *Egypt’s Occupation: Colonial Economism and the Crises of Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 167–92.

Egypt and a tripartite struggle among colonial officials, the Egyptian monarchy, and the secular-nationalist Wafd party for primacy,<sup>53</sup> but also by the economic effects of the Great Depression.<sup>54</sup> The growth of mass politics both reflected and furthered the breakdown of traditional political, economic, and religious structures, and varied movements lay claim to alternative identities and public space alike.

In the shadow of such radical change, Islamic movements invested in the development of a national infrastructure of mosques and branches that could facilitate particular projects of subject formation.<sup>55</sup> Just as importantly, these movements used print to speak not only to literate Muslim Arabic speakers generally (as al-Afghani, 'Abduh, and Rida had previously done), but specifically to members of their respective movements. As the Young Men's Muslim Association, Muslim Brotherhood, Jam'iyya Shar'iyya, and Ansar al-Sunna turned to publishing bi-weekly or monthly periodicals, they mirrored the approach of secular-nationalist competitors such as the Wafd (Majallat al-Shubban al-Wafdiyyin) and Young Egypt (al-Sarkha).<sup>56</sup> In sum, periodicals had become a key site for articulating competing ideological visions directed at a growing middle-class readership.

Among Islamic periodicals, the Young Men's Muslim Association's *al-Fath* hosted the earliest elaborations of calls for the regulation of individual behavior. The journal, which first appeared in 1926, published a 24 February 1927 article in which the author argued that "Westernized Egyptians" (*al-mutaḥfarnajīn*) posed a danger to "Islamic norms of comportment and ethics" (*al-ādāb wa'l-akhlāq al-Islāmiyya*), and reiterated that such norms constituted the dividing line between "[pious] Muslims and sinners (*bayna al-Muslim wa'l-fāsiq*).<sup>57</sup> Three weeks later, a second article in the journal noted that acts violating Islamic law (*munkarāt*) had become widespread and invoked the longstanding

<sup>53</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 71–72. In his memoirs, the noted European Muslim scholar Muhammad Asad described a 1926 interaction with Wafd leader Saad Zaghlul: "I was vividly reminded of my encounter in 1926 with Zaghlul pasha ... and of his reaction to my youthful enthusiasm about the role of Islam's in man's social and political life. He had turned his pale face towards me and said pontifically: 'The time of religion has passed, my young friend. Our time is a time of nationalism.'" Muhammad Asad and Pola Hamida Asad, *Home-Coming of the Heart (1932–1992): The Road to Mecca* (part II), M. Ikram Chaghatai, ed. (Lahore: Pakistan Writers Cooperative Society, 2015), 161.

<sup>54</sup> Robert L. Tignor, *State, Private Enterprise and Economic Change in Egypt, 1918–1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 113.

<sup>55</sup> Steven Brooke and Neil Ketchley, "Social and Institutional Origins of Political Islam," *American Political Science Review* 112, 2 (2018): 376–94.

<sup>56</sup> The practice of tying papers to parties also reflected the reverberations of the 1907 financial crisis, in which papers had been funded by the sale of stock shares, whose value plummeted. By contrast, parties could fund papers based on membership dues. See Jakes, *Egypt's Occupation*, 172–73.

<sup>57</sup> Muhammad Sa'id Ahmad 'Ali, "al-Mar'a wa'l-Din," *al-Fath*, 24 Feb. 1927/22 Sha'ban 1345, 5.

duty to “command right and forbid wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf waʿl-nahī ʿan al-munkar*). While the author advocated that scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) engage in this duty verbally and that common folk do so in their hearts, coercive enforcement fell to the government in order to “protect Islamic Society ... from open indecency ... vice ... and wrongdoing.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, a June 1929 article by the editor and a leading Syrian reformist, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib (d. 1969), explained that, as members of the *umma*, Muslims have both “rights and obligations” (*ḥuqūq wa wājibāt*),<sup>59</sup> and further emphasized that Islam “is the only social religion” (*al-dīn al-ijtimāʿī al-wahīd*).<sup>60</sup>

These three articles in *al-Fath* did not necessarily constitute a broader conversation within reformist circles—their authors did not explicitly address one another—nor did they collectively center on the concept of Islamic Society. Instead, such calls for piety are significant because they represent early efforts by Islamic reformists to fuse the protection of public morality with secular-nationalist conceptions of individual self-regulation in the service of a communal whole. While the first article turns to voluntary observance of Islamic norms of comportment and the second to government enforcement, the author of the final source envisions a contract of rights and obligations that serves Islam’s imperative as a “social religion.” This approach, which would become the hallmark of later conceptions of Islamic Society, had far more in common with Mustafa Kamil’s model of secular-nationalist masculinity than it did with prior articulations of the *umma* as an organic body. As Islamic movements turned to considering the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule, they would reckon with how to articulate a vision of Islamic Society undergirded by an abstract and horizontally organized community of self-regulating individuals.

#### THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND CALLS TO SOCIAL CHANGE

In the face of both competition among Islamic movements and secular-nationalist challengers, the Muslim Brotherhood, too, gave increasing attention to transmitting a broad-based social vision. Established in 1928 by a schoolteacher from the Nile Delta by the name of Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) in response to both the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate and the challenge of Christian

<sup>58</sup> ʿAbd al-Baqi Surur Naʿim, “Mawqif al-Muslimin hiyal al-Munkarat fi al-ʿAsr al-Hadīr,” *al-Fath*, 17 Mar. 1927/12 Ramadan 1345, 1–2, at 2. On the longstanding obligation to command right and forbid wrong from which this concern emanates, see Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, “Bi-Madha Yakun al-Muslimun Umma,” *al-Fath*, 20 June 1929/13 Muharram 1349, 1–2, at 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

missionary activity in Egypt,<sup>61</sup> the Brotherhood worked in the early 1930s to build a network of branches.<sup>62</sup>

Hasan al-Banna's rise also reflected the structural and cultural transformations that made the call to form an Islamic Society both intelligible and attractive. Al-Banna was a graduate of Dar al-'Ulum, an educational institution founded by the Khedival state in 1872 to train Egyptians to teach Arabic and Islam in the civil educational system. Though sometimes framed within a narrative of secularism,<sup>63</sup> a growing state claim to shape Islam—of which Dar al-'Ulum was a product—is best understood within a framework of “bureaucratization” by which the Ottoman-Egyptian state sought to exert increasingly central control over its territory and those who lived within it.<sup>64</sup> The early twentieth century also saw the rise of competing visions of Egyptian Nationalism, including Islamic, Easternist, Supra-Egyptian, and Pan-Arab varieties.<sup>65</sup> The question of defining Islam's place in the national community was unavoidable, and it was within this context that Egyptians engaged in a “culture war” to fuse modernity and authenticity.<sup>66</sup>

In the Brotherhood's early years, however, this Islamist movement had yet to articulate an explicit vision of Islamic Society. Most notably, a July 1933 article authored by the General Guidance Office, the organization's executive body, used the term *umma* when describing the Brotherhood's dedication to transmitting the principle that Islam affects “all aspects of its life,”<sup>67</sup> while an August 1933 article by al-Banna contrasted “the principle of Islamic brotherhood” (*madba' al-ukhuwwa al-Islāmiyya*) with the “principle of nationalism” (*mabda' al-qawmiyya*).<sup>68</sup> Finally, a February 1934 article by the

<sup>61</sup> Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 117–34.

<sup>62</sup> Brooke and Ketchley, “Social and Institutional Origins.”

<sup>63</sup> Asad, *Formations*, 205–56.

<sup>64</sup> Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 81–131.

<sup>65</sup> Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35–144.

<sup>66</sup> Hilary Kalmbach, *Islamic Knowledge and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2. This contest over social life was hardly limited to Islamic movements: in his 1938 *The Future of Culture in Egypt (Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr)*, secular intellectual Taha Husayn does not employ *mujtama'* but does refer to “social life” (*al-ḥayāt al-ijtimā'iyya*), “social order” (*al-nizām al-ijtimā'ī*), and “our social morals” (*akhlāqinā al-ijtimā'iyya*): *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1993), 65, 72, and 252, respectively.

<sup>67</sup> “Fi Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin,” *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 20 July 1933/27 Rabi' al-Awwal 1352, 20–21, at 21.

<sup>68</sup> Hasan al-Banna, “La Qawmiyya wa la 'Alamiyya bal al-Ukhuwa al-Islamiyya,” *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 3 Aug. 1933/11 Rabi' al-Thani 1352, 1–3. In a later article, al-Banna sought to Islamize nationalism by declaring that “the nationalism of Islam” (*qawmiyyat al-Islām*) is a project that unites the entire *umma*. See al-Banna, “Qawmiyyat al-Islam,” *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 22 Feb. 1934/8 Dhu al-Qa'da 1352, 1–3, at 1. Also see al-Banna, “Bayna al-Qawmiyya wa'l-Islamiyya,” *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 29 Jan. 1944/3 Safar 1363, 3–4.

organization's founder declared its commitment to shaping the *umma*.<sup>69</sup> Although references to society did appear during this period, most notably in a December 1934 article regarding the necessity of "protecting society" (*ṣiyānat al-mujtama'*) from the threat of prostitution,<sup>70</sup> such language was the exception rather than the rule.

The articulation of a broader nation-state-based social vision in interwar Egypt began not with explicit invocations of Islamic Society, but rather with the fusion of religious and territorial claims through calls for "Islamic Egypt" (*Miṣr al-Islāmiyya*). An August 1937 article by unidentified law students in *al-Fath* noted the threats posed by gender mixing (*al-ikhtilāf*) and immodest female behavior (*al-tabarruj*), asking rhetorically: "Do we live in an *umma* that subscribes to the Quran and Sunna...?"<sup>71</sup> The students then declared: "Oh virtuous ones, we are not in Paris, or Germany, or Hollywood, but rather in Islamic Egypt."<sup>72</sup> Similarly, a September 1942 article in *al-Fath* referred to the existence of multiple "Islamic homelands" (*al-awṭān al-Islāmiyya*) afflicted by female immodesty,<sup>73</sup> with "modern Islamic Egypt" (*Miṣr al-Islāmiyya al-ḥadūtha*) no exception to this malady.<sup>74</sup> In an attempt to meet the challenge, the author called on the Ministry of Social Affairs to equip young women with "pure Islamic culture."<sup>75</sup> Such calls to fuse the nation-state framework with Islamic territorial visions undergirded later claims to Islamic Society.

Just as writers in *al-Fath* called for the protection of Islamic Egypt, so too did other Islamic movements increasingly link individual conduct and the communal whole. While scholars of Islamic law (*fiqh*) had long evinced a greater concern with public sin due to its capacity to normalize such behavior in comparison to its private counterpart,<sup>76</sup> a December 1939 *fatwa* in the Salafi Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya's *al-Hadi al-Nabawi* emphasized the social implications of increased male/female interaction in Egypt through the conceptual framework of social purity. Written by Muhammad Bahjat

<sup>69</sup> Hasan al-Banna, "Ila' al-'Amal Ayyuha Ikhwan Muslimun," *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, 15 Feb. 1934/1 Dhu al-Qa'da 1352, 1–4.

<sup>70</sup> Mahmud Abu al-'Uyun, "Tanzim al-Bugha' Hadam al-Din wa'l-Akhlaq," *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, Dec. 1934/13 Ramadan 1353, 14. This special issue devoted to the threat of prostitution is undated but appeared as issue #33 between the 6 Ramadan 1353 (#32) and 20 Ramadan 1353 (#34) issues.

<sup>71</sup> The Sunna is the authoritative account of the Prophet Muhammad's life as understood by Sunni Muslims.

<sup>72</sup> Tallibat Huquq, "al-Ikhtilaf bi-Ashba' Mazahirihi," *al-Fath*, 27 Aug. 1937/19 Jumada al-Ukhra 1356, 6–8, at 8.

<sup>73</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Ridwan, "Mushkilat al-Sufur," *al-Fath*, 24 Sept. 1942/13 Ramadan 1361, 8–11, at 8. In the early twentieth century, this term was used specifically to refer to the unveiling of the face.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> For a Hanbali example of this point, see Cook, *Commanding Right*, 171–72.

al-Baytar (d. 1976), a leading Syrian Salafi scholar,<sup>77</sup> this non-binding legal ruling began by tackling the question of whether men and women were permitted to shake hands. Al-Baytar then proceeded to argue that men and women being alone together (*khalwa*) and mixing (*al-ikhtilāf*) in public spaces would facilitate everything from alcohol addiction to gambling to beach leisure, leading to “the corruption of society” (*fasād al-mujtamaʿ*).<sup>78</sup> At this time, however, Ansar al-Sunna’s activities focused on transmitting Salafi (e.g., neo-Hanbali) understanding of Islamic theology and precise ritual practice within mosques, and it had yet to turn to articulating a broader vision of Islamic Society in print.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, it is unsurprising that al-Baytar’s vision of society centers on forbidden actions rather than on practices constitutive of a broader social whole.

During the early 1940s, however, the Brotherhood first sought to link belief and action in the service of a broader social project. The organization was not exclusively focused on bottom-up change: al-Banna had first put himself forward as a candidate for parliament in his home district of Ismaʿiliyya in February 1941, before withdrawing quickly due to pressure from Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahas Pasha.<sup>80</sup> Yet, a focus on social activism won out over parliamentary competition and, in an October 1942 article in *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, the Brotherhood’s founder emphasized the “influence [of individual conduct] on the family,”<sup>81</sup> and declared that “if the family is pious then the *umma* will be pious as the *umma* is a collection of families....”<sup>82</sup> Yet, while it would be easy to frame al-Banna’s linkage of domestic practice with broader matters of public welfare within a broader narrative of Islamic Society, his formulation hewed to older understandings of a hierarchical social order centered on a particular social unit (the family) rather than on the particular regulatory regime of an abstract and horizontal society of individuals set forth by the nationalist project.<sup>83</sup>

Just a month later, however, ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿAzzam (d. 1976), who had previously served as the Egyptian Minister of Endowments between 1939 and 1940, published an article in the Brotherhood’s *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* in which

<sup>77</sup> Baytar began his career well within the mainstream of Salafism but, by the 1950s, this trend’s coalescing around neo-Hanbali theology and a purist commitment to deriving all law from the Quran and the Sunna left him on the margins.

<sup>78</sup> Muhammad Bahjat al-Baytar, “al-Fatawa,” *al-Hadi al-Nabawi*, Dec. 1939/ Dhu al-Qaʿda 1358, 38–43, at 39–40.

<sup>79</sup> Aaron Rock-Singer, *In the Shade of the Sunna: Salafi Piety in the Twentieth-Century Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 86–101.

<sup>80</sup> Mitchell, *Society*, 27.

<sup>81</sup> Hasan al-Banna, “Daʿwatuna ... Fi Tawr Jadid,” *Jaridat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin*, 24 Oct. 1942/14 Shawwal 1361, 5, 17, 23, at 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>83</sup> The claim that the *umma* is a collection of families was not limited to Islamic movements. Specifically, Susanna Ferguson has identified the usage of variations of this phrase among writers in the Arabic women’s press in 1920s, in “Tracing Tarbiya: Women, Education, and Childrearing in Lebanon and Egypt, 1860–1939,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2019), 372.



he explicitly invoked an Islamic Society which pivoted on horizontal individual action. Although he echoed al-Banna's linkage of individual action and collective welfare, 'Azzam *also* argued for the "responsibility of the individual in Islamic Society" (*mas'ūliyat al-fard fī al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*).<sup>84</sup> In his vision, the individual and society were linked, since they constituted "a single strong, happy and productive body."<sup>85</sup> Indeed, for 'Azzam, "Muslims' viceregency of God on earth," long understood as taking the particular institutional form of a Caliphate,<sup>86</sup> is premised on "correspondence" between the individual and the collective.<sup>87</sup>

The bottom-up thrust of 'Azzam's vision is most evident in his argument for the role of social norms, rather than the state, in producing an Islamic society. Specifically, he calls for a united "public opinion" that produces sound rulers and individuals alike and enables the *umma* to expel "evil or corruption" from its midst.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, "the greatest social maladies come from the absence of sound public opinion" (*al-ra'ī al-'āmm al-ṣāliḥ*), and proselytization (*al-da'wa*) serves to establish such norms.<sup>89</sup> In this vein, 'Azzam concludes that "proselytization is the basis of reform prior to legislation."<sup>90</sup> For 'Azzam, "Islamic Society" depended on the existence of a social order whose shared moral compass was the product of a public composed of individual members who could both regulate themselves and monitor the ruler.

'Azzam's questions gained urgency over the course of the 1940s as the prospect of decolonization beckoned across both Asia and Africa. With the end of French colonial rule in Lebanon and Syria and British rule in Jordan (1946), the partition of India and creation of Pakistan (1947), and the British exit from Mandatory Palestine (1947), elites within varied political movements faced challenges of the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule as they considered new questions of the objectives of sovereignty and state power. In Egypt, formal British rule had ended in Egypt in 1922, yet semi-colonial rule under the British-aligned Palace—first under King Fu'ad (r. 1922–1936) and then under his son King Faruq (r. 1936–1952)—restricted the exercise of foreign and military policy.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>84</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam Bak, "al-Islah al-Ijtima'ī fī al-Da'wa al-Muhammadiyya," *Jaridat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 7 Nov. 1942/28 Shawwal 1361, 12–13, 22–23, at 12.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> This principle would, over the course of the twentieth century, come to be understood in light of popular sovereignty. See Andrew March, *The Caliphate of Man: Popular Sovereignty in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019). For the dominant medieval view, see *ibid.*, 32–35.

<sup>87</sup> 'Azzam Bak, "al-Islah al-Ijtima'ī," 12–13.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>91</sup> Jacques Berque, *Egypt: Imperialism & Revolution*, Jean Stewart, ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 305.

Decolonization constituted a particularly acute strategic and conceptual dilemma for Islamic activists and movements for whom transnational networks had long been central. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's itinerant career had taken him from Iran to Afghanistan to the Ottoman imperial center of Istanbul to Egypt, while Muhammad Rashid Rida had searched in vain across the Middle East for a leader who could maintain some combination of Arab and Islamic unity. Egypt's Islamic movements, in turn, had arisen in the shadow of the ideological challenge posed by the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate.<sup>92</sup> By contrast, decolonization challenged Islamic movements to focus on a defined national space.

It was thus unsurprising that questions of a local social order, often framed in national terms, gained corresponding urgency. In December 1947, an article in *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* noted woman's responsibility for both her family and broader "human society" (*al-mujtama' al-insānī*), though it made no explicit reference to an Islamic social collective.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, a January 1948 article authored by a scholar employed by al-Azhar University's Faculty of Arabic Language argued that the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad and of local saints (s. *Mawlid* pl. *Mawālīd*)—a form of worship associated with Sufism—posed a threat to "Egyptian society" (*al-mujtama' al-Miṣrī*).<sup>94</sup>

By the early 1950s, the Brotherhood stood at the forefront of the call to form a specifically *Islamic* society. Following in the footsteps of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam, a 1951 article authored by a leading Brotherhood activist Salih 'Ashmawi (d. 1983) in the organization's periodical, *al-Da'wa*, argued that Egypt's leading Islamist organization offered a "comprehensive system and complete program ... for the formation of a virtuous society" (*mujtama' fāḍil*).<sup>95</sup> 'Ashmawi fused al-Banna's vision of Islam's comprehensiveness<sup>96</sup> with an emphasis on individual regulation as he noted that each Muslim was responsible for his or her behavior "in both private and public ... [including] the building of a Muslim home." This behavior, in turn, would produce an Islamic Society (*al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*).<sup>97</sup> While 'Ashmawi acknowledged the necessity

<sup>92</sup> An exception to this broad statement is the Jam'iyya Shar'iyya, founded in 1912.

<sup>93</sup> "al-Ukht al-Muslima: Mashakiluna al-Ijtima'iyya: al-Mar'a," *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 13 Dec. 1947/30 Muharram 1367, 21. For a similar argument, see Haram al-Ustadh al-Hadi al-Muhāmi, "Ikhwatuna," *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 9 Oct. 1948/6 Dhu al-Hijja 1367, 20–22.

<sup>94</sup> 'Abd al-Salam Abu al-Naja Sarhan, "Fi al-Mujtama' al-Miṣrī," *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 25 Jan. 1948/13 Rabi' al-Awwal 1367, 4, 26.

<sup>95</sup> Salih 'Ashmawi, "Ila Ay Shay Nad'u al-Nas?" *al-Da'wa*, 6 Feb. 1951/29 Rabi' al-Thani 1370, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Al-Banna declared in his famed "Twenty Principles" (*al-Uṣūl al-'Ishrīn*) that "Islam is a comprehensive religion that treats all manifestations of life collectively" (*niẓām shāmil yatanawwal maẓāhir al-ḥayāt jamī'at*). See Jum'a Amin 'Abd al-Aziz, *Fahm al-Islam fi Zīl al-Uṣūl al-'Ishrīn li-l-Imam Hasan al-Banna* (Cairo: Dar al-Da'wa li-l-Tiba' wa'l-Nashr, 1990), 23; and also Mitchell, *Society*, 232–59.

<sup>97</sup> 'Ashmawi, "Ila Ay Shay Nad'u al-Nas?," 1.

of *also* calling for “an Islamic government,” such a political structure was the mere “starting point” for broader social change.<sup>98</sup>

At a time when the prospect of national sovereignty had become thinkable even as the Brotherhood’s political future was unclear, ‘Ashmawi embraced the conceptual centrality of Islamic Society as a framework through which the Brotherhood could transform society from the bottom-up. Just as important is the subtle, yet significant, shift in emphasis from al-Banna: while the Brotherhood’s founder acknowledged the influence of individual conduct on the family, the latter was the standard unit. By contrast, ‘Ashmawi inverted this arrangement by emphasizing the influence of individual self-regulation on the family and broader society alike.

The Free Officers revolution of July 1952 toppled King Faruq and inaugurated Egypt’s postcolonial era. In the shadow of new opportunities and challenges alike, Sayyid Qutb expanded on ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Azzam’s vision of social reform in a series entitled *Towards an Islamic Society (Nahwa Mujtama’ Islāmī)*. In an article published just six months after the Free Officers had come to power, this leading Islamic thinker sought to theorize Islamic society along legal lines, specifically the distinction between an unchanging vision of principles of legal obedience (*Shari’a*) and the “tens of social models” produced by substantive law (*Fiqh*).<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, Muslims must review and revise the legal tradition in order to respond to “our contemporary problems.”<sup>100</sup> In launching this call, Qutb not only voiced a particular vision of the Muslim Brotherhood’s future but also challenged both Salafi scholars who aspired to define daily life in non-negotiable terms of worship (*‘ibāda*) as well as their traditionalist counterparts who sought to maintain interpretative centrality under postcolonial rule.<sup>101</sup>

The next month, Qutb moved from the legal to the social, asking rhetorically: “What is the meaning of the term ‘Islamic Society?’”<sup>102</sup> Noting the varied systems employed by “Western society” (*al-Mujtama’ al-Gharbī*)—whether feudalism, capitalism, socialism, or communism—Qutb argued, “Islamic Society is ... an exclusive product of the *Shari’a* ... which has not changed over time ... it is this *Shari’a* that brought this society into existence and erected it on the basis desired by God for His Servants.... Islamic Society does

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>99</sup> Sayyid Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama’ Islami: Kayfa Nastawhi al-Islam,” *al-Muslimun*, Jan. 1953/Jumada al-Ula 1372, 43–50, at 44.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>101</sup> On the battle between traditionalist and Salafi scholars for interpretative centrality, see Emad Hamdeh, *Salafism and Traditionalism: Religious Authority in Modern Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). On the challenge posed by the Muslim Brotherhood’s thinkers to the scholarly elite, see Kalmbach, *Islamic Knowledge*, 169–74.

<sup>102</sup> Sayyid Qutb, “Nahwa Mujtama’ Islami: Tabi’at al-Mujtama’ al-Islami,” *al-Muslimun*, Feb. 1953/Jumada al-Ukhra 1372, 31–37, at 31.

not produce the *Shari'a*. Rather, it is the *Shari'a* that has produced Islamic Society (*al-Sharī'a hiya allatī sana'at al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*) ... the *Shari'a* enables Islamic Society to develop ... according to authentic and fixed precepts."<sup>103</sup> In sum, Qutb argued that an Islamic legal tradition produced an Islamic Society, yet, to return to the opening anecdote of this article, such a society had multiple legitimate manifestations.

Unlike 'Ashmawi, however, Qutb continued to reject the nation-state framework. In an April 1953 entry in this series, he declared that "Islamic Society is a global society (*mujtama' 'ālamī*) ... it is not limited by geographical borders..."<sup>104</sup> Noting the dominance of nationalism in the twentieth century, Qutb declared, "Islam does not recognize geographical borders ... every land under Islam is a homeland for all Muslims (*waṭan l-il-jamī'a*)..."<sup>105</sup> Unlike the writer of the September 1942 article in *al-Fath* who implicitly accepted geopolitical boundaries, Qutb argued for a transnational political collective. Finally, in July 1953, Qutb further elaborated on the role of individuals in such a society, arguing that "Islamic Society is distinct ... from Communist Society (*al-Mujtama' al-Shuyu'ī*) in its freedom of belief ... [it is] a free and open society" (*mujtama' ḥurr maftūh*).<sup>106</sup>

Sayyid Qutb's attempt to elaborate on the roots, principles, and application of a model for the formation of an Islamic Society reflects not only the ideas of a leading member of the Brotherhood, but also the key questions and fault lines that future advocates for the establishment of an Islamic Society would navigate. In this series of articles, he foreshadowed debates over interpretative method, application, individual practice, and the relationship between such a society and postcolonial states. In the process, Qutb refuted the claim that the particulars of an Islamic Society were well-established and self-evident. Over the next two decades, however, the opportunity for Islamic movements to articulate a project of Islamic Society narrowed considerably and Qutb's vision hardened.

Notwithstanding Qutb's challenge, though, many Islamic activists and thinkers had already begun to articulate a religious-nationalist vision of "Islamic Egypt." This project challenged Muslims not merely to observe longstanding legal responsibilities such as prayer or fasting, but also to uphold the fate of an Islamic society more broadly by reframing the self-regulation characteristic of nationalism more broadly in terms of piety. 'Abd al-Nasir would soon intensify his own religious claims and limit the opportunity of his ideological competitors to shape Egyptian society.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>104</sup> Sayyid Qutb, "Nahwa Mujtama' Islami: Mujtama' 'Alami," *al-Muslimun*, Apr. 1953/Shahban 1372, 26–32, at 26.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>106</sup> Qutb, "Nahwa Mujtama' Islami: Mujtama' 'Alami," *al-Muslimun*, Jul. 1953/Dhu al-Qa'da 1372, 18.

## STATE POWER, SOCIALISM, AND ISLAMIC SOCIETY

In October 1954, several members of the Muslim Brotherhood's paramilitary branch, known as the "Secret Apparatus" (*al-Jihāz al-Sirrī*), tried to assassinate Egypt's secular-nationalist ruler. In the aftermath of the failed attempt, 'Abd al-Nasir initiated a broad crackdown on his one-time revolutionary ally.<sup>107</sup> With the Brotherhood confined, and quietist Salafi organizations such as Ansar al-Sunna working copiously to avoid any actions that might be interpreted as a political challenge,<sup>108</sup> public debate over Islamic Society among Islamic movements ceased.

The period of 'Abd al-Nasir's rule is often identified with his efforts to position Egypt as a pan-Arab leader regionally and to implement "scientific socialism" locally.<sup>109</sup> Just as importantly, though, Egypt's ruler worked to regulate existing religious institutions such as al-Azhar University,<sup>110</sup> and reformed the public educational system in an attempt to inculcate a religio-political vision that accorded with his policies and preempted political dissent.<sup>111</sup> In this context, 'Abd al-Nasir empowered two key state institutions to transmit his priorities: the Islamic Research Academy at al-Azhar, which published *al-Azhar*, and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, a body within the Ministry of Endowments that regulated Egyptian mosques and published *Minbar al-Islam*.<sup>112</sup> 'Abd al-Nasir's project of secular nationalism thus depended not on restricting Islam to private space, but rather on utilizing it in the service of particular ideological goals.

In the wake of the repression of the Brotherhood, scholars and bureaucrats within the Islamic Research Academy and Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs appropriated the concept of Islamic Society as they articulated a vision of state power. In a November 1954 article in *al-Azhar*, published in the midst of the crackdown on Egypt's leading Islamist organization, Muhammad Muhi al-Din al-Masiri (d. 1972) sought to elucidate the "systems on which Islamic Society is

<sup>107</sup> Mitchell, *Society*, 107–15.

<sup>108</sup> For example, Ansar al-Sunna's founder Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi (d. 1959) visited 'Abd al-Nasir in 1954 to congratulate him for having expelled the British from Egypt. See "Akhbar al-Jama'a," *al-Hadi al-Nabawi*, Nov. 1954/Rabi' al-Awwal 1374, 49–51, at 49.

<sup>109</sup> Joel Gordon, *Nasser: Hero of the Arab Nation* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2012), 69–94.

<sup>110</sup> On the twentieth-century history of reform at al-Azhar, see Malika Zeghal, "The Recentring of Religious Knowledge and Discourse: The Case of al-Azhar in Twentieth-Century Egypt," in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 107–30.

<sup>111</sup> Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 77–86.

<sup>112</sup> On the regulatory practices of British colonial rule, see *ibid.*, 23–61. On the longer-term "bureaucratization" of law, including *Siyasa* and *Fiqh*, see Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 84–92.

based” (*al-nuzum allatī yaqūm ‘alayhā kiyān al-Mujtama‘ al-Islāmī*).<sup>113</sup> This Azhari scholar and prolific author then proceeded to enumerate four systems in particular: “the family,” “private property,” a “social system for all” (*al-nizām al-ijtimā‘ī li-l-jamā‘a*), and “the system for rule over all.”<sup>114</sup> Al-Masiri then turned to contrasting Islam with its ideological competitors—socialism, communism and capitalism—arguing that each had its own “social system.”<sup>115</sup>

Al-Masiri’s vision depended not on bottom-up change but on the enforcement of the Islamic penal code (*ḥudūd*) by the state, with a particular focus on crimes that harmed public morality such as theft, apostasy, prostitution, alcohol consumption, and banditry (*al-hirāba*).<sup>116</sup> While ‘Abd al-Nasir had stripped al-Azhar University of much of its independence in 1961, prior government efforts to reorganize this center of Sunni learning made clear that, for the ‘ulama’ to retain influence, they had to embrace the principle of a highly interventionist state.<sup>117</sup> Accordingly, for al-Masiri, the project of Islamic Society depending on access to state-controlled levers of coercion. Unlike his Islamist and Salafi counterparts, however, he was focused primarily on preventing certain practices rather than on promoting affirmative modes of individual and collective moral formation.

Calls for Islamic Society from within the Egyptian government’s religious institutions served not only to buttress state power but also to justify secular nationalism under a postcolonial state. Gregory Starrett has previously shown that, under ‘Abd al-Nasir, bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education revised the religious education curricula in public schools to support a secular-nationalist vision generally, as well as the regime’s particular socialist leanings.<sup>118</sup> State-aligned religious elites similarly used this concept to provide ideological legitimization for the open-ended exercise of state authority: In January 1963, Muhammad Baysar (d. 1982) published “Islamic Society between Reactionism and Progress” (*al-Mujtama‘ al-Islamī bayna al-Raj‘iyya wa’l-Taqaḍḍum*) in *Minbar al-Islam*. In the article, this Azhari scholar, who in 1978 would

<sup>113</sup> Muhammad Muhi al-Din al-Masiri, “al-Nuzum allatī Yaquḥ ‘alayhā Kiyān al-Mujtama‘ al-Islāmī,” *al-Azhar*, Apr. 1955/Ramadan 1374, 859–68, at 859. Al-Masiri’s economic vision, in particular, strongly resembles that of Palestinian scholar Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhānī (d. 1977), who founded the transnational Islamist organization, Hizb al-Tahrīr (generally rendered in English as Hizb ut-Tahrīr). See Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhānī, *al-Nizam al-Iqtisādī fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Dar al-Umma li-l-Tibā‘a wa’l-Nashr, 2004).

<sup>114</sup> al-Masiri, “al-Nuzum allatī Yaquḥ,” 859.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 860.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 863.

<sup>117</sup> On the longer history of state-sponsored “reform” of al-Azhar, including the 1908 reform code, see *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris 2013[2009]), 197–230.

<sup>118</sup> Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, 84–85.

become Minister of Endowments and Azhar Affairs,<sup>119</sup> argued that “socialist principles” stood at the core of Islamic Society, specifically the “progressive approach that seeks to realize social justice.”<sup>120</sup> Declaring that the principles in question could be called “socialism,” “reformist principles,” or an “Islamic system,” Baysar argued that socialism could serve as a means to “realize a shared goal.”<sup>121</sup> In sum, Baysar sought to reclaim Islamic Society from his Islamist competitors by reframing this concept within a broader project of socialism which could reshape state and society alike.

Along similar lines, in a May 1969 article in *al-Azhar*, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafaji (d. 2006) sought to fuse socialist discourses regarding labor with the call to Islamic Society. Asserting that “workers hold a [lofty] status in Islamic Society” (*makānat al-‘āmil fī al-Mujtama‘ al-Islāmī*),<sup>122</sup> this faculty member at al-Azhar’s Faculty of Arabic Language declared that “workers’ rights in Islam are paralleled by obligations.”<sup>123</sup> While Khafaji sought to meld socialism and Islam, his understanding of rights and obligations reflected longer debates over the formation and maintenance of Islamic Society. Just as importantly, his call to socialism contrasted sharply with Muhammad Muhi al-Din al-Masiri’s 1954 defense of private property, underscoring both the ideological flexibility of state-sponsored visions of Islamic Society and the shared commitment to state power that linked them.

Notwithstanding the significant repression faced by the Muslim Brotherhood during this period, its members continued to explore the parameters of an Islamic Society in both theory and practice. The most prominent voice in this regard was Sayyid Qutb, whose *Milestones (Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq)* was published in 1964 and departed significantly from the theoretical thrust of Qutb’s earlier work. Qutb declared: “Islam only acknowledges two types of societies ... Islamic Society and *Jāhili* society.”<sup>124</sup> Islamic Society is the society in which Islam is applied ... creed and worship, *Sharī‘a* and order, morality and behavior ... while *Jāhili* society is the society in which Islam is not applied, and in which Islamic creed and conceptions, values and standards, order and rules of conduct, morals and manners are not followed.”<sup>125</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Muhammad al-Jawwadi, “al-Shaykh Muhammad Baysar alladhi Jama‘ bayna al-Juwayni wa’l-Ghazali,” published 7 Sept. 2020, at: <https://mubasher.aljazeera.net/blogs/2020/9/7/الشيخ-محمد-بصار-الذي-جمع-بين-الغزالي-والجويني>.

<sup>120</sup> Muhammad Baysar, “al-Mujtama‘ al-Islami bayna al-Raj‘iyya wa’l-Taqaaddumiyya,” *Minbar al-Islam*, Jan. 1963/Ramadan 1382, 50–55, at 50.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>122</sup> Muhammad ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Khafaji, “al-‘Amal wa’l-‘Ummal fi al-Mujtama‘ al-Islami,” *al-Azhar*, July 1969/Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1389, 190–98, at 198.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>124</sup> Qutb, following two leading South Asian scholars—Abu al-A‘la al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) and Abu-l-Hasan al-Nadawi (d. 1999)—used this term trans-historically to refer to all “un-Islamic” elements in the past and present. On Qutb’s use of this term, see Shephard, “Sayyid Qutb’s Doctrine.”

<sup>125</sup> On Qutb’s later call for an “Islamic Society,” see Sayyid Qutb, *Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1979), 105.

As Qutb gave up hope for the efficacy of the Brotherhood's project of gradual change, his understanding of Islamic Society correspondingly shifted away from a mass project, and he came to focus on the threat posed by allegedly dangerous non-Islamic influences. Yet, his understanding of Islamic Society, like that of religious nationalists within and beyond Egypt, was inextricably premised on the decidedly novel model of self-regulating pious Muslims who, through their collective practices that far exceeded the realm of legal obedience, would uphold an Islamic Society.

Moreover, while Qutb is certainly the most prominent Islamist voice of this period, he was far from the only Muslim Brother to debate the question of Islamic Society. Rather than precluding such discussions, mass imprisonment enabled the Brotherhood's members to engage in extended debates. Most notably, Sa'd Surur Kamil (d. 1993)—a member of the Brotherhood's Secret Apparatus—described the al-Wahat prison camp, located in the New Valley Governorate (*al-Wādī al-Jadīd*), as “a perfect society (*mujtama' mutakāmil*) in every sense of the word.” Furthermore, another imprisoned Brother, 'Abd al-Halim Khafaji (d. 2013), described how Muslim Brothers at al-Wahat worked to reorient daily life exclusively around religious activity.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, this period saw no parallel development of calls for Islamic Society by Salafis. Indeed, to the extent that leading figures within Ansar al-Sunna addressed the question of public morality more broadly, they praised 'Abd al-Nasir's religious ambitions rather than critiquing them.<sup>127</sup> The question of Islamic Society would gain new urgency in the early 1970s.

#### ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND CALLS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The 1967 Arab-Israeli war dealt a body blow to 'Abd al-Nasir's vision of pan-Arab secular nationalism. In 1970, his vice president, Anwar al-Sadat, ascended to the presidency and in the early 1970s he released many Brotherhood members from prison as part of a broader decision to allow the organization to reestablish itself.<sup>128</sup> At this time the Brotherhood's grassroots infrastructure was in tatters; as Khalid 'Abd al-Qadir 'Awda, a leading member of the Islamic Student Movement (*al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya*) in the Upper Egyptian city of Asyut

<sup>126</sup> Sa'd Surur Kamil, *Khawatir Masjun: al-Fikr la Tuqayyiduhu al-Aswar* (Alexandria: Dar al-Da'wa, 1984), 28; and 'Abd al-Halim Khafaji, *Indama Ghabat al-Shams* (Kuwait City: Maktabat al-Falah, 1979), 223–24. I thank Mathias Ghyoot for both of these citations.

<sup>127</sup> For example, in September 1957, a leading member of Ansar al-Sunna, Abu-l-Wafa' Muhammad Darwish declared, “The prophetic migration (*hijra*) was an awakening (*ba'th*) in the path of freedom, just as our blessed [Free Officers'] revolution (*thawratunā al-mubāraka*) is an awakening (*ba'th*) in the path of freedom. Abu-l-Wafa' Muhammad Darwish, “Inbi'ath fi Sabil al-Hurriyya,” *al-Hadi al-Nabawi*, Aug.–Sept. 1957/Safar-Jumada al-Ula 1377, 53–54, at 53.

<sup>128</sup> Abdullah Al-Arian, *Answering the Call: Popular Islamic Activism in Sadat's Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 27.



recalled, “There was no organization ... [there was merely] the idea of the Brotherhood.”<sup>129</sup> Conversely, the organization’s ability to engage in a project of religious transformation was hobbled: it would only regain permission to publish an official periodical, *al-Da‘wa*, in 1976 and had limited access to the printing infrastructure necessary to produce pamphlets.<sup>130</sup>

Over the course of the 1970s, Muslim Brothers, along with members of Ansar al-Sunna and the Islamic Student Movement, competed to claim the mantle of public piety. This competition, waged not only among Islamic movements but between them and leading state religious institutions such as al-Azhar and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, shaped the emergence of a broader “Islamic Revival” (*Ṣaḥwa Islāmiyya*) that was distinguished by the popularization of novel forms of daily prayer, gender relations, and Islamic education.<sup>131</sup> It would be in this context that leading Islamist thinkers, joined by their Salafi counterparts, would return to the question of Islamic Society, building on the debates over the power of social practice, the centrality of a self-regulating pious citizen, and the assumption that such a society was to be formed within postcolonial nation-states.

As Ansar al-Sunna reemerged in 1973 after regaining control of its branches and the right to publish a journal,<sup>132</sup> it turned to a question previously raised by the Brotherhood: how to craft a socially ambitious religious vision. That a Salafi organization tackled this question prior to the Islamist Brotherhood reflected Ansar al-Sunna’s comparatively light experience with repression during the previous two decades. Just as importantly, however, the call to Islamic Society was part and parcel of a broader expansion of Salafism’s organizing principle—exclusive worship of God (*Tawḥīd*)—beyond acts such as prayer traditionally considered within the realm of worship (*‘ibāda*) to encompass daily practices of dress, comportment, and social relations such as beard length and gender segregation.<sup>133</sup>

As part of this turn to shaping society, ‘Abd al-Rahim Sadiq ‘Arnus, Ansar al-Sunna’s Secretary General, published a July 1973 article in which he argued for the link between the individual, family, and society as Islam “constitutes a complementary structure that has neither limitations nor shortcomings...”<sup>134</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Khalid ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Awda, Ikhwantube, 2010, in *Hadith Dhikrayat ma‘a Khalid ‘Abd al-Qadir ‘Awda, al-Juz‘a al-Awwal* (no longer online).

<sup>130</sup> On the Brotherhood’s limited ability to transmit its religious vision prior to 1976 as compared to Ansar al-Sunna and the Jam‘iyya Shar‘iyya, see Rock-Singer, *Practicing Islam in Egypt: Print Media and Islamic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 82–84.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–153.

<sup>132</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Tahir, *Jama‘at Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya: Nash‘atuha—Ahdafuha—Manhajuha—Juhuduha* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Hadi al-Nabawi li-l-Nashr wa’l-Tawzi‘/Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Fadila li-l-Nashr wa’l-Tawzi‘, 2004), 241.

<sup>133</sup> See Rock-Singer, *In the Shade of the Sunna*, 66–101.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Abd al-Rahim ‘Arnus, “Muwazana bayna al-Shari‘a wa Qawanin al-Nas,” *al-Tawhid*, July 1973/Jumada al-Thaniyya 1393, 2:239–44, at 2:41. Numbering from *al-Tawhid* is based on the .bok

Far more similar to Qutb's vision in *Milestones* than in *al-Muslimun*, 'Arnus described how, "At the dawn of Islam, Islamic Society had an ideal and model form (*wa-kāna al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī fī saḍr al-Islām šūra namūdhajīyya mithāliyya*) ... with the Quran and Hadith<sup>135</sup> as its constitution...."<sup>136</sup> Ansar al-Sunna soon turned to translating 'Arnus's theoretical concern into practice by organizing conferences that tackled perceived impiety in state and society alike. Most notably, a 20–21 November 1975 conference included a series of resolutions including a call for the use of *Shari'a* as the source of state law, the prevention of gender mixing (particularly within state educational institutions and on public transportation), and "social reform" through the realization of an Islamic Society (*qiyām al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*)...."<sup>137</sup> As Ansar al-Sunna moved beyond the mosque to shape society more broadly, their calls for Islamic Society framed this project.

Ansar al-Sunna's focus in the mid-1970s on the imperative of forming an Islamic Society was far from exceptional. The next month, Muhammad b. Sa'ud Islamic University (also known as al-Imam University) held an Islamic Law Conference. Located in Saudi Arabia's capital city, Riyadh, the conference welcomed a reported 160 scholars from some twenty Muslim-majority countries and focused on the application of Islamic law. Specifically, conference participants were concerned with "application of Islamic punishments in matters of penal law in order to create a sound Islamic Society" (*taṭbiq al-'uqūbāt al-Islāmiyya fī al-ḥudūd li-ijād Mujtama' Islāmī salīm*).<sup>138</sup> While the relationship between state law and an Islamic Society was not the exclusive focus of conference attendees—other key topics included Islamic economics, education, and the reform of mosques<sup>139</sup>—the prominence of this concept as an object and method of reform reflected and enhanced broader regional ideological winds.

Yet, for Salafis and Islamists in Egypt, the access to state power on which a project of legal change depended remained a pipe dream. Instead, it was during this period that representatives of both trends came to link ritual practice and the welfare of a broader Islamic society. A spring 1976 article in Ansar al-Sunna's *al-Tawhid* declared that collectively engaging in practices such as "prayer at the first permissible moment, breaking the Ramadan fast, engaging in supererogatory night vigils (*ṣalāt qiyām al-layl*), and sharing the meal before the *fajr* morning

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file accessed through the Shamela program. I have compared hard copies of the magazine with the .bok version to confirm general accuracy.

<sup>135</sup> 'Arnus's use of the term *ḥadīth* functions similarly to previous invocations of Sunna, which is composed of authenticated oral reports (s. *ḥadīth pl. ahādīth*) regarding the sayings and actions of Muḥammad and his Companions (the *Ṣahāba*).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:42.

<sup>137</sup> "Akhbar al-Jama'a," *al-Tawhid*, Dec. 1975/Dhu al-Hijja 1395, 29:2–3, at 29:3.

<sup>138</sup> "Mu'tammar al-Fiḥ al-Islami bi-l-Riyad Yusdir Qarrarat wa Tawsiyyat Hama," *al-I'tisam*, Dec. 1976/Dhu al-Hijja 1396, 10–11, at 11.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

prayer ... [produce] an Islamic Society defined by order and stability and complete mutual understanding.”<sup>140</sup> Similarly, in March 1977, the longtime Brotherhood leader Salih ‘Ashmawi, who over a quarter century prior had called for the formation of a “virtuous society” (*mujtama’ fāḍil*), criticized the failure of state institutions, whether government offices or schools, to facilitate the performance of the early afternoon *Zuhr* prayer.<sup>141</sup> Specifically, ‘Ashmawi argued that such observance constituted “a sincere and serious approach to the establishment of an Islamic Society” (*li-īqāmat al-Mujtama’ al-Islāmī*).<sup>142</sup> In sum, both Salafis and Islamists sought to define ritual practice not only as an individual legal obligation, but also as a means to model the pious sociability necessary to form an Islamic social collective within Egypt more broadly.

During the second half of the 1970s, proponents of an Islamic Society also sought to regulate women in public space. This is not to suggest that a concern with women’s circulation outside of domestic space was new; Marion Katz has shown that as early as the ninth century, jurists articulated an explicit link between female sexuality and social disorder (*fitna*),<sup>143</sup> while Muslim Brothers in the 1930s expressed a concern with the moral implications of women’s public presence.<sup>144</sup> Conscious of this longer history as well of a project of State Feminism that had emerged under ‘Abd al-Nasir and valorized women’s public presence as both objects and agents of reform,<sup>145</sup> both Islamists and Salafis sought to link limits on women’s public movement with the broader fate of Islamic society.

Calls for Islamic Society frequently concerned women’s rights to education and employment. In June 1977, the Brotherhood’s *al-Da’wa* featured an article entitled “Women’s Education in Light of the Desired Islamic Society.”<sup>146</sup> Echoing longstanding debates over the relative importance of top-down and bottom-up change, the author noted, “The formation of an Islamic Society cannot come only from legal change, but also depends on Islam being dominant [in society]” (*yakūn al-Islām huwa al-muḥaymin*).<sup>147</sup> Accordingly,

<sup>140</sup> Mustafa Kamal Wasfī, “al-Tawhid wa’l-‘Adat,” *al-Tawhid*, Apr.–May 1976/Jumada al-Ula wa’l-Thaniyya 1396, 5:43–48, at 5:44.

<sup>141</sup> Salih ‘Ashmawi, “Ayna al-Salat fi Dawlat al-‘Ilm wa’l-Iman?” *al-Da’wa*, Mar. 1977/Rabi’ al-Thani 1397, 41. On the broader project of popularizing this early afternoon prayer, see Rock-Singer, *Practicing Islam*, 106–31.

<sup>142</sup> ‘Ashmawi, “Ayna al-Salat fi Dawlat al-‘Ilm wa’l-Iman,” 41.

<sup>143</sup> Prior to the ninth century, “An association between the concept of *fitna* and women and sexuality ... was not yet the predominant connotation of the term.” Marion Katz, *Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 103–4, quote 103.

<sup>144</sup> For example, ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Jalil Radi, “Qism al-Tallaba: Fitnat al-‘Asr,” *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimun*, 6 Dec. 1933/19 Sha’ban 1352, 21–22.

<sup>145</sup> Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 65–100.

<sup>146</sup> Ahmad Muhammad ‘Ali Ibrahim, “Ta’lim al-Mar’a fi Zill al-Mujtama’ al-Islāmī al-Manshud,” *al-Da’wa*, June 1977/Rajab 1397, 46–48.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Islamic Education—transmitted either in gender segregated educational spaces or in mixed spaces in which women dress modestly—will enable “women ... to raise the next generation based on an Islamic spirit so that the Islamic Society that we seek can arise.”<sup>148</sup> Similarly, Ansar al-Sunna’s journal, *al-Tawhid*, featured an article by ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. Baz (d. 1999) in which this leading Saudi Salafi scholar argued that female employment in “domains which are specific to men ... [constitutes a] danger to Islamic Society” (*amr khaṭīr ‘alā al-Mujtama‘ al-Islāmī*).<sup>149</sup> The formation and maintenance of Islamic Society was thus disproportionately dependent on women’s dual role as exemplars of modesty and educators of the next generation.

In the face of Salafi and Islamist calls for the formation of an Islamic Society and renewed grassroots activism, state-aligned religious elites reiterated the state’s centrality and the legitimacy of its control over defined religious spaces. In July 1976, a high-ranking bureaucrat within the Ministry of Endowments, Zakariyya Ibrahim al-Zuka, published an article in *Minbar al-Islam* in which he argued that, since the Prophet Muhammad’s time, mosques had served as the premier engine for the formation of Islamic Society.<sup>150</sup> While al-Zuka did not seek to collapse the distinction between state and society, he effectively placed the regulation of society’s religiosity under the authority of the Ministry of Endowments which, for the previous twenty years, had fought unsuccessfully to assert control over independent mosques.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, in the April 1977 issue of *Minbar al-Islam*, the Egyptian poet and litterateur Hasan Fath al-Bab (d. 2015) authored “Unity and Brotherhood in Islamic Society.” In the article, al-Bab affirmed the value of cooperation irrespective of social position.<sup>152</sup> This unity, in turn, is a product of “coordination” overseen by the ruler<sup>153</sup> and a relationship defined by “cooperation and brotherhood between leadership and the base.”<sup>154</sup> For al-Bab, “coordination” was a euphemism for control which neutered alternative religio-political visions, including those that sought to advance competing claims to Islamic Society. In sum, as state-aligned religious elites and Islamic movements dueled for religious authority, the

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. Baz, “Khatar Musharakat al-Mar’a li-l-l-Rajul fi Maydan ‘Amalih,” *al-Tawhid*, Aug. 1978/Ramadan 1398, 13–17, at 14. On the broader Salafi project of gender segregation during this period, see Aaron Rock-Singer, “The Salafi Mystique: The Rise of Gender Segregation in 1970s Egypt,” *Islamic Law and Society* 23 (2016): 279–305.

<sup>150</sup> Zakariyya Ibrahim al-Zuka, “Risalat al-Masjid,” *Minbar al-Islam*, July 1976/Rajab 1396, 102–3, at 103.

<sup>151</sup> Patrick Gaffney, “The Changing Voices of Islam: The Emergence of Professional Preachers in Contemporary Egypt,” *Muslim World* 81, 1 (1991): 27–47, at 30–40.

<sup>152</sup> Hasan Fath al-Bab, “al-Wahda wa’l-Akha’ fi al-Mujtama‘ al-Islami,” *Minbar al-Islam*, Jumada al-Ula 1397, 201–5, at 201.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

question was not whether an Islamic Society should exist in Egypt but who should shape it and how.

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of roughly half a century, competing Islamic movements and institutions embraced Islamic Society as an organizing framework: while Islamic movements used this concept to promote bottom-up calls for public morality, state-aligned religious elites embraced top-down claims to shape society in the service of causes as varied as socialism and private property. Beginning in the 1970s, these calls came to focus on core issues of religio-political contestation, whether public ritual practice, gender relations, or state control over mosques. In sum, this concept became a catch-all box that held contradictory ideological ambitions. Yet, it is precisely because of the ubiquity of calls to form an Islamic Society that its history has persisted unexamined. By tracing the history of this concept, I have shown the process through which Islamic movements came to link communal identity and social practice, while their counterparts within the Egyptian state privileged the top-down exercise of state power in a manner that positioned the state as the arbiter of proper behavior.

The specific use of conceptual history to tell this story casts light on the history of Islamic reform within and beyond Egypt. While claims that premodern Islamic reformers could turn to a tried-and-true playbook of revival and reform always obscured a significant degree of local variation, the radical shifts in social organization, mobilization, and identity produced by modernity have fundamentally reshaped the terms of engagement with this tradition. Conceptual history enables us to take seriously the competition for authenticity among competitors for the mantle of Islamic piety, while also probing how such claims both reflect and facilitate particular projects of religious change that depend on novel organizing principles. It is through such an approach that the broader battle to define the relationship between Islam, state, and society through a focus on practice becomes legible.

The gradual development of Islamic Society also intervenes in the scholarship on religion and state in twentieth-century Egypt that has been dominated by scholars of secularism. This article began where Asad's work on Egypt ends and charts the emergence of competing models of Islamic Society that continue to undergird debates over the role of religion in public life. In the process, I have shown the conceptual framework through which Islamist and Salafi thinkers and state-aligned religious elites negotiated the link between public and private as they emphasized the centrality of individual moral cultivation to communal integrity.

This story also has implications for the study of religious nationalism more broadly, particularly at a historical moment when calls for religiously exclusive societies have reemerged, whether among Hindu nationalists in India, Christian

nationalists in the United States, or Salafi-Jihadi groups such as the Islamic State. The concept of Islamic Society as it developed in Egypt between the 1930s and 1970s, and particularly the ways in which it foregrounds the regulation of practice, either from bottom-up or top-down, shows how the subsuming of a project of moral reform by the geographical and political assumptions of the postcolonial nation-state has provided the framework for exclusivist forms of religio-political mobilization and, in some cases, regulation.

Finally, this study argues for the linkage of theory and method in the study of conceptual history more broadly. Scholars of conceptual history have focused disproportionately on books and anthologies of popular writings. While such an approach is understandable—such texts represent key themes accurately and reflect ideas that have become dominant within particular approaches—their publication often marks the end point of an idea's development. By contrast, a focus on periodicals enables a granular story not merely of which concepts became dominant, but *how* and *why* they reached this status as rival claimants to Islamic authority sought to lay claim to an increasingly literate population. Far from the ivory tower, the ideas that shape societies emerge in dialogue among competing elites and between those elites and communities that they seek to shape.

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Abstract: This article explores the history of “Islamic Society” (*al-Mujtama' al-Islami*), a concept whose widespread usage is paralleled by shallow understandings of its origins. Scholars of premodern Islamic history often use this term to describe the ideas and practices of Muslim communities under Islamic political rule, while historians of the Muslim Brotherhood highlight this leading Islamist movement's commitment to forming such a collective yet treat the concept as *sui generis*. This article, in turn, draws on a wide array of Islamic print media published by leading Islamic movements and state institutions in Egypt between 1898 and 1981 to tell a story of how this concept became intellectually viable and politically meaningful in the context of transition from colonial to postcolonial rule in the mid-twentieth century. Building on histories of religious nationalism which trace how religious nationalist visions produce novel understandings of religious identity rather than replicating prior models, the article explores the ways in which identity is linked to particular projects of religious practice. In doing so, it casts light on how religious nationalist projects seek to structure social life through calls to continuity with the past even as they adopt the core assumptions of the nation-state project. Specifically, it argues that, as Muslim thinkers, activists, and scholars navigated the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule, they turned to this concept to articulate dueling conceptions of religious change through state power and social mobilization alike.

Key words: Middle East history, Islamic history, religious nationalism, Islamism, Salafism