

Article

# Conspiracy Theories and Muslim Brotherhood Antisemitism under Sadat

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights how the Muslim Brotherhood instrumentalized antisemitic conspiracies in its journal *al-Da'wa* in its bid to strengthen its socio-political authority under Sadat. After discussing theoretical insights on conspiracy theories and (Muslim and Muslim Brotherhood) antisemitism, the paper zooms in on the return of the Muslim Brotherhood under Sadat, focusing on the movement's internal dynamics and its growing socio-political ambitions, followed by a content analysis of antisemitic conspiracy theories found in *al-Da'wa*. The final part of the paper analyses the different dimensions and the functions of these antisemitic conspiracies for the movement. The paper concludes that through the antisemitic conspiracies, the Muslim Brotherhood has positioned itself as a religious, moral and political authority. Although *al-Da'wa* promulgated classical (European) antisemitic conspiracies, these were utilized by the movement for purposes other than mere hatred and distrust of the Jews and Jewish–Muslim polemics.

**Keywords:** Muslim Brotherhood; antisemitism; conspiracy theories; Sadat



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## 1. Introduction

In May 1978, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) journal *al-Da'wa* published a small article with the title “Impudence, negligence and disdain”. In this article, the Brotherhood accused “the English Jews who own the company Marks & Spencer” of “recently dumping men’s underwear on the market on which ‘there is no God but God’ was written in Arabic calligraphy”—the ultimate indignity of Islam. Although this claim seems absurd, the accusation against Marks & Spencer did not originate out of the blue. The company’s family is well known for its political connections with Zionist leadership and its support of and commercial connections to the state of Israel (Sieff 1986; Kurz 2006; Schneer 2011).

The accusation made in *al-Da'wa* is reminiscent of the persistent rumors that circulate in the Muslim world about the Coca-Cola logo, which allegedly reads *lā muḥammad lā makka* (“No Muhammad, no Mecca”) when viewed in a mirror or upside down. As early as 1951, the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* published a fatwa issued by the Egyptian state mufti that ruled the drinking of Coca-Cola permissible (Skovgaard-Petersen 1997, p. 172). This legal advice was issued because various conspiracies circulated about the soft drink, one of which was the accusation of the hidden message behind the logo. The rumor continued to surface in the Muslim world in later years (BBC News n.d.; Times of India n.d.).

The article about the defamatory underpants was not an isolated case, as antisemitic conspiracies formed an intrinsic part of *al-Da'wa*. It was, moreover, written at an exceptional time. The story appeared in May 1978, when tensions were mounting inside and outside of Egypt. In January 1977, bread riots broke out throughout Egypt, protesting the lowering of subsidies on basic foodstuffs. In November 1977, Anwar Sadat made his historic visit to Israel, followed by an immediate reaction from Arab countries, who collectively cut diplomatic ties with Egypt. In September 1978, the peace summit began at Camp David. From the onset, the MB vehemently and openly opposed any overtures to Israel. At the same time, the movement was struggling with a divided rank-and-file, a diversified field

of Islamic activism and a growing desire to realize its long-standing political ambitions (al-Arian 2014; Rock-Singer 2019; Santing 2020; Willi 2021).

This article studies, from a historical and sociological perspective, how the MB instrumentalized antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa* in its bid to strengthen its socio-political authority under Sadat. Studying the antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa* helps to gain better insight into the functionality of conspiracies and the different dimensions of antisemitism in general and for the MB in particular. Moreover, this paper also helps us to get a better understanding of the MB's internal dynamics during the Sadat years, when it made its reappearance after years of suppression under Nasser. First, a theoretical framework is provided, consisting of two concepts: conspiracy theories and antisemitism, especially in the Muslim world and within the MB in particular. Next, the return of the MB under Sadat is discussed, focusing on the movement's internal dynamics and its growing socio-political ambitions, followed by antisemitic conspiracies found in *al-Da'wa*. Subsequently, an analysis is provided in which the function of the antisemitic conspiracies for the MB is expounded.

## 2. Conspiracy Theories: Origins, Appeal, and Function

Van Prooijen et al. argue that a conspiracy is a suspicion that “a number of actors join together in secret agreement, and try to achieve a hidden goal, which is perceived as unlawful or malevolent. Such conspiracies typically exist of either powerful others [ . . . ] or societally marginalized groups [ . . . ]” (van Prooijen et al. 2015, p. 571). According to Moscovici, “a conspiracy is, by definition, the work of a minority”, which is either “composed of foreigners or it is financed by and in league with foreign powers” (Moscovici 1987, p. 151). The actor is the “visible member of a body, which, itself, remains invisible” (Moscovici 1987, p. 155). This group of conspirators, which acts in secret, must be small, according to Keeley (1999, p. 116). Conspirators are generally believed to have evil intentions (van Prooijen et al. 2015, p. 576). According to Bale, conspiracy theorists consider the conspirators as evil and inhuman beings who commit abominable acts and try to subvert and destroy all that is good. Moreover, the conspiratorial group is viewed as monolithic, omnipresent, and omnipotent (Bale 2007, pp. 51–53).

Often, it is argued that conspiracy theories are triggered by a certain event. They arise in periods of social (Moscovici 1987, p. 151) or political unrest that “tend to breed feelings of uncertainty in politics and lack of control over politics” (Kofta et al. 2020, p. 900). Van Prooijen and Douglas agree and believe that societal crisis situations stimulate belief in conspiracies (van Prooijen and Douglas 2017, pp. 323–33). Conspiracy theories, moreover, “purport to identify the underlying source of misery and injustice in the world, thereby accounting for current crises and upheavals” (Bale 2007, p. 51). Kofta et al. mention that a “single potent group is often identified as a source of evil” that provides an explanation for negative events that occur. “Conspiracy theories about Jews provide perhaps the best example of such a grand, universal explanatory device” (Kofta et al. 2020, p. 902).

Conspiracies have a “scapegoating function”, focusing “anger and hostility on designated victims that distract from the real suffering” they try to explain (Landes 2007, p. 14). The benefit of looking for an outside antagonist is that “instead of waging a civil war, one can take up arms against the outsider. [ . . . ] One is dealing with an enemy against whom one can fully express and loudly voice one's aggression” (Moscovici 1987, p. 153). According to Krekó, even though they can be harmful, conspiracy theories are “normal” because they are products of normal social psychological processes. “Especially in epochs of wars and crises, conspiracy theorizing can become [ . . . ] a way of normal thinking” (Krekó 2015, pp. 63–64).

Sunstein and Vermeule mention the close connection between conspiracy theories and closed societies because, here, individuals “have good reasons to distrust all or most of the official denials they hear” (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, p. 210). Belief in conspiracies helps people “make sense out of a confusing, inhospitable reality, rationalize their present difficulties and partially assuage their feelings of powerlessness” (Bale 2007, p. 51). Kofta

et al. agree that political, personal, and general loss of control are major factors in conspiracy theorizing. Additionally, economically deprived people are more willing to believe in (Jewish) conspiracies (Kofta et al. 2020, p. 901).

According to Bale, academics often downplay the significance of conspiracy theories and do not make serious efforts to incorporate the activities of conspiratorial groups into their political or historical analyses (Bale 2007, pp. 47–48). He argues that “the least that can be expected of serious scholars is that they carefully examine the available evidence before dismissing these matters out of hand” (Bale 2007, p. 59). Clark agrees and wonders: “could intellectuals really be justified in dismissing conspiracy theories merely by pointing to the fact that these are just conspiracy theories?” (Clark 2002, p. 132) Keeley also believes that conspiracy theories should not be dismissed too easily. The issue, he argues, is not to find out whether conspiracies are true, but the issue is one of warranted belief (Keeley 1999, pp. 110–11). Conspiracies often seem irrational, but generally speaking, “reality must enter into it very little, if at all, for this mentality to have its *raison d’être* and its effectiveness.” In the end, we will not better understand conspiracies if we see them as merely irrational (Moscovici 1987, p. 157). Sunstein and Vermeule add that “justification and truth are different issues, which is why pointing out that some conspiracy theories are true does not show that it is rational to believe in those theories” (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, p. 207). According to Fenster, moreover, just because conspiracies might be wrong does not mean that they are not onto something. They “ideologically address real structural inequities, and constitute a response to a withering civil society [ . . . ]” (Fenster 1999, p. 67).

Sometimes people believe in conspiracy theories because they provide a suitable outlet for their anger, whereas the rumor could also fit well with “other deeply rooted beliefs” that people hold. “[ . . . ] Certain conspiracies simply fit well within a general narrative about who is the aggressor” (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009, pp. 213–15). Moscovici calls this the “habitual thought process that one has recourse to, as if by reflex” (Moscovici 1987, p. 151). In this sense, “the very existence of a minority already constitutes a conspiracy”, which none can deny or disprove. Such beliefs are “placed above controversy [and] they must simply be accepted without discussion” (Moscovici 1987, pp. 158–59).

Conspiracy theories could be viewed as an expression of mistrust of authority (Wood 2016, p. 695) or contesting authority (Harambam and Aupers 2015, pp. 466–80). In this paper, I argue that it can also be instrumentalized as a tool to strengthen one’s authority, often at someone else’s expense. Yablokov, for example, explains how Russian politicians used the “rhetoric of conspiracy to strengthen their position in competing for public support in the state” (Yablokov 2018, p. 10). As Fenster puts it, “above all, conspiracy theory is a theory of power” (Fenster 1999, p. xiv).

According to Grey, conspiracy theorists often come from a “disenfranchized or alienated political position” (Grey 2020, p. 6). Political elites, on the other hand, “when struggling to maintain authority and popular support, are tempted to use conspiracy theories in conversation with the population as a distraction or as a unifying narrative” (Grey 2020, p. 9). Conspiratorial beliefs are, moreover, “more a *source* than an *outcome* of conspiracism, and have been created by political dynamics and historical conditions” (Grey 2020, p. 11).

Pipes believes that “conspiracism provides a key to understanding the political culture of the Middle East,” including its alleged culture of violence, and “constitutes one of the region’s most distinctive political features” (Pipes 1996, pp. 1–2). Grey agrees that “conspiracy theories are a common and popular phenomenon in the Middle East” (Grey 2020, p. xi). Although a global phenomenon, conspiracies “clearly are a feature of political discourse” in the Middle East (Grey 2020, p. 3).

### 3. Muslim and Muslim Brotherhood Antisemitism

According to Lewis, “Jews are news” (Lewis 1986, p. 13). Incidents involving Jews receive disproportionate attention. Antisemitism and antisemitic conspiracies are seen all over the world but very prominently in Muslim countries. This hostility has evolved over

the years, especially after the establishment of Israel in 1948 (Lewis 1986, pp. 15–19). Lewis speaks of three categories of hostility directed at Jews. The first is opposition to Israel and to the Zionist movement. This view defines the Arab–Israeli conflict as a political one and argues that Arab hostility to Jews is not necessarily a result of antisemitism. The second is what he calls “common, conventional, in a sense even ‘normal’ prejudice, sometimes giving rise to ‘normal’ persecution”. Allegedly, there are many examples of minority groups all over the world that arouse hostility and persecution. This was how Jews were treated in premodern Islamic societies, “before it was transformed by the introduction of antisemitic notions and writings from Europe”. The third type is antisemitism, which aims at eliminating, destroying, and eventually exterminating its victim. Antisemitism, from this perspective, is a “special and peculiar hatred of the Jews”, even though the three types of hostility towards Jews may interact and merge at times. In its extreme form, antisemites view Jews as a “satanic force, the root of virtually all evil in the world”. Another characteristic of the antisemite is “the invention of facts and the fabrication of evidence to support them”. The most (in)famous of these forgeries are the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which served as the “basis for worldwide antisemitic propaganda” (Lewis 1986, pp. 20–23).

Brownfeld discusses the changing meaning of antisemitism throughout the years. He believes that the term is often falsely used to silence any criticism of Israel and American policy in the Middle East (Brownfeld 1987, pp. 66–67). Volkov adds that anti-Zionism and antisemitism “formed part of a larger ideological package consisting of anticolonialism, anticapitalism, and a deep suspicion of US policies” from the 1960s onward (Volkov 2006, p. 51). Especially after the 1967 June War, anti-Zionism began to play the role of a “cultural code” within the ideology of the New Left in both the US and Europe. Additionally, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, anti-Israel expressions were also voiced more frequently by developing countries. “Through a vague adoption of old antisemitic claims and suppositions,” the Jews became a symbol of the West. They “stood for its essence and its vices” (Volkov 2006, pp. 54–55).

This new form of antisemitism that arose after 1967 is called “new anti-Semitism” by Schroeter (2018, p. 1172). Presumably, this term was used by “scholars and political analysts interested in defending Israel and alarmed at what they saw as growing sympathy for the Arabs and Palestinians”. This kind of antisemitism was, purportedly, expressed or disguised as anti-Zionism. In a parallel development, with the rise of Islamist movements from the 1970s, the term “‘Arab anti-Semitism’ merged with or was replaced by ‘Islamic anti-Semitism’ or ‘Muslim anti-Semitism’” (Schroeter 2018, p. 1172). This “new anti-Semitism,” which was revived all over the world, has two dimensions, according to Wieviorka. On the one hand, this “anti-Zionism spiraling into anti-Semitism” became common among “certain sectors of the extreme left”. On the other hand, this is connected to the rise of Islamist movements, as “jihadism espouses virulent anti-Semitism” (Wieviorka 2018, p. 45).

Many scholars agree that modern-day Muslim antisemitism has European roots (Küntzel 2005, pp. 99–118; Lewis 1986; Tossavainen 2005, pp. 109–18; Tibi 2015, pp. 457–83). Antisemitism based on the notion of a Jewish world conspiracy is rooted in European ideological models. The Nazis transferred this ideology to the Arab world between 1937 and 1945, and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, was the first to translate this into an Islamic context (Küntzel 2005, p. 99).

According to Küntzel, the MB was at the forefront of the rising antisemitism in Egypt, fueled by German propaganda. He believes that Islamist groups like the MB (but later also al-Qaeda, for example) are driven by a deeply rooted antisemitic ideology that reached the Arab world through the Nazis (Küntzel 2007). The MB’s antisemitism crystallized in its close association with Husseini, a “rabid anti-Semite” who collaborated closely with the Nazis (Johnson 2010, pp. 111–12) and had transnational influence (Rubin and Schwanitz 2014, p. 6). The movement was, allegedly, even funded by German money (Küntzel 2007). Johnson also mentions that the MB received “significant funds” from Germany in the 1930s. The Nazi money was used to establish the movement’s secret military wing (Johnson 2010, p. 109). Tibi calls this the “Islamization of European antisemitism” (Tibi 2015, p. 457).



He argues that this was instigated by the MB and further radicalized by Sayyid Qutb, who developed a hatred of the West and concluded that the Jews rule the United States (Tibi 2015, p. 466).

Gershoni and Jankowski, on the other hand, argue that the collaboration with and admiration for Nazi Germany are overrated. The fact that the MB was in contact with Husseini does not mean that it shared the Mufti's antisemitism (Gershoni and Jankowski 2010, pp. 279–80). In fact, Mattar mentions that Husseini's "propaganda and military efforts [...] were either unsuccessful or were insignificant" (Mattar 1988, p. 237). Gershoni and Jankowski add that the MB had indeed "briefly received clandestine subsidies from the German News Agency in Cairo to facilitate its anti-British activism", but there was very little evidence for such contacts since the outbreak of the Second World War (Gershoni and Jankowski 2010, pp. 213–14). They also mention that describing the MB as "fascist" is inadequate and misleading as it "fails to account for the uniquely *Muslim*" and anticolonial nature of the movement (Gershoni and Jankowski 2010, pp. 211–12).

A key event in the development of the MB's antisemitism was the 1936 Arab Revolt that mostly focused on Jewish immigration and British rule in Palestine. The MB sent volunteers to Palestine, organized demonstrations and fundraising events, and spoke out against the Zionists and the British. The events in Palestine produced a change in Egyptian public opinion, "from indifference in the late 1920s to a deep sympathy for the Palestinians Arabs in the 1930s. This strongly reinforced the shift of public opinion from secular Egyptian nationalism and Westernization towards an Arab Islamic orientation, thus closer to the position of the Muslim Brothers" (Lia 1998, p. 235). Additionally, Gershoni argues that the MB utilized the Palestinian question to "strengthen its own ranks and expand its activities" and it generated the "most noticeable change in the essential character of the Society during the 1930s—the transition from religious preaching and education to social and economic agitation and, especially, dynamic political activism" (Gershoni 1986, p. 390). Lia agrees and mentions that the Palestine campaign became a "fundamental issue in the political struggle of the Muslim Brothers" (Lia 1998, p. 243).

The Palestine campaign propelled the Brotherhood into prominence. This is also what the MB propagated in *al-Da'wa*, in which it boasted about its achievements in Palestine in the 1930s (Santing 2020, pp. 67–70). Allegedly, there was little antisemitism in Egypt before 1936, whereas after the beginning of the Arab Revolt, the Brotherhood called for a boycott of Jewish businesses in Egypt, and fake rumors were spread about the Jews (Küntzel 2005, pp. 105–8).

According to Lia, however, "the official policy of the Muslim Brothers never came close to that of the Nazis in Europe. Apart from calling for the boycott of Jewish merchants, attacks remained verbal. The Brothers' anti-Jewish propaganda was inextricably connected to the Palestinian Revolt". There were no anti-Jewish articles in the movement's press throughout 1933–1936, for example, and even during the Revolt, many MB writers "attempted to uphold the essential distinction between Jews and Zionists" (Lia 1998, p. 244). Gershoni and Jankowski agree and argue that the MB's "hostile attitude toward Egyptian Jews did not reflect the movement's adoption of the tenets of contemporary European anti-Semitism". Were it not for the events in Palestine, peaceful coexistence with the Jews was seen a possibility, which was no option for the Nazis (Gershoni and Jankowski 2010, p. 224).

From a religious perspective, Tibi argues that antisemitism is alien to Islam (Tibi 2015, p. 462). Racist antisemitism and Jewish world order conspiracies were of European origin and generally foreign to Islamic views of the Jews. As the idea was not native to the Muslim world, it had to be "hammered" into it more forcefully. Thus, the conflict in Palestine was not the reason but an opportunity for its spread (Küntzel 2005, pp. 103–4). Husseini, moreover, aggravated these sentiments by using his office to "Islamize anti-Zionism and provide a religious rationale for hatred of Jews" (Küntzel 2005, p. 105). Nettler, on the other hand, argues that Muslim concerns with the Jews, especially after 1948, were expressed "in a way which is highly reminiscent of early Muslim depictions of the Jews". Although Zionism and the state of Israel gave rise to anti-Jewish sentiments, these have

“almost invariably been expressed in terms highly dependent on the ancient archetypes” and whatever Muslim writers “have taken from the West is easily combined with ancient Islamic doctrines” (Nettler 1990, p. 67).

After the Second World War, antisemitism had settled firmly in the Middle East. The loss of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war by the Arab states and the establishment of the state of Israel caused antisemitism to take a new dimension. This was later fueled by Nasser, who, for one, disseminated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the Arab world. The previously incited hate against Jews was further radicalized in an Islamist direction after 1967 (Küntzel 2005, pp. 108–10; Cohen 2013, p. 551). Cohen argues that Muslim antisemitism reached a “fever pit,” but Islamist movements, like the MB, “did not turn outward toward Zionism and Israel until relatively late, in the 1970s, following the debacle of the Six-Day War, the Egyptian peace treaty with Israel, and the Khomeini revolution in Iran” (Cohen 2013, p. 551), a view that is confirmed in *al-Da’wa* (Santing 2020, pp. 392–407).

Kenney, moreover, adds that “radical Islamists and their defenders used ‘Jew’ as a weapon of reproach against Sadat. Decoded, it meant that Sadat failed the test of Muslim leadership; he was responsible for his own death because he established relations with the greatest enemy of Islam, the Jews, thereby jeopardizing Egypt’s security and Islamic character” (1998, p. 66). In this sense, the peace with Israel gave the Islamists political leverage, because even though the state has absolute authority to use violence, it is “still constrained by the need for traditional religious sanction” (Kenney 1998, pp. 66–67).

#### 4. The Muslim Brotherhood under Sadat

Established in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, the MB developed from a socio-religious to a political-religious opposition movement within a few years (Mitchell 1993; Lia 1998). Al-Banna was assassinated in 1949, and he was succeeded by Hasan al-Hudaybi. In 1952, the Free Officers, including Gamal Abdel Nasser, launched a coup that toppled the monarchy. Initially, the Free Officers and the MB were on friendly terms, but it soon became evident that their interests were far apart, and a confrontation became inevitable (Arafat 2017). After a young Muslim Brother attempted to assassinate Nasser in 1954, the movement was declared illegal. Virtually all leaders were arrested; many members were incarcerated, in hiding, or they fled abroad, and the movement’s publications were put to a stop. The ban heralded a traumatic era of oppression and an underground existence for the MB (Santing 2020, pp. 85–114), which would continue until Nasser’s death.

Although internal discord had plagued the movement from the onset, an open conflict broke out between the radical and the more moderate factions during the Nasser years. Broadly speaking, Sayyid Qutb represented the radical camp and Hasan al-Hudaybi—the movement’s formal leader—the more moderate side (Rosefsky-Wickham 2013; Kepel 2003; Ashour 2009). Hudaybi was no strong leader, and he was incapable of providing the imprisoned, oppressed, and disillusioned Brothers with the powerful ideology they longed to hear. Qutb’s book *Milestones* eventually became the radical Muslim Brothers’ guidebook (Calvert 2010). Hudaybi openly declared himself against violence and wrote *Preachers, Not Judges* in answer to *Milestones* (Zollner 2009). This internal division was never healed successfully and continued to exist during the Sadat years, when, after Hudaybi’s death in 1973, Umar al-Tilmisani was the movement’s leader.

When Sadat came to power in 1970, he needed to consolidate his power. Therefore, he needed a strong group of supporters, for which he chose, among others, the Islamic groups (Beattie 2000, p. 115). Under Sadat, the Brotherhood enjoyed ever more freedom of movement and expression. The last Brothers in prison were released in 1975, and, that same year, a general amnesty was proclaimed for everyone who had been convicted for their political ideas during the Nasser years. Meanwhile, the movement remained illegal, but it was allowed to resume the publication of journals, the most prominent of which was *al-Da’wa* (Kepel 2003, pp. 104–6). Sadat also opened the Egyptian economy to (foreign) investors and started to seek a rapprochement with the West, especially the United States

(US). The enormous public sector—an inheritance from the socialist Nasser regime—was, moreover, replaced by a capitalist system.

Generally, the Middle East witnessed a religious upsurge in the 1970s. This can be connected to the 1967 War and subsequent defeat of the Arab countries (Ibrahim 1980, p. 425) as well as to a number of more general crises in the Middle East, such as the failure of secular leadership and the economic problems throughout the region (Dekmejian 1980, pp. 3–8). According to Ayubi, the 1973 Yom Kippur War was another key moment in the Egyptian process of Islamization, as it was launched during the month of Ramadan and had a religious aura from the onset (Ayubi 1980, pp. 490–91). Sadat even gave it the code name ‘Operation Badr’ (al-Arian 2014, p. 87). The religious upsurge was also connected to what Kepel describes as the “demographic explosion and the rural exodus” of the first generation that was predominantly literate and had never known direct colonial rule. Their confusion became a significant factor in the crisis of secular ideologies and led them toward faith (Kepel 2003, pp. 11–13).

This religious upsurge also translated into a “growing pervasiveness of Islamic thought in mainstream culture” (al-Arian 2014, p. 81) and “Egyptian Muslims increasingly applied Islam to their daily lives” (Rock-Singer 2019, p. 1). Sadat, who started calling himself the ‘believer president,’ passed a new constitution in 1971 that established *sharia* as a source of legislation. Additionally, many new mosques were built, al-Azhar enjoyed greater freedom, there was an increase in religious television programs, and much more. Sadat relied on Islamic principles for his legitimacy, and his Islamization policy likely also was aimed at “shifting the country’s political capital away from traditional ‘centers of power’” (al-Arian 2014, pp. 86–88). According to Rock-Singer, moreover, the Sadat era was a “period in which Statist religious elites and Islamist movements competed to shape society by asserting control over the daily rhythms of life within state institutions and, in the process, produced novel models of religiosity” (Rock-Singer 2019, p. 2).

The MB was, however, not the only Islamist opposition (Rock-Singer 2019). The 1970s also witnessed the rise of conservative Salafism, popular Sufism, and militant jihadism in Egypt’s Islamic field (al-Arian 2014, pp. 81–85). Thus, even though the Brotherhood’s future looked bright, its return was not a smooth one. During the prison years under Nasser, other Islamic groups had begun to compete for power, and the movement returned to find “increasing diversity within the field of Islamic activism”, which posed an “unwanted challenge to its authority”. This diversity nevertheless “provided the Muslim Brotherhood with an opportunity to distinguish itself from the rise of fringe elements pursuing a militant path and possibly to attain for itself a better standing with the state” (al-Arian 2014, p. 76). Sadat, on the other hand, also needed the MB’s cooperation “if he wanted to contain the radical elements at the far right of the Islamic movement” (Willi 2021, p. 79).

Overall, the Brotherhood profited from the religious upsurge. Combined with the relative freedom it was granted by Egyptian authorities, it managed to expand significantly in the 1970s and develop into a mass movement with growing political ambitions. However, many members found it hard to pick up after having spent so many years in prison, and when the movement made its return, it was internally divided over its future course. Rock-Singer, moreover, argues that none of the different competing Islamic currents, including the MB, had the “capacity to lead a mass movement in the early 1970s, while all sought to do so through the frame of Islamic Revival by the decade’s end” (Rock-Singer 2019, p. 51). Willi adds that when Tilmisani took over in 1973, the Brotherhood was so weakened that it “could barely be called an organization, let alone a social movement” (Willi 2021, p. 50). Adding to the movement’s internal divisions, Sadat shifted his attention to MB leaders abroad and employed a divide-and-conquer strategy. Consequently, the leaders faced the challenge of coordinating between the different factions that emerged (al-Arian 2014, pp. 91–94).

Three camps had emerged within the MB by 1973, according to al-Arian. The first believed that the movement had to lay low for a while and called for a return to cultural and intellectual activism. The second group advocated Islamic activism and believed the MB needed a strong internal structure, a rigid hierarchy, and a strong membership

base. The third faction combined elements of the first two groups and coalesced around Tilmisani, who “managed to combine elements of the conflicting perspectives to form a cohesive vision for the future of the Muslim Brotherhood” (al-Arian 2014, p. 100).

Regarding the movement’s formal course, Ashour argues that the MB’s leadership attempted to de-radicalize its ranks three times: between 1951 and 1953, between 1964 and 1965, and between 1969 and 1973. The first two attempts failed, but the third was, allegedly, successful and “led to the promotion of the moderation process” that the movement underwent during the leadership of Tilmisani (Ashour 2009, p. 63), who played a “pivotal role” in the movement’s reconstitution (Willi 2021, p. 51). According to al-Arian, moreover, Tilmisani was “grateful for Sadat’s apparent change of heart” regarding the MB, whereas other groups were more “weary of the state’s legacy of repression of independent political voices, especially those inspired by Islam” (al-Arian 2014, p. 88).

The relationship with the regime began to deteriorate in 1977. This is the year in which the first major demonstrations against the Sadat administration, which had driven many people into poverty, were organized. In order to reduce government expenditure, Sadat wanted to reduce the system of subsidies he had inherited from Nasser. When the cancellation of subsidies on bread and other basic commodities was ordered in January 1977, Egyptians from various social classes took the streets in what became known as the ‘bread riots’. Whereas Sadat accused his leftist rivals of orchestrating the uprisings, he realized that he needed to calm the public outrage (Willi 2021, pp. 82–84). At the same time, a growing number of radical Islamic groups emerged. The major turning point, however, was the President’s controversial visit to Israel—the avowed enemy of the MB—in November 1977 and the subsequent peace talks between Egypt and Israel, against which the Brotherhood openly declared itself in *al-Da’wa*.

Most Arab countries condemned Sadat’s overtures to Israel, and the peace agreement isolated Egypt from the rest of the Arab world. At home, many Egyptians supported the peace, but, most opposition leaders and political elites did not. Several factors contributed to domestic support for the peace agreement. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, many Egyptians wanted to maintain the relative stability and rebuild the economy. The regime, moreover, launched a massive media campaign in favor of the peace initiative. The sheikh of al-Azhar had also given religious authority to the initiative by issuing a fatwa, which gave the peace treaty religious sanction (Cook 2013, p. 151).

There was also resistance and criticism. Different Islamic groups launched attacks against the regime. Political elites from the left, in particular, disagreed with the peace agreement out of loyalty to the concept of the Arab union and solidarity with the Palestinians (Beattie 2000, pp. 231–34). Furthermore, several members of Sadat’s own National Democratic Party openly revolted against the decision. Consequently, Sadat dismissed Parliament three weeks after signing the peace treaty (Cook 2013, p. 151). He eventually also closed down all oppositional media, including *al-Da’wa*, in September 1981.

Like other Islamic groups in Egypt, the MB did not accept the peace treaty. This was clearly reflected in *al-Da’wa* (Santing 2020, pp. 233–43, 392–407). Umar Tilmisani, for instance, criticized handing over any Islamic land to the Jews, which he felt was against Islam. Accordingly, “our religion demands from us that we extract every inch of Muslim land if non-Muslims have forced their way into it” (*al-Da’wa* 21, p. 2). Willi subscribes to this view and argues that the peace treaty “pushed the relationship between Sadat and the Brotherhood to its lowest point yet” (Willi 2021, p. 94).

##### 5. *Al-Da’wa* and Antisemitic Conspiracies

*Al-Da’wa* was founded in the aftermath of al-Banna’s death by Salih ‘Ashmawi, the former head of the MB’s Secret Apparatus. He was ousted from the movement in 1953 but continued to publish the journal independently. By the time the MB was allowed to publish its own journals under Sadat, ‘Ashmawi had managed to maintain his original publishing license. He approached Tilmisani, and, together, they oversaw the journal’s gen-



eral direction (al-Arian 2014, p. 182–83). It was published from June 1976 until September 1981, when Sadat banned all oppositional press.

As for the readership, Holtmann argues that “the *Da’wa* group represented the section of the bourgeoisie that profited from the *infatih*” (Holtmann 2009, p. 8), Sadat’s opening up of the economy. Kepel agrees and argues that *al-Da’wa* should be attributed to a new generation of Muslim Brothers, which he calls the “Neo-Muslim Brethren” (Kepel 2003, p. 107). More generally, Rock-Singer adds that “Islamic print media served as a key means of social mobilization” during the Sadat years, and *al-Da’wa* “represented the sole site where the Brothers could safely address a national audience and lay claim on a vision of Islamizing state and society [ . . . ]” (Rock-Singer 2019, pp. 2–3). He also points out that the journal mostly targeted a middle-class audience (Rock-Singer 2019, pp. 52–74). With regard to the distribution, *al-Da’wa* itself mentioned in 1977 that it had a distribution of 78,000 (*al-Da’wa* 8: 17).

In order to construct the MB’s antisemitic conspiratorial discourse, I carried out a qualitative content analysis, for which I read all issues of *al-Da’wa* (1976–1981) in an in-depth manner. I looked for all articles that dealt with the Jews as a religious phenomenon and/or the Jews (or Zionists) as a political phenomenon, which mostly related to the state of Israel and the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty. Subsequently, I noted page numbers, authors, keywords, and short summaries of all these articles in a database. All quotes from *al-Da’wa* in the following paragraphs are, thus, my own translations.

In *al-Da’wa*, several lines of conspiratorial antisemitic discourse can be distinguished, starting with the notion that the Jews are agents of the West, most notably the US, and vice versa. Generally, *al-Da’wa* seems to believe that the Jews, the US, and, at times, also the (Communist) East are plotting to oppose Islam and gain world dominance. Examples are aplenty. For example, one article argues that “peace the American–Jewish way” is forced upon the Arabs (*al-Da’wa* 8: 58–59). Another article argues that “American policy has two faces: one towards the Arabs and one towards the Jews”. Allegedly, US policy consists of promises to the Arabs and weapons and money for the Jews (*al-Da’wa* 17: 50–51). Not just the US sides with the Jews; the same can be said for the Soviet Union (SU). In one article titled “O Muslim rulers, are you not afraid of God”, it is argued that both the US and the SU do whatever it takes to support the Jews in achieving their ambitions, not out of love for the Jews but out of hatred of Islam (*al-Da’wa* 20: 2–3). This union of the Jews with the US, which is seen as a collective struggle against Islam, is again expressed in an article that underscores that President Carter talks much about human rights but allows for Muslims to be displaced and tortured in Israeli prisons, whereas he openly expresses his grief whenever something happens to a Jew (*al-Da’wa* 24: 2–3). Not long after, another editorial mentions that “Moscow is always on the side of the Jews and Washington is always against the Arabs” (*al-Da’wa* 26: 32–33). Why, then, does the West embrace the Jews? This is, among other things, connected to the strong influence of American Jews and Christians alike (*al-Da’wa* 48: 4–6). In fact, “forty million evangelical Christians support Zionism [even] more than Jews [themselves]” (*al-Da’wa* 61: 25). Moreover, “the truth about the position of the [different] parties in the Arab–Israeli conflict” is that the world powers stand with the Jews (*al-Da’wa* 53: 7–9). In another article titled “The Jews: from the atomic bomb to the Shekel” it is mentioned that the Jews are supported by western countries, predominantly the US, and that they have managed to convince the world of their standing, meanwhile strengthening themselves in every field (*al-Da’wa* 60: 28–30).

Another aspect of this desire for world dominance is the alleged influence of Jews in (global) media. For example, the Jews are accused of heading an “intellectual campaign” against Muslims in general and Egyptians in particular. Purportedly, first, a military movement took control of the Islamic world, and now an intellectual movement threatens Islam. This intellectual movement is no less dangerous than the military movement; in fact, the latter is easier to expose, whereas the intellectual campaigns do not need much more than a pen and media exposure (*al-Da’wa* 51: 24). The Jews are the secret force

behind destructive media, “spreading their venom together with the US and the SU” (*al-Da'wa* 62: 3).

The Jews’ evil intentions are, furthermore, reflected in their desire to eventually take control of Egypt and other (Muslim) countries in order to establish a Greater Israel and gain ever more control of the region. Therefore, the peace deal with Egypt is only beneficial for the Jews. This “Israeli concept of peace” is based on Israel’s desire to eventually become a superpower state (*al-Da'wa* 12: 38–39). In the end, the Jews want a state stretching from the Euphrates to the Nile (*al-Da'wa* 13: 17–19), and, despite the peace deal, it is unlikely that the “Jews will give up on the map of a Greater Israel” (*al-Da'wa* 35: 61). “Today Jerusalem and the Golan, tomorrow Jordan and Lebanon” (*al-Da'wa* 52: 4–6). Eventually, they want to control the whole world (*al-Da'wa* 42: 27–29), and the normalization of relations with Egypt is just “one step of the total Israeli plan” (*al-Da'wa* 48: 16–17).

The character traits ascribed to the Jews are exclusively negative and depict them, in a classical antisemitic way, as evil, untrustworthy, and inhuman. In “[Menachem] Begin is the unadorned face of Israel”, for example, it is argued that the tendency to aggression and treachery are latent in the soul of every Jew (*al-Da'wa* 13: 58–60). “The Jews: intolerance, selfishness and apathy” argues that their religious history is marked by intolerance, their social history by selfishness, their political history by treason, their ideological history by apathy, their economic history by greed, and their moral history by treachery and meanness (*al-Da'wa* 21: 2–3). They are, moreover, depicted as “propagandists of factionalism, destruction, corruption and decay” (*al-Da'wa* 32: 15–17). Additionally, “the character of the Jews prevents them from living in peace with others” (*al-Da'wa* 42: 27–29), and lying lies in their nature as they only advocate peace with their mouth, whereas their actions advocate war (*al-Da'wa* 44: 31). Jews are, moreover, depicted as killers of prophets and, in fact, “most people who commit crimes against humanity are Jews” (*al-Da'wa* 49: 16–17). Throughout history, they have proved themselves to be untrustworthy, never allowing others to interfere in their affairs whilst always interfering in the lives of others in order to corrupt them with their intrigues and deceit (*al-Da'wa* 61: 22–23). One author wonders how Egypt can have diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations with the Jews, whilst they cannot be trusted and their history is filled with greed and evil (*al-Da'wa* 51: 39). This greed is further underscored in another article that argues that money is their God (*al-Da'wa* 52: 24–25).

By far, the largest share of antisemitic conspiratorial articles in *al-Da'wa* is connected to Israel and the peace with Egypt. Everything related to Israel is suspicious, including, very prominently, the peace deal, against which the MB openly speaks out. It is called “un-Islamic” and “we object to Camp David and peace with Israel” (*al-Da'wa* 47: 4–6). “Peace is incompatible with the Zionists’ intentions” of expanding their power and territory (*al-Da'wa* 45: 18–19) and the MB sees it as “its main duty” to inform Israel that it is not welcome in Egypt (*al-Da'wa* 47: 27). “Stopping the negotiations is not enough; they need to be canceled,” proclaims Tilmisani in the summer of 1980. The MB is, accordingly, against all forms of normalization and does not believe that Israel truly wants reconciliation (*al-Da'wa* 50: 4–7). That same year, Tilmisani again writes that the MB refuses the peace initiative because of Israel’s treachery but also because it goes against *sharia* (*al-Da'wa* 56: 4–7). In what could be seen as a call for mobilization, Tilmisani later writes: “normalization of the relations with the Jews is all evil and it is up to the Egyptian people to boycott the Jews in everything” (*al-Da'wa* 60: 4–7).

Egyptians are, in fact, repeatedly called upon to boycott the Israelis, for example, in recurring small articles titled “To every Egyptian”. “Do we accept”, for example, that we have to deal with the people of Israel when they occupy the al-Aqsa mosque (*al-Da'wa* 47: 29), “brazenly declare” that Jerusalem is their capital (*al-Da'wa* 48: 63), “denounce your religion” (*al-Da'wa* 48: 63), “infiltrate every aspect of our lives and want to see us end up in the gutter” (*al-Da'wa* 62: 63) and “want to remove you from your religion” (*al-Da'wa* 63: 55)?

The peace deal is also believed to only benefit Israel, not Egypt. “Normalization of the relations with Israel [only] achieves [Israel’s] ambitions and hopes” (*al-Da’wa* 45: 4–6). “The four greatest dangers coming from Israel” are the invasion of the Egyptian mind, the further isolation of Egypt from other Arab countries, the strengthening of the myth of Jewish superiority, and the fact that Egypt’s economy will be at the mercy of Israel (*al-Da’wa* 46: 46–48). The normalization will result in an intellectual, economic, social, and political invasion; “are we taking the bait” (*al-Da’wa* 47: 19)? “We were honest,” but Israel will harm Egypt’s welfare (*al-Da’wa* 47: 47). “The Jews and the conspiracy to tame the Egyptian people”, in addition, argues that the peace deal is a planned project to corrupt the Egyptian people. The Jews want to influence us in every way, an indoctrination that should be opposed (*al-Da’wa* 64: 22–23).

Additionally, the peace deal is repeatedly framed as un-Islamic, and the Jews are depicted as plotting against Islam. In “The many enemies of the *umma*”, it is argued that Islam has faced many enemies since its inception, starting with Mohammed and the Jews, then the Crusaders, and now the alliance of Jews, communists, and capitalists against Islam (*al-Da’wa* 40: 66). In fact, Islamic scriptures teach us not to trust the Jews (*al-Da’wa* 47: 55). The peace deal is, thus, un-Islamic and a historical mistake (*al-Da’wa* 48: 16–17), and the Jews, who always played a dividing role in Islamic history, now (after Camp David) continue to sow division between Muslims (*al-Da’wa* 32: 4–5). Additionally, it is mentioned that the year of the peace deal was a “black year”, in which relations with the enemy of God were normalized, whereas peace with the enemy is not (even) required in Islam (*al-Da’wa* 59: 47). “We do not fear peace”, as Islam is essentially peaceful but not at any price (*al-Da’wa* 38: 4–5).

## 6. The Functionality of Antisemitic Conspiracies for the Muslim Brotherhood

Often, conspiracy theories arise in times of social or political unrest or societal crisis, and they can help explain bad events (Moscovici 1987; Kofta et al. 2020; Sunstein and Vermeule 2009; Bale 2007). This “scapegoating function” (Landes 2007) helps to focus anger and hostility on external victims while explaining any negative events that occur. As for the MB, at the time the antisemitic conspiracies became a prominent feature in *al-Da’wa*, the political, social, and economic situation in Egypt was turbulent. The bread riots, rising religiosity, peace with Israel, the subsequent international isolation, Egypt’s close(r) relationship with the US, and the change to a more capitalist economic system and subsequent rise in poverty all contributed to a broad range of unrest that needed explaining. Additionally, economically deprived people are more susceptible to conspiracies (Kofta et al. 2020), and the economic situation of many Egyptians deteriorated significantly in the 1970s. The fact that Egypt remained, socially and politically, a closed society under Sadat (Hibbard 2010) could further help to explain why the MB and its audience were susceptible to believing in conspiracy theories and why they were inclined to produce them (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009).

Anti-Israel expressions became more prominent in the late 1960s and 1970s in developing countries (Volkov 2006), which also comes to the fore in *al-Da’wa*, published in the late 1970s and early 1980s in Egypt, a developing country (Bruton 1983) that was the first Arab nation to establish peace with Israel. This politicization of antisemitism (Schroeter 2018) went hand in hand with Volkov’s notion that through the adoption of old antisemitic claims, the Jews became a symbol of the West (Volkov 2006), in this case, especially the US. Conspiracies are, moreover, often the work of a minority composed of foreigners or financed by and in league with foreign powers, usually operating in secrecy (Moscovici 1987; Keeley 1999; van Prooijen et al. 2015). In the case of *al-Da’wa*, the Jews are believed to form a (secret) alliance with the West and, to a lesser extent, the communist East. This alliance has a shared aim for world dominance at the expense of others, especially the Muslims.

As argued by, among others, Bale (2007), Clark (2002), Keeley (1999), and Moscovici (1987), the significance of conspiracies is often downplayed rather than seriously examined.

As for the Marks & Spencer (M&S) case, for example, closer investigation shows that the allegations made by the MB did not come out of the blue. M&S was run by a well-to-do Jewish family, known for its long-standing involvement with early Anglo-Zionism and, later, Israeli political affairs. The family had been part of Chaim Weizmann's "Zionist circle" in Manchester since the 1910s (Kurz 2006, pp. 5–24), where it played a significant role as "facilitators, fund-raisers, and organizers" (Schneer 2011, p. 116). Moreover, Marcus Sieff, chairman in the 1970s, fought on the Israeli side during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War (Sieff 1986). Additionally, M&S continued to conduct business with Israel, from where it exported, among other things, suits, t-shirts, lettuce, and underwear (Sieff 1986, pp. 202–7). For many years, the company's only significant imports came from two Israeli producers (Chapman 2004, p. 3). Sieff also openly advocated peace between Israel and Egypt, exemplified by his promise that M&S would help Egypt develop its textile and food industries if a peace agreement was signed. Sieff even traveled to Egypt in 1980 with a delegation of M&S, where he also met Sadat (Sieff 1986, pp. 230–36). In fact, he had previously attempted to campaign for peace between Israel and Egypt. In 1968, the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, was in London. Sieff met him in his hotel because he knew that he was a good friend of Nasser, and he wanted the Egyptian President to make peace with Israel (Han et al. 2015, pp. 107–8).

Nevertheless, the fact that there is some truth to a conspiracy does not mean that it is necessarily rational to believe in such a theory (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009). It is unlikely that M&S produced the blasphemous underwear as the only proof provided by *al-Da'wa* is a drawing. Closer examination of the underwear collection of the late 1970s in the M&S archives, moreover, did not reveal any underpants with a print that could be read as a reversed *shahada*. Nevertheless, the accusation against M&S shows how easily the MB's "deeply rooted beliefs" (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009) surface, beliefs that simply fit well "within a general narrative about who is the aggressor" (Sunstein and Vermeule 2009), in this case, the Jews and their alleged plots against Islam.

The antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa* show clear signs of what Tibi (2015) calls the "Islamization of European antisemitism". These MB antisemitic conspiracies evidently relate to classical European antisemitism, originating from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, first published in Russia in 1903 and, "arguably, the most influential piece of antisemitic propaganda ever created" (Bronner 2000, p. 71). Connections between the antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa* and the *Protocols* are aplenty. For instance, Jews were depicted in *al-Da'wa* as greedy and money-hungry. According to the first protocol, they use their money to buy political power in order to, eventually, seize power by means of violence, cunning, bribery, deceit, and treachery. Additionally, Jews are believed to control the press (protocol 2 and 12), which they use to manipulate people. The same can be said for education (protocol 16); the Jews wish to abolish the independence of thought, which they initially claimed to promote. Jewish control of the press and of education are echoed in *al-Da'wa*. Jews are, moreover, evil and bloodthirsty, and they will rule mercilessly once they take power (protocol 3 and 15), something they already do in Palestine, according to *al-Da'wa*. Them being an international force (protocol 4) only makes them stronger and more dangerous, and, as mentioned in the fourth protocol, it is hard to overthrow an invisible force, something *al-Da'wa* subscribes to. The treacherous behavior of Jews, often mentioned in *al-Da'wa*, can also be found in the *Protocols*, for example, in the ninth protocol, which argues that Jews only pretend to accept the law, whereas they actually corrupt the system from within. In the end, their eventual goal is to eliminate all other religions, as stated in, e.g., the fourteenth protocol. This also comes to the fore in *al-Da'wa*, where Jews are depicted as slayers of prophets and, most notably, as conspiring against Islam. In line with Nettler's (1990) observations, we find in *al-Da'wa*'s antisemitism a combination of western influence and traditional Islamic doctrines.

As argued by Pipes (1996) and Grey (2020), conspiracies are important to understand the political culture of the Middle East and form an essential part of its political discourse. The MB wanted to establish itself as a political group and was searching for more political



power and representation under Sadat (al-Arian 2014; Rock-Singer 2019; Willi 2021). By speaking out against any overtures to Israel in *al-Da'wa*, the MB emphasized the dangers this poses to (Egyptian) Muslims. Having a strong enemy, such as the Jews, thus fitted well within the political culture in which the MB wanted to participate, and it could also help strengthen its own political legitimacy and authority (Yablokov 2018; Fenster 1999).

From a historical perspective, the movement had been deeply involved with the struggle for Palestine, and this heroic episode played an important role in its historiography and the way it portrayed itself to its members and the outside world (Santing 2020). Not speaking out against Sadat's overtures would have been a renouncement of what the movement propagated. Additionally, the events in Palestine indicate how the MB already utilized the Palestinian question in the 1930s to enhance its political activism and strengthen its political authority (Lia 1998; Gershoni and Jankowski 2010). Thus, it remains debatable whether antisemitism is, historically, an intrinsic part of MB ideology, as mentioned by Küntzel (2007). Collaboration with and admiration for Nazi Germany was overrated, and the MB's anti-Jewish rhetoric seemed more anti-Zionist (or pro-Palestinian) than anti-Jewish (Gershoni 1986; Lia 1998; Gershoni and Jankowski 2010). It seems that the MB was historically not necessarily against Jews but rather against Jews in Palestine and, later, the state of Israel.

Additionally, peace with Israel put pressure on the complicated relationship between the MB and the regime. The MB was cautiously tolerated but remained illegal, and, if it overstepped the regime's red lines, it risked a return to the dark days of the Nasser era. Resuming its pre-Sadat activism "was sure to set off a new round of confrontation with the state" (al-Arian 2014, p. 96). One clear example of this uneasy relationship is Sadat's disputed visit to Jerusalem. The event itself was not elaborately discussed in *al-Da'wa*, but many critical and conspiratorial articles on Jews and Israel appeared afterwards. This seems to indicate that the movement was not prepared to directly attack the regime but felt confident enough to indirectly challenge Sadat's political choices by targeting the Jews, who predominantly symbolized Israel. In addition, aside from the peace with Israel, the movement also spoke out against other political events, such as the regime's alleged failure to implement *sharia* legislation, rising prices, food shortages, the housing crisis, birth control campaigns, political corruption, the obstruction of the MB's political participation, and much more (Santing 2020, pp. 233–91). The peace deal with Israel was, however, discussed most vigorously.

The movement competed for socio-political authority and piety on multiple levels—with the regime, with other Islamic groups, and internally, it had to satisfy its own divided rank-and-file (al-Arian 2014; Rock-Singer 2019; Willi 2021; Ashour 2009). The antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa* can be viewed as part of this multilevel struggle for authority on behalf of the MB. As for Sadat, the antisemitic conspiracies indicated that he was a bad Muslim for brokering a peace deal with the enemy and that this deal is, in fact, un-Islamic. Depicting the Jews as agents of the West added to the delegitimization of the president, who sought rapprochement to the presumed immoral and pro-Jewish West. Such rhetoric made Sadat seem untrustworthy and even anti-Islamic, which was a serious accusation. These critiques were challenging for Sadat, as he needed religious sanction for his socio-political legitimacy (Kenney 1998), and he also needed the MB's cooperation to contain radical Islamist currents (Willi 2021), which gave the movement political leverage. However, the fact that *al-Da'wa* was banned in September 1981, together with all oppositional press, demonstrates that the MB not only regarded itself as political opposition but that the regime also viewed the MB as such. If the regime had not deemed the MB as threatening, it would not have felt the need to ban the journal. When reading *al-Da'wa*, this perceived threat appears to be realistic. Generally, Islamic media in the 1970s were a "key means of social mobilization" (Rock-Singer 2019), and the MB did appear to mobilize its readers in *al-Da'wa*, for instance, by its repeated calls to boycott the Jews and not accept the peace treaty.

Regarding the other Islamic groups that the MB competed with for authority, anti-semitic conspiracies were also a tool to assert its dominance in the religious field. The MB

positioned itself in *al-Da'wa* as an opponent to the regime, a protagonist of the Palestinian question since the 1930s and, more generally, an advocate and protagonist of true Islam. By drenching the Jewish threats in religious terms and framing the conspiracies as a broad struggle against Muslims, the MB portrayed the alleged dangers as a struggle between the Jews and Islam, with the MB in the forefront. This also shows from the articles that address “every Egyptian,” for example, in which the MB positions itself at the protagonist of all Muslims.

Internally, the Jews also had a scapegoating function that helped the MB to unite its divided rank-and-file by appealing to a common enemy as conspiracies can be used as a “unifying narrative” (Grey 2020). The MB had been internally divided for many years (al-Arian 2014; Willi 2021), and the growth under Sadat resulted in an increasingly broad following that had to be appeased and kept together. The Jews were a safe enemy that could be used to legitimize the MB’s position as an authoritative Islamic oppositional movement and to satisfy its followers by expressing strong language regarding an enemy that would likely not endanger the hard-fought position the MB had obtained under Sadat (Santing 2020).

Overall, the antisemitism expressed in *al-Da'wa* is multifaceted and broadly fits into Lewis’ (1986) first and third category of hostility directed at Jews. As for the first category, the MB’s antisemitic discourse is mostly opposition to Israel and to the Zionist movement. Thus, the (critique on the) Arab–Israeli conflict and, in this case, the Egyptian–Israeli peace seems to be mostly politically motivated, not religious. On the other hand, *al-Da'wa*’s antisemitic conspiracies are also in line with Lewis’ third category of antisemitism. The MB unmistakably views the Jews as a special, at times, even satanic, kind of evil, different from other enemies. They are the root of much of the evil in the world, and facts and other information were fabricated to support this view. This merger between antisemitism and anti-Zionism or anti-Israel sentiments also shows from the choice of words in *al-Da'wa*, where the terms “Jews” and “Zionist” are used interchangeably and, often, as being synonymous with “Israel”.

## 7. Conclusions

Antisemitic conspiracies formed an intrinsic part of the MB discourse under Sadat. The way the MB instrumentalized the antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa* in order to strengthen its socio-political authority is multifaceted. On the one hand, it was a clear reaction to the peace with Israel, a political event that conflicted so much with what the movement stood for that it had little choice but to respond fiercely. This was likely also expected by its broad rank-and-file that had to be appeased, which became increasingly challenging after the return to the socio-political scene and the subsequent growth of the movement under Sadat. Having a common enemy helped to distract attention from internal issues, and speaking out against a far enemy was safer than directly attacking Sadat, who could make it hard for the MB as it was still officially an illegal movement. By emphasizing the Jewish threats, especially in relation to Egypt and, more specifically, in relation to Islam, the MB positioned itself as the main protagonist of Islam and, consequently, as a religious, moral, and political authority. This message not only appealed to its own rank-and-file but was directed at all Muslims. The antisemitic conspiracies in *al-Da'wa*, thus, conveyed a message that was essentially socio-political, albeit often framed in religious terms. In this sense, the Jews and everything that could be attributed to them, such as the products of M&S, formed an ideal scapegoat. However, calling the MB under Sadat an essentially antisemitic movement is over-simplified. Yes, *al-Da'wa* promulgated classical (European) antisemitic conspiracies, but these were utilized by the movement for purposes other than mere hatred and distrust of the Jews and Jewish–Muslim polemics. This underscores Lewis’ notion that the different types of hostility towards Jews may interact and merge. Antisemitism is, thus, in this regard, a spectrum, and in the case of the MB under Sadat, it seems more appropriate to speak of anti-Israel sentiments that were utilized by the MB for socio-political purposes rather than anti-Jewish conspiracies.

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