7 The Political Economy of Radicalization: Informal Networks and the Rise of an Urban Militant Islamism in Cairo

In Egypt, by the 1990s, both state policy and broader external forces played a role in the rise of Islamist militancy in informal Cairo. To be sure the persistence in the popularity of the *Jama'a al-Islamiyya* following the siege of Imbaba was in great part a response to the blatant abuse of security forces, which incarcerated scores of Islamists and the litany of abuses on the part of state security services, which included the use of local traditional authorities in the monitoring and surveillance of "terrorists." However, the rise in the popularity of militant Islamists in Imbaba was a response to broader external economic forces that had increasingly isolated the quarters of Western Munira, geographically and economically, from the mainstream of Cairean society. These included structural changes in the national and local economy; persistent neglect of the community by state institutions, including local municipal officials, and nearly two decades of authoritarian policies that severely circumscribed avenues of political participation and adversely affected the quality of life of residents of Western Munira and accelerated the decline and deterioration of their neighborhood.[1]

The context for Islamic militancy in this period is closely associated with broader economic and political factors that in the 1970s and early 1980s combined to produce a transformation in terms of the articulation of urban space, social organization, and Islamist political activism. As detailed in Chapter 1, in the Sadat era and the early years of the Mubarak regime expatriate workers heavily invested their earnings in housing stock, which resulted in a dramatic boom in informal housing and, by extension, informal labor (especially labor in the construction sector), concentrated in informal settlements such as Western Munira in Imbaba.

In the post-1986 recession era, the combination of the drying up of remittance inflows from migrant workers and economic reforms in the form of price liberalization effectively undercut black-market currency trading and the power of informal financial institutions. However, it did not result in the demise of all segments of informal economic activity. Economic reforms encouraged the further expansion of informally organized wage earners and the expansion of informally organized production

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and work. That is, the old Nasserite economic system rooted in a social contract between large firms and a stable, unionized industrial labor force gave way to a new regime based on service occupations and a dramatic reorganization of labor markets and wage structures. By 1995 upward of 62 percent of Egypt's economically active population was engaged in informal sector activities in at least one of their primary, secondary, or tertiary economic activities.[2] Moreover, as in other labor-exporting countries, the general investment boom associated with the internationalization of the Egyptian economy led to an expansion of the informalization of the markets in housing, land, and labor. As a result of the reduction of subsidies and social welfare (as well as the continued increase in the rates in population growth and urbanization), Islamic Welfare Associations (*al-Jam'iyyat al-sharia al-Islamiyya*) and numerous private mosques (*ahali*) expanded dramatically. Taken together these developments altered social relations and political developments at the community level in a dramatic fashion.

As discussed in Chapter 4, by the 1990s, thousands of these Islamic voluntary associations managed to develop a parallel economy and a parallel welfare system. In some instances, these modes of informal organization translated into an Islamist-inspired challenge to the state. Moreover, where radical Islamist activists of the Islamic Group were able to exploit informal financial networks and procure informal labor contracts for their supporters in the informal settlements around Cairo, they used these as bases of power and influence. Using private financial sources that often bypassed the strict regulations of the state to activate social networks and establish and fund a dense network of private mosques, activist leaders of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya sought to build, literally, a "state within a state." However, contrary to some accounts, this new, more militant Islamist movement was not ubiquitous among Egypt's urban poor. Rather, al-Jama'a's "takeover" of parts of Cairo's informal settlements grew out of the ascendancy of an informal labor force that relied on the expansion of informal markets in housing and labor. In the informal settlements of Cairo, al-Jama'a leaders adapted "traditional" Egyptian rural norms in ways that allowed them to supplant the political power of local notables while institutionalizing extortion practices and implementing their own brand of "law and order."

Al-Jama'a militants exploited the high levels of social and economic uncertainty in Cairo's informal housing areas while simultaneously framing their message in ways that resonated with the conservative norms of many local residents. Indeed, an important reason for the popularity of al-Jama'a in this period among local residents was its ability to settle local disputes, albeit often through highly coercive methods, and to enforce

informal labor contracts for its members, while simultaneously preaching against the ills of conspicuous consumption and imposing strict Islamic modes of conduct. The socioeconomic conditions that played a key role in the popularity of Islamist radicalism were made possible by economic change at both the international and domestic level. However, despite its violent confrontation with militant Islam, the Egyptian state, until the historic uprisings of 2011, demonstrated relative political continuity in the context of drastic economic policy transformation.[3]

A Comprehensive Strategy of Militant Mobilization

The link between these political and economic developments and the rise in the popularity of more militant forms of Islamist activism in the informal quarters of Imbaba is rooted in four factors: First, the social organization of the informal labor market in Imbaba was particularly conducive to drawing the rank and file of adherents to the militants. This, as I argue later, was because it mirrored the structure, organization, and normative framework of al-Jama'a as it developed in the informal quarters. Moreover, while these informal labor markets are characterized by the absence of legal and bureaucratic institutions, they are nevertheless regulated by informal institutions such as customary norms, kinship ties, and in the case of some of these ascriptive ties in Western Munira in the 1980s and 1990s, Islamist networks. As scholars of informal networks have long established, informalization implies that labor control relies less on the associative pattern of social organization (e.g., collective bargaining or corporatist arrangements) and more on authoritarian forms of "indigenous networks" which are knit together by family, friends, kinship, and regional affinities.[4] Naturally, which of these ascriptive ties and networks (i.e., religious, kinship, regional) are mobilized at a particular historical moment requires close examination of locally specific institutional settings.[5]

Second, militant leaders benefited from the weakened role of local traditional leaders and institutions. As detailed in Chapter 1, informal councils (*majalis 'urfiyya*) and dispute settlement committees (*lijan sulh*) which had traditionally maintained social order saw their traditional authority greatly undermined by the late 1980s as a result of drastic demographic, political, and socioeconomic transformations. But in the 1990s and 2000s the latter's authority in the quarters of Imbaba was further eroded as a result of the regime's persistent "war on terrorism" against militants, which essentially transformed the bulk of local traditional leaders into security agents of the state exacerbating the grievances of local residents against state authorities.

Third, the role of Islamic Welfare Associations, and particularly the dense network of private Mosques in Western Munira, and the dissemination of particular Islamist norms via the congregational sermons provided both the material and normative orientation for young men to join the ranks of the militants. And, finally, an important factor associated with the popularity of the Islamic Group in mobilizing members in Western Munira, and the violent nature of this type of mobilization had to do with the way in which militants established mafia-like "protection rackets." Indeed, the manner in which militants attempted to "build a state within a state" conforms closely to Tilly's description of local strongmen – forcing merchants to pay tribute under threat and actual use of violence. The militants also routinely used intimidation and violence to settle local disputes and procure and enforce labor contracts for new and potential members. One sympathizer of al-Jama'a in Western Munira summarized their strategy succinctly:

When we have trouble, the Muslims quickly come to help. If someone treats you unfairly, you can go to the Muslims and they speak to him or beat him. If someone tries to flirt with your daughter, they threaten him. If you are in debt, they tell the moneychanger to be patient.[6]

Consequently, the leaders of al-Jama'a utilized a comprehensive strategy, which entailed approximating social relations and normative frames familiar to local residents, enforced strict "Islamic" modes of conduct to safeguard the "Islamic" family, and used coercive as well as noncoercive methods to settle disputes and enforce contracts in a highly competitive, and unstable, informal labor market. As a result of the combination of these factors militant activists in the quarters of Western Munira were able to mobilize a significant number of adherents to their organization and ultimately pose a threat to the state.

Joining the Militants

The primary reason that the crisis in Imbaba had such dramatic political consequence is that it represented a new phenomenon in the modern history of the Islamist trend in Egypt. In the 1970s and 1980s, in the initial phase of the Islamist trend in urban Cairo, the Muslim Brotherhood primarily spearheaded Islamist activism. In this period the Ikhwan managed to build a wide range of financial and civil society institutions through a successful social movement that was, unlike the Jama'a, largely nonviolent. The siege of Imbaba made it abundantly clear that an important element of the Islamist movement had gone through an

important transformation in terms of its social profile in two important respects.

First, many of these militants came from rural backgrounds. But they also drew in segments of Cairo's lower-class residents living in the informal settlements, or shantytowns, lying on the fringes of the city. Of great significance is that by the 1990s there was an unprecedented rise in the recruitment of juveniles by the Islamic Group in Western Munira, Imbaba.[7] Lower-class youth emerged, for the first time, as central players in what was to become a more radical element of Islamist activism. Thus, while the Muslim Brotherhood continued to represent middle-class and lower middle-class aspirations, militant activists reflected a new socioeconomic profile. Specifically, compared to their counterparts in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s, they were younger (ranging from fifteen and twenty old), and less educated.[8]

Second, the fears on the part of the state surrounding the growth of informal settlements represented the regime's anxiety about the informal, or casual, laboring class, which represented a large segment of residents in the poorest quarters of Imbaba. In the quarters of Western Munira, children, fifteen years old or younger, representing the lowest rung of the informal labor force in Imbaba were attracted to the militants in the neighborhood. Moreover, as one study observed, these "youths were often recruited as entry points into households and utilized to recruit additional members of their respective families."[9]

The small "convenient" sample in Table 7.1 collected from interviews with ten leaders of the Jama'at and twelve of its rank and file members in the 1990s is instructive in shedding light on the social and economic profile of the leadership and rank and file members of the organization and it demonstrates the linkage between informal labor and membership in the Islamic Group.[10]

First, it is important to note that while the majority of members of the Jama'a were primarily employed as casual, or informal, laborers in construction and other trades, albeit at different levels of the labor market, there is a distinct social distance between leaders and rank and file members. Indeed, while the majority of the local leaders of the militants are of a higher social class,[11] rank and file members generally represented those in the lower-skilled segment of this labor market. Second, it is evident that the majority of young men (all of whom were in their late teens and early twenties at the time) and who joined in the late 1980s and 1990s were either underemployed or unemployed.

Finally, and of equal significance, in my research among former members of the Islamic Group in Western Munira I found that the bulk of rank and file members in Western Munira were young men, or *Subyan*, often

Table 7.1 *List of select leaders and rank and file members of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya by profession in Western Munira, Imbaba, Cairo*

List of Jama'a Sheikhs and leaders by profession in Western Munira, Imbaba	List of rank and file members of the Jama'a by profession in Western Munira, Imbaba
Sheikh 'Esam al-Masri – **Physician** (Emir of Imbaba; imprisoned in the late 1990s)	Said Nabil – **Informal laborer** (Bricklayer)
Sheikh Gabir Farag – **Drummer** (Commander, Military Wing; imprisoned in the late 1990s)	Amgad Gamal – **Informal laborer** in leather workshop
Sheikh Ali Farag – **Pharmacist** (Sheikh Gabir's brother)	Abu Hamid – **Informal laborer** in oil factory
Mohamed Ibrahim – **Owner of hardware store**, also construction foreman (imprisoned in 1990s)	Mohamed Hamdi – **Informal laborer** (Furniture weaver)
Shakir Yousef – **Truck driver**	Mohamed Farag – **Unemployed**
Hamd Abu Elias – **Engineer**	Yusif Amir – **Unemployed**
'Antar al-Din – **Secondary school teacher**	Mohamed Yusif Hassan Ibrahim – (Bread maker)
Sheikh Raouf – **Informal laborer** (Plasterer)	Salah "Karate" – **Karate teacher**
Mohamed al-Fattah – **Arabic script painter/artist**	Mustafa (Salah's Brother) – **Student**
Al-Saed Gabir – **Informal laborer** (Carpenter)	Mohamed Abdel Fattah – **Unemployed**
	Ahmed Abdelwahab – **Student**
	Tariq Hassabo – **Informal laborer** (Bricklayer and seller of ceramics)

Source: Data compiled from interviews conducted in the course of the author's field research. Western Munira, Imbaba, Cairo.

the most-exploited laborers in the informal construction firm (*dulab*). Even in the best times, the *subyan* receive the lowest wages of the *dulab*'s employees though they undertake the most strenuous form of work, and due to the high degree of intra-market competition, they are rarely in the position to negotiate terms with the contractor. This concrete, day-to-day exploitation – more than some amorphous sense of alienation or psychological attributes – explains why so many of Imbaba's *subyan* joined the ranks of al-Jama'a. The fact that these *subyan* joined in significant numbers is evidenced by one study, which confirmed the unprecedented increase in the number of juveniles (fifteen and under) in the rank and file membership of al-Jama'a in 'Izbat al-Mufti – the Western Munira quarters of the neighborhood of Imbaba where informal labor is most highly concentrated and where the Islamist militants enjoyed their strongest following.[12]

Tariq Hassabo, a former member of al-Jama'a, represents an illustrative example of the profile of those who joined the Jama'a in the late 1980s and 1990s. In 1998 Tariq was twenty-nine years old, married with one young daughter, and a long-time resident of 'Izbat al-Mufti. He joined the Jama'a when he was twenty-two and noted that most of the members of the Jama'a in the quarter were, like him, in their twenties and worked mostly in the informal labor market. Tariq himself worked as a casual laborer as a wall-fixer and painter on a casual basis. His daughter is of a different mother while his mother and father live in the adjacent apartment. He did have a younger brother whom he described as a "baltagi" and who died in a knife fight in the neighborhood. Like so many in 'Izbat al-Mufti, Tariq Hassabo is off rural origins. His father is originally from al-Munifiyya governorate and an active member of the regional association of *ahl al-Munifiyya*, although he was born in Imbaba.

Tariq was drawn to the Jama'a gradually and for a combination of reasons linked to socioeconomic as well as moral reasons rather than political. Indeed, he rarely mentioned politics, and while many in the leadership stressed politics as the door to recruitment, it is not a factor that was highlighted by Tariq and other former members of the organization. According to his own account, what drew him to the Jama'a was the piety and morality of the leadership, their attention to the social and moral ills of 'Izbat al-Mufti, and what he termed the "passion and fire" of the preachers at the Jama'a mosques. Like many in the quarter, he was particularly drawn to an important leader in the quarter: Sheikh Mohamed Ali. Sheikh Ali, Tariq recollected, gave the poor sheep and meat during festive occasions, assisted the poor and ill with alms, and instructed members of al-Jama'a, including Tariq, to pay visits to the poor in their homes as part of a good-will campaign. Sheikh Ali also organized

sessions on "Arab issues" in his apartment where potential members would speak and discuss the politics of the day in the Arab world and, as Tariq put it, discuss the corruption of non-'Muslim' tyrants (*Tagha*). But while "enjoining the good" meant paying visits to the poor, "forbidding evil" was, if certainly more punitive, equally attractive to the young members to the organization. "We often broke up marriages where men and women congregated, closed brothels in the 'Izba, and made sure that people in the neighborhood would inform us (the Jama'a) of where these brothels were. We would then beat the men operating them and cut the hair of the women." At first, he continued, "[T]he residents of the 'Izba appreciated and supported these actions."

He used to pray regularly at Masjid al-Nur in al-'Izba, where he first encountered Sheikh Ali, the brother of Sheikh Gabir who led the uprisings in 1992. Subsequently, he began working and spreading the Da'wa under the instruction and guidance of Sheikh Ali. He was also given a specific task in the organization's recruitment efforts. Specifically, he was charged with the assignment of accompanying a group of fellow "Muslims" to persuade young men "loitering" in the neighborhood's street corners to join in the street prayers (*salat al-masaha*). "We began with only six individual 'Muslims' but our group," he noted with some degree of pride, "increased to thirty within just two months."

From Boom to Bust: Informal Labor Markets and the Advent of Militant Islam in Informal Cairo

For the young men and boys in Imbaba like Tariq who during the construction boom had come to rely on wages from casual labor, the recession of the mid-1980s struck especially hard. Out of work and destitute, this already demoralized workforce found no social services or social institutions upon which to depend. As the young men of the neighborhood sought out some semblance of social cohesion, stability, and predictability in their daily lives and those of their families, activists from al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya found themselves, in the latter part of the 1980s, well positioned to take advantage of this state of affairs.

During the 1970s, the infitah polices of Anwar Sadat had profoundly restructured the labor market, and lower-skilled labor, such as the non-skilled segment engaged in construction, had paid the highest price for the state's neoliberal economic policy. Because the emerging job market demanded skilled labor a large segment of lower-skilled workers relocated to the informal sector, which meant that they faced higher levels of economic insecurity and lower wages. Semi-skilled craftsmen, in particular, who had learned their trade through many years of apprenticeship,

were less flexible about changing their occupations and as result they were particularly hard-hit in terms of finding new employment opportunities.

The key problem is that in Egypt, there is a stark distinction between the nature of the relationship of the state and contractual relations in the formal and informal labor markets. Workers in the formal sector enjoy legal protections that are based on a class-based social organization of production closely linked to the state and thus more favorable to collective action. By contrast labor relations in the informal labor market in informal quarters such as *Western Munira* are essentially locked into dependent contractual relations with jobbers, recruiters, gang bosses, and other intermediaries, often kinsmen or co-villagers, which reduces their capacity to pursue their collective interests. Moreover, this "immobilizing effect" caused by informal work is increased not only by the pressure to invest in informal social ties, it is made more precarious in the context of volatile markets dependent on both the national and world economy.[13]

An important aspect linking informal settlements to the national economy is evidenced by the informal labor markets' vulnerability to boom and bust cycles. In the 1980s procuring work in *ta'ifat al-mi'mar* (construction sector) was crucially dependent on contracts available in the informal housing sector financed by the wages of remittances of migrants working in the Arab oil-producing countries. As informal workers informed me, at that time informal work was not only available in Imbaba but *Masr al-Gadida* and all of the many middle- and upper-class neighborhoods built up by the boom in out-migration. Construction workers often spoke of this time of great opportunity and that even if you lived and worked in *Western Munira* you could find employment as far afield as Sinai and *Sharm al-Sheikh*. One worker recounted how he found a "great" job working on building the Baron Hotel in *Sharm al-Sheikh*, and he proudly noted that an Egyptian rather than a foreign construction firm built it. The fact that many laborers lived in the informal settlements was because it was cheaper and wages for informal work were low and fixed by the subcontractors despite the availability of work. Indeed, it is important to note that workers still expressed frustration because wages were not adjusted upward even when, as one worker put it, "the contractor got more money from a private sector firm." Nevertheless, these social, class, and spatial divisions were greatly subdued during the boom since as one scholar aptly noted, the ethic of group solidarity (both vertical and horizontal) was a key element in procuring gainful employment and of achieving some modest measure of upward mobility for those at the lowest rank of the informal labor market.[14] As one subcontractor noted: "I was responsible

for resolving conflict [and] during the boom this was not a crucial problem since work was relatively plentiful and informal housing affordable."[15]

Upon the onset of the recession, however, a severe crisis in the informal labor market emerged as the supply of labor became plentiful as a result not only of the severe economic downturn associated with the slump in oil prices but also because of the increased saturation of the market in affordable land for housing. The real-estate heyday joining land speculators and middle-class Egyptians slowed by the late 1980s. Whereas in 1985 the Egyptian construction industry was touted as the largest construction market in the region,[16] by the end of the decade, rising costs in building materials and falling confidence signaled the end of the era of large-scale infrastructural development that had begun after 1973.[17] The seasonality of the construction business also contributed considerably to the glut of unskilled and semi-skilled informal labor in Imbaba. In general terms, unless the supply of labor is limited, industries that have seasonal peaks of production tend to produce a labor supply in excess of normal needs. During the boom years, when contractors needed a continuous level of employment but faced labor shortages caused by wide-scale out-migration to the Gulf, they heavily recruited workers from Upper Egypt to work in construction throughout greater Cairo. In the case of the neighborhood of Imbaba, workers were most often recruited from the regional associations (*rawabat iqlimiyya*) created from rural-to-urban migrants originating chiefly from the governorates of Assiut and Sohag.

With the recession, construction companies sought to quickly cut down costs, announcing that they would keep labor and material expenses to a minimum.[18] Whereas during the boom, employers kept laborers on salary, in the recession there was little incentive to maintain a continuous level of employment, and contractors targeted semi-skilled and unskilled labor for sharp cutbacks. Subcontractors (i.e., craftsmen) said that by the late 1980s they had to implement a number of strategies to remain competitive and find employment. Under pressure from the big contractors, they had to ration labor or dismiss "redundant" workers, workers had to lower their wages in order to attract contractors, and both had to build a "good reputation" to find work.

While in the past family, kin, or in-law relations mitigated social tensions and served as important networks to find employment, in the recession regular employment was increasingly maintained by a combination of intangible qualities: hard work, a reputation for trustworthiness, and the friendship of an employer or contractor. Skilled and semi-skilled traders who had a reputation for insubordination or tardiness or whose poor health or age was thought to constitute a liability were the

workers hit hardest by the downturn in the construction boom. Magdi Mohamed Hussein, a craftsmen specializing in steel support and concrete molding (*Naggar Musalah*) explained the nature and consequences of the bust for informal workers in the building trade in eloquent terms:

I began work in the early 1970s and in the 1980s there was a real boom in terms of work. There was lots of it for everybody. But there has been a strong recession in our work over the last 5 years in 'Izbat al-Mufti; most of our work went down and "*al-shugl nayim*" (the work fell asleep). 1992 was the beginning of the end. The regulations in terms of informal housing [also] halted our work. Before 1992 people could build here but this is not the case anymore. Now there is more competition. We all have to use our good reputation to get jobs, and the work has to be very clean [of superior quality] because that is the only way we can have an advantage over our competition. I personally cannot do any other work. I am not qualified to do anything else and I am too old to learn.[19]

In the Western Munira quarters of Imbaba, a subcontractor, referred to locally as a *ra'is* or *commanda*, no longer found it profitable, or feasible, to maintain a *dulab* – a full team of building operatives who are contracted informally – and he was forced to ration work in ways that led to the increasing immiseration of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Employers shortened working hours, adjusted salaries downward, and laid off non-essential workers and apprentices.[20] "As the ra'is," Mr. Hussein explained, "I am responsible for resolving disputes. There is often a problem with six *subyan* (apprentices) because I cannot use them all since the work had disappeared. I try to rotate them, so everyone has a chance."[21] Indeed, as a consequence of the decline in employment opportunities in the building trade, informal laborers were forced to adjust in a number of ways, including simply by living below subsistence.

The severity of the intra-market competition resulting from the recession, and in the construction sector, was gravely compounded by the lack of any social protection or insurance for those who relied on informal work for their livelihood. Kin, familial, and friendship ties served residents well in the boom years, but in the recession these networks lost the material incentives that sustained and secured the economic livelihoods of individuals and families residing in the poorer quarters of *Western Munira*. In the boom years it was sufficient to rely on ties of family, friends, and kin to procure work; in the recession the scarcity of work and the oversupply of labor meant that workers with stronger links to the formal economy and acquaintances outside the neighborhood enjoyed greater access to new information about job opportunities that might otherwise remain unknown.[22] For its part, the state never showed any willingness to insure informal laborers to any degree, introduce legislation to improve work conditions, fix minimum wages, or curb child labor.

Indeed, the great capacity of the state bureaucracy to tightly control product and labor markets stands in stark contrast to its inability to organize and regulate informal labor relations, a fact captured in the official usage of the term *al qita' ghayr al-munazam* to describe this "unorganized sector" of the economy. Moreover, neither public nor private firms, which seek flexibility in the labor market in order to keep wages low, were willing to provide any social benefits to their employees.

Almost overnight, disputes over wages became more common and social tensions intensified in Western Munira, pitting contractor against worker and unskilled laborer against semi-skilled craftsman. Workers began to prefer public construction companies to the previously more lucrative private ones. Informal workers reported that although the public enterprises paid lower wages, they offered stable work. As one worker put it, "at least they [public-sector firms] paid wages in advance, rather than in installments like the corrupt private companies."[23] The recession had proved less of a burden for the large public sector corporations, which, unlike the private firms, operated without the demand for profitability. Because large government-funded projects continued to be the preserve of the large public sector firms, they could offer more stable and reliable contracts for construction workers. Moreover, with the onset of the privatization of the industry in the late 1990s the competition between subcontractors, craftsmen, and unskilled workers for even these shorter-term and less-stable contracts in what emerged as a far more competitive private sector further intensified competition and social tensions between those dependent on the informal labor market for their livelihood in the Imbaba.[24]

What is important to note, however, is that these opportunities continued to be dependent on vertical patron-client ties since employers tend to hire workers they know personally, and workers strive to foster such personal ties to get jobs. In Imbaba procuring employment in the informal labor market is not only dependent on the stock of connections, and access to information and social networks, it is also a function of place of residence. Higher-status workers (i.e., contractors) possess long-standing relations outside the neighborhood and stronger links with the formal economy. As a result they are able to acquire new information about job opportunities that remain unknown to workers lower down the labor market hierarchy. By contrast, subcontractors and lower-status workers residing in Western Munira noted that they simply did not have the connections to procure work in the public sector and, moreover, they could not trust that a contractor (*Muqawil*) from outside Imbaba would meet his contractual obligations. As one worker put it: "On the Sharm El-Sheikh job, the contractor was from outside Imbaba and refused to pay

fully after we completed the job. In the 'Izba this would never happen because the contractor has to interact with us face to face." The primary problem for the casual laborer was that no formal contracts regulated these arrangements, and the laborers – and to a lesser degree, the contractors – had to rely on the good reputation of their employers. As one ra'is (head of a dulab) explained:

Contractors are the ones who find us the jobs. We cannot look for them ourselves. We do not have the tax papers or licenses. This has to come from the contractor in order to bid for the job. [In addition] the contractor works with the public sector and we are in the private [i.e. informal] sector. You have to be connected to the public sector to get job assignments. For example, you have to be approved by someone connected with Sharikat [Osman Ahmad] Osman.[25]

In-migrants who became unemployed waited, despite the recession, in anticipation of further construction work instead of returning to agriculture. As James Toth has noted in a study of workers in rural Egypt, "despite the inflated size of the workforce, both the intermittent nature of construction work and the paternalistic ties to employers made this expectation possible."[26] Indeed, as I witnessed first-hand in the informal settlements of 'Izbat al-Mufti, Beshteel, and al-Waraq, the informal settlements, in Western Munira, the very nature of informal labor lent itself to a particular type of job insecurity in which a large portion of the workforce remained in a casualized limbo, filling short periods of employment by invading an already overfilled, generally unskilled labor market.

To make matters worse, in the context of the recession and increasing land competition in rural Upper Egypt, scores of in-migrants, particularly from Fayoum and Assiut, migrated to Imbaba and came to represent what Egyptian scholars refer to as *al-proleteriat al-ratha* or the lumpenproletariate.[27] These young men possessed little education or skills and they essentially filled the ranks of *Umaal Ugari*, day laborers or odd jobbers, and lived in the worst conditions in the poorest quarters of the neighborhood. In Imbaba, this led to intensified competition reflected in severe and dangerous tensions along regional and sectarian lines. Thus, Muslim "fellahin" (farmers from the Nile delta) stood against "sa'ayida" (upper Egyptians), and the two against Coptic Christians. As one fellahin laborer put it, "The sa'ayida are like Christians. They know how to take care of themselves." In addition, since the cost of living was increasing, the informal labor market also received a steady stream of Cairo denizens ousted from their regular occupations or simply unable to make a living wage in the neighborhoods of middle-class Cairo. This has meant not only that the poorer quarters of Imbaba were assuming a more heterogeneous makeup (similar to the original quarters of the neighborhood and

some other informal settlements), but also that there was increasingly stiff competition in the informal labor market between Cairenes and in-migrants.

Another important consequence of the employment crisis that came to be exploited by Islamist militant leaders was the breakdown of the traditional kinship-based patron-client relations through which the *dulab* operated. With the introduction of severe competition, trust became rare and fragile, allowing al-Jama'a members to enter the market as intermediaries between contractors and laborers. Very quickly, leading members of the Jama'a procured the limited number of contracts from the head of the *dulab* for those young men who supported them and, moreover, they acted as guarantors to clients of their choosing guaranteeing to the firm that laborers under their patronage would work for an agreed-upon wage and working hours. In this way, al-Jama'a supplanted the traditional Upper Egyptian patrons in the informal labor market over a short period. The key difference was that al-Jama'a, unlike traditional labor recruiters, often resorted to coercive and violent means to enforce contracts. Selim Hafiz, a long-time resident of 'Izbat al-Mufti, and not affiliated with al-Jama'a observed that prior to the recession "there was no need for the Islamic Group" if you belonged to a "big family" because the big families were able to offer "protection" to their members and find them secure employment. However, he added that with the recession, the big families found it hard to "prevent their sons from joining."[28]

Mirroring the *Dulab*: Militancy and the Informal Labor Firm

The linkage between the emergence of a radical Islamist social movement that emerged in the 1990s in Imbaba and informal labor markets rests on a empirical affinity between small-scale informal establishments on the one hand and social marginality and the absence of state regulation on the other. Because of their limited start-up costs and the ease with which they enter and exit markets, small firms provide the most appropriate setting for informal practices such as casual labor recruitment. In addition, this informal market is linked to identity-based forms of mobilization as a result of two of its essential features: the segmentation of work conditions (i.e., barriers to entry) along class, kinship, gender, regional and class lines, and the vertical forms of dependency in which the casual laborer is compelled to enter into a contractual relationship with a labor recruiter, subcontractor, and other intermediaries often kinsmen.[29]

In the case of the informal market in construction in Western Munira where I conducted my research two elements stand out. The first is the

dulab, which structures employment contracts and casual labor relations between individual employers and workers. The *dawaleeb* are also the site of skill acquisition through apprenticeship, which in turn depends on patriarchal forms of social control that prevail in family- or apprentice-based workshops. The second are construction coffee houses, which define the relationship among workers, and between workers as a group, and employers as a group. Since formal trade unions are irrelevant for most construction workers, coffee houses serve as the primary locus of interaction between workers and craftsmen, and it is here where social networks and contacts are made, workers hired and paid, and craftsmen socialized as an "insider" to procure contracts and work.

Al-Jamaʻa in particular found, to the initial surprise of some of their leaders,[30] that Western Munira (*Munira al-Gharbiyya*) – the poorest section of Imbaba – was fertile ground for recruitment in part because of the similarity of its social organization to that of the *dulab*. The informally organized institution of the *dulab* operates on a system that is hierarchical and built on norms of paternalism, deference, and discipline. For its part, al-Jamaʻa, at least as it functioned in Western Munira, in many ways mirrored this social institution. The close fit between its own hierarchy, norms, and organization and those of the informal labor market facilitated entry for new recruits. Indeed, newly recruited members easily understood and appreciated the fact that al-Jamaʻa could serve both as an alternative source of income generation and a source of discipline.

Specifically, what workers in the quarter term *Shuruut al-ʻAmal*, the rules and conditions of work in the informal labor market, particularly as they applied to day laborers and the *subyan*, closely aligned with the preferences of militant activists in their attempts to draw these laborers to their cause. If subcontractors preferred what one laborer described as "strong, able bodied young men" ranging from eighteen to twenty years old with a reputation for a "strong work ethic, dedication to the job" and less inclined to pursue "frivolous and costly forms of entertainment like the young men of the Bandar (City)," another casual laborer and former member of the Jama'a noted that the organization generally selected recruits for these same attributes and further noted that education for the *sabi* and hence a potential member to the organization was deemed a liability: "[T]o get the job done, you have to have a strong body, not a certificate or diploma."[31]

Moreover, two additional conditions frequently noted by informal workers in ʻIzbat al-Mufti facilitated entry in terms of joining the militants in the quarter: a strong belief that class stratification was part of the natural religious and social order as reflected in the frequently cited Quranic injunction of *Wa ja'lnakum foqa ba'dikum darajat* (and we have

made of you different classes), and an equally strong perception of the real possibility of upward mobility through *sabr* (patience) and hard work, born out of their own experience with the apprenticeship system of the informal labor firm which in the boom years all but guaranteed reaching a higher position in the informal labor market over time so long as one is "clever, has a strong work ethic and maintains a good reputation for clean work." In addition, the hierarchical and paternalist structure and the rules of conduct and penalties associated with the work conditions of the *sabi* mirrored those enforced by the Jama'a on its rank and file membership. Indeed, just as Jama'a leaders enforced strict modes of conduct and applied penalties against rank and file members for a variety of infractions, the *sabi* in the informal labor firm is under the complete authority and responsibility of his patron or *Mu'alim al-sabi* (teacher). In a similar process utilized and adapted by militant leaders to generate loyalty among its rank and file, a *sabi* who does not complete his assigned work in time, "causes problems" with higher-ranked members of the dulab, or does not abide by *Shurat al-'Amal* of another craftsmen he is assigned to work with, is reported to his *Mu'alim* who decides on the appropriate penalty.

This is an important point because while most analysts of Islamist militancy in Egypt have focused on the role of rural-to-urban migration from Upper Egypt in the transplanting of al-Jama'a's structures and politics to urban Cairo, this in itself is not a sufficient explanation. While the first generation of the leadership of al-Jama'a was, by and large, of rural origin, most of the rank and file of the second generation of leaders, including Shaykh Jabir, were born and raised in the neighborhoods of Imbaba. Shaykh Jabir had originally worked as an informal laborer – he was a plumber by profession.

The social organization of the *dulab* is hierarchical (see Figure 7.1). The firm itself is headed by a subcontractor known as the *ra'is* (head or job boss) whose chief responsibility is to procure work from a contractor (*muqawil*) belonging to one of the large public or private construction firms. Immediately below the *ra'is* is the semi-skilled craftsman (*hirfi* or *sani'*), who serves as the contractor's chief assistant. He is hired by the subcontractor on a causal basis and for this reason he must rely heavily on his own personal contacts and social networks to find employment. Lowest in the *dulab's* hierarchy is the unskilled apprentice, or *sabi* (plural, *subyan*), who is usually no more than fifteen years old but who is, nevertheless, chosen for his strength to withstand the heavy tasks assigned to him. Most often this includes handing out mortar and it is only after many years of apprenticeship as *Musa'id al-sina'iyy* (craftsman's assistant) when he learns the more advanced technical aspects of the *minha*, or profession, that he is allowed to perform the task of the master's trade
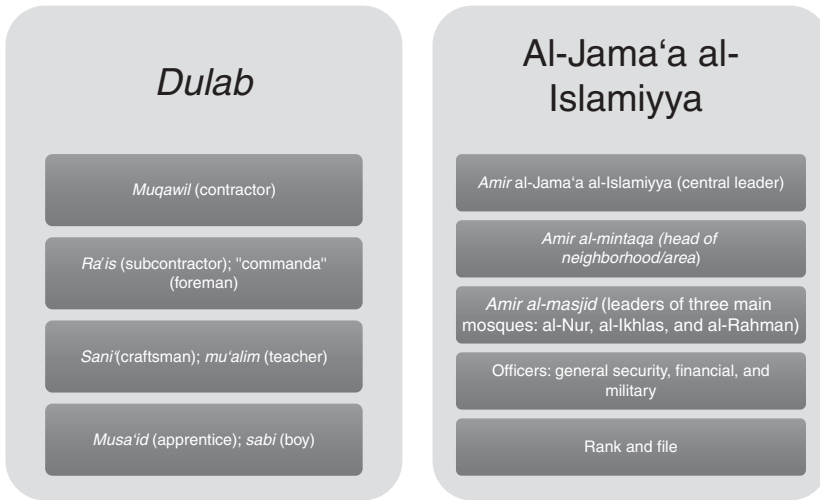
Figure 7.1 Hierarchical structure of the *Dulab* and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Imbaba, Cairo
Source: Data compiled from interviews conducted in the course of the author's field research. Western Munira, Imbaba, Cairo.

eventually qualifying him to become a full-fledged assistant. At this point, he may work in the same workshop as his former boss or open his own depending on available resources. In addition, there is a separate market for a common laborer (*'amil*). These workers, known as *'Umaal Ugrah*, day laborers or odd jobbers, are also hired by the subcontractor and are often found outside the coffee houses waiting to be hired on the spot on an impersonal basis. They are often newly arrived small peasant farmers or farm workers.

This hierarchy conforms to strictly paternalist lines and this is reflected in the common reference to the contractor as *commanda*, the subcontractor as *ra'is*, and the apprentice as simply *sabi* (literally, "boy"). The *ra'is* is usually relatively affluent, dressed in an expansively tailored Upper Egyptian *'ibayyah*, and he has the added social privilege of sitting with the *Kibar*, the elders of the clan. Indeed, the nature of this hierarchy and paternalism was one reason why so many youth belonging to the lower rungs of the informal market and the social system joined the Jama'a. While some former members of the Islamic Group stated that a friend or family members recruited them in the quarter, others revealed that subcontractors who had also been recruited by the Group and with whom they had a long-standing relationship recruited them. Naturally, the line

between "friendship" and labor boss is often an ambiguous one. Nevertheless, the same paternalism that underpinned the social relations of the informal labor market mirrored and was in many ways replicated by the Jama'a in Western Munira in ways that served to remove some of the social as well as economic barriers to entry for potential recruits.

Another reason Islamic militant leaders were able to recruit successfully among juveniles is simply because they exploited the high levels of social and economic uncertainty which stemmed from the very nature of this informal labor market. Indeed, the demand for "boy" labor, or the *sabi*, is one of the causes of endemic poverty in Imbaba and, moreover, he is one of the most exploited workers since the supply of young boys exceeds demand. Employers use inexpensive *sabi* labor to lower costs as much as possible. As one subcontractor informed me, "You can always find a *sabi* whenever you need one."[32]

The *subyan* are often employed as masons and errand boys. Since there are few vocational schools in Imbaba, they have no alternative but to depend on the apprenticeship system to acquire a higher level of skills – a process that can take up to ten years. Moreover, while the apprenticeship system does provide a *sabi* with the chance for upward mobility over time, in the context of recessionary downturns he faces a higher level of economic insecurity than the more skilled craftsmen who may find employment opportunity in artisan firms outside of the quarters of Western Munira. Those able to work jobs demanding physical strength found regular employment, but most *subyan* simply could not transition into other more skilled forms of work. Nor is pursuing education an option for the majority of boys and young men in the neighborhood: there is one secondary school in Western Munira. By the time they reach adult age, these youths find themselves without any general or special industrial qualifications and little access to a stock of personal contacts that would enable them to find steady work. Thus, a stream of young men from industries that rely upon *sabi* labor continually replenishes the mass pool of the unemployed. Cast adrift, these young *subyan* filled the ranks of al-Jama'a, although many continued to work as informal laborers following their entrance into the organization.

The key point here is that the structure and social organization of the informal labor market resulted in a highly precarious state of affairs in terms of job security for a large segment of the working population in the neighborhood. The increasing reliance on informal social networks and kinship ties means that death of relatives or familial conflict could jeopardize one's chances for work, and the increasing number of bankruptcies of small informal firms working in construction meant that cyclical economic downturns expel a worker into the unskilled labor market at the

threshold of adulthood. Indeed, it is difficult to describe the state of frustration, alienation, and depression of these men and their deep resentment against those who, as one worker put it, derive income "*fi al-Bandar* (in the City) from shuffling paper" (i.e., white collar jobs).[33]

This is the reason why the rank and file of the al-Jama'a was increasingly characterized by a younger and less-educated membership composed of essentially two groups: informal laborers who were generally no longer employed in the industry and other workers who continued to find casual employment in the informal market. The latter group benefited from the fact that the leaders of the Islamic Group often served as intermediaries in a tight market securing them work and enforcing their informal contracts.

Social Networks and *Qahawi Ta'ifat Al-Mi'mar* (Construction Sector Coffee Houses)

The social and political consequences engendered by the severity of intra-market competition in the construction sector that resulted from the nation-wide recession could be discerned at the level of the community from observing the casual laborers in the coffee houses (*qahawi ta'ifat al-mi'mar)* in the poorer quarters of 'Izbat al-Mufti and Beshteel in Imbaba. Since formal trade unions are irrelevant for most construction workers, coffee houses serve as the primary locus of interaction between workers and craftsmen, and it is here where I observed social networks and contacts made, workers hired and paid, and craftsmen socialized as an "insider" to procure contracts and work.[34] Of great significance is that these coffee houses, whose sheer number (upward of forty) in Western Munira suggests that informal labor is the backbone of the local economy, are themselves institutionally differentiated according to the segment of the informal labor market, as well as social and regional lines.

The main lines of social division are between craftsmen who serve as subcontractors for potential employers, lower-skilled apprentices (*sub-yan*), and common laborers who possess the lowest social status. Thus, one can observe coffee houses for craftsmen such as industrial workers (*qahawi al-sani'un*) and blacksmiths (*qahawi al-haddadeen*), and others frequented primarily by apprentices such as the one for bricklayers (*qahawi al-kharasanjiyya*), and common laborers or day jobbers (*'umal*) congregate in their own coffee houses referred to more generally as *qahawi al-mi'mar* (construction coffee houses*)*. The latter are rarely accepted as social equals and are looked down upon by the craftsmen and the local merchants, shopkeepers, and small businesses owners in the quarter. As

a result, they usually congregate in their own separate establishments or simply stand on the nearby streets awaiting recruitment. In addition, there is segmentation in the market along the lines of place of origin as evidenced by several coffee houses established by, and for, rural migrants from *Sohag* and *Assiut*.

It is to these coffee houses, so unlike their social and jovial counterparts in other parts of Cairo that often "provide social ease from anxiety,"[35] that craftsmen as well as lower-skilled laborers arrive in the early morning to acquire information about possible work, and to which they return in the evenings to receive their pay. In Western Munira the workers, mostly in their early to mid-twenties, hardly speak to one another and none play the board game of backgammon popular in Egyptian coffee houses. The only link among the youth is one of a shared social and economic insecurity, which, as one labor explained, is a result of a "very competitive environment; we are all competing in an already tight labor market."[36] New entrants are seen immediately as competition because contractors hire laborers on the spot making sure to keep wages low. The result is that the worker must put in an offer for his pay for a certain job. Consequently, there is great pressure on the laborers to compete with each other by bidding as low possible in order to be hired. In this context, family and kin ties neither mitigate social tensions nor render social relations more palatable; place of residence and friendship do so only minimally.

Moreover, the recession and rise in labor competition in Western Munira meant that the subcontractors and higher-skilled workers lost control of the work process. More specifically, they lost the ability to induce workers to accept their authority and elicit their cooperation in controlling the content, pace, and scope of the work. The division between craftsmen, who relied on their stock of personal contacts to procure contracts, and laborers who most often relied on friends and kin to find work, broke down in the context of increasing competition.

Indeed, in the context of work shortages, laborers were able to find work more efficiently than the craftsmen primarily because more low and menial work was available. As one laborer explained with some pride, "the *Sina'iyyi* (crastmen) or *Mihni* (professional) cannot work without *'amil ugari* (the odd jobber) since no matter how skilled the craftsmen is in measuring, cutting and laying the *bulat* (brick), it is the *'amil* who must mix, pour and carry the cement to the job site."[37] Importantly, since in Western Munira the distinction between subcontractor, usually a craftsmen, and common laborer followed regional lines there emerged a distinct element of cultural competition. As one craftsman noted in frustration, "they [the contractors] only hire Upper Egyptians . . . only the ones who can do menial, tough work."[38] During al-Jama'a's reign in

Western Munira, many of these young casual laborers joined its ranks. One of the key advantages of joining the militants, according to former Jama'a members working in construction, was that they no longer had to wait on the streets outside the coffee shops "like slaves." Instead, they typically would congregate in front of the nearby mosque and the contractor would be forced to approach them to give them their wages for the day's work. In the past craftsmen not only distinguished themselves from labors in social terms, they also would not allow the laborers into the Coffee Houses. These members proudly acknowledged that their membership in the organization afforded them special status for their first time in their lives.[39]

Ta'amul Ma'a Al-Waqi' Hawlana: The Erosion of Trust Networks and Social Conflict

In ideological terms the Jama'a distinguished itself from the Muslim Brotherhood and other accommodationist Islamist activists in its reinterpretation of the doctrine of Hisba (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*) or commanding the right and forbidding wrong as a collective rather than an individual obligation (*fard kifaya*) designed to establish an Islamic state by force (*bi-al-quwaah*). In this regard the Jama'a laid the ideological foundation for other Islamist militant and Salafist organizations. However, the Islamic Group also laid an important legacy for other clandestine militant organizations in strategic terms. The latter is evident in the manner in which it sought to overcome the central challenge of generating commitment among its rank and file members in order to implement this new responsibility of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*. Consequently, after 1984 when the Jama'a first began to make inroads in the informal settlements of greater Cairo a significant change took place in its Islamic program (*al-manhaj al-Islami*) that reflected new strategic considerations. Specifically, its leadership recognized that in order to popularize their movement they had to pursue a course of militant action and a process of recruitment of cadres that was relevant to local social and economic conditions. This is the reason that in the mid-1980s their program stated clearly that the ways in which the organization "interacts with the reality around us" (*ta'amul ma'a al-waqi' hawlana*) and finds "means of changing it" depend on the Imams that are presented by God.[40]

In the case of Imbaba, and Western Munira more specifically, local conditions were influenced in great part by the nature and very structure of the informal labor market associated with the construction sector. This meant that at no time was there a unified, homogenous class pursuing

informal work. This is in stark contrast to the unity and class-consciousness associated with industrial labor, which in the Nasser era represented the majority of new migrants to Imbaba. During that period of state-led development, a clear class-consciousness was present among the factory workers residing in Imbaba's government-subsidized housing, but by the late 1980s the great majority of labor in the neighborhood had become informalized. In the 1970s when formal labor organizations waged a short-lived struggle against Sadat's liberalization policies on working-class grounds, a similar brand of class-consciousness did not, and could not, develop among workers living in the informal settlements. Structural inequities had come to be accepted as part of a fatalistic religiosity – in rhetoric if not in practice. This meant that by the late 1980s and 1990s al-Jama'a's discourse sublimating class grievances into issues of morality, the status of the women and the home, and antistate resistance found a much more receptive audience.

This social conflict, reflected along cultural lines, and one that was readily exploited by the Jama'a leaders, had to do with the fluidity of the trust networks that underpinned the organizational and social structure of the informal market. During the boom craftsmen could easily rely on their personal contacts and "friends" to acquire construction contracts. In the recession these trust networks broke down as evidenced by my observations of the Coffee Houses where the competition over any kind of job was a central feature of the increasingly somber cultural life of *Qahawi al-Mi'mar*, and more significantly, the increase in the number of violent conflicts between kin-backed laborers and non-kin-related craftsman. It is in this context that the Jama'a were able to enter the market and recruit from the socially frustrated and downwardly mobile craftsmen as well as the socially elevated common laborer.

The social detachment of these young men was made worse by the fact that in the construction trade, social relations are not oriented around the stable system of reciprocity (*mujamala*) that in other, higher-skilled trades allows for a sense of loyalty and community. Instead, there is a severe form of social stratification between laborer and local contractor or subcontractor. This is easily observed in mode of dress as well as conduct. Typically, the far more affluent contractor, the *ra'is*, dresses in the Upper Egyptian *'abaya* (robe) and sits across, rather than within, the coffee shop. In contrast to the socially stigmatized casual laborer, the contractor enjoys an elevated status and is held in high esteem by middle-class residents and certainly by the elders of his clan (*kibar al-qabila*). Indeed, class tensions in the neighborhood exacerbate the social exclusion of these underemployed laborers. In spite – or rather, because – of the difficulty of their work, informal laborers are looked down upon by Imbaba's middle-

class residents, many of whom own property such as small businesses or retail shops.[41]

An important factor underlying the popularity of the Jama'a in the quarter is that its leadership demonstrated a keen and intimate understanding of these class and cultural tensions, as well as the general economic insecurity faced by casual laborers in Western Munira, and devised its recruitment strategies and offered incentives likely to motivate individual participation.

Al- 'Umaal Shaylin Al-Balad (The Workers Are Carrying the Country)

As one local resident who joined the Islamic Group but later left the organization in opposition to their increasing use of violence against their local rivals in the quarter put it, "they [al-Jama'a] recognized that these workers *Shaylin al-Balad* (are carrying the country)."[42] Importantly, al-Jama'a recognized debt payments are a crucial problem in settlements like 'Izbat al-Mufti, Bashteel and Osim where they continue to be a source of a great many disputes, often resulting in violent confrontations. Indeed, it is rare that in the course of one month one does not observe two or three disputes over unpaid debts in 'Izbat al-Mufti. The problem is that daily wages fluctuate arbitrarily while the cost of living steadily increases. Furthermore, because the meager daily wages do not cover household expenditures, to say nothing of allowing for personal savings, most residents live on credit, which is difficult to pay back. Al-Jama'a assisted debtors in settling disputes, repaying or postponing payments on credit, and in general introducing some semblance of stability if not necessarily social peace. Indeed, al-Jama'a regularly utilized coercive means to assist their members and sympathizers to resolve their outstanding debts. Specifically, the Jama'a leaders made use of *baltagiyya*, local strongmen, who through the threat of violence were tasked with extracting compliance from debt collectors. Many of these *baltagiyya* worked as day laborers and a significant number joined the ranks of al-Jama'a.

Al-Jama'a also offered assistance to its members who suffered from a work-related accident. Whereas the subcontractor often refused to pay any form of compensation for on-site injuries and merely dismissed the laborer from the construction site, al-Jama'a would often collect funds for health care provisions and even provide a small pension. They also took care of the family of the injured worker until he could get back on his feet. In instances where the organization was not in a position to actually disburse funds, it would attempt to find the worker a form of employment that was less strenuous than construction work. In cases where the

education of the worker (usually very modest) and his skill level are relatively low al-Jama'a neighborhood leaders would assign him the job of collecting the zakat (alms) from local residents.[43]

Al-Jama'a also provided a form of work compensation for casual laborers among their membership who were taken ill for a long period of time in the course of their difficult work in the building trade. In these situations, the al-Jama'a leadership would provide regular payments to the individual and his family generated from contributions collected from other members of the organization. Moreover, since al-Jama'a members were under close surveillance, particularly following the 1992 siege of the neighborhood, the organization would provide less-visible forms of employment within the organization for loyal members released after being incarcerated by state security forces. Since these members were registered as "terrorists" or militants by state security after their release they were unable to find employment in the construction trade as they had often done in the past due to the constant surveillance by the police and state security that stigmatized their reputation among the contractors. Subsequently, the Jama'a would provide these loyal members administrative positions within the organization. Significantly, these members also gained higher social status within the organization. In Western Munira only al-Jama'a members who had been registered after being detained and released by state security wore the Islamist dress (*jalabiyya* and *sirwal*) and grew the customary long beards. These markers were signs of status within the organization; especially among the rank and file, the members who were thus distinguished, and who harbor the greatest loyalty to al-Jama'a, evoked great admiration.

Furthermore, the insecurity of men's labor means women must work to provide the necessary supplementary household income. In Western Munira women often work as fruit-and-vegetable sellers, hawkers, domestic servants, and sex workers. However, the very importance of women's work in Imbaba has resulted in its denigration by some male members of the community, and economic and social hardships among local residents continue to manifest themselves in domestic disputes, a high divorce rate, and absentee husbands. In practical terms al-Jama'a worked to lower the social expectation of women in the neighborhood. In the sermons in Masjid al-Mursileen which I attended in 'Izbat al-Mufti during my research in the quarter, preachers regularly sermonize about the proper place of women as "caretakers of the home" (*Rabuti al-Bayti*) and enjoined men to remember that they are the primary "caretakers of their women." Moreover, two recurring themes of the sermons, which resonated strongly with local residents, pertained to the increasing illicit drug use by the youth in the quarter which was generally understood as

a primary reason of juvenile delinquency and the call of a boycott against foreign goods and imports to address the ills associated with conspicuous consumption. Indeed, in contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood which has long maintained a favorable view of foreign investment and economic liberalization policies more generally,[44] the Imam of *Masjid al-Mursileen* called for residents in the quarter to participate in a boycott of imported consumer goods citing, in one sermon, the example of India's Mahatma Gandhi who waged a successful campaign of noneconomic cooperation associated with his campaign of civil disobedience against British colonialism.

Embedding the "Message": The Relevance of the *Khutba* (Sermon)

That Imbaba, however poor, enjoyed rising social and economic fortunes during the boom in informal housing was a key component of why grievances, exacerbated in the bust, laid the context for the transformation of parts of the neighborhood into a stronghold of militant Islamist activism. However, it is important to note that, as in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, the recruitment of rank and file members into al-Jama'a was very much a process that involved the provision of both material and normative incentives designed to frame joining the organization as a moral obligation if not as an economic necessity. As Salwa Ismail has noted, there is no seamless web between social and economic immisseration and the turning toward militancy.[45] Indeed, among the important factors that made the difference in the case of al-Jama'a is the careful manner in which the organization's leadership articulated a discourse that simultaneously sought to wage a political and moral campaign against the state, as well as to address the grave social and economic conditions that resulted from the profound economic and social transformations in the quarter. Not surprisingly, an important objective of the sermons was to strengthen the resolve of the organization's members and potential activists against state repression:

The enemies of Islam know for certain that a confrontation with Muslims in their beliefs will not benefit them. Instead, it will make Muslims even stronger. They know that when a Muslim is challenged in his faith, his beliefs and the Book of his Master and the straight path, this confrontation removes the fog from his brain and makes him leap to defend his nation.[46]

Nevertheless, during my attendance of the highly popular sermons that followed the Friday congregational prayers in Western Munira, the Imams often gave more time to social and economic factors such as the problem of juvenile delinquency, social and moral corruption, and the importance of rehabilitating the patriarchal family which, from the

perspective of the Imam's of the Jama'a and many residents, was under threat than to antistate rhetoric. The role of women, in particular, was frequently highlighted in ways that were clearly designed to center the moral reputation of women as both a problem and the potential solution for much of what ails the community. One female resident, critical of al-Jama'a at the time, insisted that the militants were intent on what she termed "lowering the social expectations of women" by insisting on the *Niqab*, calling for anti-consumption behavior and enjoining the men of the family to protect and serve as caretakers for the family.[47]

The people in this state were divided into three groups: the believers and the unbelievers. These two need no explanation. The third group is the hypocrites. They accuse the Prophet Mohamed's (My God bless him and grant him peace) wife of adultery. You worshipers of Allah, if a man came to you and told you that your wife is an adulteress or if your mother is a whore or if your sister is loose, what would happen to you? Would you be able to sleep for one instant? . . . Worshipers of Allah, it is because of these kind of people that calamity struck the Ummah.[48]

Another regularly reiterated theme of the sermons of particular relevance to residents of Western Munira had to do with what one resident termed *al-Inhyar al-Ijtima'iyy* (societal breakdown); for many, this was the central reason behind the grave social ills and everyday conflicts afflicting the quarter ranging from the rise in thuggery and crime (*balta-giyya*) to juvenile delinquency evidenced by the increasing sale and consumption of drugs by the youth. One sermon, an example of several others, addressed this issue offering both a diagnosis and a not-so subtle critique of the ineptitude of both state institutions as well as traditional male authorities in dealing with the problem.

Drugs have made their way into children's schools. Those who use have come to me with their parents at the mosque, suffering from their addiction and asking me to recite some verses and invoking some supplications wishing for Allah to wrest the addiction out of their blood. I am not exaggerating if I say that at least two or three come to me each week. These issues cannot be resolved unless people find a religious Islamic consciousness . . . There should be state institutions, which come in aid such as the Ministries of Education, *Awqaf* [The Ministry of Religious Endowment], social services and associations. Above all the responsibility should be with fathers and eminent men and notables.[49]

Indeed, the legitimacy of the content of the sermons of al-Jama'a was effective not only because it was tailored to the lived experience of residents and resonated with their own political orientation; it was also greatly enhanced because it contrasted sharply with the sermons of the government-regulated mosques elsewhere. While Jama'a Imams in Western Munira were preaching against state policy, the ills of

conspicuous consumption, and the need to reinvigorate the traditional Islamic family, the government-run mosques promoted an idealized Egypt ruling over compliant and docile citizens and insisted on strict adherence to the laws of what was, from the perspective of al-Jama'a, an unjust and heretical state. Government Imams asserted a notion of the territorial boundaries of national citizenship, stressed the importance of inter-sectarian harmony, and spoke of the need to reform the family structure but only in vague terms. Importantly, rarely did they speak of issues having to do with state corruption. In the government-run mosque in the nearby neighborhood of 'Aguza, for example, the Imam often repeated these themes:

As long as we have a card of citizenship of the Arab Republic of Egypt, we must obey all its laws and follow its regulations. We must follow the government's laws so long as this does not contradict our main identity as Muslims, and *al-hamdillah* (thank Allah), these [the laws of the State] do not contradict this. For if we do not live in accordance with the state's laws (*Qawaneen al-Nizam*), we lose our ability to live in *Karama* (dignity) and *Salam* (peace). We need *Salam al-Dakhil* (internal peace). [Further], everyone is now a republic unto himself and cares only for his own instrumental and selfish purposes. Allah punishes those who depart from his *Da'wa*; all of the Umma must follow the laws of the book. We must call for *Islah* (reform) between people, and between man and wife. If we live as Shi'a, Sunni or this or that (*hisb*) party, then we live as if we have our own religion without rules. As the verse about Ibrahim says *Lakum dinikum, wa lana dinana*, and so each who lives in Egypt, must live by its laws. We must be united to succeed on this earth and in the hereafter.[50]

The Politics of *Tarbiyya* (Religious Education)

Other members who joined were simply true believers following a relatively long process of *tarbiyya* or religious education. They fervently and sincerely believed in the message of hell, damnation, and heavenly redemption. The sincerity of these followers should not be underestimated. The sermons that conveyed this message in the storefront mosques of the neighborhood drew thousands of men, young and old alike. These sermons are very attractive to young men who find no temporal explanation for their social conditions and see no prospects for a better life outside the informal settlement. Indeed, the cultivation of piety and a particularly religious form of communal space in the neighborhood played an important role in the success of al-Jama'a in this period. But it is important to note that a primary reason for this success was that the sermons helped make sense of otherwise inexplicable social conditions and, moreover, addressed real-world politics in ways that built on the lived reality of many residents in the quarter.

Religious education (*tarbiyya*) took place in two important ways. The first was through essentially private religious or Quranic lessons, and the second was via the Friday and Tuesday sermons. The religious lessons, attended by Jama'a members, included, most notably, the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and Sayid Qutb, and readings on Islamic Fiqr, as well as Quranic memorization. In addition, members were instructed in the writings and ideas of Sheikh Ahmed Abdel Sattar, an important discipline of Sheikh Omer Abdel-Rahman, the then spiritual guide of the Jama'a. Importantly, members of the Jama'a noted that the oral lessons in particularly were extremely important because "many of us were illiterate at that time, and it was not possible for us to read the Quran and the other writings on our own."[51]

The second method of disseminating the message was achieved through the Khutba or sermon. On the third Friday of every month, all members of the nearby mosques would attend prayers at Masjid al-Ikhlas on Luxor Street in central Cairo, which, at the time, was the headquarters of al-Jama'a. Following the sermon members would discuss not only religious but "political" matters which were the subject of the sermon. Most notably, in addition to the discussion of the writing and ideas of Qutb, Ibn Tayimah, and the "Blind Sheikh" Omer Abdel-Rahman that was certainly noted by former members, what seemed to impress the young men, was the ways in which these religious instructions went hand in hand with the discourse of social welfare and politics.

Naturally, the sermons consisted of the resuscitation of Quranic verses, but they were also accompanied by what members termed "*al-Nashrah*" or the news segment. During al-Nashrah that followed the official sermon members would hear commentary on events in Bosnia, and Afghanistan and other Muslim countries, and would often be shown videos (*al-Manassa* films) on the struggle between the "Nasara" (heathens) and Muslims throughout the world. Importantly, during al-Nashra and often during the screening of the videos the Imam of the al-Jama'a Mosque would collect donations from the organization's members and others in the congregation. As one example, Sheikh Ali Turki in 'Izbat al-Mufti was heavily involved in gathering donations for the cause in Bosnia and for the private (*Ahali*) mosques of al-Jama'a in the neighborhood and for the Ikhwan held in prison and their families.

Nevertheless, there is little evidence that al-Jama'a contributed significantly in terms of providing a wide range of social services to their members or the general resident population. As one member put it, "the Jama'a do not have the means to provide social services. Most of these services are provided by the *Ikwhan* or *al-Da'wa wa al-Tabligh*." Nevertheless, much of the services provided by al-Jama'a had more to do

with the religious and moral campaign that was extremely important to religiously minded residents. On Tuesdays after Maghreb (dusk) prayers, the al-Jama'a brought and distributed clothing and some money to the poor all over the neighborhood; on Youm al-Wakfa, banners of al-Jama'a unfurled and children asked to recite Quranic verses in public; and on Eid al-Adha, al-Jama'a members would lead a *masira* (march) bringing cows, sheep, and rice to the poor, and during Ramadan on Shari Luxor they organized a free *iftar* (Ramadan breakfast) for hundreds of poor residents. Most of the members organizing these services would be paid salaries, and the families of members imprisoned by the state security provided with some limited provisions.

Equally significant, according to the members who joined the organization at the time in the neighborhood, was the role of al-Jama'a in terms of assisting in marriages in what is a very poor community. As a member of al-Jama'a members of your family were entitled to an al-Jama'a wedding (*Zawaj al-Jama'a*) wherein food would be provided by the Masjid, the *Mazoun* (officiate) paid for transportation and for his services, and *Wakeel al-Arusa* (the Bride's advocate) would be transported to *katb al-kitab* (wedding ceremony). In addition, the organization would also arrange for the *Masira* (wedding procession), even while women would not be visible and asked to stay at home. It is important to note that these services were often accompanied by far more coercive and unpopular campaigns. Al-Jama'a members, often under the instruction of the leaders of the organization, burned down video stores, broke up marriage celebrations to prevent the mixing of sexes, and beat up any singers, musicians, and artists in the neighborhood that did not conform to proper "Muslim" practices.

Moreover, despite al-Jama'a's relative success in providing a modicum of "services," material as well as symbolic, members also recounted the divisive role of the organization in the neighborhood, particular in terms of exacerbating Muslim-Christian tensions. The role of the Copts was often part of the sermon and it helps in some measure explain the rise of inter-sectarian conflict in Imbaba at that time. Indeed, the conflict between Muslims and Copts in Imbaba is well known and it continues to the present day. The sermons often consisted of allegations that the Copts in the neighborhood were not only *Nasara* (Christian "heathens") but also that they monopolized commerce and trade in the neighborhood. This perception, among many in the quarter, was increasingly popularized on the ground in part due to the sermons of the Imams which alleged that Copts practiced riba (usury), monopolized the Gold and retail markets, and charged exorbitant prices for medicine. This is an important reason why Muslim-Copt attacks became commonplace in this period leading to a dangerous spiral of violence. According to accounts by former

members themselves, as the Jama'a mobilized larger numbers to their cause by the early 1990s, the violent clashes between Muslims and Copts in the quarter increased significantly.

The social and economic immiseration of the local population in the context of the recessionary downturn, and particularly those who worked as causal laborers, was an important contributor factor that motivated many young men to join the Jama'a's ranks; it also helps to explain the timing associated with their popularity in the late 1980s and 1990s in particular. The informalization of the economy in Western Munira provided the context for radical mobilization in the quarter and afforded the Jama'a the opportunity to provide selective social, economic, and ideational incentives relevant to many young men in the quarter, which it used to mobilize new cadres. Naturally, however, this was hardly a sufficient condition for *militant* activism. Moreover, while state repression, which was considerable particularly following the 1992 siege of the neighborhood, played a role in the persistent popularity of the militants in Western Munira this factor does not fully explain why individuals in Western Munira joined the militant al-Jama'a rather than the more moderate Muslim Brotherhood Islamist trend and, moreover, why they continued to remain fervently committed to al-Jama'a's cause at very high risk to themselves. Answering the questions of why members chose a militant rather than an accommodationist form of political and social activism and why Jama'a leaders employed particularly radical and often violent modes of collective action requires a closer analysis of the organization itself and the local context in which it thrived in the poorer quarters of Western Munira.

Mobilizing Militants: The Challenge of Generating Commitment and Trust among the Rank and File

The most important way to understand how militant organizations are able to pursue effective recruitment campaigns and generate commitment is to examine the challenges these organizations face in securing loyalty to the organization and generating trust among their ranks in the context of severe state repression.[52] In the case of the Jama'a al-Islamiyya in Western Munira, three additional elements stand out as key factors that enabled leaders of the organization to accomplish these objectives: the organizational structure of the organization, its methods of recruitment and socialization of new militant activists, and the context-specific Islamist ideology disseminated through the congregational sermon (*Khutbah*) in the unregulated institutions of the private (*Ahali*) mosques.

The Role of the *Ahali* Mosque

In Imbaba as in many neighborhoods in Cairo, Islamic welfare associations (*al-jami'at al-shar'ia al-Islamiyya*) filled the gap between government services and cost-prohibitive fully privatized social services. In so doing, they presented a "third way" that has proved highly successful particularly among the middle and lower classes. In Western Munira in Imbaba, for example, the sheer density of Islamic charitable associations and the fact that most of the private (*ahali*) mosques in the area had some form of health care unit or clinic indicates the important role Islamists played in providing key social services. However, to say that the Islamic trend in Egypt was invigorated by the spread of Islamic welfare associations does not necessarily implicate them in the rise of al-Jama'a in Imbaba. A far more significant factor was the density of small private mosques in the neighborhood. It is here that Islamist preachers delivered persuasive sermons to the community and youth found the opportunity to fashion a new, more "moral" way of life.

There is no large-scale survey available that accounts for the entire organization and its many branches in the 1990s. Indeed, studying the entire organizational makeup of any clandestine organization is a naturally difficult task. However, my ethnographic research in Imbaba among former members of the *Jama'a* provides an important lens through which to understand how a militant organization, in this case the Jama'a in Western Munira, was able to build their organization in the context of state repression and generate trust networks of the type that generated relatively high levels of commitment to their cause. One of the main arguments I make, building on my interviews with al-Jama'a members and attendance of the organization's sermons, is that while ideology and the framing of the message played an important role in generating high-risk behavior this in itself is not a sufficient explanation to explain the relative efficacy in recruiting and mobilizing new members.

According to former members of the Jama'a, the first Masjid of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya established in Western Munira was *Masjid al-Rahman li al-'Itimad*, which was established in 1986–1987. At that time, the Amir of the neighborhood of Imbaba was Sheikh Ali Abdel-Bakri, and the Amir of Western Munira was Sheikh Mohamed Za'ar who was born in Aswan in Upper Egypt and migrated to Cairo. It was at this time that the network of mosques of the Jama'a was established. These included *Masjid al-Nur*, *Masjid al-Ikhlas*, and *Masjid al-Rahman*, and each of these was led by an Amir of the respective Masjid. Overseeing all three was Sheikh Hossam al-Rayyan. Importantly, the link between these mosques that made up this network was based on weekly interactions and close

coordination between the respective mosques of the organization. Every Tuesday, rather than Friday, primarily to avoid state surveillance, the different branches and groups from the mosques would congregate at the Masjid in Shari Luxor. These meetings included Jama'a members not only from Imbaba but members of the organization residing in other informal settlements including Bulaq al-Daqrur and al-Umraniyya. Imbaba alone brought 7,000 persons from as many as twenty-five different mosques, which, according to one former member, were the "largest groups of *Jama'a* members of any other neighborhood."[53] It was in this period that Sheikh Jabir served as the "military" rather than spiritual or political leader chiefly responsible for military and "jihadist" operations.[54]

In addition to the close coordination among the various mosques, the organizational structure of the *Jama'a* was carefully institutionalized and embedded in the quarter through a strict hierarchical structure. At the level of the executive there were the heads of the area (*Amir al-Mantiqqah*), the mosque (*Amir al-Masjid*), and the organization itself (*Amir al-Jama'a*). Overseeing the operation of these units, was a consultative council (*Majlis al-Shura*), which included all the Amirs and comprised the decision-making body of the organization on the ground. Finally, the day-to-day operations were the responsibility of officers responsible for finance, general security, and military operations.

Importantly, in order to successfully recruit individuals in the quarter, the organization also appointed an official spokesperson (*mutahadith rasmi*) at the level of the community who would speak on behalf of the Jama'a in Imbaba. It was the responsibility of Amir al-Masjid, who possessed intimate knowledge of the local community to personally appoint every one of the local officers of the organization. Masjid al-Nur in Western Munira serves as a good example of this organizational structure. In the late 1980s and 1990s Amir al-Mantiqqa was Sheikh Hossam al-Rayyan, and Amir al-Masjid was Sheikh Ahmed Abdel Wahab. In this period, Amir al-Jama'a of Imbaba was Sheikh Emad Gohar who succeeded Mohamed Za'ar, and the spokesperson for al-Jama'a was Mohamed Abdel Yousef. During the 1992 clashes, it was Abdel Yousef who became Amir al-Jama'a.

In addition to Amir al-Mantiqqah and Amir al-Masjid, these local officers collected dues, organized the military wing, oversaw the security operations, and recruited youth. In Masjid al-Nur, which was the center of recruitment, Amir al-Mantiqqah, Hossam al-Rayyan, was the one chiefly responsible for these aspects of the organization. Significantly, al-Rayyan was a second-generation migrant from Upper Egypt and as such had great legitimacy among local residents. Indeed, in contrast to the

Muslim Brotherhood in this period, al-Jama'a continued to privilege the organization's security and military wings, which included an emphasis on military training and the training of cadres in methods to evade state security forces. Fridays were the days of training wherein selected members were instructed in karate and other martial arts and engaged in role-playing with other members who would play the role of the state's security forces. Sheikh Gabir, the head of the military wing at the peak of the organization's popularity in the neighborhood in the late 1980s and 1990s, personally trained new members in athletics and sports, especially football. Importantly, this training was conducted from early dawn to ten in the morning following which everyone would attend the Friday *khutbah* most often in *Masjid al-Ikhlas* in 'Izbat al-Mufti, a stronghold of al-Jama'a influence at the time.

The congregational prayers in particular offered a social, spiritual, and political outlet and a distinctly congenial and communally oriented cultural space amid the squalor of daily life. These prayers were regularly held on the street (*Salat al-Masaha*) to accommodate the large numbers of devotees who eagerly looked forward to them. Unlike the spatially individuated mosques of middle-class Cairo, which are often built on very expansive grounds and set apart from daily street life, the storefront mosques of Imbaba are integrated into the street. It is here that a particular form of community ethic is fostered and where young children are given microphones and encouraged to introduce the prayers before the multitude of men who make up the congregation. As a consequence, those who joined the ranks of al-Jama'a were rewarded with a profound sense of community and "fellow feeling." Rank and file members often expressed great affection and loyalty for their "brothers" in the movement. When a member is imprisoned by *Amn al-Dawla* (state security), al-Jama'a members often banded together, in collecting the necessary funds in order to employ competent lawyers for their friends "inside" (*fi al-dakhil*) and also to support the families of those incarcerated. This message of brotherhood, which was disseminated frequently by the Imams in their sermons, had particular resonance and appeal to residents in the informal settlements. This is because the majority of them, particularly those residing in the quarters of Western Munira, were living in a context of deeply fractured social relations, difficult and unpredictable forms of work, environmental hazards, and claustrophobic dwellings.

Another important service provided by al-Jama'a was to improve the literacy of those youth who joined its ranks. Most young men in Western Munira, where there was only one elementary school and no secondary school at the time, said that they saw no future in education. Moreover,

rarely could families afford to forego the labor of any member, no matter how young. The organization's mosques partially compensated for the limited educational opportunities neighborhood residents faced. Former members of al-Jama'a noted that through the memorization of the Qur'an and weekly religious lessons conducted by the *shaykhs* in the neighborhood mosques, youths learned how to read and write properly. To be sure, these lessons were conducted under strict disciplinary guidelines, and the young men coerced into memorizing verses from the Qur'an under threat of penalties. Nevertheless, these lessons offered the hitherto rare opportunity to receive a modest education at no cost.

Rules of Conduct and Militant Recruitment

In contrast to the recruitment of Muslim Brothers, but similar to other clandestine militant organizations, al-Jama'a implemented a far more stringent code of conduct designed to secure loyalty and to maintain a high level of commitment among its rank and file. According to former members of the Jama'a, members who do not follow certain obligations are punished in ways that guarantee loyalty to the organization and signal to other members not to stray.[55] A key method of accomplishing this is through *Ta'zeer* or ostracism. Members who do not comply by the rules of conduct and certain obligations in the form of attending prayer meetings and *khutbahs* regularly or dispute the strategic decision or moral positions of leaders faced a number of penalties. Most notably, these include financial penalties that are paid to the Jama'a's leadership directly from their wages, and a form of social ostracism designed to generate discipline among the ranks and strengthen the loyalty of adherents to the cause. In the case of the latter, Jama'a leaders commanded members not to talk to the noncooperative individual and they rescinded the member's privilege of participating in any collective activities of the organization. Former members noted that *Ta'zeer* was a particularly *mulim* (hurtful) form of punishment since by this time they were isolated from their families and other forms of social support and networks. Another punishment utilized is *'Itikaf* (meditative seclusion) whereby the individual is instructed to spend a period of up to one week inside the mosque, eat, sleep there, conduct daily maintenance, and, most importantly, is compelled to conduct additional prayers in isolation.

A number of actions warrant the penalties of *Ta'zeer* and *'Itiqaf*. First, this can occur when individual members conduct certain actions without the supervision of the leadership or amir. One example occurred in 'Izbat al-Mufti when the Beni Hamed clan came into conflict with the Jama'a and Sheikh Ali Gabir attacked the Beni Mohamed without first consulting

the leadership, which, in this case, was the amir of a Masgid in Imbaba. Under the guidelines of the Jama'a, any lower-ranking member in the organization must inform the amir prior to any retaliatory action against individuals or groups outside of the Group. Second, if a member is instructed to conduct an operation and he does not fulfill this act the local amir of the mosque reports this infraction to Amir al-Mantiqqa who decides on the punishment for the individual. Former members informed the author of a number of these actions. These included minor and major offenses to the leadership such as when a member is told to clean the Masjid, collect donations, memorize the Quran in its entirety, or spread the *Da'wa* (Islamic call) in the neighborhood to the satisfaction of the emir of the settlement.

Given these stringent codes of conduct the key question is, why do members join in the first place? There are of course those true believers who join for religious reasons and are genuinely inspired by the religious classes and moral message associated with the congregational sermons and the *Da'wa*. As one former member recalled, one amir used to gather us *Shabaab* (youth), read to us the Quran because we couldn't, and give each of us one pound after each lesson.[56] He gave us a "sense of community . . . a sense of communal love."[57] Others joined simply for reasons of social security and a sense of solidarity. As one former member put it, "some of us joined so that we could feel stronger . . . and to have others stand with us in times of need and trouble."[58]

Doubtless these are factors that induced many to join the middle-class Muslim Brotherhood organization. However, the profound social and economic transformations in Imbaba since the 1970s meant that many who joined the militants did so as a result of reasons unique to the informal settlements of Cairo. As former members acknowledged, some individuals who joined were "criminals" and they made their way into the Jama'a to engage in theft and extortion. A number of others joined to escape blood feuds (*Tar*) in their home villages in Upper Egypt. Indeed, a number of residents noted that those Upper Egyptians that joined, and there were a number who did, arrived to '*Izbat al-Mufti*, *Beshteel* and *Osim* to escape conflict in their town of origin although they also acknowledged that the majority migrated for economic reasons to "make money" in the city.[59]

Finally, it is important to highlight that in the Western Munira sections of Imbaba, a large number of young men and juveniles who joined the militants did so as a second choice when they experienced socioeconomic barriers of entry with respect to their aspiration to join the Muslim Brotherhood. This was evident in both spatial and class terms in two ways. First, the Muslim Brothers in the neighborhood often utilized

Masjid al-Rahman in the more socially and spatially distant middle-class sections of Imbaba "far away from Munira beyond *Shari al-Buiyyi*." A second important barrier to entry into the Brotherhood for the young men in Western Munira was simply their lack of education, prospects, and general economic and social marginalization. This is the reason why a number of members regularly complained that even when they attempted to join the *Ikhwan* they were not chosen since the Brotherhood required upwardly mobile, middle-class, and lower-middle-class recruits. "They want," one lamented, "those who have *ras maal* (capital) or a university degree so they can make use of them."[60]

Explaining Militant Violence: *Tagheer Al-Munkar* and the Struggle for Law and Order in a Heterogeneous Community

One of the most important challenges for clandestine organizations and social movements is not only to generate commitment among their rank and file, but also to establish a source of legitimate law and order. Islamists have only been partially successful in this endeavor. In this regard, and in the case of militant organizations in particular, the central principle of *taghher al-munkar*, which serves as a key source of ideational legitimacy, recruitment, and popular mobilization, also functions as a central instrument in securing territorially based political and economic control. However, in the context of a community divided along the lines of sect, class, kinship, and gender militant activists not only faced state repression, they also encountered a daunting challenge in establishing a monopoly over law and order in their efforts at building a "state within a state." This is evidenced in the way militant members clashed with the Copts as well as kin groups and women in the informal settlements of Western Munira.

In this poorer quarter of Imbaba the attraction of many local residents and young men to the principle of *tagheer al-munkar* had very much to do with a perceived moral and social corruption (*al-fasad al-akhlaqi*) in the neighborhood. It is a state of affairs that the Jama'a were intent on remedying, albeit often through coercive and violent means. One incident, which exemplifies the "protection racket" aspect, associated with the Jama'a's methods, inspired Tariq, a long-standing member of the Jama'a at the time, to renounce his membership in the organization. In this instant, a married landlord solicited an unmarried woman living in one of the apartments in the neighborhood for sex, and he threatened to evict her if she did not comply. Subsequently, she sent word to Jama'a members who then forcibly removed the man from his home and physically assaulted him. However, the man eventually

donated 1,000 pounds to *Masjid al-Rahman* in *al-'Itimad* street and persuaded the Jama'a to evict the woman from her apartment. When Tariq went to the amir of the Masjid to complain and criticize the expulsion of the woman from her home he was duly punished for insubordination, forced into *'itikaf* (meditative seclusion), and fined a fee of twenty pounds. It was this incident, among others, that led to his withdrawal from the Jama'a.

Yet another example illustrates the way in which the implementation of *tagheer al-munkar* by militant activists in the neighborhood regularly resulted in fueling what emerged as a pattern of inter-sectarian tensions and violence. In this one instance, a coffee shop owner and Coptic Christian in 'Izbat al-Mufti, Abdel Labib was commanded by a well-known member of the Jama'a, Mustafa al-Rayan, to shut down his coffee shop on the grounds that he allowed the consumption of alcohol on his premises despite there being no formal ban against alcohol consumption. A fight quickly ensued between the Copt and al-Rayan and, as al-Rayan informed me, he made a complaint to Amir al-Jama'a at the time, *Amir Mutwali*, but received no response. After four days with no response from any members of the leadership of the organization, al-Rayan organized Jama'a members at a meeting in *Masjid al-Rahman al-'Itimad* and formed what Jama'a members term the *Khamsaat*, a formation of five rows each consisting of five individuals who stand side by side in the Masjid, and refer to themselves as martyrs. In this instance al-Rayan led a *Khamsaat* in military formation to the coffee house of Abdel Labib. By Mustafa al-Rayan's owned admission they "destroyed" the coffee shop, stole the video player and television, and caused what Abdel Labib said was more than seventy pounds worth of damages. In retaliation the Copts in the quarter responded and attacked members of the Jama'a, which escalated into a larger inter-sectarian conflict in the quarter.

To these inter-sectarian tensions, rooted in the marked increase in economic competition and rivalries in the quarter, the Jama'a interjected what proved to be an incendiary message directed toward some of their most ardent and committed followers intended to legitimize anti-Copt violence on "religious" grounds. One example of this message relayed through one of their Imam's sermons cast doubt on the moral intentions and character of *Ahl al-Kitab* (the People of the Book) as well as unbelievers (*Kufar*):

He who exhibits hostility towards you, you do not need evidence or proof to confirm his enmity . . . The battle against unbelievers is clear since ancient times; listen to what Allah said: those who do not believe, the pagans and the People of the Book, reject the goodness from God and God is merciful with whomever he wants saying: "You believe them but they do not love you." As the saying goes:

"He gives you sweets from the tip of the tongue and deceives you as the cunning fox teases its prey."[61]

If the Jama'a came into frequent conflict with Copts in '*Izbat al-Mufti* resulting in violence, another equally important source of conflict had to do with the organization's relationship to members of the newly urbanized kinship groups. However, the relationship between Islamists and kinship networks is a complicated one. To be sure, far from an archetype of the past, kinship networks in Cairo's informal fringe continue to have great influence among the local population especially among the poorer and more recent migrants from rural areas. Nevertheless, the nature and consequences of violence between the militant activists and clan elders and larger kinship-based associations reflect a pattern of violent conflict as well as tacit cooperation.

One illustrative incident involved a violent conflict between the Beni Mohamed clan, led by Safwat Abdel Ghani,[62] whose members represent new rural migrants from Assiut and Sohag to 'Izbat al-Mufti. When the wife of a member of the Jama'a (wearing the *Niqab*) disposed her garbage in front of the coffee house of Mohamed Ali Magbouli, a member of the Beni Mohamed clan of Assiut, Ali insulted her and she complained to Amir Masjid al-Nur who then organized a Jama'a Khamsaat, marched to Magbouli's coffee shop, and assaulted him. In retaliation, members of the Beni Mohamed clan fired on a number of the Jama'a. Quickly the violence between the Islamists and the Beni Mohamed escalated. Sheikh Gabir organized his own personal security force drawn from Masjid al-Ikhlas and Masjid al-Nur and marched to 'Izbat al-Mufti in a show of force, beat Magbouli, and vandalized his car. In the Friday prayers that followed a group from the Beni Mohamed went to Masjid al-Ikhlas and fired into the mosque killing one person. At a Tuesday Jama'a meeting held at Masjid Sayid al-Mursileen, and after three days of clashes, the Imam, himself from Assiut, resolved the conflict, vouching for the Beni Mohamed as "good Muslims" and persuading the Jama'a to make peace with them. The conflict was resolved when the leader of the Beni Mohamed paid damages to the Masjid and, according to local residents, built a second story for *Masjid al-Ikhlas*. Importantly, in this instance, while traditional conflict resolution mechanisms were used to resolve the dispute the reason that this proved effective was primarily because those members of the Jama'a chiefly responsible for negotiating an end to the conflict with the elders of the Beni Mohamed hailed from the same clan.

Nevertheless, despite frequent conflict between Islamist militants and individuals belonging to local clans in the neighborhood, the notion of

tagheer al-munkar found a popular resonance among a wide range of local residents. Indeed, a number of former members of the Jama'a as well as local residents not formally aligned with the organization acknowledged that they were deeply attracted to the militants understanding of *tagheer al-munkar*. That is the notion that it was a collective rather than an individual obligation. They felt strongly that this interpretation established both a sense of peace and religious morality in the neighborhood, and this attraction was markedly evident by the hundreds of residents who attended the *khutbahs* on a regular basis and who clearly found the message of morality associated with the idea of commanding the good and forbidding evil an obligation as well as a necessity in their conflict-ridden quarter. They noted that the idea of changing "immoral ways" by hand (*al-yad*) and not just via Jihad was crucially important in that it gave them a sense of authority in the neighborhood and a great deal of *ihtiram* (respect).

Importantly, former members of the Jama'a spoke of *tagheer al-munkar* in very similar terms as their notions of *tar* or blood feud and it was clear in my interviews that the notion of morality, honor, punishment, and justifiable reprisals associated with the tradition of *tar* was perceived as a form of *tagheer al-munkar*. In this respect, *tagheer al-munkar* resonated deeply with Upper Egyptian norms, which despite the fast-paced developments of Imbaba still resonate strongly in certain quarters of the neighborhood. The adherence to, and implementation of, *tagheer al-munkar* also provided militants with an ideological advantage and legitimacy in the neighborhood vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood. According to former members of the Jama'a, the *Ikhwan* not only do not abide by the proper understanding and interpretation of *tagheer al-munkar* as part of their strategy and *Da'wa*; they also "do not hold conferences or *Khutbas* against the government."[63] While this was not always the case even in the late 1990s, it was indeed a time of political accommodation on the part of the Brotherhood's leadership, a state of affairs that the Jama'a routinely exploited in their efforts at popularizing their own brand of Islamist activism and to outbid the Muslim Brotherhood in mobilizing adherents to their cause.

As inter-sectarian violence continued in the neighborhood long-standing socioeconomic as well as religious divisions have deepened. Indeed, as a stronghold of Cairo's Coptic minority, housing five Coptic Churches and four Anglican Churches within a space of only three blocks, Imbaba continues to be a site of inter-sectarian tensions and frequent incidences of violence. This pattern of violence pitting Salafists against Coptic Christians, which emerged in the 1990s, increased in the years just prior to Mubarak's ouster and in the aftermath of the Tahrir uprising. On

May 12, 2011, less than four months after the uprising, the Supreme Court of Prosecution arrested twenty-three Salafists for their alleged involvement in inter-sectarian clashes that followed the burning of Saint Mena Church in Imbaba earlier that month. The Salafists were charged with terrorism and murder as well as vandalism and the destruction of public and private property. The ensuing violence left fifteen Copts dead and injured hundreds of others reigniting dangerous levels of religious violence. In response to the violence, and as a result of a notable absence of a legitimate and impartial police presence in the neighborhood, members of the Coptic community organized small groups of "self-defense" units to protect not only the churches but also small businesses and coffee shops owned by Copts.[64]

The Role of the Local Strongman: *Baltagiyya Al- 'Ataat* and the "Market" in Coercion

The association of al-Jama'a with the institution of the local strongman, or *Baltagi*, provided the organization with another source of recruitment as well as another important source of conflict. From the point of view of the Jama'a, these strongmen served three important functions in the organization's attempts to expand its popularity among local residents and to build a shadow government under the radar of state authorities: the coercive enforcement of informal contracts, the extraction of "taxes" from local residents and merchants, and as a means of providing material incentives in the form of monetary compensation for some rank and file members, albeit generated from illicit and coercive means.

According to former members in 'Izbat al-Mufti and Beshteel, leaders of the organization preferred "clever people" who were "healthy and physically strong." Some, albeit certainly not all, of these "strong" youth were well known in the neighborhood as *baltagiyya* (strong men) and they were selected to be part of the military wing and to participate in antistate "defense campaigns" (*Hamlaat al-Tameen*). In addition to the strong men recruited by al-Jama'a, young boys (*subyan*), ranging from thirteen to fifteen years old, were also recruited into the organization's *Istihlal* (praise) wing. The latter's primary responsibility was to ride their bicycles and man checkpoints to detect state security personnel, particularly during the Tuesday and Friday prayers and meetings. Leaders, responsible for recruitment at the time, acknowledged that the *baltagiyya* rarely joined for religious reasons and many did not attend prayers regularly. Rather, they joined because, as one former recruiter put it, "street life is dangerous and there is a great deal of competition, rivalries and violence between the *Baltagiyya*." Thus, joining al-Jama'a was not only

a good way of joining a large group of like-minded people; it "assured the *Baltagi* the opportunity to earn income."

Indeed, while the *Baltagiyya* phenomenon is commonly associated with general criminality, in its modern manifestation it is closely linked to the increasing levels of wealth and socio-spatial disparity, and most particularly to the great expansion of informal labor concentrated in informal housing areas such as those in Imbaba. To be sure the *baltagiyya* are distinct from informal labors and marginalized youth in the neighborhood in important ways (most notably in their propensity to engage in violence and to participate in the outsourcing of coercion) but because they often must take on informal jobs, it is difficult to separate the two groups in socioeconomic terms. Many of these *baltagiyya* work as day laborers or odd jobbers, and a significant number joined the ranks of al-Jama'a. Importantly, in the case of Western Munira, recruiters acknowledged that most of the *baltagiyya* who joined the al-Jama'a did so not so much for the opportunity of engaging in new forms of racketeering, but simply because they had no other alternative. "There is," as one activist noted, "little work in the informal settlements and no infrastructure or transportation to the City to find work."[65] It is this state of constant economic and social insecurity, rather than simply the poverty or high unemployment, that can quickly transform these youth into "*Baltagiyya*," serving as freelance operators who can, as Adel Iskander has aptly noted, act like an "unofficial urban mercenary force providing services to the highest bidder."

Moreover, local residents in Imbaba distinguish three varieties of *Baltagiyya* with only two categories of urban mercenaries linked to the security arm of the state or militant Islamist activism, albeit in different ways. The first group is known as *Baltagiyya al-Bashawat* (thugs of the elite or aristocracy) and, among local residents, these are considered the "thugs" who are linked to the State Security forces and who do the dirty work of the political and military elite. The second category is *Baltagiyya al-Futuwwa* or the chivalrous *baltagiyya*. Traditionally these young men were revered (and feared) by local residents and generally considered a legitimate segment of social and political life. They served as agents of protection buttressing the legitimacy of traditional authority by aiding in the enforcement of informal social contracts following the resolution of local conflicts via traditional methods. The Jama'a recruited some of these *Futuwwa* into their military wing because of their legitimacy among local residents and also because they are known for their physical prowess and knowledge of the security forces.

Finally, and most importantly, in terms of those considered opportunists and freelance operators of coercion are the *Baltagiyya al-'Ataat*

(literally, the enforcers of contracts or "bids"). In the context of the erosion of traditional authority, the *Baltagiyya 'Ataat* emerged as power-ful agents of coercion in the neighborhood. Many were enlisted by mili-tant leaders to serve two important functions denoted by their name, *'Ataat*: the enforcement of informal labor contracts, and the extraction of revenue, or "taxes," generated from local residents and commercial establishments. These were the youth who regularly used violence or the threat of violence to extort fees from the *Suq* (market). This included implementation of an informal tax regime on informal street peddlers, on vehicles parking or passing through the neighborhood's narrow alleys, and on formal commercial establishments and retailers.

But if the *baltagiyya* provided an opportunity for the Jama'a leadership, they also presented a key dilemma for the organization. On the one hand, the association of al-Jama'a with the institution of the local strongman provided the organization with an additional source of recruitment and they were an important component of the military wing of the organiza-tion. On the other hand, Jama'a leaders experienced great difficulty in generating discipline and ideological commitment from them in a sustained fashion. Initially, the organization's leadership was able to institute a modicum of law and order by recruiting the *baltagiyya* into their ranks, but ultimately they were not able to limit the latter's violent excesses in Western Munira which served as a key constraint in the expansion of their popularity among local residents and resulted in defec-tions of a significant number of rank and file members of the organization. Three key issues were important in this regard: the method of recruitment of the *baltagiyya*, the coercive methods used by strong men to generate revenue for the organization, and the attempt on the part of local leaders of al-Jama'a to sanction the coercive methods of the *baltagiyya* on reli-gious grounds. The latter had the unintended consequence of undermin-ing the ideological legitimacy of the Islamic Group in the quarter.

Importantly, local residents describe the recruitment of *Baltagiyya al-'Ataat* by militants in starkly different and far less selective terms from the one used to generate high levels of commitment from the organization's general rank and file, but one uncannily similar to the process and guidelines (*kuras shuruut*) job recruiters employ in contracting informal workers in the construction firms in the neighborhood. One resident familiar with the process explained: "When there is a demand for them [*Baltagiyya al-'Ataat*], the patron offers a tender ['*ataat*] at competitive prices and whosoever has good reputation in the market wins. Of course, some in the 'Izba have regular clients that they have built over time." The difference of course is that in the heyday of the Jama'a's recruitment drives in Western Munira the "contractor" of *Baltagiyya al-'Ataat* was

oftentimes a local resident harboring strong allegiance to the organization in the quarter.

As is the case with the recruitment of cadres, generating revenue is another key challenge for any clandestine organization operating in the shadow of an authoritarian state. In the case of the Jama'a it is important to note that the organization generated funds through noncoercive as well as coercive means. Indeed, the bulk of the funding was locally generated and based on local donations, dues, and fees collected on Tuesdays and Fridays at prayers and meetings where as many as 7,000 to 8,000 individuals were in attendance. The financial system was underpinned by the dense networks of small *Masajid* not registered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs all of which were linked to the memberships and maintained by weekly meetings and prayer groups. That is, while the funding was gathered informally it was done through a highly centralized fashion overseen by the amir of Financial Affairs. Moreover, most of the investment and funding sources of the Jama'a centered on smaller enterprises focused on the domestic market. Retail chains such as *Tawhid al-Nur* and other small shops specialized in selling Islamic dress, clothing, belts and other attire, and income from livestock raising projects (*Nishat Tarbiyyat al-Mawashi*) and the selling of meat from livestock raised in Assiut, al-Minia, and other Upper Egyptian cities provided another source of legitimate revenue. Another source of funding was in the sale of cassettes of sermons of Egyptian as well as Saudi Arabian Wahhabist preachers sold at the mosques in the neighborhood. This was designed not only to generate profit but also to raise the consciousness of followers. At the height of the Jama'a's popularity former members noted that each Masjid sold approximately 250 cassettes that would be collected by the leadership of the organization from all the mosques generating annual revenue of upward of 2 million Egyptian pounds. Since these cassettes were not licensed or taxed by the state, they represented an important source of funding from informal trade for the organization.

A second source of funds generated primarily through coercive means involved the participation of the *Baltagiyya al-'Ataat*. Under the authority and guidance of *Amir Majlis al-Shura* who was responsible for the financing of the organization, many of these *baltagiyya* were put in charge of organizing and staffing "Zakat Committees" and collecting, in the words of one participant, "donations from the street." By their own admission, even some of the most devout members stated that they would keep a small amount to themselves with the tacit approval of the Jama'a leaders in lieu of, or as a supplement to, their regular salaries. However, what distinguished the discursive designation of which individual among the ranks was a *Baltagi Futuwwa* or a *Baltagi 'Ataat* hinged on who joined the organization primarily for opportunistic reasons. To be sure, the Jama'a

recruited from both groups, which often resulted in rivalries and conflict among the *baltagiyya* and between the latter and the Jama'a organization.

Nevertheless, a former committed Jama'a member informed me that the *Baltagiyya al-'Ataat* in particular joined because they found it lucrative and that they regularly extorted money form store owners, coffee house owners, housewives, and "anyone they could." Indeed, from the perspective of the Jama'a, as well as many local residents, these were the most divisive variety of *baltagiyya* since they not only extracted *'ataat* (fees) from local residents by force, they were also involved in selling and distributing illicit drugs thus further degrading the moral status of the community. The challenge for the Jama'a leadership was not only that the lines of division between these categories were blurred, but that the rules of conduct and obligations so important to generate commitment and trust did not apply to those recruited but who were more interested in racketeering rather than the ideological program of the Jama'a. The challenge for the Jama'a leadership emerged as the lines of division between *Baltagiyya al-Futuwa* and *Baltagiyya al-'Ataat* blurred, and coercion for opportunistic reasons became indistinguishable from that formerly deployed by al-Jama'a in the service of mobilizing resistance against the authoritarians state. At the heart of the problem was that the rules of conduct and obligations so important in generating commitment, trust, and discipline among the ranks did not apply to those *baltagiyya* more interested in racketeering and personal gain rather than the ideological and political program of the Jama'a.

If the excessive forms of coercion and violence deployed against local residents and commercial interests diminished the organization's popularity among local residents, its legitimacy was further undermined by the efforts of the Jama'a to legitimate the coercive tactics of those *baltagiyya* under their charge in religious terms. Specifically, leaders in the organization referred to the extortion of revenue and "taxes" from local residents and merchants as a form of *Fard al-'Ataat*, that is, a religious duty for those working on behalf of the cause of the organization, and some leaders and some rank and file alike went as far as to promote the idea that stealing from gold shops, groceries and coffee shops owned by Copts (*Kufar*) is *Hallalu al-Sirqa* (a permissible, albeit illicit, form of primitive capital accumulation) and an important aspect of their campaign of *Tagheer al-munkar wa al-amr bi al-Ma'ruf*.

Economic Crisis and the Erosion of Traditional Authority: Militants versus Kin

If a major objective of any clandestine organization is to build institutions of law and order so as to establish hegemonic control and a monopoly of

coercion over local populations, a major challenge in this endeavor for militant activists is how to successfully supplant, or displace, the authority of local rivals. In the case of Imbaba, the most important source of rivalry for al-Jama'a was the customary judicial systems, which underpin traditional kin or regionally based local authorities. Among the most important of these were the regional community associations (*rawabit iqlimiyya*), which traditionally resolved disputes among kin through reconciliation committees (*lijan al-sulh*) of an informal deliberative council (*al-majlis al-'urfi*). A major reason that al-Jama'a were able to establish what their leaders termed the "Emirate of Imbaba" (i.e., "a state within a state") in Western Munira was because they were able to capitalize on the erosion in the legitimacy and social relevance of these institutions to local residents. Moreover, an important source of grievance among local residents that played an important role in many joining the Jama'a had to do with the erosion in the authority of local notables which was greatly diminished as a result of two developments: the economic transformations, predating the rise of al-Jama'a, which profoundly altered the socioeconomic conditions in the quarter, and the increased regulation and co-optation of these informal institutions by state authorities through legal as well as coercive means.

Under traditional law and custom, it was the wealthy and notable family elders, most often possessing an average of 10–20 feddans, that controlled the village and resolved local disputes. Importantly, these local notables also appointed individuals to the *lejan al-sulh* (reconciliation committees), and while strict hierarchies were enforced the latter generally enjoyed the legitimacy of local authority among local residents. In great part this was due to the manner in which the Omdas (village governors) were appointed. The traditional requirements for appointment included three important criteria that ensured their legitimacy among local residents: that he is nominated by the local residents of the village, perceived to hold a "good reputation," and that he be a medium landowner, neither poor nor exceedingly wealthy but sufficiently "comfortable" to ensure a form of evenness. The wealthiest landowners were rarely chosen to be Omdas because of the perceived bias such wealth would necessarily engender.[66]

The legitimacy of these traditional authorities was further enhanced by relatively transparent, if not democratic, process of dispute settlement. Prior to 1992, informal councils (*majalis 'urfiyya*) were presided over by the Omda and the Sheikh, the religious authority of the village who served as the Omda's assistant. The disputants would meet at the Omda's house, deliberate until a decision is made, and, in accordance with custom, the disputant who lost the case would be awarded with

a gift by the one who was awarded the favorable decision. Moreover, the proceeding would be presided over by the reconciliation committee (*lajnat al-Musalaha*), which comprises kin elders of two or more clans involved in the dispute. Prior to 1997, when the state formally intervened in the neighborhood, and according to Sheikh Osman Mohamed of Osim village, these committees comprised five large families who would elect a representative to the committee who in turn would be formally approved by the Omda.[67]

However, by the mid-1980s these customary justice systems underwent drastic changes as a result of three interrelated social and economic transformations: the influx of rural-to-urban migration, in-migration from other lower-class sections of Cairo, and the cyclical depression associated with construction trade during the era of the informal housing boom which was an important source of employment for many men and youth in Imbaba. Indeed, what is noteworthy is that, as a consequence of the absence of strong and legitimate state institutions and formalized labor relations, residents of the poorest sections in Western Munira came to increasingly rely on informal social institutions to negotiate their social relations. However, over the years, and prior to the mid-1990s, social and familial conflicts in Western Munira, and Osim, Beshteel, and 'Izbat al-Mufti in particular, worsened in the context of the economic crisis and increasing competition in the informal labor and housing markets.

The disputes were often over agricultural plots in the home village. In the past these disputes were often mitigated by a brother who came to the city to find work but following the recession in the 1980s in Osim and 'Izbat al-Mufti, the Omdas I interviewed in Western Munira noted that these brothers often laid claim to their lands back home in upper Egypt, and families were no longer able to resolve the situation on their own. Increasingly, problems of inheritance were referred to the police and the Omda and Sheikh would be asked by the police to appear before the judge to legitimate as well as to formalize the legal decision already reached by state authorities. Indeed, Sheikh Osman recalled that in the past, the majority of disputes he had to resolve had to do with *tar* (blood feuds), killings in addition to disputes over inheritance. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, the most common were inheritance problems, which usually occur among brothers. "We have had very little problems with '*unsuriyya* (clannism) or *taifiyya* (sectarianism) here in the past although *tar* (blood feud) was our biggest security problem in the old days."[68]

"Putting Out Fires": Surveillance and the Securitization of Traditional Authority

However, while dramatic economic and social transformations undermined traditional authorities in ways that provided the context and opportunity for militants and some of their *baltagiyya* emissaries to fill the vacuum of sociopolitical life, this should not obscure the role of state coercion and surveillance that played a crucial role in exacerbating grievances of many residents that enhanced the popularity of al-Jama'a.

The ubiquitous nature of surveillance in authoritarian states is of course a matter of common knowledge and public concern. However, rarely are the consequences of this form of not-so hidden coercion apparent in terms of its consequences at the level of the community. Indeed, a key element associated with authoritarian states is the overlap and linkage between the formal regulatory and coercive arm of the state (whether legal, military, or intelligence), and the informal institutions at the level of the community that, taken together, are intended to simultaneously subdue dissent and expand and consolidate state power. However, the unintended consequences of this are the erosion of traditional authority, the enhanced popularity of antistate organizations, and, in the case of some of Cairo's informal areas, the expansion in the market for informal sources of coercion.

Following the pivotal events of 1992, the Mubarak regime intervened in Imbaba and effectively upended the already weakened authority of the informal councils, Omdas, and Sheiks in the neighborhood. In contrast to previous decades, for example, the Omda is directly appointed by the Ministry of Interior and automatically becomes a member of the ruling party at both the local council and village level. Moreover, he receives funding directly from the state[69] rather than from local residents or from his land, as was the case in the past. Furthermore, while in the past the Omda wielded great influence in selecting the member of the Local Council (the local branch of the National Democratic Party at the time), the latter is now more often chosen from one of the wealthiest families. As one resident in Osim put it, "big families and wealth are [now] the two main means of getting into the Local Council."[70] By the late 1990s, for example, in *al-Waraq* representatives of *Malis al-Sha'ab* were members of the most powerful and largest clans, the *Hamdiyya* and *Amer* clans, and the Local Council, the administrative arm of the National Party in Imbaba, was dominated by the clans of the *Salmaniyya*, *Shawaykha*, and *Ashmuniyya*. These are all families, which while not representing the biggest clans in Imbaba generated great wealth through land speculation (Chapter 1). Consequently, a major reason the government-appointed "leadership" of the local councils lost legitimacy is that

they catered almost exclusively to the more affluent members of the local community. Moreover, in the eyes of most residents, local councils stood as a poor substitute for the traditional notables, whose weakened role was exemplified by the shallow reach of informal councils and reconciliation committees. Traditionally, these bodies arbitrated disputes, but the erosion of formerly legitimate institutions of social cohesion and control had rendered them increasingly irrelevant in Western Munira.

In 1997 the state further regulated the traditional institutions in Osim and other satellite villages in ways that transformed them into a veritable security arm of the state. In that year the regime passed *Qarar Ta'ayeen al-Omid* (Law of Appointing Omdas).[71] Thus, by 1992 and formally in 1997, the Omda and Sheikh (Omda's assistant) were appointed by the regime rather than by local residents; the membership of *Lajnat al-Sulh* had to be approved by the security forces; and the police rather than the informal councils took the lead in resolving familial as well as social disputes in the neighborhood. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior now forwarded selected individuals from the community and compelled the Omda to nominate them to the local council and assign them the task of monitoring residents. While the Omda in Osim informed me that the new system was "no problem," it was very clear that the inability of having independence in appointments and the ill reputation it engendered among local residents were a source of great consternation for what are still traditional minded rural migrants with great attachment to their community.

A central function of the government-appointed Omdas became one of security rather than resolving local disputes. The Sheiks and Omdas were essentially transformed from *Ghuffar*, traditional caretakers of plots of land or apartment buildings in Cairo, to what local residents derisively termed *Ghuffar al-Nizam*, caretakers of the regime. "Our two main concerns are criminals in the village and security problems."[72] If the Omda is disconnected from local residents, the Sheikh or Omda's assistant also lacks legitimacy. Residents complained that the Sheikh was not only appointed by the Ministry of Interior but that he had no religious background whatsoever and "comes from a military background: the Omda is paid not by the Minister of Education and the Sheikh but the Minister of Interior."[73] To make matters worse for state-community relations, as one resident, 'Alaa noted, "few government-appointed Imams at the Mosques in Osim are respected by local residents." Indeed, they are treated with open disdain. For example, in the late 1990s, Sheikh Hassan Sa'eed appointed by the Ministry of Religious Endowment and who ran the Masjid in Osim was the only one of the government's

appointed Imams that the Omda and Sheikh noted as having any authority.

The responsibility of the Omda and Sheikh is to resolve local disputes, register voting-age residents for elections, issue personal IDs, confirm competency for the military drafts, and oversee issues having to do with security, farming fertilizers, and the irrigation of land from ground wells, and assist orphans. However, the Omda and Sheikh in Osim, Western Munira, acknowledged that by the late 1990s, the "most important duty" is to work with security authorities and "even if the resident is rich and has land to make sure he has moderate, democratic values." They noted that the lieutenant (*liwa*) of the security forces informed the Omda and Sheikhs that their main role is now to build the "new social order" (*bina Ijtima' jadeed*) which is composed of three issues: civil defense, the emergency laws, and to "put out fires."[74] One Omda in Western Munira described succinctly the exact manner in which the former Mubarak regime designed and orchestrated its surveillance through the use of local intermediaries:

If the terrorists are from among our own residents here in Osim, we immediately tell the state security (*amn*), if they are simply *baltagiyya* than we tell the police (*shurta*) ... if terrorists are from outside, we immediately inform the security forces. If we see Islamists implementing *Da'wa* we do not approach them ourselves, but simply report them to the security forces. We monitor them for the state security (*Amn al-Dawla*) that ask us to do so and see if they are really terrorists ... we don't tell the large families, they have no role in these things.[75]

It is within this context that, and at the peak in their popularity, that militants were able to capitalize on the erosion of traditional authority in very specific ways. Specifically, the militant Islamic Group found it possible to diffuse a particular form of family-based Islamic norms through the establishment of the dense network of unregulated private mosques that provided a wide range of social services. While these social services were minimal, they were nevertheless far more substantial than those provided by kin-based or state institutions such as the local councils (*majalis mahliyya*) and governmental Developmental Associations (*munazamat tanmiyya*). As a consequence, Islamists largely supplemented both the state and the traditional Regional Community Associations (*rawbit 'iqlimiyya*).

Furthermore, Islamist militants used their newfound institutions to legitimize their stringent codes of social control and they intervened to settle disputes in the quarter formerly resolved through customary judicial systems. They routinely imposed a strictly enforced code of behavior and discipline legitimized via the espousal of norms of social

justice (*al-'adl al-ijtima'iyy*) and presented local residents an "alternative lifestyle" in the context of very poor and squalid conditions.[76] These norms resonated strongly in the local community since they stood in marked contrast to both the neglect of the state and the ineffective and co-opted traditional kin-based institutions; that is, they approximated the normative outlook and "lived experience" of a large segment of Cairo's urban poor.

Following the 1992 siege, the state did intervene to underwrite some basic infrastructural development. Yet as late as 2000, the rehabilitation of Imbaba's poorest areas was only partial and failed to bolster the legitimacy of the state in the view of local residents. The minimal social services the state provided following Imbaba's siege were largely financed by foreign aid rather than domestic sources. The bulk of these funds were allocated to extending electricity and paving roads – allocations made out of security considerations rather than a sincere interest in improving the material conditions of the community. Members of the local council (the local branch of the then ruling National Democratic Party) remained apprehensive about al-Jama'a's presence in their neighborhood. They expressed great frustration with the government's less-than-sufficient assistance and were well aware that residents held them in low regard in comparison to al-Jama'a.[77] Indeed, when I returned to visit in the summer of 2015 very little State or foreign assistance was in evidence and, by most accounts, the changes following the 1992 siege have been superficial: unemployment remained high, housing scarce, and health problems prevalent. As one resident put it, the Islamists did not spread in Imbaba just because there was sewage or there was not sewage.[78]

How Poverty Matters

The vast literature on political radicalization and terrorism has reached a somewhat troubling consensus that relegates social and economic conditions to the back burner in terms of explaining the "root causes" of religious, and particularly Islamist, militancy. Scholars such as Alan Krugman and Marc Sagemen, for example, contend that since most militant leaders are generally from a middle- or even upper-class backgrounds, this indicates the lack of correlation between economic status and political radicalization, militancy, and terrorism.[79] In other words, poverty is not an explanatory variable. The problem with this line of analysis is that the attempt to formulate a generalized model of radicalization that presupposes an equally generalized conception of poverty obscures the locally specific economic contexts and networks within which the process of

radicalization is deeply embedded. What the case of Egypt demonstrates is that it is not poverty as such that sets the stage for militant recruitment. Rather, it is the condition of economic and social insecurity that is gravely compounded by economic downturns and recessionary cycles. I do not mean to imply that this exacerbated insecurity is both a necessary and sufficient condition for militant recruitment. There is little in the way of a consensus on a generalized theory of political radicalization, and some scholars, most notably Martha Crenshaw, have argued that it is both a process that evolves over time and that it is context specific. In the case of Imbaba, for example, historical contingency and an externally induced economic crisis combined to set the stage, giving young men a motivation to join the militant al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. Neglected by the state and acutely aware of their social marginality in relation to the more prosperous middle-class quarters, the young men of Imbaba were drawn to a particular discourse that was crafted to accommodate all manner of grievances. Moreover, al-Jama'a promised, however unrealistically, to provide employment, social cohesion, and moral uplift.

While these types of conditions provide an enabling environment for recruitment into social movements generally, they do not adequately address the question of why some join Islamist moderate movements as opposed to militant organization. This requires the difficult task of empirically grounded research. In the case of Egypt, socioeconomic conditions provided the context for recruitment for both moderate and militant organizations. What really made the difference were the opportunity structures that are grounded in class and social dynamics. The most poignant experiences that I had interviewing militants in Imbaba were when I asked why they did not join the Muslim Brotherhood. The response was always immediate and unanimous: "We have tried to join them, but they will not have us." The barriers to entry guarded by the middle-class moderate Islamist movements were insurmountable for the scores of lower-class and poor Egyptians. In Imbaba, the young men wanted desperately to be included in a movement that promised social mobility and political voice. They simply did not have the social and cultural capital to do so. The exacting and complex screening and vetting processes barred them from entry, denied selection, or led to their expulsion at the latter stages of the recruitment process. As a result, many young men who might otherwise have become moderate Islamists were thus left vulnerable to recruiters from militant groups whose history of violent confrontation with the state reflected not simply their protest against its negligence and coercive apparatus, but an extremist project of toppling Arab regimes and promoting jihad worldwide.