

Autobiography or Fiction? Ḥasan al-Bannā's Memoirs Revisited

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Abstract

Scholars dealing with the rise of contemporary Islamism and the Muslim Brothers' early history frequently turn to Ḥasan al-Bannā's autobiography, *Mudhakkirāt al-Da'wah wa'l-Dā'iyyah* (Memoirs of the Call and the Preacher) as one major source of information about the movement's origin. Despite the centrality of this autobiography and the abundance of references to it in Islamist literature, it remains poorly understood. Drawing upon a range of under-explored primary sources, this article argues that the autobiography was never written as a traditional *ex post facto* memoir. Only by recognizing its fictionalized nature and by exploring the boundaries between biography and fiction, can al-Bannā's memoirs be properly understood.

Key words: Islamism, Egypt, Ḥasan al-Bannā, The Muslim Brothers, Biography, Autobiography.

Introduction

Scholars dealing with the rise of contemporary Islamism and the Muslim Brothers'¹ early history frequently turn to Ḥasan al-Bannā's autobiography, *Mudhakkirāt al-Da'wah wa'l-Dā'iyyah* (Memoirs of the Call and the Preacher), as one major source of information about the movement's origin. Despite the centrality of this autobiography and the abundance of references to it in Islamist literature, no attempts have been made to subject it to a critical analysis.² The lack of primary sources is one reason for this.³ However, in recent years, new sources on the early life of the MB leader and the foundation of the Ikhwān movement have become available. These include al-Bannā's letters to his father, edited and published

1 The Muslim Brothers first official name was *Jam'iyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*. The term *jam'iyah* was commonly used by Islamic welfare societies at the time. In the mid-1930s, however, as the movement gradually politicized, the term *Jama'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (lit. "The Society of Muslim Brotherhood" or "The Muslim Brotherhood Group") was adopted. For the sake of convenience, I will use the terms "the Muslim Brothers" or "The Muslim Brotherhood" or, simply, "MB".

2 The only partial exception is LIA 1998.

3 Richard Mitchell's seminal work on the Muslim Brothers from 1969 observed that, "unfortunately, there are no critical sources, to our knowledge, with which to compare this autobiographical material." MITCHELL 1993: 1.

by his youngest brother Jamāl al-Bannā.⁴ Another one is a report, written by the secessionists in the first internal crisis in the Brotherhood around 1932.⁵ These and other new materials represent critical sources to the autobiography, and have enabled scholars to reinterpret the mysterious Ismailiya period of the Muslim Brotherhood's movement.⁶ More important, however, is that these sources also allow for a reinterpretation of al-Bannā's memoirs, which is the primary goal of this article.

“Impose on the past the order of the present”

In order to move slightly beyond a one-dimensional comparison of these sources, it is useful to place al-Bannā's autobiography in a broader theoretical perspective. Robert F. SAYRE's classical book *The Examined Self* from 1964 is a good starting point for understanding autobiographies as a genre.⁷ Sayre criticizes the sharp distinction between “truth and fiction” in the literature of autobiographies, advocating instead an “autobiographical criticism [which should not] chase every fictional episode back to some precedents in ‘real life’”. He argues that an autobiographer is “committed to making as many selections and judgements of his material as is the historian or the novelist”. Hence, an autobiographer's work is undeniably “an image”, and Sayre therefore recommends a study of “how these images are made, what their components are, how they are different, and how they are related [...]”.⁸

The creation of self-images must, inevitably, be dependent on the actual time of writing. The autobiographer cannot escape being influenced by his present, and contemporary events would certainly, to some degree, leave their mark. An autobiography can therefore be regarded as a “retrospective reordering of one's life's experiences on the basis of one's viewpoints and understandings held at the time of the reconstruction, not at the time of the lived experiences”. The autobiographer thus, to some extent, “imposes on the past the order

4 J. al-BANNĀ 1990, which reproduces edited versions of letters which Ḥasan al-Bannā sent to his father between 1923-1941. More recently, the MB has digitized and released a number of MB's early journals and other primary source material on their ikhwanwiki website (ikhwanwiki.com).

5 See YŪSUF 1932. Another available source is al-BANNĀ / al-SUKKARĪ / al-‘ASKARIYYAH 1929, a memorandum sent to the king of Egypt, the princes, the primes ministers, al-Azhar dignitaries, etc. See also SHU‘AYYIR 1985: 192-197, where a more or less complete list of the Ikhwān's publications and articles in the Salafiyyah journal *Majallat al-Faṭḥ* from 1928-1932 can be found. The memoirs of one of the founders, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ḥasib Allāh, can be found in *al-I‘tiṣām*, May 1976. The newspaper *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (from May 1933) also gives some insight into the early history of the movement.

6 LIA 1998: 21-43. Although a number of more recent studies have dealt with aspects of the MB's pre-revolution history, they do not revisit or complement MITCHELL 1993's and LIA 1998's accounts of the MB's establishment in 1928 and its expansion during the 1930s. See e.g. WICKHAM 2012; PARGETER 2010: 15-60; THOMPSON 2013: 150-176; EL-AWAISI 2000; MURA 2012.

7 SAYRE 1964. The literature on the theory of autobiography is extensive. A key reference work is LEJEUNE 1996. See also the excellent literature review by SCHWALM 2014. As for Middle Eastern autobiographies, the works of SHUISKII 1982, SIRRIYEH 2000; and KRAMER 1991 are useful works. For this particular article, I have chosen to draw upon SAYRE due to his discussion of the creation of self-images in the autobiographical genre.

8 All quotes from SAYRE 1964: x.

of the present".⁹ This might, of course, not always be evident. In this case, however, as will be shown below, the situation Ḥasan al-Bannā faced in 1947 when he wrote and published his autobiography, is of crucial importance. For al-Bannā, "the order of the present" has fundamentally influenced both the style and content of his work, and his autobiography cannot fully be understood without taking into consideration the circumstances and events of 1947, the time of most serious internal crisis in the Muslim Brotherhood's early history.

Ḥasan al-Bannā's memoirs and the internal crisis of 1947

Ḥasan al-Bannā's autobiography, *Memoirs about the Call and the Preacher*, can be divided in two parts. The first part recounts his early life and the early years of the movement in Ismailiya until his transfer to Cairo in 1932.¹⁰ This part comprises the actual autobiography. The second part is the history of the movement conveyed through a collection of press clippings from the *Ikhwān's* weekly magazines of the 1930s, accompanied by brief comments. This part is probably not al-Bannā's work and will not be treated in detail here.¹¹ The first part, the actual autobiography, can be subdivided in three periods: his childhood and youth in the town of al-Maḥmūdiyyah in the Egyptian Delta up to 1923, al-Bannā's four years of studies at the Dār al-'Ulūm educational institute in Cairo up to 1927, and finally the period he spent in Ismailiya in the British-controlled Canal Zone working as a primary school teacher from 1927-1932. It was here that the Muslim Brotherhood movement was founded. Thus, al-Bannā did not write a complete autobiography, covering his whole life, but confined his memoirs to his childhood, youth and the five years as an unmarried school teacher in Ismailiya after graduation from Dār al-'Ulūm. His marriage and transfer to Cairo at the age of 26 mark the end of the autobiography. After the foundation of the Muslim Brothers in 1928, his personal life story receives less attention, and the history of the movement becomes the focal point.

9 ZONIS 1991: 63. – See also WEINTRAUB 1975: 824-827.

10 I have been unable to compare the first part of the memoirs with the original version from Muslim Brothers' newspaper in 1947. The newspaper was not available at the Egyptian National Archives during the time of research. The edition: *Mudhakkirāt al-Da'wah wa'l-Dā'iyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā'ah wa'l-Nashr al-Islāmiyyah, 1986) will be used here. I have compared this edition to the first complete edition published in Cairo, undated, but most probably c. 1950. They do not differ substantially, but a few events have been omitted in the latter edition, such as the Muslim Brothers' celebration of King Farouq's coronation in 1937.

11 In the fall of 1947, there was a column with more or less regular installments in the MB's daily newspaper *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, entitled *Mudhakkirāt min al-Da'wah wa'l-Dā'iyyah*, (with a slightly different wording from the book title). Taken together these installments correspond roughly with the second part of Ḥasan al-Bannā's autobiography. There are a number of factual errors in this second part which may suggest that Ḥasan al-Bannā did produce this part himself, but left the tedious job of selecting press clippings and writing comments to one of his secretaries. A comparison between the second part of the 1986 edition and the original version in *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, Nov.-Dec. 1947, reveals that a fair number of installments have not been included, starting from the pro-Palace parades by the Muslim Brothers and the controversial oath of allegiance to the king in 1937. A number of installments about the MB's Palestine campaign, demonstrations for the Palestine cause, police confrontations, and arrests in 1938-39 have also been omitted.

Autobiographies by religious or political personalities are very often written after the author has withdrawn from public life. This was not so with al-Bannā's autobiography. When the autobiography was written, the author headed the Brotherhood in their golden age of postwar popularity, which raises the question: Why did he decide to write down his memoirs at this point? Why did he set aside time to write and publish memoirs at a time when he was more than ever before busy with the affairs of the movement? Al-Bannā tried to give a partial answer in the introduction to the autobiography where he recalls the hardship and suffering he had to endure when the police confiscated his personal diaries in 1943 and used them in their prosecution against him. As a result, he subsequently refrained from writing down memories. Still, fearing that these dear memories might fall into oblivion, he was finally encouraged to write them down so that "the ravages of time" would not destroy them, for "quarrels in the morning are forgotten in the evening".¹²

What were these dear memories which had to be written down and made known to the members in the summer of 1947 when the first installment of "Memoirs about the Call and the Preacher" was published in the Brotherhood's widely-read daily newspaper? It seems that the publishing of the autobiography must have been closely linked to the internal crisis in the Brotherhood in 1946-47 and in which al-Bannā himself was deeply involved. This internal conflict, often referred to as the third *fitnah* in the Brotherhood's own historiography, was no doubt the most serious crisis in the movement since its foundation, a crisis which resulted in the expulsion and resignation of two of al-Bannā's closest friends and leading deputies of the movement, Ibrāhīm Ḥasan and Aḥmad al-Sukkarī.¹³ Several elements were involved in this conflict. First of all there was a policy disagreement over the Brotherhood's relationship with the political forces in Egypt, especially the Wafd and the Palace. Many MB members questioned the wisdom of al-Bannā's policy, which tended towards a confrontation with the Wafd party and an alignment with the Palace-sponsored minority parties, more specifically Ismā'īl Ṣidqī Bāshā. Aḥmad al-Sukkarī, al-Bannā's old friend and leading deputy, was among the leading advocates of a rapprochement with the Wafd.

However, apart from these political considerations, there are strong indications that al-Sukkarī had also decided to challenge al-Bannā's role as leader of the movement. According to Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥalīm's four-volume memoirs, often considered the MB's official history-book, al-Sukkarī spread rumours that he had been the first leader of the movement, relegating al-Bannā to the position of secretary.¹⁴ There was a growing unrest in the MB leadership, stemming from the Supreme Guide's continued exercise of arbitrary powers. The lack of *shūrā* (consultation) had also been among the major factors leading to the internal crises of 1932 and 1939. In 1946-47 the leadership question assumed greater urgency due to a scandal which involved al-Bannā's brother-in-law, the general-secretary, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm 'Ābidīn. He was charged with "violating the homes and honour of some of the

12 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 11.

13 After his dismissal from the Muslim Brotherhood, Aḥmad al-Sukkarī joined the Wafd party and wrote a series of critical articles against the MB and especially against the general-secretary and al-Bannā's brother-in-law, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm 'Ābidīn. He also worked for the Wafdist government in 1951. See al-SĪSĪ 1987, I: 150-166; and author's interview with Fu'ād .Sirāj al-Dīn, 16 May 1995.

14 'ABD AL-ḤALĪM 1979, I: 458-459.

Brothers” and described by some of the most angry members as the “Rasputin of the Muslim Brothers”. Al-Bannā's family relationship with ‘Ābidīn made the affair very delicate, and his integrity was seriously questioned by his reluctance to dismiss him.¹⁵ The combined effect of all these factors must have been one of the MB leader's main concerns in 1947, and he could not have overlooked the potential threat they posed to his position as the MB's Supreme Guide. In this situation, al-Bannā had to make extraordinary efforts to regain the members' confidence and reassert his authority. Publishing his autobiography in which the true story of the MB's origin was revealed was one way of restoring trust and establishing order. As noted, it was printed in/as almost daily installments in the MB's newspaper for more than six months from July 1947, and they appeared at a time when the repercussions of the crisis were still very strong.¹⁶ It is not only the timing of the publication of the autobiography that is striking. As we shall soon see, the description of events and projection of images in the memoirs reveal a close relationship with the 1947 crisis. In several places “the retrospective reordering” of events almost turns into a kind of fictionalized memoirs, where elements from the 1947 crisis are placed in the context of the Ismailiya period, the very time of the Muslim Brotherhood's birth and hence a symbolically charged period for anyone claiming to leadership and seniority in the movement. Finally, at the end of his autobiography, al-Bannā abandons the past completely and concludes with a two-page *khawāṭir* (“thoughts”), revolving around the leadership crisis and his conflict with Aḥmad al-Sukkarī.¹⁷ In sum, it seems to be established beyond doubt that the 1947 crisis constitutes the background for this autobiography.

Reasserting authority by projecting images

How could an autobiography at this point be a means to strengthen al-Bannā's position and to close the ranks in the Muslim Brotherhood? This is inextricably linked to his unique style of leadership and personality. The MB leader had an extraordinary memory and was legendary for his ability to remember thousands of names, faces, and details about his followers' lives. Combined with his humble way of being, this enabled him to create a sense of personal friendship with his followers.¹⁸ Al-Bannā also had a remarkable ability to “convey a sense of sincerity, humility and selflessness” and a complete devotion to his cause.¹⁹ This was not only visible in his warm interest for the humblest of his followers, in his ceaseless touring of backward villages, travelling on third-class tickets, but also in his

15 See MITCHELL 1993: 52-55 for a complete account on these events.

16 Aḥmad al-Sukkarī was dismissed a few months after Ibrāhīm Ḥasan's resignation in April 1947. Still, as late as November 1947, there were meetings in the MB's general assembly, confirming Ḥasan al-Bannā's expulsion of al-Sukkarī and some of his partisans. Aḥmad al-Sukkarī also published open letters to Ḥasan al-Bannā in the Wafdist press *Ṣawt al-Ummah*, criticizing him for allying with Ibrāhīm Ṣidqī Bāshā and exercising “dictatorship” in the Brotherhood. See al-Sīsī 1987: 150-155, where the whole letter is reprinted accompanied by Ḥasan al-Bannā's letter, refuting al-Sukkarī's allegations.

17 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 151-152. See also *ibid.*: 149.

18 MITCHELL 1993: 298.

19 *Ibid.*: 297.

austere lifestyle and his donation of a third of his salary to the organization.²⁰ There was no doubt in the minds of his followers that their leader was different from all the other political leaders in Egypt. The leadership crisis in 1946-47 had shattered some of these images, however, especially the image that al-Bannā was absolutely selfless and devoid of all kinds of favoritism, partisanship and personal interests. At the previous internal crisis he had managed to reassure his followers by facing his opponents' arguments in the MB press and subsequently touring the branches. In 1947 the MB leader applied the same tactic by printing Aḥmad al-Sukkaṛī's criticism on the front pages of the MB's daily newspaper and refuting his arguments there.²¹ Still, his personal charisma and ability to persuade could not be used to the same extent as earlier due to the organization's enormous growth since the time of the last crisis in 1939.²² By presenting a personal account of his life in the form of an autobiography, al-Bannā was able to direct the attention towards his strongest assets: his personal charisma and lifelong struggle for the sake of the *da'wah*. The genre gave him the literary freedom to perpetuate many of the images and myths that the Ikhwān shared and cherished. Moreover, an autobiography was the only means to dispel all doubt about who was the true founding father of the movement. It provided the movement with an official and "true" version of its early history, which strengthened his position vis-à-vis opponents and rivals.

From the very beginning of his autobiography al-Bannā focuses more or less exclusively on religious aspects of his upbringing and youth. He starts his autobiography with describing the pedagogical and spiritual virtues of his first teacher, Shaykh Muḥammad Zahrān, who, next to al-Bannā's father, was an important influence on him in the early years.²³ He also recalls how he was drawn to the *dhikr* rituals of the Sufi order of al-Ḥaṣṣāfiyyah where he later became a member.²⁴ His spiritual attachment to Sufism occupies a dominant part of the description of his youth. He says about the Ḥaṣṣāfi brethren that "they influenced me immensely" and during his time as student at the Primary Teachers' Training School in Damanhūr he "was completely engrossed in prayers and devotion to mysticism".²⁵ The author further recalls that "prayers and meditation were our most sacred programs" which they did not miss "unless a very urgent reason compelled them".²⁶ These

20 Ibid.: 299 and *al-Nadhīr* (an MB publication) in 1938: in the internal fund-raising campaign in 1938 Ḥasan al-Bannā was said to have surpassed everyone by donating a third of his teacher's salary. A tenth of the monthly income was the most common contribution among the members.

21 Interviews with Jamāl al-Bannā, spring 1995. See also al-Sīsī 1987: 152-160.

22 In 1937 the MB claimed to have 250 branches, although it seems clear that quite a number of these branches were not firmly established. At the peak of its postwar popularity, the organization boasted more than 2,000 branches and 500,000 members.

23 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 13-15. Ḥasan al-Bannā no doubt had a close relationship with Shaykh Muḥammad Zahrān. Ḥasan al-Bannā writes in one of his letters to his father that he deputized for Zahrān in the mosque school in al-Maḥmūdiyyah. Both Zahrān and al-Bannā's father were among the most faithful contributors in the religious section of the first MB newspaper from 1933 onwards. See J. al-BANNĀ 1990: 127.

24 al-Ḥaṣṣāfiyyah was reportedly a suborder of al-Shādhiliyyah Sufi order. See al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 24.

25 Ibid.: 20, 28.

26 Ibid.: 35.

pages of his autobiography portray a young and deeply religious al-Bannā, taking pride in surpassing his peers in piousness and devotion: "We used to leave for our areas to wake up people, particularly the Ḥaṣṣāfi members, a little early for the morning prayers. I felt great pleasure and a wonderful satisfaction by waking up the *muezzin*."²⁷ The memoirs also paints him as a young man, fearless in the face of adult authorities, and who never shied away from admonishing and correcting sinners, even if they were the Imām in the local mosque or his teachers.²⁸ And his organizational talents in the religious field are also emphasized: al-Bannā recalls his efforts to organize religious societies, such as the "Society of Moral Behaviour" and "Society for the Prevention of Sin".²⁹

There are few or no references to activities that we would expect a child and a teenager to be engaged in, such as games, sports or playing mischievous tricks on people. Jobs he might have had during the school vacations to support his family are hardly mentioned. All the travelling and errands he undertook on behalf of his father in his youth, which occupy a central place in his letters to his father, are not mentioned in the memoirs at all.³⁰ Instead, his whole life, from early childhood and youth, revolves in one or another way around his struggle for the *da'wah*, a term which literally means "the call [*sc.* to Islam]", but which, in al-Bannā's and the MB's rhetoric became almost indistinguishable from their own religious-political agenda.

Many chapters in the autobiography are interspersed with stories of virtuous men and fearless prophets worthy of emulation. The long story about the founder of the al-Ḥaṣṣāfiyyah order is worth mentioning as it conveys some of the most cherished images the Muslim Brothers had of themselves: the notion that they were fearing only God and had the courage to criticize and denounce even the most powerful and influential people, and that they never cringed to those in power or humiliated themselves to anyone, whatever position they may have had. One such story of his goes like this:

[Shaykh al-Ḥaṣṣāfi] visited Riyād Bāshā, who was then prime minister when one religious scholar came in, greeted the Bāshā and almost prostrated before the prime minister. The Shaykh stood up fiercely angry, smacked him on his cheek and scolded him: "Get up, you man! Prostration is only for God! [...]"³¹

The story continues with the Shaykh scolding and reproaching all symbols of power and influence in Egypt at that time from *beks* and *pashas* to kings and the British. The same image is also projected onto al-Bannā himself through similar stories about him and his closest associates. In the Teachers' Training School, for example, he rebukes the General-Inspector of Education who had told him he would not get any appointment if he insisted on wearing his Islamic clothing. Al-Bannā then retorts: "The time has not come and when it comes the Directorate for Education shall be free to take its action and I shall be free to

27 Ibid.: 36.

28 Ibid.: p. 17 and pp. 31-32.

29 These societies were called "Jam'iyyat al-Akhlāq al-Islāmiyyah" and "Jam'iyyat Man' al-Muḥarramāt". Ibid.: 15, 18.

30 J. al-BANNĀ 1990.

31 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 21.

take my own decision. My livelihood is in the hands of God, not in the hands of the Ministry of Education!”³² These defiant words took the General-Inspector aback, and the author notes triumphantly in his memoirs: “The director kept silent!!”³³

The man and his vision

The autobiography devotes much space to views on a variety of religious and social matters, which serves to refocus attention on the man and his vision. By recounting the history of his early life, the memoirs succeed in revealing signs of a man with remarkable leadership. However, to convey the image of a man with a vision and a larger purpose, the autobiography also included long detours of reflections unrelated to the author’s life story. For example, the account of his Sufi attachment in his youth is accompanied by a thorough treatment of his own views on Sufism in general.³⁴ There was a very widespread scepticism of Sufism among Brotherhood members, and al-Bannā might have felt obliged to take a firm stand against its “excesses”.³⁵ Thus, in the autobiography, he was anxious to emphasize the values of a purified and reformed Sufism, especially as a means of spiritual education. In his visions for a unified and dominant Islamic nation he saw the religious scholars of al-Azhar, the Sufi orders, and the Islamic societies, as representing the three constituting elements:

Had God wished and the scientific power of al-Azhar been combined with the spiritual power of the Sufi orders and the practical power of the Islamic societies, then a unique and exceptional nation (*ummah*) would have come into existence, a nation which would have been a guide, not a guided one, a leader, not a led one!³⁶

In this way, al-Bannā turned Sufism into an element of his vision for a national Islamic renaissance: a strong and unified nation based on both the traditional institutions of Islam and the emerging Islamic activism, represented by the Islamic societies. The MB leader knew that he would lose the youth if he did not manage to connect their religious attachment with the nationalist struggle against the British. The younger generation of the late 1940s was more likely than ever before in Egyptian history to associate religion with obscurantism and reaction. Al-Bannā’s Sufi background represented a potential Achilles heel if his leadership qualities were put in doubt. Hence, by linking Sufism to spiritual force and making it a constituent part in a broad Islamic revival, he avoids this pitfall. Furthermore, the autobiography spends ample space on detailing the author’s early participation in the 1919 Revolution against British rule and the subsequent national struggle, as if to underscore that he did not neglect his national duty despite his Sufi preoccupation. To most young men of

32 Ibid.: 31-32.

33 Ibid.: 31-32.

34 Ibid.: 26-27.

35 Some MB activists went as far as saying that: “The first aspect of the Muslim Brothers’ call is that it is a call of ‘al-Effendia’. Thus, it repudiates all manifestations of Sufism and stiff dervishism”. See al-JUNDĪ 1946: 84.

36 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 28.

al-Bannā's generation the 1919 Revolution had a profound symbolic value, and many of the younger politicians of the 1930s were eager to claim a role in these glorious days of national struggle and sacrifice, even if they were pupils in primary school.³⁷ The memoirs paint an image of the MB leader as one of the student activists, leading demonstrations in Damanhūr, and even negotiating at a young age directly with the police.³⁸ Again, his leadership qualities are communicated to the readers through stories from his early life.

Anti-Westernism reinvented?

Al-Bannā moved to Cairo in 1923 to complete his studies at Dār al-ʿUlūm, studying a combination of traditional and modern sciences. The description of his encounter with the Cairo of the 1920s has been used frequently to illustrate how he and the MB's were angered and traumatized by the combined effect of Westernization and modernism in Egypt of the 1930s. He writes:

A wave of moral dissolution, undermining all firm beliefs and ideas, was engulfing Egypt in the name of intellectual emancipation. This trend attacked the morals, deeds and virtues under the pretext of personal emancipation. Nothing could stand against this powerful and tyrannical stream of disbelief and permissiveness that was sweeping our country. [...] [At the Egyptian University] it was thought that the Egyptian University never could be a secular university unless it revolted against religion and waged war against all social traditions derived from it. The university plunged headlong after the materialistic thought and culture entirely taken over from the West. The foundations were laid for the 'Democratic Party' which died before it was born and had no program except that it called for freedom and democracy in the meaning these words had at that time: dissolution and libertinism. [...] I saw the social life of the beloved Egyptian people oscillating between her dear and precious Islam which she had inherited, defended, lived with during fourteen centuries, and this severe Western invasion which is armed and equipped with all destructive influences of money, wealth and prestige, ostentation, power and means of propaganda.³⁹

It is possible that al-Bannā was deeply disturbed by the disrupting effects of modernism and Westernization when he arrived in Cairo in the mid-1920s. At least in his autobiography, he claims to have refused for a long time to accept the change of school uniform from traditional Islamic clothes to Western dress.⁴⁰ Compared with other sources on his lifestyle in this period, the memoirs appear inaccurate and should not mislead us to believe that the MB leader, *from the very beginning*, strongly opposed everything of Western

37 See JANKOWSKI 1975: 7. – Ḥasan al-Bannā has reached 13 years in 1919, and his claim to have played a part in the demonstrations and riots of the 1919-1924 seems more credible than those of the Young leaders of Egypt.

38 Ibid.: 32-34.

39 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 57-58.

40 Ibid.: 56-57.

origin and that his “already kindled intellectual hostility to Western influence then became crystallized into emotional xenophobia”, as one historian puts it.⁴¹

In one of his earliest articles published in the late 1920s, he far from advocates a complete rejection of everything Western. Instead he carefully defines the aspects he wants to adopt from Western schools. These are not strictly confined to natural sciences, but, for example, their “attention to new trends in modern education”, “their attention to physical training” and their efforts to “inoculate nationalist virtues in the souls of their pupils”.⁴² Years later when the Muslim Brotherhood became more politicized and radical and the Palestine revolt added to their nationalist fervour, few MB leaders would publicly ascribe any positive quality to Western civilization. In 1937, for example, al-Bannā claimed, in an inflammatory article, that except for their sciences, the West had no virtues and no beauty whatsoever.⁴³ Their anti-Western writings in the late 1930s have also lead historians to see the rejection of the West as one of their most remarkable features.⁴⁴ However, during al-Bannā’s early days in Cairo and Ismailiya, such an overall rejection of Western culture seems to have been non-existent. The young al-Bannā writes proudly to his father, describing how he improvised a speech about the French Revolution, even amazing those teachers who were specialists in history.⁴⁵ In his early writing in *Majallat al-Fath* and later in the first years of *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* in the 1930s, the references to the West are abundant and very often composed of examples from Europe which Egypt should emulate. Taken as a whole, this indicates that the anti-Western fervour most probably is a later development.

A Selfless and True Believer

The fact that the autobiography tends to over-emphasise al-Bannā’s anti-Westernism illustrates again how the memoirs have been written with the 1947 context in mind.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, the author’s ambitions to acquire higher education and to travel abroad for further studies or work also illustrate the latent conflict between some of the images he wishes to convey in his autobiography and the actual facts of his life story. Before being finally ac-

41 See HARRIS 1964: 148.

42 Ḥasan Aḥmad al-BANNĀ, “Hal nasīr fī madārisinā warā’ al-gharb?” *Majallat al-Fath*, 19 September 1929.

43 *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 47 (9 March 1937).

44 See for example GERSHONI 1988: 370-75.

45 J. al-BANNĀ 1990: 106.

46 Despite his attacks on freethinking and immorality in the capital, Ḥasan al-Bannā seems to have felt very attracted to Cairo, its intellectual-religious environment and its opportunities. He describes his life as “a wonderful mixture of different activities: participating in the *ḥaḍrah* at the Ḥaṣṣāfī Shaykh’s house or at the residence of ‘Alī Effendi Ghālib, visits to the bookshop *al-Salaḥiyyah* where al-Sayyid Muḥibb al-Dīn was, and visits to Dār al-Manār and Rashīd Riḍā. I also used to go to the house of Shaykh al-Dajawī and to Farīd Bek Wajdī. Sometimes I would spend time in the library Dār al-Kutub and sometimes on the mats in Shaykhūn Mosque”. When, after graduation, he was granted a job as a primary school teacher in Ismailia, he protested violently and had no desire to leave Cairo. Cited in al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 67.

cepted to Dār al-ʿUlūm, al-Bannā recalls how he was torn between the desire to acquire knowledge and the teachings of the medieval Islamic thinker al-Ghazālī, who said learning was to be confined to what is necessary to fulfill religious duties and earn a livelihood. He was about to abandon the whole project of higher education at Dār al-ʿUlūm when one of the teachers finally convinced him to continue.⁴⁷ He recalls the same hesitation to put himself up as candidate for going abroad on scholarships after graduation from Dār al-ʿUlūm. One reason he gives is his desire to give up external pomp and put into practice the Islamic call he bore in his mind.⁴⁸ In his memoirs, the MB leader also recollects his negotiations about an appointment in Saudi Arabia with the councillor of King Ibn al-Suʿūd in 1928. After having insisted on being appointed, not as an ordinary official, but as “a believer”, carrying a mission, he adds: “I did not bother about other conditions of my service such as my salary and material privileges. I did not even mention them”.⁴⁹

In this way al-Bannā clearly emphasizes his self-abnegation and selflessness, professing his wish to sacrifice all his professional ambitions and material privileges for the sake of the *daʿwah*. This image of the MB's Supreme Guide eventually became an essential part of the movement's identity. However, this Ghazalian and otherworldly attitude cannot be traced in the other available sources we have on his early life. On the contrary, in his letters to his father in the Ismailiya period we find that he often had to reassure his parents who complained that he spent a too large part of his salary on himself, and failed to send them their expected share.⁵⁰ His younger brother also recalls how chic and well-dressed Ḥasan al-Bannā used to be in Ismailiya. He says that his asceticism and simple lifestyle was acquired later when he began touring the poor Egyptian countryside.⁵¹ This receives some further support from the earliest editions of *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* in 1933, where we find Ḥasan al-Bannā travelling with some of his fellow Brothers on first class tickets.⁵² In the late 1930s, however, when the MB launched vehement attacks on the luxurious and sinful life of government representatives and upper class personalities, one finds reports about al-Bannā travelling on third class tickets and donating a third of his salary.⁵³ Thus, his asceticism represents another example of how he “imposed on the past the order of the

47 Ibid.: 39.

48 Ibid.: 68.

49 Ibid.: 89-90. References to the affair can also be found in Ḥasan al-Bannā's letters to his father. His main concern seems to be that the procedures must be done correctly. There are no references to his negotiations with the Saudi councillor. When the whole project fails to be realized Ḥasan al-Bannā is obviously disappointed and writes to his parents: “Concerning the Hijāz-affair, the Ministry of Education gave me their answer today: they rejected the application. So I have abandoned the whole thing. I was not so preoccupied with this affair as you thought I was and the rejection did not at all come as a great blow to me. I take no offense at it; all is in the hands of God and the glory belongs to Him”. Cited in al-BANNĀ 1990: 114.

50 See J. al-BANNĀ 1990: 117-121.

51 Interview with Jamāl al-Bannā, spring 1995. See also J. al-BANNĀ 1990: 113-114.

52 *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* 1352h.

53 See for instance Maḥmūd ṢĀLIḤ, “Fī riḥāl raʿīs jamʿiyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn”, *al-Nadhīr*, 12 Jumādā II 1357h: 13.

present” in his autobiography, projecting leadership images that would help him restore his authority as Supreme Guide.

A commoner, a non-elite leader

A widely cherished ideal in the Muslim Brotherhood was that they should never humiliate themselves before people representing power and influence, but always preserve their honour and dignity. Al-Bannā’s autobiography highlights this ideal in a story about himself going to one of his father’s acquaintances in Cairo to ask him to facilitate one of his exams, but in a dramatic moment at the doorstep of his patron’s house, he suddenly decided to leave: “I felt strongly that this was to seek refuge in someone other than God. This was to trust someone other than Him and bowing before a mortal and not the Almighty.”⁵⁴

This image that the MB did not care about contacts, patronage and *wasāʾiṭ*, but only relied on themselves, trusting God, was no doubt a cornerstone in the Ikhwān’s self-perception. A sense of dignity and honour accompanied this rejection of clientism and patronage. Nevertheless, contacts and *wasāʾiṭ* were indispensable for the success of the movement, and al-Bannā could not afford to ignore the pivotal role of informal networks in Egypt. There was, no doubt, a conflict between this cherished ideal and the organization’s interest. An example can be taken from the MB’s fifth conference in 1939, convened at a time when there had been complaints about al-Bannā’s cordial relationship with the strongman of Egyptian politics at that time, ‘Alī Māhir Bāshā. The MB leader made it a point in his speech to the conference that the Ikhwān avoided “the dominance of notables and names”.⁵⁵ However, contrary to this statement, ‘Alī Islām Bāshā, one of the very few pashas in the movement, despite being a newly recruited member, was given a very prominent place among the conference speakers.⁵⁶

In the early days in Cairo and Ismailiyya, there is no doubt that the “notables” (*aʿyān*) played a decisive role in the movement, and al-Bannā by no means belittles the role of their local patron and benefactor, Ḥājj Ḥusayn Zamalūt, who donated 500 £E to the building of the MB’s first mosque.⁵⁷ Still, he recalls that at the foundation-laying of the mosque, the Muslim Brothers insisted that he, al-Bannā, should perform the ceremony. He rejected this offer for the sake of the *daʿwah*:

I explained to them that this would not bring any material or moral benefit to our project. It is better to think of someone who would benefit our cause. The Muslim Brothers began to review names of various high-ranking officials and notables. It became one of our best jokes that whoever I mentioned for them, one of the Brothers would say: ‘What makes you think of this guy? He is neither pious so there would be no blessing, nor is he rich so we won’t benefit from his money!’⁵⁸

54 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: p.48

55 See ‘ABD AL-ḤALĪM 1979: 120-121, and *al-Nadhīr*, 35 (17 Dhū ‘l-Ḥijjah 1357h).

56 ‘Umar al-TILMISĀNĪ, “Bawākīr al-Najāḥ”, *al-Nadhīr*, 1 (1 Muḥarram 1358h): 22-24.

57 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 93.

58 *Ibid.*: 95.

By retelling such anecdotes, the autobiography succeeds in upholding the image of the MB and its leader even if the hard facts from the memoirs indicate a strong dependence on their benefactors' goodwill. Most probably, the ceremony was not a matter of discussion at all. Ḥajj Zamalūt had donated the money, had signed the purchase contract for the plot of land where the mosque was built, and the mosque was later named after him.⁵⁹ Moreover, he subsequently convened the notables in Ismailiya in order to settle the MB's outstanding debts.⁶⁰ Despite this, the hero in al-Bannā's autobiography is not Ḥajj Zamalūt, but the Brotherhood members from the lower classes. He recalls with great joy how one of his humbler followers sold his only means of transportation, a bicycle, to provide money for the mosque project.⁶¹ Another story describes the amazement of a General Inspector visiting the MB's newly established school in Ismailiya: "The guest was wonderstruck by the tea party, especially when he was told that this speaker is a carpenter, this one is a gardener, the third speaker is an ironer, etc. He uttered: 'This is the most peculiar and wonderful school I have ever seen.'"⁶²

Why is there in al-Bannā's memoirs such a conspicuous emphasis on class-related images and images of Muslim Brothers opposing the established authorities and rejecting their patronages? One reason is the socio-economic background of its members. The overwhelming majority were recruited from the educated lower middle-class of petit-officials, teachers and students. In addition, many merchants, artisans and village notables also joined the movement. One common denominator of these groups was distrust for the ruling upper classes whose Westernized and luxurious lifestyle completely contradicted what the Brotherhood saw as the simple lifestyle proscribed by Islam. Their campaigns for moral and social reform frequently bore undertones of class criticism with a conspicuous emphasis on condemnation of immorality among the ruling establishment. Proposals for drastically reducing the salaries of all high-ranking state officials also appeared on their religious-political programs.⁶³ On the whole, the Muslim Brothers considered the ruling system in Egypt to be completely dominated by personal interests of the upper classes, and lost no opportunity to launch vehement attacks on the corruption of the existing order. Such vitriolic attacks were costly, however. In 1941 al-Bannā was banished to Qena in Upper Egypt, mainly because of his frankness in criticizing the government for its departure from the straight path.⁶⁴ The escalating conflict with the government made the MB leader aware of

59 Ibid.: 93.

60 Ibid.: 135. See also "Bayān bi-tabarru'āt kirām al-Ismā'īliyyah", *Majallat al-Faḥ*, 310 (15 September 1932): 14.

61 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 91-92.

62 Ibid.: 101.

63 See for instance the MB pamphlet *Rasā'il al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn: al-Manhaj* (Rajab 1357h or 1938) and letter by Ḥasan al-Bannā to prime minister 'Alī Māhir Bāshā's government in *Majallat al-Ta'aruf* (8 June 1940).

64 See FOREIGN OFFICE 1942: 2. There was apparently no direct British pressure on the Ḥusayn Sirrī's government to order Ḥasan al-Bannā into internal exile to Qena in spring 1941. However, during the fall the same year, the British authorities in Egypt became increasingly uneasy about the subversive activities of the Brotherhood and induced Prime Minister Sirrī to order the arrest of al-Bannā and his two principal lieutenants, Aḥmad al-Sukkarī and 'Abd al-Ḥakīm 'Ābidīn. See LIA 1998: 261-65.

the fatal consequences such a confrontational policy would entail, and in subsequent years he was willing to make considerable concessions to the government of the day in order to secure the movement's survival. In 1942 this policy brought him widespread criticism from his followers and led to a temporary split in the movement.⁶⁵

More ominously for al-Bannā personally was that these compromises undermine the image of him as “a fearless prophet”, courageously speaking out against the powerful Pashas, the King and the British. During the 1947 crisis the question of confrontation or accommodation reemerged with full force. His prime challenger, Aḥmad al-Sukkarī, advocated a confrontational policy in alliance with the Wafd against the government, accusing al-Bannā of dismissing him due to pressure from Prime Minister Ismāʿīl Ṣidqī Bāshā. There were strong indications that the MB's Supreme Guide had made a deal with Ṣidqī in return for various privileges for the movement. Against this background, al-Bannā would use his memoirs to reconfirm the image of himself and the Muslim Brotherhood as uncompromising in their opposition to the ruling elites in general and the Ṣidqī government in particular. For example, the autobiography describes how a leader of the Brotherhood's Cairo branch had scornfully rejected a considerable amount of money from the Ṣidqī Bāshā government.⁶⁶ In his memoirs al-Bannā also recalls that when the Prime Minister was passing through Ismailiya, al-Bannā had been chosen to deliver the welcome address, but instead blatantly rejected “eulogiz[ing] Ṣidqī Bāshā”, telling his superiors:

If you think that the civil servant (*muwazzaf*) is some toy you can play around with as you like, I will tell you that I know perfectly well how to estimate myself, I don't leave that to the Ministry of Education. They cannot oblige me to anything except what relates to my work as a teacher.⁶⁷

Nowhere did the image of the steadfast and proud Muslim Brothers reach such dimensions as in their dealings with the hated British occupation. In his autobiography, the MB leader recalls how one of his disciples, brother Ḥāfīz, confronted the arrogant Mr Solent from the British-dominated Suez Canal Company who had accused him of overcharging and, in addition, had the temerity to insult the king. Brother Ḥāfīz demanded an apology and said:

First I shall write a report to your consul and the ambassador. After that I shall inform the higher authorities of the Suez Canal Company in Paris. Then I shall write to the editors of local and foreign newspapers [...]. And if I don't get my right, I shall insult you publicly. Do not be under the impression that I shall complain to the Egyptian government which you have made powerless with your oppressive foreign capitulations! I shall not rest in peace until I have restored my honour.

Mr Solent said: “It seems like I am talking to a lawyer, not a carpenter. Don't you know that I am the Chief Engineer of the Suez Canal Co.? How can you possibly think that I will apologize to you?” Ḥāfīz replied: “Don't you know that the Suez Canal Company is in my country and not in yours? And your occupation of the Ca-

65 FOREIGN OFFICE 1942: 4.

66 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 119.

67 Ibid.: 104.

nal will soon come to an end [...] and you and people like you will soon be our employees, so how can you possibly imagine that I will give up my right and my honour?"⁶⁸

Al-Bannā interspersed many stories of this kind in his memoirs. Many of them were definitely less dramatic and emotional than the example above, but their purpose was to pay everyone due honour. In the first part of his memoirs alone he mentions more than 120 names, of whom many were still active MB members. When he, in one of his installments of the memoirs, obviously forgot to mention the MB pioneers in the village of Mit Marga Salsil (between Mansura and Matariyya) from 1930, they wrote to him and reminded him.⁶⁹ This shows us that al-Bannā's memoirs were perceived to a large degree as the MB's official history, not only its leader's life story. The image of the Supreme Guide as a sincere and selfless leader was also perpetuated by the fact that he devoted a large part of his memoirs to talking about his followers and not about himself. The numerous anecdotes served the same purpose: arousing enthusiasm and pride among those of the followers who were the heroes in these stories, and strengthening the sense of personal friendship between himself and his followers.

The British donation

The image of the Muslim Brotherhood confronting the British in Ismailiya is to some extent not really compatible with the fact that the organization received a donation from the British-dominated Suez Canal Company to build their first mosque. Al-Bannā still managed to uphold this image and we shall see how. According to his memoirs, the Director of the Suez Canal Company, by chance, came by and saw their mosque, still under construction and sometime later sent an employee to tell him that the company wished to donate 500 £E to their mosque. Al-Bannā then asked the Director how they could donate such a meagre amount since the company at the same time had donated 500.000 £E to the building of a church?⁷⁰ However, the donation was accepted, and the author goes on to describe the malicious rumours being spread that the "Ikhwān are building mosques with money from the foreigners".⁷¹ Al-Bannā put these rumours to rest, however: "This is our money, not the foreigners' money. The Canal, the sea and the land are all ours."⁷²

This version of the Suez Canal donation is most probably heavily influenced by later anti-imperialist considerations. Several other contemporary sources also refer to the donation, but nowhere as a controversial issue.⁷³ The MB leader omitted mentioning his role in

68 Ibid.: 86.

69 Ibid.: 124-125.

70 Ibid.: 104-105.

71 Ibid.: 105.

72 Ibid.

73 See Ḥasan al-BANNĀ, "Hal naḥnu qawm 'amaliyyūn?", *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 16 (13 Jumādā I 1353h); al-BANNĀ 1990: 126; "Jam'iyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn" *Majallat al-Faṭḥ*, (14 Dhū 'l-Qa'dah 1349h [March 1931]): 3.

inducing the Suez Canal Company to donate the amount of money. The editor of *Majallat al-Fath*, Muḥibb al-Dīn Khaṭīb, on the other hand, praises the efforts of “our brother and fighter for the cause of God, Ustādh Ḥasan Aḥmad al-Bannā” who managed to persuade the Suez Canal Company to donate 500 £E to a mosque”.⁷⁴ It seems very likely that the question assumed larger proportions at later stages when the Ikhwān became involved in politics in the late 1930s and the 1940s. In the postwar confrontation with Wafdist and leftist youths, the MB was accused of allying with the British and breaking the common front against the imperialists. There were also (unfounded) rumours about the Ikhwān receiving money from the British.⁷⁵ One of the secessionists in 1947, Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, published several stories of the Ikhwān’s secret contacts with the British during the war.⁷⁶ All these accusations and counter-accusations were mostly rhetoric in the struggle for hegemony in the nationalist movement, where charges of being paid or bribed by the British were commonplace, and where the rivalries revolved around who was the staunchest anti-imperialist.

Against this background, Ḥasan al-Bannā used the autobiography to add an element of antagonism between the early MB society in Ismailiya and the Suez Canal Company and reduce the perception of a collaborative relationship. He includes several stories about Brother Shaykh Farghali, who was appointed as an imam for the Muslim workers at the Suez Canal Company in the village of Jabāsāt al-Balāḥ, close to Ismailiya. When the Suez Canal Company tried to expel him and gave him his salary, al-Farghalī confronted the foreign officials with the words: “Monsieur François, I did not know that I was an employee of the Company. Had I known it, I would never have accepted it. I am representing the Muslim Brotherhood of Ismailiya here. I shall not accept any payment from you!” After a long confrontation, which involved the Governor of the Canal Zone and a police force from Ismailiya, the unwavering steadfastness and courage of Farghali finally forced the Suez Canal Company to yield. The story ends with the Director of the Company uttering: “I have spent 20 years in Algeria, but never seen anyone like Shaykh al-Farghalī. He is enforcing military orders on us like a general!”⁷⁷

True, Shaykh al-Farghalī later became known for his militancy. But in Ismailiya in the late 1920s, the Brotherhood was very much an Islamic benevolent society with “a strong touch of Sufism”.⁷⁸ Militancy and confrontation with the authorities came 8-10 years later. There are no indications of the antagonism and confrontation that Ḥasan al-Bannā describes in his autobiography. On the contrary, we find that in the early 1930s, the governor

74 “Jam‘iyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn”, *Majallat al-Fath*, 14 (Dhū ‘l-Qa‘dah 1349h [March 1931]): 3.

75 See ALEXANDER 1952: 125 and HEYWORTH-DUNNE 1950: 38-39. Such a tactic had been successfully employed by the British in 1941 against the National Islamic Party (or Young Egypt Party) in order to create internal conflicts in the party and cause its disintegration. According to Heyworth-Dunne who worked at the British Embassy at this time, the Muslim Brotherhood misled them by indicating that they would be amenable to some kind of payment. Later, however, they gave much prominence to this question of being offered money by the British during the war.

76 See Ra‘ūf ‘ABBĀS, “al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn wa‘l-Injilīz”, *Majallat Fikr lil-Dirāsāt wa‘l-Abḥāth* (8 December 1985): 144-158.

77 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 120-122.

78 Interview with Jamāl al-Bannā, spring 1995.

of the Canal Zone was invited as a guest of honour by the Muslim Brotherhood in Port Said at the feast, *Īd al-Hijrah al-Nabawiyyah*, and that the MB in Port Fu'ād appealed to the governor to petition the king for a new mosque in Port Fu'ād.⁷⁹ In the autobiography, this same governor had recommended the commandant of Ismailiya to use his police forces against Shaykh Farghalī.⁸⁰

Who founded the Brotherhood? Who was its first leader?

The version of how the MB movement was founded aroused some dispute when it was published in 1947. The partisans of Aḥmad al-Sukkarī argued that al-Bannā overstated his role in the story. They claimed that the idea was originally conceived of by Aḥmad al-Sukkarī at the time when they were both members of the Ḥaṣṣāfī order, and that it took a more definite shape in Cairo among al-Bannā's friends than he has suggested.⁸¹ The available sources unfortunately do not provide us with enough material to conclusively confirm or reject any of these versions. However, it seems clear that al-Bannā was not seen as the unrivalled Supreme Guide, or *Murshid 'Āmm*, of all the MB branches from the very beginning, but obtained this role after a couple of years, probably in 1932. This receives some support from the fact that al-Bannā sent at least five letters to his father in the period March-December 1928 without mentioning that he had founded any organization or worked for its establishment.⁸² The same is true for the memorandum of 1929, where there are no references to the MB.⁸³ Until 1931, al-Bannā continued to sign his articles in *Majallat al-Faṭḥ* as a "Teacher in Primary School in Ismailiya", not as the MB's leader. The first reference to the MB in *Majallat al-Faṭḥ* journal dates back to 1931. Here, he is only referred to as the leader of the MB branch in Ismailiya, whereas Aḥmad al-Sukkarī and Ḥāmid 'Askariyyah are referred to as the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in al-Maḥmūdiyyah and Shubrā Khayt.⁸⁴

The autobiography also hints about this and suggests, between lines, that the author's leadership position was not that of an unrivalled leader:

All the Muslim Brothers agreed unanimously that I should be the imam at the first prayer in the mosque. They all insisted on this and urged that the inauguration ceremony should be performed by me so that the ill-wishers should be fully disheartened. But Aḥmad al-Sukkarī, who was the leader of the Muslim Brothers in al-

79 See *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 36 (19 Muḥarram 1353h): 23 and *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 23 (2 Rajab 1353h): 31-32.

80 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 121.

81 MITCHELL 1993: 9.

82 J. AL-BANNĀ 1990: 104-116.

83 al-BANNĀ / al-SUKKARĪ / 'ASKARIYYAH 1929.

84 See Muḥibb al-Dīn KHAṬĪB, "Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn", *Majallat al-Faṭḥ*, 245 (14 Dhū 'l-Qa'dah 1349h): 3. See also Aḥmad al-SUKKARĪ, "al-Qunaysah al-Nājiyyah", *Majallat al-Faṭḥ* 258 (23 Ṣafar 1350h / July 1931): 8-9; and Ḥāmid 'ASKARIYYAH, "Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn fī Shubrā Khayt", *Majallat al-Faṭḥ*, 255 (18 June 1931): 7.

Maḥmūdiyyah at that time, surprised everyone. He came forward, cut the band and inaugurated the mosque.[...] I also surprised everyone by presenting brother Shaykh Ḥāmid ‘Askariyyah to lead the first prayer in recognition of his share in the completion of the mosque.⁸⁵

Al-Bannā comes through as a humble and generous leader, and his rivals are subtly described as pretentious individuals without modesty and true popular backing.

As mentioned above, the MB’s local benefactor in Ismailia, Ḥājj Zamalūt, performed the ceremony of laying the foundations of the mosque. Thus, al-Bannā performs none of those public acts that usually signify authority and leadership. Still, by September 1932 he was referred to as the Supreme Guide (*al-Murshid al-‘Āmm*) for the whole MB organization, and he had obtained a declaration of confidence from the notables in Ismailiya and the MB’s General Assembly upon which he could rely.⁸⁶ At that point he no doubt was the unrivalled and undisputed leader. But in Ismailiya the events themselves did not yet elevate al-Bannā to the position of unrivalled leadership and sole founder. How did he, all the same, manage to convey the essential message that he was the founder and the first carrier of the *da‘wah*? The autobiography accomplished this by offering a highly dramatic and emotional narrative of the moment when the movement was launched. Ḥasan al-Bannā recalls how six of those who had been influenced by his teaching came to him one night and said:

We know not the practical way to reach the glory of Islam and to serve the welfare of the Muslims. We are weary of this life of humiliation and captivity. Lo, we see that the Arabs and the Muslims have no status and no dignity. They are no more than mere hirelings belonging to the foreigners. We possess nothing but this hot blood running in our veins, these souls illuminated and uplifted by faith and honour and these few coins which we will sacrifice although our children are hungry. We are unable to perceive the road to action as you perceive it, or to know the path to the service of the fatherland, the religion and the community as you know it. All that we desire now is to present to you with all that we possess, to be acquitted by God of the responsibility, and for you to be responsible before Him for us and for what we must do.⁸⁷

Al-Bannā was deeply moved by their belief and commitment and he thereupon accepted the burden of being their leader, and named the movement “The Muslim Brothers” (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*). This passage, describing the MB’s historic foundation, must have been very convincing. The MB membership, on the whole, rejected the version of Aḥmad al-Sukkarī’s partisans. Through his autobiography, al-Bannā succeeded in arousing some of those strong emotions, which not only the MB, but large sections of the younger generation experiencing the nationalist atmosphere of postwar Egypt. They had few problems with identifying with the feeling of being “no more than hirelings belonging to the foreigners”,

85 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 103.

86 See “Bayān Tabarru‘āt...” (see above, fn. 60), *Majallat al-Fath*, 310 (15 September 1932): 14.

87 Cited in al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 83. The translation is borrowed and adapted from MITCHELL 1993: 8.

the sense of having “no dignity and status” and a burning desire to restore Egypt's honour and the bygone glory of Islam.

Allegiance to a divinely inspired leader?

Al-Bannā's version of the foundation of the Ikhwān also gives us some valuable insight into his perception of the relationship between himself and his followers. His followers entrusted the leadership to him because “[w]e are unable to perceive the road to action as you perceive it”. By entrusting him complete responsibility they wished “to be acquitted by God of responsibility, and for you to be responsible before Him for us and for what we must do”. The image this passage conveys is of al-Bannā alone possessing the knowledge of the path to redemption of the Muslims, and that by placing full confidence and obedience in him, success would be granted. This image took a more concrete form with the institution of *bay'ah*, or oath of allegiance, which was an integral part of the movement from the very beginning.⁸⁸

The *bay'ah* pledge does not itself necessarily imply a recognition of al-Bannā as a carrier of a divine mission. However, the autobiography does make specific hints in this direction, suggesting that the MB leader had been inspired by some kind of divine intervention. One example is the story from his youth prophetically foreseeing his mission for Islam. The shaykh of his Sufi order, for instance, said to him once: “I can see such signs that God will turn the hearts of people towards you and a large number of people will join your mission”.⁸⁹ Similarly, he recalls from his childhood that he used to stand

at the bank of the river Nile and listened to the calls to prayer which rang out from the muezzins' voices, all at the same time [...] and in this magical and poetical moment it was like someone told me that I was going to be the means for awakening such a large number of worshipers...⁹⁰

When he arrived for the first time at Ismailiya to start his first job as a primary school teacher, he prayed to God, “Assign to me only that which is good and save me from all evil!” He could feel in the depth of his heart that his cause in this town would be different from that of townsfolk's, coming and going, or of casual visitors.⁹¹ There are also several stories of various minor miracles happening to him, all of them serving to indicate the divine mission God has bestowed on him.⁹²

88 See YŪSUF 1932 who confirms that the founding members swore the oath of allegiance to Ḥasan al-Bannā.

89 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 25.

90 Ibid.: 36.

91 Ibid.: 70.

92 Ibid.: 49-50, 113-114, 117.

Plots and conspiracies

A similar image of a divinely inspired leader struggling in the face of evildoers was also reinforced in the autobiography by narratives of plots and conspiracies against the movement and al-Bannā himself. When some people in Ismailiya began to “sow the seeds of hatred and suspicion” against the MB, he reassures his followers: “It is evident that we are really working for the truth of Islam, that false rumours are being spread against us”.⁹³ A theological explanation was also given:

In every age and at every place the call for the Truth will always have to face opponents and enemies who obstruct the propagation of Islam and do their best to fail the mission of Islam. But the Truth always triumphs. This is the law of God. He says: [...] *‘Thus have We made for every Prophet an enemy among the sinners: but enough is thy Lord to guide and to help’* [Q: 25:31]⁹⁴ [...] Same was the fate of the Islamic mission in Ismailiya.⁹⁵

A detailed treatment of all these conspiracies would take us too far. However, two points are worth mentioning. First of all, by this conspicuous emphasis on evil plots being hatched against the Brotherhood already at this early stage, the MB leader strengthened the image of a movement facing a perennial onslaught from evil-minded and vicious people seeking their destruction. The crisis in 1947 thus assumed the character of being just another episode in a series of machinations against them. By depicting conflicts in terms of plots and conspiracies that confirmed the MB’s divine mission, al-Bannā could more easily deprive the opposition of their legitimacy. Secondly, and more important in this context, is to see how the author used the plot narratives to refute and ridicule accusations levelled against the MB and his leadership in the late 1940s, accusations which could hardly have been raised in the Ismailiya period. This shows us an interesting example of how the autobiographer no longer merely “imposes on the past the order of the present”, but goes actually a step further and implants events from his present into the past.

Under the subtitle “Against the existing order” al-Bannā describes how the opposition grew stronger as they made efforts to complete the construction of the mosque. The evil schemes of these people included, among other activities, sending a petition to Prime Minister Ṣidqī Bāshā accusing Ḥasan al-Bannā of being a communist and receiving money from Moscow. The Principal at his school informed him that he would be summoned to the Criminal Court on charges of being a communist organizing to overthrow “the existing order, the king and the whole world”. Ḥasan al-Bannā ridicules these charges in Egyptian colloquial: “*Bass kida? al-ḥamdu lillāh* [Is that all? Thank God!]”.⁹⁶ The autobiography offers another story about some of his followers coming to al-Bannā one day, extremely upset, and telling him that some malicious people “say that the Muslim Brothers believe that Shaykh al-Bannā is a God to be worshipped and that he is not a mortal human being

⁹³ Ibid.: 126.

⁹⁴ The translation used here is provided by Abdallah Yousuf ALI (n.d.).

⁹⁵ al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 92.

⁹⁶ Ibid.: 98-99.

[...]. This evil rumour was spread by a shaykh and religious scholar, holding an influential religious post".⁹⁷ The MB leader also narrates a plot where the secessionists spread rumours, saying that he had thrown a spell on his followers so that they were obeying him blindly.⁹⁸ Together with these highly unusual claims, the autobiography adds to the narrative of rumours allegations that the MB were pursuing "secret activities". This was obviously a hint about the first public revelations of MB's secret apparatus in the mid-1940s.⁹⁹

One cannot completely rule out these plots, conspiracy, and rumour-mongering directed against the Brotherhood. They have left no traces in other available sources from the period, however, despite the gravity of some of these charges. The mysterious investigation case only assumes the proportion of an ordinary visit by the General Inspector of Education in al-Bannā's letters to his father, and instead of summoning the MB leader to the Criminal Court, he complimented him on the MB's newly established school and mosque.¹⁰⁰ The only "plot" referred to in his family correspondence is a personal conflict with his Principal. In an article in *Majallat al-Faḥ* al-Bannā praised the encouragement he has received from the inhabitants of Ismailiya.¹⁰¹ The report from the secessionists in 1932 only complains about financial mismanagement and al-Bannā's autocratic leadership. According to the report, his followers far from obeyed the MB leader blindly. On the contrary, he reportedly resorted to threats and the swearing of oaths to force through his will.¹⁰² The relatively dry report is completely devoid of the dramatic details that we find in the autobiography. There are no references to secret activities, sorcery, and personal worship of al-Bannā or alliances with Moscow at all. One can probably safely assume that the secessionists in 1932 would have mentioned at least some of these events in their report, if they had taken place.

There is thus ample reason to believe that the stories of successive plots are at least partly fictitious. They do, however, fit much better to the MB's situation in the second half of the 1940s. At the height of his popularity in the postwar years al-Bannā was said to be worshipped by some of his adherents.¹⁰³ The story about Ṣidqī bears some resemblance to the highly controversial collusion between the MB and the Ṣidqī regime after the war.¹⁰⁴ The charges of secret activities and overthrowing "the government, the king and the whole world" are similar to the prevalent suspicions in the immediate postwar years, borne out by

97 Ibid.: 126-127.

98 Ibid.: 136.

99 Ibid.: 137.

100 al-BANNĀ 1990: 126.

101 See Ḥasan al-BANNĀ, "Ḥawla Jam'iyat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn", *Majallat al-Faḥ*, 245 (21 Dhū 'l-Qa'dah 1349h / [c. April 1913]): 8.

102 YŪSUF 1932: 15-17.

103 See e.g. AḤMAD (pseud.) 1946: 27-28 and al-TILMISĀNĪ 1985: 45. In the late 1930s during the increasing rivalries between the Muslim Brotherhood and the ultra-nationalist *Miṣr al-Fatāh* (Young Egypt) party, headed by Aḥmad Ḥusayn, the latter levelled charges against al-Bannā that his followers worshipped him like Prophet Muhammad. (See HUSAYN 1938) 'Whatever truth there might have been in his allegations, it seems clear from the MB's own newspaper that Ḥasan al-Bannā's charismatic qualities only became an object of attention from the mid-1930s onwards.

104 For the collusion between the Ikhwān and the Ṣidqī regime, see MITCHELL 1993: 45-53.

the discovery of its armed wing, that the movement secretly planned the overthrow of the monarchy.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the incredible accusations of communist sympathies were also a part of the whirlpool of propaganda and political gossip in the late 1940s.¹⁰⁶ It seems clear that the MB leader spiced up his memoirs with these stories and by doing so, he offered a fictionalized, not a historical, version of the MB's early history. By placing these charges and plots in the context of the Ismailiya period, instead of their appropriate historical context, al-Bannā could more easily ridicule these accusations and show their absurdity, while avoiding a serious debate on substance.

The challenge to Ḥasan al-Bannā's authority

The MB's first deputy up to 1947, Aḥmad al-Sukkarī, was the key personality in the 1947 crisis, and the autobiography was most probably written in response to the challenge posed by him. Although al-Sukkarī played an important role during the first few years of the movement, he was relatively anonymous during most of the 1930s, until 1939, when he moved to Cairo. Upon his arrival there, al-Bannā appointed him as his first deputy, leaving most of the political and administrative affairs of the society to him, enabling al-Bannā to concentrate his own efforts on spiritual guidance and teaching. There are indications that very soon they came to have different perceptions of the character of the movement and that this created friction, finally leading to the 1947 crisis and al-Sukkarī's dismissal.¹⁰⁷ Al-Sukkarī only challenged al-Bannā's political hegemony in the movement, not his role as a spiritual guide, but al-Bannā's perception of his own role as guide and supreme leader never permitted any delegation of authority or division of power in the movement. At the very end of the autobiography we find a passage which is addressed to "This Brother from al-Maḥmūdiyyah" (who can be no other than Aḥmad al-Sukkarī). Al-Bannā writes: "I know that the soul that I carry in me is a soul in which the eternal knowledge of God rests, a soul that disperses all jealousy and dissolves all sorrow and pain, afflicting Islam and its people".¹⁰⁸ Al-Bannā's self-perception as a spiritual guide and the personal-spiritual relationship he managed to establish with his followers were no doubt a major source of strength for the movement, but, as we shall see, probably also contributed to the downfall of the movement in 1949.

Al-Bannā's description of his relationship with al-Sukkarī is of great interest in light of the 1947 crisis. In his memoirs, their friendship is a major topic from their very first meeting at the *dhikr* of the Ḥaṣṣāfi brethren. The author describes how deeply attached he was to his friend, "My friendship with brother Aḥmad Effendī al-Sukkarī had become so close

105 These charges became more widespread in 1948 onwards when the cycle of political violence reached its apogee. See e.g. *Jarīdat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, 593 (5 April 1948): 1.

106 HEYWORTH-DUNNE 1950: 78.

107 See FOREIGN OFFICE, "Ikhwān al-Muslimeen" (FO 141/838), a British cable report from Cairo detailing efforts by the British in cooperation with Amin Osman to make efforts to create a schism between Ḥasan al-Bannā and Aḥmad al-Sukkarī. See also al-MUṬANĪ 1979: 71-75, where a letter from Ḥasan al-Bannā to Aḥmad al-Sukkarī from April 1940 is reprinted.

108 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 152.

that neither of us could be away from the other more than a week's time".¹⁰⁹ Their relationship, he says, was a "relationship of brotherhood, love and companionship in worship of God".¹¹⁰ When al-Bannā moved to Cairo to study at Dār al-'Ulūm, the only thing that worried him, he says, was "the feeling of being away from al-Maḥmūdiyyah and my close friend and beloved brother".¹¹¹ The memoirs focus primarily on the strong emotional aspect of their relationship.

After the Muslim Brotherhood was founded, there are virtually no references to al-Sukkarī's role as a leader of the Brotherhood in al-Maḥmūdiyyah, while other MB branches are given due attention.¹¹² He is not honoured by a single story or anecdote which al-Bannā so generously used in his memoirs to recall the virtues of the first MB generation. No mention is made of a pamphlet from 1929, written and signed by both al-Bannā and al-Sukkarī, which most probably was the first MB publication.¹¹³ This pamphlet is referred to in several places and was regarded as an important event in the history of the movement.¹¹⁴ Neither does he mention that he and al-Sukkarī had their first speeches together at the celebration of the Islamic New Year at the newly organised *Jam'iyat al-Shubbān al-Muslimīn* in 1929. Both speeches were printed in the salafīyya magazine, *Majallat al-Faṭḥ*.¹¹⁵ Al-Bannā recalls the event in his memoirs, but makes no mention of al-Sukkarī.¹¹⁶ Against this series of seemingly deliberate omissions, the emotional part is given surprisingly much attention. Al-Bannā goes so far to say in one of his final papers at Dār al-'Ulūm that, "I cannot see anyone more deserving my affection and love than a friend whose soul and my soul became like one. I have given him my love and rendered him my friendship," making it clear that this friend is no other than "Aḥmad Effendi al-Sukkarī".¹¹⁷

Why is there such a discrepancy between the images of al-Sukkarī as al-Bannā's dearest friend and of al-Sukkarī as an MB leader? Again, the 1947 crisis seems to be the answer.

109 Ibid.: 35.

110 Ibid.: 50-51. See also *ibid.*: 49, 66 for other descriptions of their relationship.

111 Ibid.: 46.

112 There are brief mentions that al-Sukkarī was elected to be president of a charitable society in al-Maḥmūdiyyah, called *Jam'iyat al-Ḥaṣṣāfiyyah al-Khayriyyah*, and later that he was the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood branch in al-Maḥmūdiyyah. *Ibid.*: 25, 69 and 103.

113 The pamphlet was called "Mudhakkirah fī 'l-ta'līm al-dīnī" signed by Ḥasan Aḥmad al-BANNĀ, Aḥmad al-SUKKARĪ and Ḥāmid 'ASKARIYYAH, most probably written in the spring of 1929. The pamphlet is a memorandum submitted to "the King, princes, the authorities, governments, etc.", and deals with educational policies. It urges the competent authorities to increase religious education in Egyptian schools. In the 1930s this was probably the most important single issue in their program until the Palestine revolt erupted in 1936. See, for a brief comment on this pamphlet: JANSEN 1992: 254-258.

114 See for instance al-SUKKARĪ, "Jihād al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn yathmur!" *al-Nadhīr*, 19 (8 Jumādā I 1358h): 1-2.

115 *Majallat al-Faṭḥ*, 151 (6 Muḥarram 1348h / [c. June 1929]): 5-7, 10-11. *Majallat al-Faṭḥ* also printed an article by al-Sukkarī where he describes how the Ikhwān in al-Maḥmūdiyyah had "rescued a young girl" from being converted by the missionaries. This event is not mentioned in the autobiography even though the struggle against missionaries is given due consideration.

116 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 128.

117 *Ibid.*: 65-66.

By emphasizing his love and affection for his friend, and underplaying his actual contribution to the MB's cause, al-Bannā managed to construe al-Sukkarī's dissent in 1947 as a treacherous act against his most devoted friend, and a betrayal of a lifelong companionship. By focusing exclusively on emotional and affective aspects, the 1947 conflict is transformed from a rational and legitimate demand for a policy-change and division of power in the MB and becomes a question of loyalty and betrayal.

In several passages where their frustration of being separated is described, al-Bannā's words seem, in many ways, to apply more to the reconciliation efforts during the 1947 crisis than anything else:

We had been consoling ourselves by the thought that we could meet during the vacations and that we both would finally end up in the same place. But as for now, we are facing a new situation. And it might be so that I shall not return to al-Maḥmūdiyyah unless God wishes. And this is a serious matter for us and we must spend much time thinking about this and overcome this problem by all means. We had meetings, we sat up at night, we talked and sat together and discussed this matter: Aḥmad is a merchant and the merchant has no particular homeland. So why does he not move to Cairo, too! But what would his family do in Cairo? They did not wish to shift to Cairo, neither do the circumstances permit it. We contemplated much about this and we finally ended up by making this year an experimental year and then see what would come.¹¹⁸

At the end of the autobiography the hints are less veiled and the fictionalized narrative gives way to direct criticism of al-Sukkarī, albeit without ever mentioning his name. By now, the hopes for reconciliation seem to be gone. The passage is addressed to Aḥmad al-Sukkarī and his partisans:

Today Mr. ... and Mr. ... came from al-Maḥmūdiyyah to see me, and we talked a lot about the MB branches [...]. In short, my view is that the branches of the MB in al-Maḥmūdiyyah and Shubrā Khayt would not be of much use, because they are established without my style, and what is not built by me or by the efforts of some of the real Muslim Brothers will not benefit the *da'wah* [...]. He is a gifted leader, but he does not make good use of his talents and wastes his time on trivialities. His heart is filled with illusions and someone like that would only cause distress and pain.¹¹⁹

The dilemma of authoritarian leadership

At the end of his memoirs al-Bannā concludes: "These people only wish to divert the *da'wah* and form it into their *da'wah* and I do not wish that".¹²⁰ After more than twenty years of continuously campaigning, preaching and travelling, he, with little wonder, considered the MB movement and the *da'wah* as "his" movement and his mission. Unfortu-

118 Ibid.: 50-51.

119 Ibid.: 151.

120 Ibid.: 152.

nately, the Supreme Guide was too reluctant to accept the necessary democratization and division of power that probably was necessary to control the unruly elements in the movement, especially the younger members of the secret apparatus. The expulsion of Aḥmad al-Sukkarī and Ibrāhīm Ḥasan created a leadership crisis in the movement which paralyzed the civilian branch of the organization and led to an unfortunate dependence on the military wing and its notorious leader 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sanādī.¹²¹ Al-Bannā had, since the first clashes with the police and his own arrest in Ismailiya in 1938, always done his utmost to practice the restraint of his followers. At times, his policy of avoiding clashes with the government even caused some of his followers to question his personal courage.¹²² In 1947-48 the MB included perhaps 500,000 members and several thousand in the military wing. Al-Bannā could possibly not be able to control all these men alone. A division of power among moderate elements in the civilian wing might have prevented the accelerating circle of political violence, which resulted in the dissolution of the MB in December 1948 and the assassination of the MB leader in February 1949. His scepticism towards potential rivals prevented him from delegating power. The final lines in his autobiography reflect his dilemma:

Today (...) and (...) talked with me about the organization of the/an administrative council. These people have not yet understood the *da'wah* of the Ikhwān. There are so few who are able to carry the burden of running this organization and implementing its extensive program. I just hope that there would be someone by my side who understood and who could run the administrative affairs. Then I would hand over this work to them so that I could find some rest and be reassured by their competence. But where are those men? So many do not understand anything of the administrative council. They are only coveting a position in the council and compete like rivals to get it. It only creates hatred and hostility. The expected changes will lead to a great uproar, but it is like a *fata morgana*, which disappears when you come closer. O God, if you see sincerity in our intentions, make us succeed! If not, lead us on your path, the path of the obedient and sincere believers!¹²³

Conclusion

Ḥasan al-Bannā's autobiography, *Mudhakkirāt al-Da'wah wa'l-Dā'iyyah*, is one of the main primary sources on the Muslim Brotherhood's early history, but remains poorly understood. As this article has suggested, the work was not written as a traditional *ex post facto* memoir, but was produced in the heat of battle with the specific aim of delegitimizing the internal opposition to al-Bannā's leadership during one of the most intense crises in the

121 MITCHELL 1993: 54-55. See also ABŪ NAṢR 1987: 87, and al-BĀQŪRĪ 1988: 72-77 for details on al-Sanādī taking actions on his own.

122 For details about al-Bannā's arrest during a pro-Palestine demonstration in Ismailiya in 1938, see "al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn yaḡḡdabūn li-Filasṭīn", *al-Nadhīr* (12 Jumādā II 1357h): 21-22. For details about Ḥasan al-Bannā's withdrawal from the elections in 1942 after pressure from prime minister Muṣṭafā Naḥḥāṣ and the temporary split this "defeat" produced in the movement, see LIA 1998: 269.

123 al-BANNĀ 1986 [c1950]: 152.

MB's early history. The memoirs highlight al-Bannā's leadership qualities by framing a series of narratives of his childhood and youth, in which specific images or traits of his personality receive particular attention. These include his deep religious devotion, his asceticism and self-sacrifice, his nationalist anti-imperialist endeavours, his willingness to defy authorities and power holders, his emotional attachment to his followers and not the least his divine mission. While such hagiographic features are common in many memoirs and autobiographies, al-Bannā's book is distinct by its use of fictionalized narratives and a transposition of events from one period to another. As we have shown, this autobiography cannot be understood without considering these fictionalized aspects, where events and issues relevant for the 1947 crisis are rewritten and inserted into the narrative of the MB's early history. By doing so, al-Bannā was able to take on and eventually dismiss criticism of his leadership during the 1947 crisis without having to rationally discuss and deal with the dire policy dilemmas facing the Muslim Brotherhood during the escalating crisis in postwar Egypt.

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