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The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Ikhwanweb: Deliberative Ethic/Voice in a Counterpublic's Rhetoric?

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Abstract

Using counterpublic theory as framework and situating the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as a counterpublic, *counterpublics* being alternative, non-dominant publics who voice their oppositional needs and values through diverse discursive practices, the goal of this study is to: (a) Examine, in the context of the years preceding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, whether the Egyptian MB, as a counterpublic, portrays a deliberative ethic/voice in its cyber rhetoric; (b) Explore whether traditional/ Western ideas of deliberation are upheld or challenged in the cyber rhetoric of the Egyptian MB; and (c) Comment on the role of Ikhwanweb, as a counterpublic sphere, in providing the Egyptian MB a space to demonstrate its deliberative potential. By looking for traits and evidences of deliberative ethic in the Egyptian MB's cyber rhetoric—in a 'text' produced by an Islamist organization functioning within a secular/authoritarian socio-political 'context'—the overarching purpose of this analysis is to make sense of : (a) an Islamist organization's role as a counterpublic and its deliberative potential in a non-democratic setting; (b) the implications of this for thinking about deliberation between diverse groups of social agents in non-democratic cultures; and (c) the role of the Internet in facilitating counterpublics' deliberative potential in authoritarian contexts. Thus, from a heuristic standpoint, this study is an endeavor towards contributing to a key question that animates public deliberation: how can we engage/engage with voices that hold (or are assumed to hold) anti-deliberative attitudes and/or those that operate within non-democratic socio-political contexts?

Author Biography

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Keywords

Introduction

In work that is becoming increasingly key to studies in the public sphere, practitioners and scholars continue to explore the ways in which counterpublics and dominant publics employ the Internet in their engagements with each other, and the types of discursive and deliberative fora to which the Internet can give rise; *counterpublics* being alternative, non-dominant publics who voice their oppositional needs and values through diverse discursive practices. According to McDorman (2001), researchers need to explore how virtual space impacts the operation of the public sphere and whether it truly offers new opportunities for the advancement of counterpublic voices. In this study, I situate the Islamist Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) as a counterpublic and analyze the Egyptian MB's rhetoric in its official English-language website, *Ikhwanweb*, during the years preceding the January 2011 Egyptian uprising. Doxtader (2001) states, with the promise to expand the form of public life, counterpublics may challenge the conventions of deliberation, creating alternative conduits of discussion, or they may use opposition to create the basis for consensus, thus leading to the question: how do counterpublics operate, and what might allow one to examine dynamics of counterpublics' communication and their deliberative value?

With this as basis, the goal of this study is to: (a) Examine, in the context of the years preceding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, whether the Egyptian MB, as a counterpublic, portrays a deliberative ethic/voice in its cyber rhetoric; (b) Explore whether traditional/Western ideas of deliberation are upheld or challenged in the cyber rhetoric of the Egyptian MB; and (c) Comment on the role of Ikhwanweb, as a counterpublic sphere, in providing the Egyptian MB a space to demonstrate its deliberative potential. Cameron and Ojha (2007) claim that elite groups in society control resources without experiencing much deliberative challenge from non-elites/counterpublics. They also argue:

> Patterns of inequality in power will vary between societies and thus ethical behavior [sic] will be sensitive to context. A society with a highly unequal distribution of power and a related capacity to use coercion and deception to reproduce that inequality will have a different ethic of resistance compared to a more equal society…. (p. 72)

By looking for traits and evidences of deliberative ethic in the cyber rhetoric created by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—cyber rhetoric in a 'text' produced by an Islamist organization functioning within a secular/authoritarian socio-political 'context'—the overarching purpose of this analysis is to make sense of : (a) an Islamist organization's role as a counterpublic and its deliberative potential

in a non-democratic setting; (b) the implications of this for thinking about deliberation between diverse groups of social agents in non-democratic cultures; and (c) the role of the Internet in facilitating counterpublics' deliberative potential in authoritarian contexts. Thus, from a heuristic standpoint, this study is an endeavor towards contributing to a key question that animates public deliberation: how can we engage/engage with voices that hold (or are assumed to hold) anti-deliberative attitudes and/or those that operate within non-democratic socio-political contexts?

From Public Sphere to Counterpublics

The publication of Jurgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* in 1962 is widely considered to be the origin of post-war research on the public sphere, specifically in Western societies (Asen & Brouwer, 2001). It is also considered the basis of most contemporary public sphere theories. Through this work, Habermas gave a "historical-sociological account of the creation, brief flourishing, and demise of a bourgeois public sphere based on rational-critical debate and discussion" (Berdal, 2004, p. 21). Habermas (1962/1989) specified that due to certain unique historical circumstances, a new civic society emerged in Europe in the 18th century. Berdal (2004) states:

> Driven by a need for open commercial arenas where news and matters of common concern could be freely exchanged and discussed, accompanied by growing rates of literacy, accessibility to literature, and a new kind of critical journalism, a separate domain from ruling authorities started to evolve across Europe. (p. 21)

The emergent bourgeoisie created a public sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored, and the means to do that was informed and critical discourse, in other words, rational argument by the people (Habermas, 1962/1989). Although it has led to important scholarship, especially on the late 18th and early 19th century cases Habermas used for his analysis, two criticisms of his public sphere theory have been central: (a) the notion that Habermas neglected the proletariat and (b) the privileging of reason too much over experience as a source of political judgment (Calhoun & McQuarrie, 2004). The first criticism leads to the concept of the counterpublic.

Before elaborating on this critique, it becomes important to delve briefly into the concept of civil society as it finds itself at the cross-section of important intellectual debates and developments on topics such as democracy, deliberation,

and the public sphere. According to Tlanhlua (2008), the Center for Civil Society at the London School of Economics defines civil society as:

> The arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family, and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family, and market are often complex, blurred, and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors, and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. (para. 1)

According to Edwards (2005), the concept of a public—"a whole polity that cares about the common good and has the capacity to deliberate about it democratically"—is central to a civil society as it leads to "effective governance, practical problem-solving, and the peaceful resolution of differences" (para. 10). Furthermore, as a public sphere, civil society becomes the platform for debates and deliberation, association and institutional collaboration. Therefore, the flourishing of the civil sphere is crucial to the strengthening of democratic ideas and institutions. But, "if alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression or if one set of voices are heard more loudly than those of others, the public interest inevitably suffers" (Edwards, 2005, para. 10); the concern over silencing alternative viewpoints within a civil society brings this discussion back to the first critique of Habermas's public sphere theory.

The first criticism of Habermas's theory focuses on the idealization of the bourgeois public sphere as a forum for rational-critical debate, which leads to the neglect of the potential and dynamics of the proletarian public sphere. Reformulations along these lines point at the ideology of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere, which considers the presence of a single overarching arena of public deliberation as desirable to the bolstering of democracy, and conversely, regards the expansion of deliberation through a multiplicity of publics as a negative departure from democracy (Fraser, 1992). Negt and Kluge (1993) suggest that the proletarian public sphere, in fact, worked in parallel to the bourgeois public sphere as a counterpublic. The term *counterpublic* took its place in academic discourse in 1972 as *Gegenöffentlichkeit* in the German-language work of Negt and Kluge, "Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung" (Public Sphere and Experience), and their work challenged Habermas's (1962/1989) account of the bourgeois public sphere.

However, the term *counterpublic* entered English-language scholarship in 1989 through Rita Felski's work *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*. Notably, in this work

Felski describes the counterpublic constituted by feminist literature as "oppositional discursive space" (p. 155) that alters, even as it is shaped by, the ideological structures within which it emerged. Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of counterpublic is most widely applied in academic circles (Brouwer, 2006). Fraser (1992) suggests that subordinated social groups, or "subaltern counterpublics," often find it "advantageous to constitute alternative public…in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p.123). Fraser also explains that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere envisioned an arena in which participants set aside status inequalities and spoke to one another as if they were equal in social and economic standing. Yet, "even in the absence of formal exclusions, social inequality can infect deliberation as modes of discussion and engagement mark inequalities" (Asen & Brouwer, 2001, p. 12). Thus, Fraser (1992) calls instead for discourse in the public sphere to address and thematize inequalities as explicit topics of debate, in a larger effort to articulate difference as a resource for public deliberation and discourse in the public sphere; here difference, following Young (1997), is viewed as a resource necessary for discussion-based politics, the aim and objective of which is co-operation, reaching understanding, and doing justice.

According to Brouwer (2006), most definitions of counterpublic share three key features: oppositionality, constitution of a discursive arena, and a dialectic of retreat from and engagement with other publics. To elaborate, oppositionality is characterized by a stance of "resistance, rejection, or dissent" (p. 197); the notion is essentially perceptual, that is counterpublics are created when social actors perceive themselves to be marginalized within dominant publics, and they communicate about that exclusion. Second, communication about marginality helps to comprise a discursive arena. Discursive "refers not just to speech—written or spoken language—but also to visual communication and bodily display" (p. 197). Further, this discursive arena is in fact a conceptual metaphor rather than just a specific place; here people who communicate oppositional stances have the ability to create imagined communities (Anderson, 1991) through asynchronous communication, over and above simply meeting together in physical spaces (Brouwer, 2006). Finally, counterpublics entail a dialectic of inward and outward address. In other words, oppositional communication exhibited by counterpublics necessitates not only interaction among themselves in moments of regrouping or reflection, but also, this inward communication anticipates and is in preparation of outward engagements with other publics. In that sense, "radical exclusions such as forced exile or chosen separatism, in which

social actors cannot or do not address other publics, do not constitute counterpublicity" (p. 197).

Undoing the conceptual hierarchy of Habermas's public sphere theory, scholars (Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Brouwer, 2006; Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1992) have theorized alternative, non-dominant publics amid wider publics to explain the complex discursive practices among these realms. The Egyptian MB is positioned in this study as an alternative, non-dominant public/counterpublic amid (a) the Egyptian state, (b) Western agents, and (c) militant fundamentalist organizations, with each of which it has shared complex discursive dynamics.

The Egyptian MB as a Counterpublic

 The Muslim Brotherhood is considered Egypt's oldest and a hugely influential Islamist Sunni Muslim group (Biot Report, 2005). It was founded when Egypt was in the midst of national turmoil; in 1928, its founder Hasan al-Banna created the MB "as an outlet to express political dissent to the short-lived half-hearted liberal experiment with parliamentary democracy" (Hassan, 2005, p. 3). During this experiment, the unquestioned embrace of European values by the parliamentary regime, on top of concerns associated with foreign colonization, "ostensibly alienated the population from the parliamentary regime and from the politicians and intellectuals who claimed to speak for the people but ignored their economic grievances and insulted their Islamic sensibilities" (Cleveland, 2004, p. 198), thus contributing to large scale national unrest.

The MB rooted itself in Egypt through its successful social programs and sought to assert its presence through a popular appeal, which the secular authoritarian Egyptian regime of erstwhile President Hosni Mubarak (and the ones before this) failed to capture (Hassan, 2005). In the decade preceding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, the organization's campaign for democratic reforms and equal representation in elections, and its fight for citizen participation, social justice, and civil liberties placed it in direct opposition to Hosni Mubarak's tyrannical tendencies. Bardhan (2014) recounts:

> Through the Egyptian uprising of 2011, citizens, specifically the youth, chose the path of nonviolent grassroots protest movements and overthrew President Hosni Mubarak. The MB, although not a catalyst, rode the wave and eventually rose as one of the most organized groups in the Egyptian political scene post-Mubarak…the MB established the "Freedom and Justice Party" (FJP) as its secular front a few months following Mubarak's ousting. The FJP won the parliamentary elections held in Egypt in late

2011 and Mohamed Morsi, a leading figure in the MB and ex-FJP Chairman, was sworn in as Egypt's President on June 30, 2012. (pp. 240-241)

However, after only a year in office, the first free and democratically elected President of Egypt, the Egyptian MB's Morsi, "proved unable to run the country effectively…leading the military to take control in a coup on July 3, 2013, following an eruption of mass protests against Morsi on June 30" (al-Anani, 2015, p. 527).

Historically, the relationship between the MB and the Egyptian government has been one of conflict and tension; reasons contributing to that are exclusion of the MB from the mainstream political process, unfamiliarity with the objectives of the MB leading to potential unease and mistrust, and systematic suppression of the organization's members by state officials. Also, the changing and complex roles the MB has been playing in Egyptian society has led diverse audiences—the secular Egyptian regime led by Hosni Mubarak till 2011, varied Western agents, especially the US, or militant fundamentalists—to form multiple and often contradictory perceptions of what the Brotherhood stands for and just what its ideology and motives are; Moaddel (2005) claims that these changes and complexities have led to the creation of multiple and changing discourses within and about the Brotherhood. For instance, scholars and policymakers, nations and governments (often Western), have viewed the Egyptian MB, on the one hand, as a radical Islamist organization and illegal non-governmental organization, and on the other, as a civil association and the Egyptian government's most popular opposition. The Brotherhood has been perceived/portrayed as anti-secular, anti-Western, opposed to liberal nationalism, out to reclaim Islam's manifest destiny (Davidson, 1998), or as a proponent of democratic reform. According to Leiken and Brooke (2007), scholars and commentators from the West have called the Muslim Brothers "radical Islamists" and "a vital component of the enemy's assault force…deeply hostile to the United States" (p. 107), while rather ironically, Al-Qaeda has accused it of "luring thousands of young Muslim men into lines for elections…instead of into the lines of *jihad* (a holy war)" (p. 107). The MB has often been under attack by agents of secular and democratic change as well as agents of militant jihad.

In addition, since September 11, 2001, Islam has been uncompromisingly associated with extremism, violence, and conflict in minds of millions around the world, especially in the West; any organization or movement with an Islamist ethos has had a complex and uphill relationship with Western societies, defending their stance, moderate or extremist. In sum, episodically or enduringly, openly or

secretly, Islamist organizations, such as the Egyptian MB, have been encountering (a) the state, (b) Western agents, and (c) militant fundamentalist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda, in complex, multiform relations; in this study, the Egyptian MB is positioned as a counterpublic to these.

According to Cleveland (2004), Al-Banna, the founder of MB, explored ways in which Muslims could take advantage of the technological capabilities provided by the 20th century. In fact, use of the Internet by counterpublics highlights the "vitality of the Internet in promoting increased political activism of groups that have had a prolonged physical existence," or the possibilities of the Internet to enhance counterpublics' expression and deliberative potential, facilitate different styles and forms of discursive exchange, etc., in situations of opposition, repression, suspicion, and conflict (McDorman, 2001, p. 192). Hence, using counterpublic theory as the theoretical framework and situating the Egyptian MB as a counterpublic, this study focuses on how the Egyptian MB rhetorically positions itself in its official English-language website and how its cyber rhetoric defines and delineates its ideology. The purpose, as aforementioned, is to examine, in the context of the years preceding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, whether the Egyptian MB, as a counterpublic, portrays a deliberative ethic/voice in its rhetoric, explore whether traditional/Western ideas of deliberation are upheld or challenged in the cyber rhetoric of the Egyptian MB, and comment on the role of Ikhwanweb, as a counterpublic sphere, in providing the Egyptian MB a space to demonstrate its deliberative potential.

Deliberation and Deliberative Ethic/Voice: A Discussion

Burkhalter, Gastil and Kelshaw (2002) define deliberation as "a combination of careful problem analysis and an egalitarian process in which participants have adequate speaking opportunities and engage in attentive listening or dialogue that bridges divergent ways of speaking and knowing" (p. 398). Developing from the Habermasian "model of critical rationalism" (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002, p. 261), deliberation has been the focus of study for scholars dedicated to theorizing and evaluating democratic processes of public participation in political and civic decision-making. According to Gastil (2008), deliberation incorporates three key criteria: (a) inclusion of all stakeholders in the political process; (b) participation opportunities for all individuals to raise problems, articulate their opinions, and persuade others; and (c) potential for the outcome of enlightened understanding, wherein each participant emerges from the process better able to articulate not only personal views but opposing perspectives as well. Mansbridge et al. (2010) note that coercion is not a defining characteristic of the deliberative process, rather, "reason-giving is required and central" (p. 65) to deliberation; participants

are obligated to support their positions with reasons that others can understand, as well as listen to reasons offered by others. In its civic tradition, deliberation rests on the premise that the solution to a problem and the most prudent outcome is best determined through a dialectical process wherein varied perspectives/arguments and contrasting positions engage each other rationally (Mascarenhas, 2014). Thus, deliberation illuminates the place of reason, validates multiple voices, and endorses a process of collective discernment.

The deliberative process must reconcile divergent points of view and conflicting meta-communicative practices—ways of speaking, modes of reasoning, or discrepant value hierarchies; according to Mascarenhas (2014), these "Western modes of rational logic tend to hold hegemonic value in deliberative contexts" (p. 45). Black (2008) argues that favoring arguments grounded in reason can prove problematic when the issues for discussion involve moral conflicts that evoke non-rational forms of discourse. In a similar vein, Crowley (2006) observes that deliberation favored by liberal voices privileges fact and reason over faith and value, and therefore holds little promise in sorting through civic issues with rhetors subscribing to fundamentalist ideologies. To delimit deliberation from reason-dominated group discussion, theorists and practitioners have included dialogic components in group deliberative models. Black (2008) describes the dialogic moment as one of "profound mutual awareness of the other person" (p. 95). Similarly, Mascarenhas (2014) claims that "the conventional approach of distinguishing between dialogic and deliberative communication blinds us to the potential for dialogic moments to emerge in the course of more rationally driven discussions" (p. 46).

Considering its roots in Habermas's public sphere theory, certain foundational ideas regarding the dynamics of deliberation and the public sphere have also been challenged. For instance, scholars have argued that consensus need not be viewed as the end of discourse in the public sphere. "Besides deliberation oriented toward agreement, discourse in the public sphere may serve a number of purposes, including expressing identity, raising awareness, celebrating difference, and enabling play" (Asen & Brouwer, 2001, p. 12). In fact, McCarthy (1992) explains that a background consensus may motivate members of diverse political communities to condone collective decisions with which they disagree. Various efforts of McCarthy and others (e.g., Estlund, 1997) lead toward what Bohman (1996) has called a "plural public reason" (p. 83), which does not presuppose a single norm of reasonableness and recognizes instead that participants may agree with one another for different publicly accessible reasons. Along these lines, some proponents of consensus (e.g., Cohen, 1989/1997) do not necessarily regard its absence as an indicator of failed deliberation. As Asen and Brouwer (2001) argue,

"elucidation of the nonconsensual ends of the public sphere has focused attention on the varied functions of public discourse, layered conceptions of reason and alternative agreements, and situations where action must be taken in the absence of agreement" (p. 13)[i].

With this discussion, I arrive at two important notions that lead me to the questions raised in this study. Using counterpublic theory as the theoretical framework and situating the Egyptian MB as a counterpublic, this study focuses on how the Egyptian MB rhetorically positions itself in its official English-language website and how its cyber rhetoric defines and delineates its ideology. This study then, clearly, does not focus or comment on the 'process' of deliberation. Instead, by taking from the tradition of civic deliberation (e.g. Burkhalter, Gastil & Kelshaw, 2002; Gastil, 2008; Mansbridge, 2010) and following Mascarenhas (2014), I use the construct of the 'deliberative ethic/voice' to answer: (a) In the context of the years preceding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, does the Egyptian MB, as a counterpublic, portray a deliberative ethic/voice in its rhetoric? (b) Does Ikhwanweb, as a counterpublic sphere, enhance the Egyptian MB's deliberative potential by facilitating its deliberative ethic/voice? To elaborate on the concept, the 'deliberative ethic/voice' essentially: emphasizes reason; is egalitarian and inclusive as it validates multiple voices, portrays open-mindedness towards divergent ways of speaking and knowing, and endorses a process of collective discernment where the collective must include all stakeholders; is non-coercive; and is solution oriented as it aims for enlightened understanding followed by a solution/prudent outcome. I come to the second important notion by returning to critiques of the traditional/Western foundational notions of deliberation, which leads to the final question: (c) Does the Egyptian MB's counterpublic rhetoric endorse or challenge traditional/Western ideas of deliberation?

Rhetoric and Artifact: Ikhwanweb Between 2005-2010

Definitions of rhetoric vary relative to, for example, historical periods, social and technological contexts, rhetoricians' ideological and ethnic commitments, and so on. In the context of this study, I ascribe the symbolic, the instrumental (includes the act of persuasion), and the political dimensions to rhetoric. In other words, rhetoric is the use of symbols/language to create discourse/s, with the purpose to persuade, respond to, reinforce, or alter the understandings of its audience/s or the social fabric of the community, with its essential activities located on a political stage. The focus/artifact of this analysis, as aforementioned, is the English-language rhetoric of the Egyptian MB in its official English-language website

Ikhwanweb; these texts, written in English between 2005-2010, are credited to Ikhwanweb—either member authored or bylined by the Egyptian MB.

Ikhwanweb, or "Brothers who have a Web presence," was founded in 2005 by Khairat el Shater, deputy head of the MB; the term *Ikhwan* means brotherhood or brethren. With its headquarters in London, Brotherhood correspondents, which include both freelance writers and regular employees, are found in several countries. The "About Us" section of the website states that Ikhwanweb is the "Brotherhood's only official English Website," and the main mission behind it is to "present the Muslim Brotherhood vision right from the source and rebut misconceptions about the movement in western[sic] societies" (Ikhwanweb, 2005, para. 6). This avowal makes the Egyptian MB's *English-language* rhetoric significant for analysis in the context of the questions being raised in this study, for instance, Ikhwanweb's deliberative potential vis-à-vis Western agents. According to Bardhan (2014):

> The content of this Web site [sic] focuses on two primary areas — the Brotherhood's history, organization, structure, and evolution and ongoing sociopolitical controversies in and outside of Egypt. Ikhwanweb contains a plethora of descriptive as well as analytical pieces, news reports and editorials, academic debates and polemical writeups, and transcriptions of speeches and interviews, which are categorized under sections and subsections; all content has been archived since Ikhwanweb's creation. (p. 244)

Written texts from the three sections—MB versus al-Qaeda, MB and the West, and Parliament—were most appropriate for analysis because they manifest the Egyptian MB's dynamics vis-à-vis key agents, and were also in keeping with the three entities it was positioned as a counterpublic to. The time frame was from 2005-late 2010; in other words, the year of Ikhwanweb's creation to right before the January 2011 Egyptian uprising that led to the ousting of Mubarak. All written texts from the first and second sections were analyzed. The last section had a vast number of articles; hence, to ensure proportionality and a manageable analysis, quasi random sampling was performed[ii]. Of a total of eight webpages in the MB versus al-Qaeda section that contained archived material, with each webpage featuring approximately 20 articles, 53 articles were specifically authored or solicited by the Egyptian MB. The average length of each article was one page, which was consistent across all sections. Out of a total of nine webpages in the MB and the West section, 42 articles were analyzed. Out of a total of 27 webpages in the Parliament section, 170 articles were specifically authored or

endorsed by the Egyptian MB; articles for analysis were chosen after quasi random sampling.

Brouwer (2006) claims that in the field of communication, rhetorical critics have been the scholars who have most vigorously taken up counterpublic theory; such scholars are prone to thinking in terms of conflict, dissent, and argument, and counterpublic's origins in oppositionality thereby makes it an apt match for rhetorical scholars. According to Hauser (2001):

> Insofar as a public sphere excludes ideas and speakers through impermeable boundaries, privileges public relations over deliberation, enforces the technical jargon of elites over contextualized language specific to issues and their consequences, presupposes conformity of values and ends, and imposes a preordained orientation, its discursive features undermine its status as a public sphere. Most importantly, when official public spheres repress the emergence of rhetorically salient meanings, those meanings are likely to emerge elsewhere in oppositional sites, or counterpublic spheres. (p. 36)

Additionally, "the specification of *counterpublic* is an explicit recognition and warning that not all publicly significant speech occurs in officially sanctioned *public* forums, by official representative of the public or the public good, or in dominant public idioms" (Brouwer, 2006, p. 198). A counterpublic sphere—Ikhwanweb in this study—is "a site of resistance" (Hauser, 2001, p. 36). Sometimes this resistance is militant as in an underground movement, and sometimes it is apparently benign as in the counterpublic sphere of a minority community enacting its own internal business. It must be kept in mind, however, that the rhetorical study of counterpublic spheres does not always ascribe an interest in consensus to counterpublics; rather, it tries to unearth and explore whether local speech acts create an opportunity for dialogue, agreement, (Doxtader, 2001) and deliberation. This distinction, Doxtader (2001) explains, means that the goal is to understand "how counterpublics identify themselves, challenge the conventions of dominant discourse, and recover the productive contingency of speech and action" (p. 66); these nuances are significant to this study.

The Egyptian MB's Rhetorical Strategies in Ikhwanweb

Throughout the Egyptian MB rhetoric, three predominant rhetorical moves were discerned: (a) the show of support; (b) the portrayal of opposition; and (c) the display of contradiction. Within each of these three broader rhetorical patterns,

prominent rhetorical tactics/devices featured, such as, consubstantiation, resource sharing, negative other-presentation, testimony, epithet, and ambiguity. Not all were used within each of the broader rhetorical moves; some of the prominent tactics with exemplars within each move are illustrated.

Rhetoric of Support

In the cyber rhetoric of the Egyptian Brotherhood, support was exhibited through *consubstantiation, resource sharing, testimony*, and *epithet*. Without being specific to any one of the three sections analyzed, the show of support, in different degrees and intensities, was manifest across all three sections; for Hamas in "MB versus Al-Qaeda" and "MB and the West," for Western agents in "MB and the West," and for students, the Egyptian people, and Copts in "Parliament." I elaborate on the four afore-mentioned rhetorical tactics that entail the overarching rhetoric of support.

The Egyptian MB rhetoric portrayed support for Hamas by focusing on the substances that unite the MB and Hamas; in other words, consubstantiation. Specifically, several areas of shared substance included the following: unity over the cause of the Palestinian people, over the oppositional attitude towards Al-Qaeda, and over the common idea that violence is context specific. Examples of consubstantiation are: "Abu Marzouk [a senior Hamas leader] confirmed that Hamas…seeking liberation for the Palestinian people" and the Egyptian MB's use of the qualifier "legitimate" to describe Palestinian peoples' resistance in "legitimate resistance carried out by the Palestinian people;" "Hamas ideology is miles away from the ideology of Al-Qaeda" and "our [MB] ideology is not the same as Al-Qaeda's;" and "our [Hamas] weapons are only directed towards the occupation" and "Morsi [sic] [a senior MB leader] pointed out that the violent incidents allegedly committed by the MB, are separate and individual incidents." The Egyptian MB rhetoric manifested consubstantiality with Western agents by uniting through an oppositional attitude towards terrorism, as seen in "the West does not support terrorism" and "Muslim Brotherhood supports Hamas although it is a terrorist organization." Consubstantiation with Egyptian students was featured in the unity over use of sit-ins as instrument of protest; exemplars in the rhetoric are "a sit-in they [students] staged in protest at the situations that the universities are witnessing" and "MB MPs held a sit-in in the Egyptian parliament."

The rhetorical strategy of resource sharing entails the Egyptian MB's show of support for an entity by allowing it to share the resources the MB possesses. A key instance was the sharing of Ikhwanweb as a forum for expression; the presence of Hamas associates as active agents using Ikhwanweb as a forum for

expression of ideas, goals, and practices was conspicuous in the Ikhwanweb rhetoric. An example is "Hamdan, a Hamas leader and representative in Lebanon said to Ikhwanweb that Al-Zawahiri's statements and criticism to Hamas movement will never have any impact," wherein Hamas's opposition with Al-Zawahiri, and by extension Al-Qaeda, is expressed by a Hamas leader through Ikhwanweb.

On the issue of testimony, or evidence in support of a fact or assertion, the Egyptian MB rhetoric portrayed use of prominent individuals to testify for Egyptian MB's claims and assertions. Examples of testimonials of support are "Hamdan [a senior Hamas leader] confirmed that Hamas rejects Al-Qaeda" and "Morsi [sic] [a senior MB leader] pointed out that peaceful change does not happen overnight." Herein, senior leaders of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood were testifying, and in the process adding credibility and strength to the claims of opposition towards Al-Qaeda and support for peaceful change.

Epithets are adjectives or descriptive phrases expressing a quality characteristic of a person, a thing, or a phenomenon. In the Egyptian Brotherhood rhetoric, numerous epithets were used for qualifying individuals, groups, actions, beliefs, insinuating support for them. Some instances can be: "MB representatives are credible," "righteous Shari'a," and "moderate Islamic movement." In the use of the epithets "credible," "righteous," and "moderate," a positive stance towards MB representatives, Shari'a, and Islamic movement, respectively, is decried.

Rhetoric of Opposition

Opposition, viewed as resistance, contrast, or dissent, is primarily exhibited through *negative other-presentation, testimonials*, and *epithets*. This rhetorical move featured across all three sections analyzed for this study; in the portrayal of stance towards Israel and the Zionists in "MB versus Al-Qaeda," stance towards Western agents' support for authoritarian regimes in "MB and the West," and the stance towards the Egyptian regime in "Parliament."

Focusing on specific rhetorical tactics, Van Dijk's (1998) "ideological square" (p. 267) includes negative other-presentation as an instance of rhetors making selections to portray an out-group entity in a negative manner. It must be reiterated that negative other-presentation is significant to the larger contextual strategy of positive self-presentation. Instances of negative other-presentation were numerous in the Egyptian MB rhetoric—associating Al-Qaeda and Al-Zawahiri with negative actions and intent, portraying Western agents as supporters of authoritarian regimes, qualifying the Egyptian regime as dictatorial,

and Zionists as sly, are exemplars. A few examples of negative other-presentation in the rhetoric are: "Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak conveniently use the Brotherhood as an excuse to prevent serious reform," "Egyptian regime turned the political competition into a security manhunt," "infighting that serves only the Zionist enemy," and "[the Zionist enemy] seeks to lead slyly and maliciously the Palestinian people." Thus, by implication the Egyptian MB was self-presenting as an organization that: dissociates itself from Al-Qaeda and Al-Zawahiri and from negative actions and intent; opposes authoritarian, dictatorial regimes and Western agents' alliance with the same; and does not condone malicious acts such as the kind practiced by Zionists.

Testimonials and epithets, defined earlier, were used by the Egyptian MB to show opposition towards ideas, entities, and actions. Some examples for testimonies are, "Dr. Mohamed Habib, First Deputy Leader of the MB, added that there are no prospects of any dialogue with US" and "Al-Sameraie [a senior member of the Iraqi political system] pointed out that Al-Qaeda network in Iraq has a foreign agenda." In the first example, Habib testifies to the Egyptian MB's stance towards dialogue with the US; and in the second, Al-Sameraie testifies to the negative intent of Al-Qaeda, that of having a foreign agenda. Both are instances of prominent individuals testifying for the Egyptian MB to strengthen the latter's claims of opposition—towards dialogue with the US, and Al-Qaeda's holding a "foreign agenda."

Instances of use of epithets for qualifying individuals, groups, actions, and beliefs, insinuating opposition, were numerous in the Egyptian MB rhetoric; "repelling violence," "the Zionist enemy," and "Zionists…lead slyly and maliciously" are some examples. In the use of the epithets "repelling," "enemy," and "slyly and maliciously" a negative stance towards violence, and Zionists, respectively, was manifest.

Rhetoric of Contradiction

The key rhetorical tool used to manifest contradiction was *ambiguity*, specifically, *theoretical ambiguity*. In turn, four predominant rhetorical devices entailed theoretical ambiguity—*action over substance, generalization, implication*, and *antithesis*. Jasper and Young (2007) define theoretical ambiguity as "fuzzy theoretical and causal arguments, which rely on audiences' unstated assumptions and understandings to fill them in" (p. 273). Using this as foundation, I define theoretical ambiguity manifest in the Egyptian MB rhetoric as fuzzy theoretical expressions of alliances, values, and goals through the use of action over substance, generalizations, implications, and antitheses, which rely on the

audiences' subjective interpretation of these unstated assumptions and understandings to fill them (the audience) in.

To elaborate on the rhetorical devices, for action over substance the Egyptian MB explicitly emphasized positive or negative, in other words, nuanced actions—support, reject, allow, confirm, condemn—to manifest its stance towards an idea or entity such as violence, jihad, the Al-Qaeda worldview, Islam, and democracy. Yet, the substantive explanations for what violence entails, what specifically separates the Al-Qaeda worldview from the Egyptian MB worldview, how Islam and democracy can (or cannot) co-exist, etc., remained vague and flimsy, thus manifesting ambiguity. In the following four statements—"what kind of jihad has the Al-Qaeda network claimed to have done?" "jihad movement will emerge again but in a peaceful method," "jihad will not be used as a counterforce against the Muslim Brotherhood," and "any way other than the method of jihad will only lead to loss and failure"—several actions are associated with jihad, and each of these statements presents jihad in either a positive or negative way. Nevertheless, none of these statements manifest a comprehensive and clear description of how the Egyptian MB defines jihad, that is, the substance of jihad as perceived and practiced by the Egyptian MB.

Ambiguity was also manifest in numerous generalizations, or presence of less-specific criteria, in the Egyptian MB rhetoric. One predominant instance was the use of generalized agents, such as "the West," "Islamic groups/movements," "We" (people in general), "Muslims," "fringe extremist elements," and "national and political powers." The use of generalizations precludes comprehension of diverse viewpoints and stances, as well as context-specific understandings; this adds to the ambiguity characteristic of much of the Egyptian MB rhetoric. Two further instances of ambiguity caused as a result of generalizations are: "Islamists will not impose their beliefs"—is this true of all Islamists?; and "Muslims do not accept to deeply discuss the Qur'an"—is this true of all Muslims?

Implication, or stating something non-explicitly, is yet another rhetorical tactic that leads to ambiguity and multiple interpretations. For example, the Egyptian MB's implication of an Islamist identity and never a direct mention of it, and its implication of what violence entails for the Egyptian MB rather than a concrete description and avowal, lead to ambiguous interpretations of the Egyptian MB's stance towards Islam, and violence, respectively.

The final rhetorical device is antithesis, or "juxtaposition of contradictory ideas in balanced phrases" (Nordquist, 2011, para. 1). A classic instance of the use of antithesis in the Egyptian MB rhetoric is in the statement "Muslim Brotherhood

supports Hamas although it is a terrorist organization." The use of the action verb "supports" shows clear agreement for Hamas; at the same time "although" in "although it is a terrorist organization" insinuates distancing from Hamas on the issue of terrorism. This antithetical presentation of stances creates ambiguity and complicates understanding of the nature of support the Egyptian MB had towards Hamas.

The Beliefs/Values Manifest in Ikhwanweb Rhetoric

The three predominant rhetorical patterns, namely, the rhetoric of support, the rhetoric of opposition, and the rhetoric of contradiction portray certain beliefs/values of the Egyptian MB, as manifest in Ikhwanweb, in the context of the years immediately preceding the 2011 uprising. According to its rhetoric in Ikhwanweb, the Egyptian MB considered its *moderate* and *Muslim* identities to be significant, and did not equivocate ascribing itself as such in the Ikhwanweb rhetoric. The moderate stance in politics and religion is one that distances itself from extremism, radicalism, and any partisan affinities; the Islamic identity emphasizes a religious positioning. Rhetorical implications and insinuations abounded that showed the Egyptian MB's support for Islamists, or "Muslims who draw upon the belief, symbols, and language of Islam to inspire, shape, and animate political activity" (Pelletreau, Address at the Council on Foreign Relations, 1996). However, there were no explicit avowals of the *Islamist* label in the Ikhwanweb rhetoric; in other words, although the Egyptian MB supported the coming together of Islam and politics, and the importance of Islam in shaping its political activity, the term *Islamist* was not rhetorically avowed. Islam was portrayed to be all-encompassing; a religion that promotes the path of righteousness, is tolerant and peace-loving, and opposed to violence and terrorism. The rhetoric was somewhat inflexible around support of methods based on Shari'a, or Islamic law, and concepts/praxis not rooted in Islam were embraced though contextualized in Islamic terms; for instance, modernization was not opposed, yet its focus on materialist philosophy and atheism was rejected.

Violence was portrayed to be context-specific, although extremism was completely opposed, and moderation, peace, and peaceful means were strongly espoused; support was shown for non-violent jihad. The Egyptian MB rhetorically separated itself from Al-Qaeda. Through its rhetoric it reprimanded the use of violence and oppression, attack on resistance factions, creed of the absolute enemy, and all questionable practices of jihad—all of which it associated with Al-Qaeda and its ideology. The support for Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood's arm in Palestine, was explicit. Specifically, Hamas's positive stance towards elections and the Palestinian people, and Hamas's negative stance towards Al-Qaeda.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian MB rhetorically distanced itself from Hamas's positive stance towards terrorism.

The rhetoric in Ikhwanweb supported the belief that peaceful political change demands time and is gradual. Support for a political system that is democratic, transparent, enjoins rotation of power, and safeguards rights of citizens was promoted. The idea of political power and position gained through undemocratic means, such as inheritance, was strongly rejected; in other words, the rhetoric supported elections and popular choice and promoted non-violent constitutional methods. In addition, the idea of the presence of an active political opposition in the Parliament that ensures healthy, effective, and democratic governance and political reform was promoted.

The rhetoric promoted social capital, an elemental component to building and maintaining democracy and creating a strong civil society. It promoted a society where Egyptian citizens and different religious groups/movements, such as Islamic movements and Coptic Christians, were not hostile towards one another and held equal rights; a society where journalists and human rights committees were free and functional; a society where students and discontented groups could voice opposition and reformists could be active; and a society where technology was used to facilitate communication and networking. Respect and honor for pledges and treaties, and mercy, justice, equity, and human rights were values and rights espoused; in addition, these were guaranteed, irrespective of position or religious differences, to all citizens. The rhetoric manifested the vision of a society marked by diversity, where differences enhance rather than curb the healthy functioning of life; in other words, the rhetoric promoted the importance of a strong civil society.

The Egyptian MB rhetoric unreservedly criticized authoritarianism and dictatorial regimes and ascribed Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt to be such. It also showed discontent towards certain Western agents' acts of supporting and forming alliances with these dictatorial, corrupt, conniving regimes in the Arab world that constrict, tyrannize, and oppress individuals, groups, or movements opposing them, such as the Egyptian MB. Distinctly, the Egyptian MB used its rhetoric to declare that the Mubarak regime uses the discourse of violence to position the Egyptian MB as an extremist organization with the intent to eject it from the Egyptian political scene. In this manner, the Egyptian regime gains empathy with Western agents, and continues to rule unhindered and unchallenged in the absence of a significant opposition force, thus ensuring prevention of any serious political reform. Under the Hosni Mubarak regime, although elections seemed to be in place, they were a façade and actual power rested in inheritance. In sum, the

Egyptian MB rhetoric portrayed dissent against the authoritarian, secular, corrupt, and conniving regime headed by Hosni Mubarak, which is supported by certain Western agents. Thus, the rhetoric also questioned Western agents' true intent towards promotion of democratic institutions, human rights, reform, and a robust civil society in Egypt.

At the same time, the Egyptian MB rhetoric in Ikhwanweb portrayed open-mindedness and flexibility by stating that the West must not be viewed and understood as a monolith, and that different Western agents have different values and goals. Extending that vein of thought, the Egyptian MB rhetoric supported the establishment of dialogue and communication with certain Western agents. With the hope that the latter can gain a contextual understanding of the Egyptian MB's objectives and actions and misconceptions are cleared and prejudices reduced. Finally, despite being oppressed, demonized, and victimized by the Hosni Mubarak regime, the Egyptian MB rhetoric in Ikhwanweb showed that its representatives in the Parliament, the MB MPs, were an active and influential force within the Egyptian political scene. As part of the official political framework, they had the political clout and the potential to exercise more influence within the Egyptian political scene than the Egyptian MB as an organization could.

Complicating Deliberative Ethic/Voice in the Egyptian MB Ideology/Rhetoric

Ideology for this study has been defined as beliefs a social group or movement shares, through systems of representation: (a) to interpret, make sense of, and define some aspect of life; and (b) to monitor their social practices—these beliefs are acquired, used, and changed in social situations, and on the basis of the social interests of groups and social relations between groups, in complex social structures (van Dijk, 1998). Ideology entails a social and a cognitive component, and it is not prejudged as essentially dominant and/or negative. With this definition as anchor and based on analysis of the Egyptian MB's rhetoric in Ikhwanweb, I contend that the Egyptian MB's ideology, as manifest in its English-language cyber rhetoric between 2005-2010, was predominantly characterized by dialectical tensions; instances such as a group or movement fluctuating between disclosure and secretiveness, between periods of honest and open communication (Miller, 2005), and between ambiguity and equivocation are manifestations of dialectical contradictions.

To elaborate, the beliefs/values manifest in the Egyptian MB's rhetoric in Ikhwanweb between 2005-2010 were characterized by ambiguities and dialectical

tensions/contradictions: (a) although it supported both, how did the Egyptian MB ensure a functional enmeshment of 'Islam' and the inherently secular ideal of 'democracy'? (b) how did the Egyptian MB contextualize the Western concept of democracy in Islamic terms? (c) if Islam is all-encompassing, and the Egyptian MB advocated Shari'a, how did it uphold the rights of other religious groups and individuals? (d) what were the specific axes of difference, other than extremism, that separated the Egyptian MB ideology from Al-Qaeda? (e) how did the Egyptian MB maintain the balance between espousing Hamas, but not the latter's support for terrorism? (f) what were the contexts in which the Egyptian MB legitimized the use of violence? (g) how did it define non-violent jihad, and how was the Egyptian MB's conceptualization of jihad separate from Al-Qaeda and other extremist, fundamentalist organizations? (h) if the Egyptian MB gained political legitimation, with its present emphasis on Islam and Shari'a, how would it envision building a democratic Egypt (and not a theocratic one)? and (i) if the Egyptian MB, as stated in its rhetoric, opposed foreign interference in its workings, what was the nature of alliance it sought from Western agents, or role it envisioned for the latter to play vis-à-vis Egypt?

To gain a nuanced understanding of these findings, to provide the overall context apropos which the Egyptian MB's ideology as manifest in the Ikhwanweb rhetoric between 2005-2010 can be interpreted, and to diligently answer the questions this study purports, implications of the following must be taken into consideration: (a) the position of the Egyptian MB as a counterpublic; (b) the use of its English-language website—Ikhwanweb—as a communicative platform whose intended and openly avowed audience is the West; and (c) the hugely confounding and controversial debate surrounding the place Islam should occupy vis-à-vis politics, and the possibilities democratic institutions hold in Muslim societies.

The literature on counterpublic communication has focused extensively on the goal and purpose of it. Much has been written, and some of the predominant purposes of counterpublic communication have been distilled to be the attainment of consensus, the expression of opposition, and the expression of difference as a resource for public deliberation. The Egyptian MB rhetoric manifests these counterpublic communicative moves. In so doing, it also communicates certain elements of a deliberative ethic/voice, such as inclusivity, validation of multiple voices, open-mindedness, and support for collective discernment vis-à-vis Hamas, Al-Qaeda, Western agents, Egyptian activist students, MB MPs, Islam/Islamic movements, Shari'a, the Egyptian regime, Zionists, violence, democracy, and so on. However, analysis shows that there is yet another consequential goal and purpose to counterpublic communication—the expression of dialectical

contradictions by counterpublics. I contend, this strategy is used by a counterpublic to evade commitment and complete disclosure vis-à-vis wider publics, to keep one's true intent and positionings ambiguous and obscure. It must be kept in mind that counterpublics' relationship with wider publics is often marred by distrust consequent to experiences of suppression and marginalization. In the case of the Egyptian MB, it neither trusted the Hosni Mubarak regime for the latter's dictatorial maneuvers and historical hostility towards the Egyptian MB, nor did it completely rely on Western agents' rhetoric of democracy due to their support of authoritarian regimes in the region. In anticipation of danger, to ensure survival in an atmosphere of hostility and distrust, to reduce its vulnerability, and to protect its own interests, the Egyptian MB portrayed a rhetoric of ambiguity, contradiction, and non-commitment in many of its stances. This aspect, thus, brings to light one of the key elements characterizing the Egyptian MB ideology—*an inherent absence of trust*—leading to the questions: Is it practical for a counterpublic that functions within a non-democratic/authoritarian cultural context to nurture and communicate a deliberative ethic/voice? Can such counterpublics, within such cultural contexts, be authentic participants in a "Western-style" deliberative process? Does the Egyptian MB's rhetoric, specifically the element of dialectical contradictions, stir a need for challenging traditional/Western ideas of deliberation?

Related to this issue of trust is the implication of online communication by counterpublics. Literature abounds on how repressive governments can control flow of information and curb freedom of expression. Although the Internet is considered to have emancipatory potential and fewer constraints than traditional mass media, content on the Internet can be readily available to counterpublics' intended audience and oppressive regimes alike. In such a scenario, rhetoric of dialectical contradictions evades total disclosure of any stance or belief; in the absence of forthright stances and commitments it becomes tough for repressive regimes to persecute counterpublics. This concern associated with the Egyptian MB's cyber communication points to *the relevance of caution*, another key element of its ideology in Ikhwanweb. The Egyptian MB exhibited characteristics of a counterpublic through a rhetorical portrayal of its counterpublic potential on Ikhwanweb, its forum for counterpublic expression. The Egyptian MB voiced experiences of exclusion and marginalization, communicated difference, negotiated, critiqued, opposed, and showed association. In its rhetoric—by showing support for human rights, popular choice, religious tolerance, democratic ideals, and peace—it exhibited support for values central to a civil society. In all these respects, the Egyptian MB rhetoric portrayed beliefs and choices innate to civil society actors and aligned itself with features inherent to a functioning and robust civil society. Nevertheless, the dialectical contradictions inherent in the

Egyptian MB's rhetoric challenge a full realization of the counterpublic potential of the Internet, and by extension, the deliberative potential proffered by the Internet to counterpublics functioning within authoritarian contexts.

Another issue of significant import is the implication of the West as the intended audience of Ikhwanweb. This naturally connotes that the Egyptian MB's rhetoric and communication strategies in Ikhwanweb were motivated by what it intended to achieve vis-à-vis its primary audience. The Egyptian MB rhetoric portrayed criticism towards certain Western agents' act of supporting authoritarian regimes and questioned whether they truly intend to promote democratic institutions in Egypt. At the same time, the rhetoric emphasized the importance of not viewing the West as a monolith, the need to promote understanding between Western agents and the Egyptian MB, and manifested the Egyptian MB's support for human rights, a strong civil society, and democratic ideals—values predominantly associated with Western societies. Thus, the Egyptian MB rhetoric demonstrated *the need to be valued by Western agents*, which constitutes another key element of its ideology. In other words, *value* entails the Egyptian MB's need to be respected by Western agents irrespective of differences and discontent, and *value* demands honesty, forthrightness, and a genuine effort by Western agents to counter prejudice and reduce misconceptions about the Egyptian MB. This element of the Egyptian MB's ideology as manifest in its rhetoric most strongly points to its democratic/deliberative ethos. It, in addition, brings to light the notion of 'value' within deliberative contexts involving counterpublics; in other words, what might be the importance of 'feeling valued' (by larger/dominant publics) for counterpublics, to effectively participate in deliberation?

Finally, the dialectical contradictions surrounding the Egyptian Brotherhood's rhetoric on the role Islam must play vis-à-vis secular democratic ideals and institutions are characteristic of the inherent incertitude facing Islamic organizations keen for political legitimation. Furthermore, violence and intolerance perpetrated by Islamic extremist organizations, and the resultant reductionist perceptions and prejudicial stances towards Islam complicate the task of Islamic organizations that do not espouse violence in their discourse. The Egyptian MB's rhetoric portrayed a *sense of confusion and flux* that accompanies any move towards transition, the final key aspect of its ideology. In other words, the Egyptian MB rhetoric portrayed the fundamental tension associated with the organization's attempt to transition into an Islamic organization with democratic aspirations, raising the questions: When entities have identities in flux, how can that affect their deliberative potential? And, in light of entities with identities in flux, might traditional/Western notions of deliberation need re-examining?

Conclusion

The Egyptian MB's ideology manifest in its English-language rhetoric in Ikhwanweb before the 2011 Egyptian uprising featured four key elements: (a) distrust; (b) caution; (c) the need to be valued; and (d) an identity in flux. As afore-stated, this ideology/rhetoric is the product of a specific socio-political/cultural context; specifically, the Egyptian MB's role as an *Islamic counterpublic*, that functioned within an *authoritarian* framework supported by *Western* agents, using *cyber* communication for *political legitimation*. Dryzek (2009) identifies (political) culture as an antecedent of deliberative capacity and argues that deliberation may manifest itself differently in different (political) cultures. Gastil (2008) sees culture as a determinant of deliberative capacity. In line with these claims, the findings of this study reiterate the importance of culture and context to an entity's deliberative potential. In the context of the years preceding the 2011 Egyptian uprising, the Egyptian MB, as a counterpublic, portrayed elements of a West-centric deliberative ethic in its rhetoric in Ikhwanweb. For instance, inclusivity and open-mindedness towards Hamas and Western agents despite disagreeing with them on use of violence and support for Arab regimes, respectively; despite being an illegal entity in Egypt under Mubarak's presidency, choosing to communicate with the Egyptian regime through elected MB MPs instead of violence and coercion, and so on. Nevertheless, by manifesting a rhetoric of dialectical contradictions and ambiguity, minimal use of rational justifications for claims made, etc., the Egyptian MB rhetoric also pointed to a re-examination of traditional/Western ideas of deliberation for non-Western socio-political/cultural contexts. Lastly, for counterpublics, extended and diverse fora offered by new communication technologies mean valuable discursive spaces from which to engage and interact with dominant powers and wider publics. Ikhwanweb enhanced the Egyptian MB's counterpublic potential and enabled it to challenge certain conventions of deliberation (Doxtader, 2001); yet, Ikhwanweb's ability to facilitate the Egyptian MB's deliberative potential was inhibited by the socio-political/cultural context under which it was functioning before the 2011 Egyptian uprising.

In addition, Cameron and Ojha (2007) argue that "deliberation needs to be purged of the utopian idealism of appealing solely to free moral agency supposedly persuadable by well intentioned texts claiming to be universally rational" (p. 68). Analysis of the Egyptian MB's cyber rhetoric and its deliberative potential as a counterpublic indicates a need for questioning institutionalized participatory processes, specifically, the universal applicability of Western notions of public deliberation. In the context of non-democratic cultures, there is an ongoing problem of the control of and influence on decision spheres by social agents who

enjoy greater symbolic/rhetorical privileges in society/the deliberative sphere due to their caste, class, gender, religious, and/or political position (Malla, 2001; Ojha et all, 2006). Thus, when it comes to civic engagement, especially in non-Western and authoritarian socio-political contexts, scholars and practitioners must suspend a priori assumptions of social agents' deliberative potential, and they should be warned of the presupposition of completely free and equal symbolic privilege/agency among social agents prior to deliberation.

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[i] Some studies cited in this section might not be relatively recent. However, these are formative works by experts in the area.

[ii] According to Castillo (2009), in this method of sampling, the items are first arranged in some order. For this study, it was arranged in ascending order of year, starting from 2005. The first item is then chosen at random, and subsequent items are then selected at a regular interval known as the period. The period is determined according to the population and sample sizes. If the population size is N and the sample size is n, then the period is N/n (or the nearest integer to the value of N/n).