# Zaynab al-Ghazālī al-Ǧabīlī, a Female Activist and Writer in Favour of the Islamic Cause
## From the Formative Years to Her Imprisonment Under the Regime of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir (1917-65)

Maria Cristina Paciello
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

**Abstract** Zaynab al-Ghazālī (1917-2005) was an activist of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the founder of the Muslim Women's Association, a religious preacher and a prolific writer. The article seeks to trace the evolution of al-Ghazālī's activism and her political ideas, starting from the formative years (1917-48) until her imprisonment under the regime of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir (1964). The article is expected to make an original contribution to the existing literature by presenting al-Ghazālī's thinking beyond her conception of women and by relying on the analysis of a group of articles written on the *Magazine of the Muslim Women* (Maǧallat al-Sayyidāt al-Muslimāt) between 1951 and 1957, which has remained so far unexplored.

**Keywords** Zaynab al-Ghazālī al-Ǧabīlī. Muslim Brotherhood. Islamic movements. Political Islam. Women. Egypt. Nasserism. British colonial rule.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Egypt Under British Colonial Rule: The Formative Years and the Beginning of Political Activism (1917-48). – 3 The resistance against the British occupation: From the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood to the Free Officers' Coup (1948-52). – 4 The Era of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir: From Cooperation to Persecution (1952-65). – 5 Conclusions.

## 1        Introduction

Zaynab al-Ghazālī (1917-2005) was an activist of the Egyptian Muslim
Brotherhood, the founder of the Muslim Women's Association (MWA),
a religious preacher and a prolific writer. Al-Ghazālī's commitment
to the Islamic cause came before marriage and family, since she had
no children, married twice, and was herself divorced from her first
husband because, as she stated in an interview, marriage was dis-
tancing her from her political project (Hoffman 1985, 237; cf. also al-
Ghazālī 1995, 33-5). She can be considered the first woman to have
achieved a prominent position within an Islamic movement. In the
mid-1950s-early 1960s, during the harsh repression unleashed by
ʿAbd al-Nāṣir against the Muslim Brothers, al-Ghazālī played a cen-
tral role in the secret reorganisation of the Islamic movement that
cost her a sentence of 25 years of hard labour at the age of 48. Af-
ter spending six years in prison (1965-71), she was granted amnesty
under the regime of Anwār al-Sādāt (1970-81). From then until the
mid-1990s, she continued to dedicate her life to the Islamic mission
(*daʿwa*), giving lessons in Cairo mosques and in her home, lecturing
in Muslim countries, and writing articles and books. In addition to an
intense political activity, al-Ghazālī was the author of a substantial
number of articles published in Islamic journals close to the Muslim
Brotherhood, as well as numerous books.[1]

The article aims at tracing the evolution of al-Ghazālī's activism
and her political ideas, starting from the formative years (1917-48)
until her imprisonment under the regime of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir (1965). In
particular, the article will situate al-Ghazālī's writings and activ-
ism within the specific political context of the period under investi-
gation to show how her ideas and involvement in favour of the Islam-
ic cause were profoundly shaped by the history of Egypt and that of
the Muslim Brotherhood. It will also shed light on al-Ghazālī's contri-
bution to the Muslim Brotherhood both as an activist and as a writ-
er, the latter being an aspect generally overlooked in the literature.

The article is expected to make an original contribution to the ex-
isting literature on three grounds. First, it will present al-Ghazālī's
political ideas that go beyond her conception of women. In fact, since
the mid-1980s, the academic debate on al-Ghazālī has been mostly

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[1]    Based on the sources collected by the author, al-Ghazāli wrote 178 articles in the
following magazines: *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* (The Magazine of the Muslim
Women – 1951-57); *al-Daʿwa* (The Call – 1978-81); *Liwāʾ al-islām* (The Banner of Is-
lam – 1988-91); and *al-Muǧtamaʿ* (The Society), published in Kuwait but censored in
Egypt (1995-96). With the exception of *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt*, all the above-
mentioned articles were consulted by the Author at the library of the American Univer-
sity in Cairo (AUC). Among her books, see al-Ghazāli 1989; 1991; 1994a; 1994b; 1995;
1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 1997.

**10**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale      e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

concerned with explaining one aspect of her figure that is considered particularly controversial. This refers to the contrast between her discourse on women, according to which "the first, sacred and most important mission" is that of mother and wife, and her life, marked by a total dedication to Islamic activism as she recounted in her autobiography (Hoffman 1985, 236-7).[2]

Second, concerning primary sources, the article will rely on a collection of 34 articles written by al-Ghazālī in the magazine *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* (The Magazine of the Muslim Women), between 1951 and 1957. The issues of the magazine were generously made available to the author by al-Ghazālī herself during a research trip to Cairo in 1997, as they were only present in her private library. The magazine was founded by al-Ghazālī as the organ of the MWA in 1950 and was published until 1958, year in which it incurred the censorship imposed by ʿAbd al-Nāṣir.[3] During that period, she wrote mainly about domestic and foreign policy issues. Her articles published in the magazine have remained unexplored in the English and French literature.[4] To complement the analysis, the article will also rely on al-Ghazālī's autobiography *Ayyām min ḥayātī* (Days of My Life) and seven interviews.[5] Although the core of the autobiography was represented by al-Ghazālī's experience in prison between 1965 and 1971, she provided a detailed account of her political activism from 1936 until 1965.

Third, the article will add to the broader literature on influential members of Islamic movements by giving visibility to a female figure. Indeed, attention has been so far solely paid to male figures, such

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**2** For the literature, see Cooke 1994; 2003; Ahmed 1993; Mahmood 2013; Lewis 2007; Olatunde 2010.

**3** The issues I was able to consult are from July 1951 until 12 June 1952 (for the period before the Free Officers' coup d'état), and from March 1953 until July 1957 (for the period under the Nasserist regime), for a total of 64 articles signed by al-Ghazālī. Regarding the period after the coup, for the year 1952, I could only consult one issue (August, 57) and for the year 1953, only two (March, 72 and April, 74). The numbers issued in 1954 and 1958 were completely missing. In this regard, I was told that, in 1965, the police had seized some issues of the magazine from al-Ghazālī's library.

**4** For example, the English-language literature is based on a selected number of al-Ghazālī's writings, mostly her prison memoirs (*Ayyām min ḥayātī*), a few articles published between the mid-1970s and the 1980s in the magazines *al-Daʿwa* and *Liwāʾ al-islām*, and some references to al-Ghazālī 1991; 1994a. Among the authors, see, for example, Zuhur 1992; Karam 1998; Lewis 2007; Mahmood 2005. Moreover, all the above works are concerned with al-Ghazālī's discourse on women.

**5** Four interviews were published in Arabic-language magazines: *Ṣabāḥ al-ḫayr* (Good Morning), 9 February 1956; *al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* (The Islamic Digest), February 1988; *Liwāʾ al-islām* (The Banner of Islam), 5 June 1989; *al-Masāʾ* (The Evening), 4 April 1990. Two more were carried out by Valerie Hoffman (1985) and Sherifa Zuhur (1992), respectively in 1981 and 1988, while the third one was conducted by the author at al-Ghazālī's home in the Heliopolis neighbourhood (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī, Cairo, 26 May 1997).

**11**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale     e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

as Ḥasan al-Bannā, Sayyid Quṭb and Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī, to name but a few.[6] This although al-Ghazālī's entire intellectual production covered a period of about forty years, from the early 1950s to the mid-1990s, she wrote extensively on political matters beyond issues related to women, and became a leading figure within the Muslim Brothers.

Mirroring a chronological order, the article will be structured in three parts, reflecting the most important passages of the history of Egypt and that of the Muslim Brotherhood.

## 2 Egypt Under British Colonial Rule: The Formative Years and the Beginning of Political Activism (1917-48)

### 2.1 The Religious Education and a Favourable Affective Context

Zaynab al-Ghazālī was born on 2 January 1917 in the village of Mit Yahish, about eighty kilometres far from Cairo (*al-Masā'* 1990; Hoffman 1985). A few years earlier, in 1914, Egypt, already under military occupation since 1882, had been unilaterally declared a British protectorate. Later, in 1919, the British refusal to recognise Egyptian aspirations for independence sparked the first broad nationalist uprising. In 1922, as a unilateral concession, Britain ended the protectorate by recognising Egyptian independence. However, for thirty years, the British government continued to maintain a firm grip on the country, through its control of Suez Canal security, the army, the police and foreign policy. As a reaction to Western occupation, in 1928, Ḥasan al-Bannā founded the Muslim Brotherhood movement with the purpose of promoting a deep moral reform rooted in Islam.

Al-Ghazālī, therefore, was born and lived under the British rule, and under a progressive and increasingly visible westernisation of Egyptian society. Such a political context, together with the particular emotional and educational environment in which al-Ghazālī grew up, significantly contributed to shaping her political consciousness as well as developing a sense of deep attachment to the local culture and a harsh criticism of the foreign presence on Egyptian soil.

As the first daughter after four boys, al-Ghazālī was enthusiastically welcomed by her family, especially by her father, who was the most influential and important figure in her formative years. Her father was a wholesale cotton merchant who graduated from the religious university of al-Azhar and, in the off seasons, travelled to neighbour-

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[6] The few anthologies that insert a chapter on Zaynab al-Ghazālī within an extensive review dedicated to the figures of Islamic movements only deal with her conception of women (cf. Euben, Qasim Zaman 2009; Shehadeh 2003).

ing villages as an independent preacher to spread Islamic teachings (Hoffman 1985; Sullivan 1986). As al-Ghazālī herself reported, her father paid special attention to her from an early age. It seems that he immediately understood the special qualities his daughter had (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī; *Ṣabāḥ al-ḫayr*, 1956). Al-Ghazālī described herself as "a brave child, skilled in speech and intelligent" (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī). Her father provided her with a solid religious education, contributing to root Muslim values in her (al-Ghazālī 1989, 18). Above all, he raised al-Ghazālī encouraging her to follow the example of the Muslim women who had distinguished themselves by their courage and by playing an important political role in the Prophet's time (Hoffman 1985, 237-8). From an early age, al-Ghazālī frequented 'male spaces', as her father often took her with him, which was unusual for the time. She told me, for example, that at the age of four, holding her on his shoulders, the father would introduce her to the men gathered in the guest room and make her recite a welcoming poem (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī). Her father even exempted al-Ghazālī from the domestic duties that usually fell to women. One day, turning to his wife, he told her that Zaynab should not enter the kitchen (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī). Not only did al-Ghazālī therefore transcend certain boundaries normally reserved for men, but she was dispensed from roles traditionally assigned to women.

It was in this favourable affective context, in some respects 'exceptional' compared to the customs of the time, that al-Ghazālī's strong personality was forged and that her sincere conviction of the superiority of the Muslim tradition as well as her conception of the central role of women in Islam matured in her.

Such observations become particularly relevant when one compares the family environment in which the feminist consciousness of many Egyptian women developed. For example, unlike al-Ghazālī, Hudā Shaʿrāwī, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), received a different treatment from her brother and was given in marriage to an older man against her will at the age of only thirteen (cf. Badran 1994). This eventually prompted Huda Shaʿrāwī to adopt an opposing attitude towards the local culture and to take Western values as a model for women's emancipation.

With regard to the type of education, al-Ghazālī also distinguished herself from the feminists of her time, who were educated in private schools run by foreign missionaries. She attended public school up to secondary level where she studied Arabic and the Muslim religion (cf. Badran 1994, 154). To further emphasise the singular treatment al-Ghazālī received in her family, it must be added that attending public school up to secondary level was relatively exceptional at the time. Female illiteracy continued to be so high that, in 1937, 91% of Egyptian women still could neither read nor write (217-18). It should

also be recalled that, until 1944, secondary education in Egypt was not free of charge (Talhami 1996, 20).

Moreover, unlike her contemporaries, such as feminist Durrīya Shafīq (1914-1976), who completed their education in universities abroad or in Egypt (opened to women in 1929), al-Ghazālī pursued "fully Islamic studies" (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī). She indeed continued her education privately with some *shayḫs* of al-Azhar, with whom she deepened her Islamic knowledge in Qurʾānic exegesis, *ḥadīth* and legal theology (al-Ghazālī 1989, 18). The books that most influenced her were 'the books of heritage' (*Kutub al-turāth*), including the Qurʾānic commentaries by Ibn Kathīr, al-Buḫārī and Muslim Ibn al-Haǧǧāǧ (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī). The dichotomy of the education system developed in Egypt during the colonial period was among the major factors that contributed to the formation of different ideological orientations within the country, particularly among women, with significant repercussions on the sense of cultural identity and belonging (Ahmed 1993).

## 2.2 Al-Ghazālī's Brief Militancy in the Egyptian Feminist Union

In 1933, at the age of sixteen, al-Ghazālī joined the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) founded by Hudā Shaʿrāwī ten years earlier. The EFU was aimed at promoting the political, social and legal equality of women. Al-Ghazālī remained with the EFU for a year and a half as a member of the administrative board, and then left it in disagreement with its aims (Ahmed 1993; Hoffman 1985). In describing her brief experience in the EFU, al-Ghazālī revealed that, initially, she joined it "thinking she was serving the cause of Islam", but "soon, she realised that Hudā Shaʿrāwī, increasingly absorbed by the cause of women, was neglecting the issue of faith" (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī; *al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988).

Al-Ghazālī's disagreement with the EFU became irremediable after she participated, as a representative of the organisation, together with Sīzā Nabarāwī and Hudā Idrīs, in a series of lectures on women held at the religious university of al-Azhar. On that occasion, she became convinced that "the right way to re-build the State and the *umma* is through Islam" (Author's interview with al-Ghazālī; *al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988; Hoffman 1985, 235). Years later, in the 1950s, she harshly criticised Hudā Shaʿrāwī and the other Egyptian feminists in the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* (al-Ghazālī 1951, 3: 15, 18, 21; 1951, 5: 57; 1952, 57: 4). In an interview published in the magazine, al-Ghazālī openly accused Hudā Shaʿrāwī of being wrong in calling for 'the emancipation of women' (*taḥrīr al-marʾa*) because the Egyptian women's movement, "taking as its reference model a cul-

**14**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale      e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

ture foreign to the Muslim culture, namely the Western culture, was harming the country and the woman" (1952, 57: 4). Instead, as she added in the same interview, "when a woman fully understands the teachings of Islam, she can do anything. She can even lead an army" (4). However, as Margot Badran (1993; 1994) documented, over the 1930s-40s, al-Ghazālī continued to work together with Egyptian feminists in favour of the Palestinian cause and of the struggle for national independence against the British rule.

Al-Ghazālī's militancy in the Egyptian feminist movement, although brief, had a profound influence on her political thinking. On the one hand, it contributed to strengthening her feeling of rejection towards the West, on the other hand, it developed in her the conviction of the importance of promoting women's rights within an Islamic framework (Lewis 2007, 11). More broadly, al-Ghazālī's contacts and frequentations with the Egyptian feminists of her time contributed to shape her "ideological syncretism" (7). Her complex personality was indeed influenced by different sources: the Egyptian feminist movement, the gender conservative discourse of Sayyid Qutb, the Sufi tradition and the liberal discourse of the Egyptian nationalism (Lewis 2007).

## 2.3 The founding of the Muslim Women's Association (*Ǧamāʿat al-Sayyidāt al-Muslimāt*)

Shortly after leaving the EFU, in 1935, at the age of only eighteen, al-Ghazālī founded the MWA (Hoffman 1985, 235). The association was officially established as a private charitable organisation with the objectives of spreading Islam, educating women, and providing assistance to the needy (al-Ghazālī 1989; Hoffman 1985). In particular, the MWA was born with the intention of making women acquainted with their religion, "so that they would be convinced, through studying, that the women's liberation movement was a deviant innovation" (Hoffman 1985, 235). As al-Ghazālī stated in a speech given at the administration board of her association in 1939, the Muslim woman had preceded all other women in the world because Islam had granted her all the rights for which Western women were still fighting (1989, 203). The MWA thus clearly distanced itself from the EFU and most of the women's associations of the time as it rejected their secular and liberal orientation, was open exclusively to Muslim women, and sought to spread Islamic teachings (Mahmood 2005, 69-70).

The Muslim Women organised a variety of activities in favour of women. The association held Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* lectures in its mosques and centres (about twenty meetings a week) as well as public conferences, attended by numerous *ʿulamāʾ*, scholars and experts in Islam (al-Ghazālī 1989, 195). The MWA also had a study institute

**15**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
59, 2023, 9-44

e-ISSN 2385-3042

where classes in Qur'ānic exegesis, jurisprudence, *da'wa* methodology, Arabic language and social work were held, with the aim of training women who would have to teach other Muslims the true Islam. Al-Ghazālī was in charge of giving lessons in social work (204-5).

Moreover, on the pages of the MWA's magazine, one can read that the association had orphanages for girls who were offered workshops for weaving and other craft activities (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1951, 10: 7-8; al-Ghazālī 1989, 195). The manufactured objects were then sold at charity exhibitions organised at the centre and the proceeds were used to finance the association along with other activities. The Muslim Women also promoted the building of schools and hospitals as well as they were very active in rural areas where they achieved a certain popularity (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 57: 12-13, 57; 1953, 72: 12-13; 77: 15, 18, 19, 31).

The MWA seemed to be also active outside Egypt. Annually, it was engaged in organising a pilgrimage mission to enable Muslim women to travel to Mecca, where it had numerous centres to welcome pilgrims (cf. al-Ghazālī 1989, 195, 207).[7] In an issue of the Muslim Women's magazine, it was reported that they had appointed a "general secretary for foreign affairs" to represent the association at a conference of Muslim peoples in Pakistan in the same month. The delegate would have taken the opportunity to propose to some Pakistani women to establish a section of the Muslim Women in their country (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 45: 4).

In addition, although, as pointed out above, the MWA officially started out as a private charity organisation, from the very beginning it had a clear political orientation since its ultimate goal was to establish an Islamic state (al-Ghazālī 1989, 18). Al-Ghazālī herself reported that she entered politics on the very day the MWA was founded (Ahmed 1993, 19). It seems that Ḥasan al-Bannā had decided to contact al-Ghazālī precisely after noticing a commonality in objectives between the two associations (Hoffman 1985, 64).

Just six months after the birth of the MWA, al-Ghazālī met the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood for the first time at a lecture she gave at the headquarter of the Islamic movement (al-Ghazālī 1995, 23; *al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988). On the day of the meeting, al-Ghazālī received a proposal from the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood to absorb the newly founded association of the Muslim Women into the women's section of the Islamic movement, the Muslim Sisters (*al-Iḫwāt al-muslimāt*), and to assume its presidency (al-Ghazālī 1995,

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7 In the association's magazine, there were frequent announcements to come to the office of the Muslim Women to register for the mission of women sent on pilgrimage. Once, it was reported that, in 1951, about 350 women left, while about 300 women left in 1952 (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 57: 4).

**16**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale      e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

23). Ḥasan al-Bannā and the Muslim Brothers were indeed aware of the difficulties their movement was encountering in gaining popularity among women (cf. Talhami 1996, 46; Mitchell 1993, 175).

However, despite Ḥasan al-Bannā's insistence and the numerous meetings that continued in the following years, al-Ghazālī and the Muslim Women always preferred to retain their name and independence, while working together (al-Ghazālī 1995, 23-5). The Council of the Muslim Women unanimously approved the decision to reject Ḥasan al-Bannā's proposal at a meeting held on 14 July 1937 (al-Ghazālī 1989, 197). As al-Ghazālī stated in various occasions, she was too "proud" of her association, "as a parent was for a child", to accept having its autonomy compromised (al-Ghazālī 1995, 23; *al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988).

It is possible to see in al-Ghazālī's refusal her unwillingness to submit her own association to the hierarchical system established within the entirely male-controlled Muslim Brotherhood as well as her fear of losing her freedom of action (Tadros 2012, 118). Studies confirm that, although headed by a woman, the section of the Muslim Sisters was under the complete supervision of Ḥasan al-Bannā and male members, while their ability to influence decision was entirely discouraged (Tadros 2012; Talhami 1996, 48-9). It seems that, until 1952, the women's section did not take part in any political debate. It was only from 1954 onwards that the Muslim Sisters began to write in a magazine of the Islamic movement (*Maǧallat al-iḫwān al-muslimīn*), editing a section devoted to the family (Talhami 1996, 47). All this was in stark contrast to how the MWA was organised and worked. All decisions were in the hands of an administration board that was entirely composed of women (cf. al-Ghazālī 1989, 200). An advisory board of three *ulamā*, in cooperation with al-Ghazālī, was in charge of providing suggestions that always needed to be approved by the administration board (200-1).

At the same time, al-Ghazālī wanted to prevent her association from being dissolved if its image as a charitable association were to be compromised by its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood. Maintaining the independence of the Muslim Women would have been more beneficial to the Islamic cause pursued by both organisations (al-Ghazālī 1995, 28). Al-Ghazālī, therefore, did not refuse to offer Ḥasan al-Bannā the support of the Muslim Women (al-Ghazālī 1995, 23; *al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988). Precisely in its most critical phases, as will be seen below, the Muslim Brotherhood found in al-Ghazālī's association a valuable support. Acting cautiously, the MWA conducted its activities without interruption for thirty years until 1965. It was dissolved only once, in 1949, when martial law was in force, but, as early as 1950, after al-Ghazālī's appeal in court, it became legal again. In addition, since its publication in 1950, the magazine of the MWA, the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt*, appeared to be a key channel through which the Islamic movement was able to disseminate its ideas particularly in times of underground activity.

**17**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale    e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

### 3     The resistance against the British occupation: From the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood to the Free Officers' Coup (1948-52)

#### 3.1     Al-Ghazālī informally joins the Muslim Brotherhood

The years 1948-52 represented an important and decisive stage in al-Ghazālī's intellectual and political trajectory, laying the foundation for her complete dedication to the Islamic cause. By the end of the 1940s, some 20 years after its inception, the Muslim Brotherhood had become a major political force in Egypt, supported by a broad base of adherents (Zollner 2009). Initially engaged in an action of religious and ethical reform of society, later, since the early 1940s, in reaction to the increased interference of Great Britain, the Muslim Brotherhood began to openly confront the Egyptian government and the British (Nasser 1993, 35). The period from 1945 to 1952 was characterised by growing instability in Egypt, marked by the widespread use of political violence in an anti-British function (Mitchell 1993, 313-20). The year 1948 marked a deterioration in the relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the government headed by prime minister Nuqrāshī of the Wafd party, which led to the dissolution decree of the Muslim Brotherhood on 6 December of that year. A few weeks later, on 28 December, the same prime minister was assassinated by a Muslim Brotherhood member, and his successor, Minister Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Hādī, inaugurated seven months of harsh repression leading to the imprisonment of four thousand Muslim Brothers.

It was in this context that al-Ghazālī decided to join the Muslim Brotherhood (albeit not yet formally) (al-Ghazālī 1995, 23). In an interview in the late 1980s, she described that moment as it follows:

> When I saw the Muslim Brotherhood in trouble and then the arrests, prisons and torture, I said to myself: if Ḥasan al-Bannā was not right, they would not fight him with such tenacity […] it means I was wrong. (*al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988, 81)

As she wrote in her biography, after immediately contacting Taḥiyya al-Ǧabīlī, Muslim Sister and wife of her brother, who informed her of many details hitherto unknown to her:

> For the first time, I found myself reconsidering all Ḥasan al-Bannā's positions and his insistence on full absorption […] and realised that he was right and that he was the Guide to whom all Muslims should swear an oath of allegiance. (al-Ghazālī 1995, 24)

So, she sent a message to the General Guide in which she declared her full submission (*bayʿa*) to him:

**18**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale    e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

> My Lord, Imām Ḥasan al-Bannā, Zaynab al-Ghazālī al-Ǧabīlī
> comes to you today as a slave to offer you her devotion and total
> loyalty in the service of God's call. (24)

In 1948, in one of the most difficult and tormented phases of the
movement, al-Ghazālī joined the Muslim Brotherhood inaugurating
a new phase in her life. It is useful to add that, in the same year, per-
haps with the intention of marking this important moment of her life,
she decided to replace the black veil with a white one, as was the cus-
tom at the time of the first generation of Muslims (cf. Zuhur 1992, 47).
From that time on, relations with the organisation became increas-
ingly frequent and intense. While the Muslim Brotherhood was still
illegal, she was given the task of setting up a "liaison ring" with the
government, through her friend Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās, a member of the
Wafd party (al-Ghazālī 1995, 25). The dense network of connections
between Muslim Brotherhood exponents and influential public fig-
ures of the time was vital to the survival of the organisation during
the underground period (Zollner 2009, 16).

On the same day that the Muslim Brotherhood returned to le-
gality, with the end of martial law (1 May 1951), al-Ghazālī official-
ly resumed contact with the Islamic movement, sending a gift to its
headquarter. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAwda, at that time the second most im-
portant exponent of the Muslim Brotherhood after the Guide Ḥasan
al-Huḍaybī, visited al-Ghazālī to thank her, and she reconfirmed her
support for the movement (al-Ghazālī 1995, 25). As a further proof of
the growing importance of al-Ghazālī for the Islamic movement al-
ready at that time, probably with the purpose of serving as Muslim
Brotherhood spokesperson, shortly before the coup she received at
home the first president of the future government, Muḥammad Naǧīb,
together with Prince ʿAbd Allāh al-Fayṣal and other Muslim Brother-
hood representatives (26).

## 3.2 The Magazine *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* as a Key Channel for Spreading the Muslim Brotherhood's Ideas

When the Muslim Brotherhood was still in hiding, in 1950 the MWA
began to publish the first issues of its magazine, the *Maǧallat al-
sayyidāt al-muslimāt*. The intention to publish a magazine under the
name *al-Marʾa al-muslima* (The Muslim Woman) was one of the ob-
jectives set out in the founding charter of the MWA already in 1937,
as the sixth of thirteen points. At that time, the aim was to spread
Islamic teachings among women to prepare them to serve their re-
ligion and homeland, to administer the home and to bring up their
children on the basis of a sound religious education (al-Ghazālī 1989,
212). Thirteen years later, the magazine seemed to expand on the

goals initially formulated in its charter. On the front page, the magazine described itself as a "religious, political and social magazine". And in fact, with the exception of a few columns, it mainly published articles on domestic and foreign policy issues, which were very often written by al-Ghazālī herself and always appeared in the first pages. From 1956 to 1957, as al-Ghazālī's political activities intensified, the articles specifically concerning women decreased considerably.

Although it never explicitly stated so, one can assume that it was among the few magazines of the time, together with *Minbar al-sharq* (The Pulpit of the East) and *al-Muslimūn* (The Muslims), to offer the Muslim Brotherhood an ideal channel to continue spreading and publicising their ideas (cf. Mitchell 1993, 187). The movement, in fact, would have had to wait until May 1954 to have its own official press organ with the magazine *Maǧallat al-iḫwān al-muslimīn*, which, however, only came out for a few months until August of that year.

To better contextualise the role of the magazine, it is important to remind that although, after al-Ghazālī's pledge of allegiance to Ḥasan al-Bannā, the MWA continued to keep its autonomy vis-à-vis the Muslim Brothers, it was expected to get much more involved in the Islamic cause. Al-Ghazālī reported that when, in 1948, she finally agreed to turn her association into the women's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, she met with rejection from the Supreme Leader who told her:

> The Muslim Women will continue to remain an autonomous organisation, retaining their name, while you and I will work together, bearing in mind, however, that it will be a building block of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. (*al-Muḫtār al-islāmī* 1988, 81)

As evidence of its proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim Women's magazine publicised books written by prominent members of the Islamic movement, such as, for example, the jurist ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAwda and Abū al-Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī, founder of the Pakistani Islamic movement *Ǧamāʿat-i islāmī* (see *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1951, 3: 21; 1951, 5: 15; 1951, 6: 17; 1951, 10: 18). Articles signed by important figures of the Islamic movement were also published, such as Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad Fatḥī ʿUthmān and Muḥammad Maḥmūd Zaytūn (see *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1951, 3: 6; 1951, 5: 7; 1951, 6: 6, 8; 1952, 34: 9). Amīn Ismāʿīl himself, who was among the journalists of the magazine *Maǧallat al-daʿwa* close, for a certain time, to the Muslim Brotherhood, was editor of the Muslim Women's magazine until the issue of 23 August 1951.

Moreover, in July 1951, when the Muslim Brotherhood was still in hiding, the magazine intervened to dispel doubts as to who was Ḥasan al-Bannā's successor by communicating the name of Ḥasan al-Ḥuḍaybī (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1951, 3: 4). Even though the appointment of Ḥasan al-Ḥuḍaybī as leader of the movement would

only be officially announced a few months later, in October 1951, when the association returned to legality, the magazine anticipated the Islamic movement's position. It is likely that, with this announcement, the magazine intended not only to deny the rumours circulating in the newspapers, but also to safeguard the Muslim Brotherhood association. Weakened by internal disagreements over the succession and the numerous problems that came to light with the death of its charismatic leader, the movement was in danger of disintegrating (cf. Mitchell 1993, 186-7). Those who supported the appointment of Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī were of the opinion that the choice of a judge as the leader of the association would favour a return to legality, providing public opinion and the government with the image of a moderate and respectable organisation (85).

Finally, when the crisis with the British reached its peak with the burning of Cairo in January 1952, al-Ghazālī expressed without delay her closeness to Ḥasan al-Bannā stating she shared his goal of creating an Islamic state, and calling him "the heir of Muḥammad" because he had understood the true Islam (1952, 34: 3).

### 3.3 The Muslim Decadence and the Return to the "True Islam": Combining Faith with Action

While becoming more actively involved into the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ghazālī started writing on the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt*. Since her first articles in the early 1950s, she seems to gravitate into the orbit of thought of the Islamic movement. Taking up the initial premises of the *Salafīyya*'s discourse on the decadence of the Muslim world, she started from the observation that the causes of this decline were not to be attributed to Islam's obscurantism and backwardness, but rather to Muslims' neglect of their religion and thus to their turning away from the "true Islam", the authentic Islam of the first generations (al-Ghazālī 1952, 34: 3). The spiritual and ethical decadence of the Muslim world was at the root of its political, military, economic and scientific decadence. According to al-Ghazālī, having neglected "the mission and message of Islam" had made Muslims "apathetic", "indifferent to action", "inert", and thus predisposed to "servility" and "submission" to rulers and other nations (1952, 39: 5, 34; 1952, 34: 3). British colonisation, as will be seen below, was in fact considered to be among the most evident signs of Muslim decadence. The "ignorance" (*Ǧuhl*) of the true teachings of Islam had allowed the spread of despotism and tyranny of rulers throughout the *umma* and caused the Muslim world to be colonised and lose the place of prestige it had once occupied among other nations (1952, 34: 3).

Like for the Muslim reformists of the Salafīyya, for al-Ghazālī too, therefore, the solution to the general crisis sweeping the Mus-

lim world had to come primarily through an ethical and spiritual re-
form, reviving the authentic Islam of the first generations of Muslims,
and not imitating the Western model (1951, 6: 3; 1951, 5: 20). In the
years 1951 and 1952, the desire to recreate the conditions to restore
the Muslim world to its greatness thus formed the backdrop for most
articles of the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt*.[8]

At the same time, in line with the Muslim Brotherhood and break-
ing away from Muslim reformism, understanding the "true Islam"
meant, first of all, combining faith with action. According to al-
Ghazālī, "the true Islam is the religion of acts of worship", but also:

> the religion of social relations with others, of commanding good
> and forbidding evil, and of *ǧihād* in the way of God. (al-Ghazālī
> 1952, 34: 3)

In short, it is the religion of action and implementation. As al-Ghazālī's
articles show, in her view, ǧihād was primarily conceived as a con-
tinuous and concrete commitment to reforming society with a view
to achieving an Islamic state. Drawing on the message of Ḥasan al-
Bannā who had insisted on the necessity of linking faith to action (cf.
Mitchell 1993), she wrote:

> If Ḥasan al-Bannā had merely understood Islam for itself, he would
> have done no harm to the colonisers. Ḥasan al-Bannā, on the oth-
> er hand, having grasped the authentic message of Islam, devot-
> ed himself to daʿwa with the aim of creating an Islamic state. (al-
> Ghazālī 1952, 34: 3)

In her articles, the Qurʾānic imperative "to command good and for-
bid evil" became a duty incumbent indistinctly on every Muslim and
not only on the ruler as was the case in classical doctrine. But above
all, as al-Ghazālī specified on several occasions, it was also a duty in-
cumbent on every Muslim woman. The need to link faith to action was
the main theme that ran through all al-Ghazālī's writings and life. In
her articles, there was a continuous call to action, now addressed to
the people, now to the rulers, now to the shayḫs of al-Azhar and, in
her later years, as noted below, also to the Saudi king Saʿūd. In the
magazine, proverbs or ḥadīth on the value of action were recurrent.

Finally, for al-Ghazālī, in line with the Muslim Brotherhood, au-
thentic Islam was conceived as an all-encompassing model, a com-
prehensive and universal system, which was to regulate the private
and public life of all Muslims, since the teachings of Islam contem-

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[8]  See, for example, the following issues: 1951, 5(19 July); 1951, 6(26 July); 1951, 9(16
August); 1951, 10(23 August); 1952, 33(7 February).

plated everything concerning man, in this world as well as the world beyond. As she wrote in an article a few months after the Muslim Brotherhood had returned to legality:

> Government (Ḥukm) is worship (ʿIbāda), justice is religion, religion is guidance, Islam is the Constitution of government, war, commerce, economy, and politics [...] it is the Constitution of perfect justice in which injustice never takes up residence. (al-Ghazālī 1951, 10: 3)

### 3.4 The achievement of a truly Islamic society requires a moral awakening of the ʿulamāʾ of al-Azhar

From the point of view of the strategies to be pursued to achieve an Islamic society, in the time preceding the Free Officers' revolution, al-Ghazālī basically proposed two paths, mirroring in their approach the programme of action conducted by the Muslim Brotherhood, although emphasising some elements more than others. First, she was convinced that a sincere and profound conversion of every Muslim was necessary for the Islamic community to rise again. For a people to change, their hearts and minds had to change first (1952, 49: 5; 1951, 6: 3). In the vision of the Islamic intellectuals, a truly Islamic society had to stand on the virtue of every Muslim (cf. Mitchell 1993). In this perspective, therefore, the strategy to be implemented was first and foremost a re-Islamisation from below through religious and spiritual education. In the early 1950s, al-Ghazālī pursued this strategy primarily through her association that disseminated Islamic teachings among women from all class.

Secondly, according to al-Ghazālī, the country's institutions had to be prepared for a government based on the Qurʾān and the Sunna. Again, she was convinced that this required, first of all, a spiritual awakening of those who occupied the institutional space. Specifically, in the years 1951-52, al-Ghazālī seemed to link the fate of the Islamic rebirth to the moral purification of the ʿulamāʾ of al-Azhar. The ʿulamāʾ were considered the guardians of morality, but also those mainly responsible for the state of moral and political decadence in the Muslim world (al-Ghazālī 1952, 39: 5). For this reason, in the period preceding the coup of the Free Officers, the ʿulamāʾ were the main interlocutors of al-Ghazālī towards whom she addressed warnings about their actions and suggestions on how to carry out their mission correctly.

At that time, al-Ghazālī was self-confident in the possibility to pursue a true reform of al-Azhar as she still nurtured a deep respect towards the religious university. She maintained relations of collaboration and friendship with important personalities of this institution.

The MWA often benefited from the advice and active participation of the *'ulamā'* in its initiatives. It is also worth remembering that, in the early phase of her life, al-Ghazālī attended lessons and was influenced by several *'ulamā'* of al-Azhar (al-Ghazālī 1989, 21), while her father studied at the religious university.

In her first writings, al-Ghazālī, therefore, did not intend to attack the institution of al-Azhar as such. Her criticism was directed, first and foremost, towards all those *'ulamā'* who had compromised the respectability of the religious university and was motivated by the need to make it regain its lost reputation and honour (1952, 39: 5). She sustained that a real ethical, and thus also political reform of the Muslim world could only take place if the *'ulamā'* returned to their mission. It is interesting to note that, for al-Ghazālī, the mission of the *'ulamā'* was not only limited to ensuring that the *sharī'a* was applied correctly by Muslims, but their role went far beyond that. In fact, it primarily consisted in curbing the despotism of political power and containing the spread of corruption. According to al-Ghazālī, the *'ulamā'*, instead of setting limits to the tyranny and corruption of Muslim rulers, "made adulation towards them their most sacred mission" (1952, 49: 5). They had passed into the service of kings and rulers, becoming "civil servants" of the state (1951, 9: 21), an expression used among the Muslim Brothers who were criticising the *'ulamā'* at that time (cf. Mitchell 1993, 214).

In another article, she wrote:

> Career advancement and salary increases are in the hands of the government, which only bestows them to the extent that the 'ulamā' and al-Azhar offer their consent. (al-Ghazālī 1952, 49: 5)

That is why, instead of fulfilling their mission as supervisors of the ruler's actions and setting limits to his autocratic power, the *'ulamā'* kept silent about the injustice and misdeeds he committed (1952, 49: 5), "they no longer got angry about important matters" (1952, 39: 5; also see 1951, 9: 3). Instead, as al-Ghazālī wrote, the umma "needed *'ulamā'* who were angry", not "weak", "inert" and "subservient to power", since their mission was "to raise a strong Islamic state" (1952, 39: 5). The role that al-Ghazālī entrusted to the *'ulamā'*, therefore, went far beyond that of enforcing religious norms. Rather it implied a de facto questioning of the existing system of government insofar as it was functional to the alternative political project of establishing an Islamic state. Al-Ghazālī thus was contravening the tendency that had prevailed in the Sunni Muslim world according to which it was preferable to owe obedience to a tyrant ruler in order to avoid the worst evil, namely sedition and anarchy. It is furthermore interesting to note that it was precisely by writing on the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* and addressing the *'ulamā'* in such a critical tone that al-Ghazālī con-

cretely made use of the Qurʾānic duty "to command the good and forbid the evil", thus affirming the right of women to freely express their opinions on any subject. Speaking on behalf of the Muslim Women, in an article addressed to the *ʿulamāʾ*, she wrote:

> We believe it is our right, as we represent half of the Islamic umma […] to express our opinion frankly and clearly. (al-Ghazālī 1951, 9: 3)

More broadly, al-Ghazālī joined the male voices of the Muslim Brotherhood who were criticising al-Azhar at that time, thus crossing another red line, never before crossed by a woman.

### 3.5 The liberation of Egypt from British occupation is the first stage of the Islamic renaissance

In the years preceding the Free Officers' coup d'état, especially in the issues of 1952, the question of national independence was the magazine's most widely covered topic. This theme took on particular significance especially when, on 8 October 1951, prime minister al-Naḥās Pasha unilaterally abrogated the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and the Sudan Convention of 1899, initiating a new phase in the struggle for national independence.

In addition to publishing numerous articles on the national question, the magazine devoted two columns to this subject: the *Min al-baḥr* (From the Sea) column, which only appeared in the 1951 issues, commenting on the most important events that took place during the week; and the column *Ḥadath fī al-usbūʿ al-māḍī* (Last Week's Events) keeping readers up-to-date on the latest outcomes of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, British policy in Egypt and what was happening in the other colonies. Beginning with the issue of 7 February 1952, the first five pages of the magazine were entirely dedicated to the subject. The magazine closely followed nationalist movements in other Muslim countries, with some of its news referring about the role of women. It also supported the boycott of products from Western countries, while criticising all forms of economic collaboration between Egyptians and British.

Between 1951 and 1952, the question of the liberation of Egypt from British occupation was a central component of the articles written by al-Ghazālī. She developed a harsh critique against the British who, at that time, were designated as the main enemy. British colonisation was seen as one of the most obvious signs of the decadence of the Muslim world. The colonisers, within the broader discourse of the Islamic renaissance, were those who opposed the project to establish an Islamic state. According to al-Ghazālī, "Ḥasan al-Bannā is the victim of colonialism" because he had pledged to spread "the

**25**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale     e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

daʿwa of the Qurʾān and the daʿwa of liberation" in the country (1952, 34: 3). The colonisers, fearing that they would lose their dominion over Egypt:

> began, day and night, to think how they could put an end to this daʿwa that was determined to cleanse this healthy land, the land of Muslims and Arabs, of their putridity [...] until they decided at one point to kill Ḥasan al-Bannā. (34: 3)

In line with the position of the Muslim Brotherhood, the independence of Egypt and of other Muslim countries from colonial rule was thus seen as a prerequisite for the emergence of the Muslim state:

> When we will kill the colonisation and every trace of it in our countries, then the State of Islam founded on the Book and the Sunna will arise, and thus we will fulfil the purpose of Ḥasan al-Bannā. (34: 3)

In the early 1950s, for al-Ghazālī, as for the Muslim Brotherhood, patriotism did not clash at all with the universalist nature of Islam; on the contrary, it was in the service of faith, both because Egypt is "a Muslim and Arab land" and because its liberation would represent the first stage of the Islamic renaissance (34: 3). The struggle for national liberation was then a commitment to be fulfilled by all Muslims because it was aimed at the larger and gradual project of establishing an Islamic state (1951, 6: 3; 1952, 34: 3).

At the same time, although al-Ghazālī kept Islam as the main referent, the starting and ending point of the whole discourse revolving around the theme of the struggle for national independence, ending foreign occupation entailed in more immediate times reasserting Egypt's political and economic sovereignty and, consequently, its international respectability. Al-Ghazālī frequently referred to the people's right to "freedom" (ḥurriya) and "independence" (istiqlāl) (1952, 50: 3). This meant, first of all, reaffirming the right to govern themselves without interference from foreign powers and with their own laws, in accordance with the spirit and traditions of the country (50: 3). Egypt's political sovereignty was strictly connected to its international respectability. Only a nation that held sovereignty could be truly free and, for that reason, could be honoured by others (50: 3; see also *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 33: 2).

Al-Ghazālī denounced with indignation the arrogance of Great Britain, which concentrated in her hands the power that, in a free country, would have de facto belonged to the local government in office. The then British ambassador to Cairo, whom al-Ghazālī dubbed "the ambassador of dogs" (safīr al-kilāb).

**26**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale      e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

had arrogated to himself the right to address the [Egyptian] people directly in an official communiqué, forgetting that he was only a representative abroad of his own government. (al-Ghazālī 1951, 10: 3)

The colonisers were frequently called "the thieves of freedom", "a despotic force" that has annihilated the livelihoods of the Egyptian people, "the usurpers" of a power that did not in fact belong to them (10: 3; 1952, 34: 3).

Al-Ghazālī was also very harsh towards Muslim rulers and ruling elites, described as "puppets manoeuvred by the colonisers", "docile instruments of colonisation", and their "affiliates" (1952, 50: 3; 1951, 9: 3). She denounced the unbridgeable gap that had arisen between the westernised ruling élite and the people, which led to the interests of the former converging with those of the colonisers (1951, 6: 3; 1952, 36: 3). As the crisis between Egypt and Britain precipitated, culminating in the popular uprising of Cairo in January 1952, and martial law was reinstated, al-Ghazālī admonished the pro-British government that it could no longer disregard the aspirations and intentions of the Egyptian people; on the contrary, it had to act prudently by strictly respecting the demands of "the man in the street" (1952, 36: 3).

She also called for the need to overcome the divergences and contrasts within the country between the various political and social forces to form a united front against foreign occupation (33: 3; see *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 34; 1952, 35). In addition to national unity, al-Ghazālī saw the solution to ending foreign occupation in the cooperation between all Arab countries. Foreign powers were accused of reinforcing the divisions in the Arab world and of working incessantly "behind the curtain", doing everything and using any means at their disposal to foment conflict and stop those who were trying to rebuild national unity, Arab unity and Islamic unity (1952, 33: 3; 34: 3; 50: 3). In order to stop foreign powers, the Arab countries had to form a united front with regard to foreign policy, specifically against the colonisation of Muslim countries and in favour of the Palestinian question (33: 3; 34: 3; 50: 3).

Lastly, parallel to her harsh criticism against Great Britain, al-Ghazālī took an active part in the struggle for national independence. Although she left no trace of it in her biography, external sources report that, a few months before the coup, during the clashes that broke out in the Canal Zone in January 1952, together with Egyptian feminists, she set up the Women's Committee for Popular Resistance and protested on the streets of Cairo against the British presence in the country (cf. Badran 1994, 248).

**27**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
59, 2023, 9-44

e-ISSN 2385-3042

## 4 The Era of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir: From Cooperation to Persecution (1952-65)

### 4.1 The Initial Enthusiasm

The coup d'état of the Free Officers on 23 July 1952 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Egypt's history. The measures initiated by the Revolutionary Command Council led to a progressive transformation of the country's political physiognomy: on 16 January 1953, a decree dissolving the political parties, sparing only the Muslim Brotherhood and the Muslim Women (under the pretext that they were religious charities), put an end to political pluralism. A few days later, the single party, the Union of Liberation, was founded, while, on 18 June 1953, the monarchy was abolished and the republic established under the presidency of General Muḥammad Naǧīb.

From July 1952 to March 1954, relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers remained relatively good. The Free Officers, who needed a broad popular base in the aftermath of the coup, were forced in the early years to tolerate the Islamic movement that gathered a broad consensus around it. As al-Ghazālī herself reported in the autobiography, at first, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Muslim Women collaborated in "the revolution" in the hope that the new government would bring about the reform of society in an Islamic sense (al-Ghazālī 1995, 26).

In the early months, the Muslim Women's magazine also enthusiastically welcomed the new government. A month after the coup, to indicate the atmosphere of cordiality that bound the Muslim Brotherhood to the new government, for the first time the magazine openly declared its ties with the Islamic movement with which it claimed to share "principles and aims". In the same number, it published a communiqué issued by the Muslim Brotherhood calling for the mosque to become a religious, social and cultural centre, as it was at the time of the first community of Muslims (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 57). The Muslim Brotherhood, in fact, had included this demand in the policy statement issued shortly after the coup to inform the Free Officers of their positions. Therefore, through its pages, the magazine continued to express, even more explicitly, the voice of the Muslim Brothers.

Furthermore, on the wave of the general enthusiasm and hoping that the new government would commit itself to establishing an Islamic government as soon as possible, one month after the coup al-Ghazālī drew some lines to follow (1952, 57: 4-5). She reminded her readers that, according to Islam, there is no separation between politics and religion. While reiterating the criticism of the *ʿulamā* of her previous articles, she demanded that the corrupted ones linked to the

old regime should be expelled following what was happening with political parties. She then proposed reforming the curricula of al-Azhar, which had been changed under pressure of the colonisers with the result of distancing the *'ulamā'* from their true mission.

## 4.2 The Prelude to a More Intense Involvement into the Muslim Brotherhood

As time passed, relations between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood began to deteriorate. In her biography, al-Ghazālī reported that, a few months after the coup, when she realised that the revolution was moving away from her initial expectations, that "things were not going as we had hoped", she started to express her opinion to all the Muslim Brothers she met (1995, 26). When, in September 1952, a new government was formed under the leadership of General Naǧīb, al-Ghazālī began to publicly manifest the first signs of discontent with the government of the Free Officers. In particular, in the pages of the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt*, she expressed her opposition to the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood "in a government not yet founded on the revealed law", to the point of stating that "those who participated in it would have to leave the organization" (26). The question of the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in the new government provoked extensive discussions within the movement, even leading to the expulsion of some of its members (cf. Mitchell 1993, 107-8).

As reported in the autobiography, it was precisely this question that marked al-Ghazālī's total submission to the directives of the Supreme Guide Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī. Following the above-mentioned article, 'Abd al-Qādir 'Awda intervened asking her to temporarily refrain from expressing opinions on this topic. However, after only two issues, al-Ghazālī returned to write on it. 'Abd al-Qādir 'Awda then visited her again but, this time, bringing her a written order from the General Guide forbidding her to publish articles on the subject. From that moment, in light of her oath of loyalty previously given to Ḥasan al-Bannā, al-Ghazālī decided to submit herself to the order and transfer her absolute obedience to Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī. From then, as she claimed, "the pact of alliance would govern my behaviour" (al-Ghazālī 1995, 26). The act of al-Ghazālī, contextualised in the Muslim Brotherhood's regulation that identified the absolute obedience to the Supreme Guide as the last stage, the level of the "uninterrupted ǧihād" (cf. Mitchell 1993, 300-1), was thus the prelude to her total devotion to the Islamic cause.

Broadly speaking, the Muslim Brotherhood's rejection of the Free Officers' proposal to be part of the new government was the first clear sign of a rupture. The point of greatest friction was the signing

of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty concluded on 19 October 1954, which irreparably poisoned relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the government. A few days later, President ʿAbd al-Nāṣir escaped an assassination attempt by a Muslim Brotherhood member. On 7 December, the Islamic organisation, the only remaining opposition force in the country, was dissolved. After the dissolution of the organisation, very few Muslim Brothers were able to escape imprisonment. No less than one million among them were imprisoned in the aftermath of the attack, while many others fled to Saudi Arabia. The seven main exponents of the Muslim Brotherhood, with the exception of the Supreme Guide, were sentenced to death.

The arrests of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954 marked the beginning of the period of al-Ghazālī's most intense political militancy in favour of the Islamic cause, which would lead to her imprisonment some ten years later. As al-Ghazālī reported in her biography, with the 1954 arrests, she broke all doubts about her dedication to the Islamic cause. ʿAbd al-Nāṣir had assumed his true guise, revealing himself to be "an enemy of Islam" (1995, 26). Just as the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1948 had been the decisive factor that had convinced al-Ghazālī to join the organisation albeit informally, overcoming her divergences with Ḥasan al-Bannā in the name of unity among all Muslims, in the same way the new arrests in 1954 put her once again in the situation of having to act to save the Islamic cause. In her biography, al-Ghazālī described the beginning of her most intense mobilisation as it follows:

> In 1955 I found myself mobilised in the service of the Islamic mission (daʿwa) without anyone calling me. The cries of the orphans who had lost their fathers [...], the tears of the widowed women, their husbands behind prison bars [...], all these cries, these tears touched me in the deepest way. I felt like I was responsible for those who were hungry and for the wounds of those who had been tortured, and so I began to offer a little help. (28)

On her own initiative and with the support of the MWA, al-Ghazālī began to offer the first aid to the families of imprisoned Muslim Brothers. But, at some point in mid-1956, the situation worsened further as some Muslim Brothers who had been arrested without trial were released from prison and needed assistance. The efforts of al-Ghazālī and her association could no longer handle all the difficulties (28). Thus, al-Ghazālī decided to join efforts with the women's section of the Muslim Brotherhood, taking secret contacts with the sister of the Supreme Guide, Ḫālida al-Huḍaybī, and with Ḥamīda and Amīna Quṭb, sisters of Sayyid Quṭb, the main ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, then in prison. The Muslim Women and the Muslim Sisters then began working together under the leadership of al-

Ghazālī, playing a crucial role in keeping the Islamic organisation alive (cf. Tadros 2012). They offered help and assistance to Muslim Brotherhood families, while delivering information and messages to those in prison or regrouping outside.

As a sign of the transformations taking place after the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood, in 1955 the magazine of the Muslim Women introduced evident changes to its cover page. While remaining within the limits imposed by censorship, it made its message more explicit. The magazine no longer called itself generically "religious, social and political magazine", but rather an:

> Islamic magazine serving the issues concerning Islam and the goals of the *Ǧamāʿat al-Sayyidāt al-Muslimāt*.

Specifically, the objectives listed were as follows:

> To dedicate oneself to the daʿwa […], to revive the Muslim woman […], to engage in the reform of the family, the care of orphans, the assistance to poor families […], to purify the Islamic society from innovations and superstitions. (*Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1955, 2, 24 April)

Although the expression "to dedicate oneself to the daʿwa" was generic, there is no doubt as to what, at that precise historical moment, this word evoked in al-Ghazālī and among the Muslim Women. As mentioned above, giving priority to the *daʿwa* in 1955 meant helping the association of the Muslim Brotherhood dissolved by the government to stay alive, while engaging "in the assistance to poor families" meant providing aid to the families of Muslim Brotherhood members in prison.

In addition, the magazine chose a new cover that accentuated its Islamic identity: a woman, veiled as in the first issues, who now appeared much more modest, with her hair entirely hidden by the veil and her proud, resolute expression turned towards the horizon. The woman continued to carry a torch in her right hand but, unlike the previous numbers, she was holding a Qurʾān in her left hand to indicate that the Muslim woman was the guide illuminating the right path. The introduction of the Qurʾān left no doubt as to what the path to be followed and the goal to be achieved were. The political project of realising an Islamic society was thus declared in complete rupture and opposition to the Nasserist regime.

**31**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale    e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

### 4.3 Communism Is Perceived as the Most Insidious Enemy and King Saʿūd is Called to Defend Islam

While al-Ghazālī was committed to helping the organisation in disarray, she continued to write her articles in the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* until 1957, pursuing a harsh criticism of the Nasserist regime. After 1954, al-Ghazālī's discourse on the Muslim decadence and its enemies was enriched with new elements.

The material presence of the coloniser on a Muslim territory of the previous period was replaced by a new threat, "another, more fearsome form of colonisation", "the intellectual and moral colonisation" by the "materialist West", identified in the United States and Great Britain, and the "pagan East", namely the Soviet Union (al-Ghazālī 1956, 9: 3-4; 1957, 4: 3-4; 6: 5). Both were "ceaselessly working to fight Islam" (1957, 4: 3-4; 6: 5), and "insinuate poisons on us in the name of materialism and civilisation" (4: 3). It was no longer about the occupation of a Muslim land by colonial powers, but about the danger of its being subverted from the very foundations. It was Islam under siege in need to be defended, since the new enemies were first and foremost "the enemies of religion" (7: 7-8, 18; 2: 5; 6: 5).

However, especially in her later writings, in line with the exponents of the Muslim Brotherhood at the time, al-Ghazālī identified in the communism the most fearsome enemy (1956, 9: 11), so much so that, in July 1956, she wrote:

> Communists are, in every corner of the world, enemies of both Islam and Christianity. (9:4)

The new enemy was perceived to be more insidious because it was "a poison" that "has begun to corrode the body of the umma" (9: 3), using more effective and sophisticated channels that threatened society from within:

> It insinuated itself into the press, into schools, into books, into every corner of society. (al-Ghazālī 1957, 6: 7)

In her articles, al-Ghazālī often stated that her motivation for writing was her dismay that "the red blasphemy of Russian communism", "the apostasy", "the sin", "the atheism" and "the impiety" had invaded the country (1955, 3: 5; 1956, 9: 7, 11; 1957, 2: 3-4, 7; 6: 5, 7; 3: 3-4, 9-10), and "there is no ruler who punishes the unbelief, nor a Muslim who gets angry" (1956, 9: 3-4).

Although al-Ghazālī never mentioned the name of President ʿAbd al-Nāṣir as censorship dictated, her continuous references to communism clearly implied a severe critique of the regime. In fact, in the 1956-58 period, Egypt strengthened its political and economic rela-

**32**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale          e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

tions with the camp of socialist countries and the Soviet Union. At the same time, once the Muslim Brotherhood was dissolved, in order to strengthen his legitimacy, ʿAbd al-Nāṣir intensified his campaign to transfer the role of representative of true Islam from the Islamic movement to the regime.

Lastly, disillusioned that the project to create an Islamic state could start from within Egypt, from 1955 onwards, al-Ghazālī entrusted the task of the Islamic rebirth to an external interlocutor, one of the most bitter enemies of the Nasserist regime, namely King Saʿūd (1955, 2: 3-4; 3: 3-4; 1956, 9: 12-14; 1957, 4: 3-4). Saudi Arabia shared with the Muslim Brotherhood the same hostility to socialism and secular Arab nationalism. Moreover, a large part of the Muslim Brotherhood persecuted by the Nasserist regime was in exile in the country. Al-Ghazālī turned to the Saudi king to promote the education of the Saudi people and create the Muslim bank mentioned below. More broadly, she entrusted him with the task of defending Islam and reunifying the umma. Doing so, al-Ghazālī was again challenging the leadership gained by ʿAbd al-Nāṣir on the scene of the Arab countries, the idea of Arab unity and Arab socialism. However, especially in her last articles, al-Ghazālī did not refrain from addressing her criticism to the Saudi monarch too, reproaching him for leaving her demands unheard (1957, 2: 5; 5: 4; 6: 5). Al-Ghazālī's dissatisfaction with the Saudi king would lead her to state in the autobiography that, in the 1960s, there was no state that came close to the ideal of an Islamic state (1995, 37).

## 4.4 A New Body of *ʿulamāʾ* that is Independent from Political Power

By now disillusioned with the initial choice to assign the task for the spiritual and moral awakening of the Muslim world to al-Azhar University, al-Ghazālī intensified her criticism of this institution to the extent that she called for the establishment of a new body of *ʿulamāʾ* fully independent of political power.

Al-Ghazālī addressed the *ʿulamāʾ* in harsher and more hostile tones, reflecting the changes that had affected the institution under ʿAbd al-Nāṣir. Indeed, al-Azhar University had gradually come under the direct control of the regime, to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam and Nasserite socialism (cf. Ibrahim 1987). Being so entrenched with power, the institution had thus lost credibility in the eyes of al-Ghazālī. At the same time, by intensifying her criticism of al-Azhar University, which came under government control, al-Ghazālī was in fact again contesting ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's regime.

In several articles, al-Ghazālī accused the shayḫs of having become irremediably complicit with power because they did not react

even if the religion itself was questioned. She proclaimed the urgent need to purify al-Azhar from those *'ulamā'* "who have thrived in affluence, submission and inertia" (1955, 3: 5; 1957, 2: 3-4). In February 1957, referring to the abolition of the religious courts decided by 'Abd al-Nāṣir in 1955 and approved by the *'ulamā'*, al-Ghazālī called it "their greatest ignominy recorded in history" (1957, 3: 3). The pessimism that al-Ghazālī increasingly manifested towards the possibility of a successful reform of al-Azhar is confirmed in the autobiography. Referring back to 1956, she wrote that "most of the *'ulamā'* had disassociated themselves from the *muǧahidīn* [the Muslim Brotherhood]" (al-Ghazālī 1995, 28).

Speaking on behalf of the Muslim Women, she went so far as to directly address the rector of al-Azhar, the shayḫ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Tāǧ, in these tones:

> It is our duty to guide our *'ulamā'* towards the truth, if you are in the right we will be at your service, otherwise we will wage war against you. Muslims who do not admonish the *'ulamā'* who are wrong become their accomplices. (al-Ghazālī 1957, 3: 9-10)

In March 1957, in the last hope that a reform of the religious university could still start from within, al-Ghazālī entrusted such task to the young people of al-Azhar, "the good plant of the chosen umma" (1957, 4: 19). Thus, she wrote:

> I would have liked to write to those 'dead' of the *'ulamā'* of al-Azhar [...] perhaps I would have brought them back to life and guided them to glory and success. But [...] how many buts? What if, instead, I had left 'the dead turbans' and turned to the 'alive', to the young, to the vital force of al-Azhar. (19)

In July 1957, in the midst of a complete rupture with the Nasserist regime, al-Ghazālī went so far as to propose the idea of an institution alternative to al-Azhar, an "eligible higher council" consisting of independent *'ulamā'* (1957, 7: 8). As early as the summer of 1956 and then throughout 1957, al-Ghazālī also launched the proposal to create a new school, "a modern Islamic university" that would serve to train a new body of "free *'ulamā'*" and would be financed by a bank funded through donations of Muslims, thus neither managed nor influenced by governments (1956, 9: 4; 7: 3-4; 1957, 3: 5; 7: 8; 2: 5).

Al-Ghazālī assigned to this new body of *'ulamā'* the task of proceeding to a work of interpretation of the sacred texts, which would further affect the monopoly of the official *'ulamā'* on religious knowledge. For this, she asked that students be trained

to exercise the *iǧtihād* in order to take inspiration from the Constitution of Islam [the Qur'ān] and the Sunna of the Prophet to make their rules and general principles compatible with the life of Muslims [...] in modern times. (al-Ghazālī 1956, 9: 4)

While advocating the need to reform curricula in the direction of strengthening religious teachings, al-Ghazālī denounced their scleroticisation and demanded that these young *'ulamā'* commit themselves "to extract from Islam the essence of its teachings" in order "to adapt the Qur'ān to modern science" (1957, 4: 19). While denouncing the compromise made by the *'ulamā'* with "Western modernity", al-Ghazālī did not reject modernity per se, rather she assigned scientific progress an important part in the process of Islamic renaissance. For instance, she proposed the opening of religious institutes that would also contemplate the study of modern sciences such as engineering, medicine, economics and sociology (1956, 7: 4; 1957, 7: 8). In the new Islamic university mentioned above, "modern methods of teaching and education in all the languages of the world" would be taught (1956, 9: 4).

Until the last articles, al-Ghazālī considered the presence of a body of free *'ulamā'* in the Muslim world to be an essential component in returning the umma to the true Islam. However, the objective impossibility of reaching this goal led her to move toward a bottom-up strategy prioritising the training of an Islamic vanguard.

### 4.5 The Strategy of Patient Activism and the Secret Reorganisation of the Muslim Brotherhood

Based on the events described by al-Ghazālī in the autobiography, from 1954, but especially from 1957, she assumed a central role in the secret reorganisation of the Muslim Brotherhood, probably becoming "the third most important leader after Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī and Sayyid Quṭb" (Talhami 1996, 51). Despite this, however, it seems that she never formally assumed a position of leadership, which instead fell to the men. Al-Ghazālī, in fact, was not part of the committee that coordinated the Brotherhood's secret reorganisation work, known as Organisation 65 and composed of four men (cf. Zollner 2009, 48).

By 1957, al-Ghazālī seemed to emerge as the only person capable of keeping the Muslim Brotherhood alive and reconstituting its lost unity. Apart from arrests and death sentences, the organisation was weakened by uncertain leadership and persistent divisions within it (cf. Mitchell 1993). Al-Ghazālī, on the other hand, was still out of prison, continued to live in Egypt, wrote on the Muslim Women's magazine and carried out her welfare activities undisturbed. In 1957, her

association was even registered by the Ministry of Social Affairs (cf. Sullivan 1986, 115).

Moreover, as the crackdown intensified and the possibility of a gradual reform of institutions in an Islamic sense faded away, al-Ghazālī became convinced that the only possible strategy was a gradual reform from below, following the model of the first community of Muslims in Mecca. Waiting for better times, together with a group of Muslim Brothers, she began to work secretly on the project of educating a minority of young militants, the so-called Islamic vanguard.

In 1957, during a pilgrimage to Mecca, where many Muslim Brothers had found refuge with the Saudi king, al-Ghazālī was introduced to a leader of the movement in exile, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl who proposed she collaborate in the reorganisation of the Brotherhood (al-Ghazālī 1995, 30). In the early months of 1958, meetings between al-Ghazālī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl at her home and the headquarter of the MWA intensified with the aim of devising an Islamic education project "to restore the country to its glory and faith", as she stated in the autobiography (32).

Al-Ghazālī personally went to the Guide Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī to explain to him the work plan she had developed with ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl and obtained his approval after numerous meetings in which she presented the details (33). Periodically, she informed the General Guide about the outcome of the first phase of research aimed at finding out who among Muslims was willing to take part in the project and sacrifice themselves for the Islamic cause (32). ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl was instructed to travel all over Egypt to form the first core of adherents to the project, starting with the Muslim Brothers who had been released or had not gone to prison. By 1959, the Islamic education programme was put in place. From that point on, al-Ghazālī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl, under the supervision of Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī, began to secretly rebuild the ranks of the dissolved association (33).

As al-Ghazālī extensively described in her biography, she was committed to reconstituting the original nucleus of the future Islamic state around her. In particular, she was in charge of educating small groups of young people (five to ten) in order to prepare them spiritually for the advent of Islamic society, through seminars, the distribution of pamphlets, and the reading and commentary of verses from the Qurʾān and other texts from the Muslim tradition (Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Ḥazm, al–Shāfiʿī and Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb) (36). Internally, the group tried to fully recreate the model of life followed by the first generation of Muslims in the Mecca phase, adhering strictly to the prescriptions of Islam and pursuing the same strategy: a patient and gradual spiritual preparation. As al-Ghazāli enunciated in her biography, the educational programme would last thirteen years. If, at the end of the period,

75% of the people in the country, men and women of the umma […] had been persuaded by the idea of establishing an Islamic government, then we would have proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic state […] If, on the other hand, the crop had only accounted for 25%, then the programme of study […] would have been renewed for another thirteen years, and more, if necessary. (al-Ghazālī 1995, 48)

In her biography, al-Ghazālī also described the intense network of contacts she maintained with numerous members of the Muslim Brotherhood during the clandestine period. Day and night, she received frequent visits to the house from ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl, the young men who were part of the project, and other Muslim Brotherhood figures, such as Muḥammad Quṭb (30-2). In 1962, al-Ghazālī met again with the two sisters of Sayyid Quṭb, who was in prison since 1954, so that they could update him on the studies carried out by the youth groups and receive further suggestions from him. Shortly afterwards, in fact, Quṭb sent al-Ghazālī the first pages of the book *Maʿālim fī al-ṭarīq* (Signposts Along the Path), as well as providing her with other advices for improving the education programme (35-6). The text thus began to circulate among the young activists gathered around her, providing the ideological inspiration for the secret reorganisation of the Muslim Brotherhood (cf. Wickam 2013, 28).

After the general amnesty that led to the release of the Muslim Brothers in May 1964, al-Ghazālī and Sayyid Quṭb met frequently (al-Ghazālī 1989). However, in late 1964, *Maʿālim fī al-ṭarīq* served the Nasserist regime to launch a new wave of arrests against the Muslim Brotherhood as proof of the radicalisation of the movement and their intentions to assassinate ʿAbd al-Nāṣir (Wickam 2013). On 15 September 1964, some thirty years after its foundation, the MWA also received a decree of dissolution. Months before, despite intimidations, al-Ghazālī had opposed the regime's repeated attempts to absorb her association into the Arab Socialist Union, the newly established single party (al-Ghazālī 1995, 8-11). The Muslim Women initially rejected the dissolution order, but the appeal had no effect (13). No longer concerned with the limits imposed by the government, the MWA sent a communiqué to ʿAbd al-Nāṣir where it explicitly manifested its political vocation:

The Muslim Women's Association was founded with the aim of spreading the daʿwa of Allah and working towards the creation of the Muslim umma that will bring back the glory and the state of Islam […] We, Muslim Women, reject the dissolution order because the President of the Republic, who calls for a secular state, has no right to exercise any authority over us, nor does the Minister of Social Affairs […] The article of faith, 'there is no God but

God', imposes on us the duty of continuous and uninterrupted effort [ǧihad] until an Islamic state arises. (15)

The Muslim Women continued to carry out their mission as preachers and to meet among themselves for a while until, following further intimidation by the government, they finally ceased their activities (16). By the time of its dissolution in 1964, there were 119 active groups throughout Egypt with a total of three million adherents, compared to the fifteen thousand members declared in 1952 (al-Ghazālī 1989, 18; *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt* 1952, 57, 7 August).

At the end of July 1965, a new wave of arrests hit the Muslim Brotherhood accused of a new plot to overthrow the Nasserist regime. On 20 August, it was the turn of al-Ghazālī and Quṭb's two sisters. Al-Ghazālī was taken to the Ṭura men's military prison to await trial. For several months, she was interrogated under torture about her relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. On 17 May 1966, she appeared in court with Ḥamīda Quṭb. Denied the possibility of defence by a personally chosen lawyer, al-Ghazālī decided to defend herself (al-Ghazālī 1995, 171). On the same day, she was sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labour on charges of receiving money from Saudi Arabia to finance the coup (175). After spending a year in the men's military prison, al-Ghazālī was transferred to the women's prison in Qanāṭīr on 5 June 1967 where she remained until the newly elected president Anwār al-Sādāt let her out of prison on 10 August 1971 (193).

## 5 Conclusions

The article traced the development of al-Ghazālī's political ideas and her activism from her formative years until her imprisonment in 1965. As seen above, the political context of her time, in parallel with the most salient phases of the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, significantly influenced her thinking and involvement in favour of the Islamic cause. Al-Ghazālī firstly joined the Muslim Brotherhood informally in 1948 in coincidence with the first wave of persecution against the Islamic movement and then she moved to a more intense phase of activism in 1954, again in reaction to the second wave of repression.

In response to the changing political circumstances of the time, al-Ghazālī's writings showed a shift in her discourse about the Muslim decadence, the way enemies were perceived and the strategy to be followed in order to establish an Islamic state. By the early 1950s, al-Ghazālī's thinking appeared to be completely in line with the ideological framework of the Muslim Brotherhood. One can find the idea of Muslim decadence, the call to return to true Islam, the con-

ception of an Islam at work, that is a militant and political version of the faith, as well as the vision of Islam as a totalising and global order. From the earliest writings, therefore, al-Ghazālī was most concerned with bringing about a profound moral reform of the Egyptian society. In the conviction that establishing an Islamic state was only possible in a society made up of sincere Muslims, in the early 1950s al-Ghazālī proposed two strategies: awakening the consciences of people through religious and spiritual education; and preparing the country's institutions through a moral reform of al-Azhar University. Within this framework, the liberation of Egypt from the British occupation was seen as an indispensable prerequisite for the emergence of an Islamic state.

In the second half of the 1950s, as relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nasserist regime deteriorated, in al-Ghazālī's perception, communism became the most insidious and fearsome enemy. At the same time, she became increasingly disillusioned that the project of creating an Islamic state could start from the top and in Egypt itself. As a consequence, she called for the creation of a body of *ulamā'* completely independent of political power and temporarily entrusted the King Saʿūd, one of the most bitter enemies of the Nasserist regime, with the task of defending Islam. However, from 1958 to 1965, with the possibility of a gradual reform of the institutions in an Islamic sense fading away, al-Ghazālī became convinced that the only possible strategy was a gradual reform from below, the patient activism followed by the first community of Muslims in Mecca. This project, as seen above, was the charge that led to her imprisonment in 1965.

Moreover, the article shed light on the prominent role played by al-Ghazālī within the Muslim Brotherhood both as an activist and as a writer over the 1948-64 period. This was also made possible thanks to the special support provided by the Association of the Muslim Women and its magazine, whose relevance for the Muslim Brotherhood has remained understudied in the literature. In addition, al-Ghazālī did not confine her intellectual contribution to women's related issues, but actively participated in the debate on the Islamic state and how to achieve it. She did not hesitate to criticise those who, at that time, she considered to be the main enemies of Islam, namely the British ruler and the Nasserist regime. She went so far as to give advice to the *'ulamā'*, criticised and rebuked them. She demanded that many of them resign, that others be dismissed, and that still others, including the rector of al-Azhar, be put on trial. Indeed, since her first writings up to the mid-1990s, al-Ghazālī placed special emphasis on women's right to freedom of expression, contin-

**39**
Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale
59, 2023, 9-44

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ually referring to the importance of "intellectual courage".[9] As demonstrated above, a woman's frankness could go so far as to question the authority of men in society, including the *ʿulamāʾ* and the rulers in power. For this, al-Ghazālī did not cease to be a troublesome figure for the two regimes that came after ʿAbd al-Nāṣir. Still at the age of 72 years, in the run-up to the 1990 parliamentary elections boycotted by the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ghazālī directly questioned the Mubārak regime. She denounced electoral fraud, demanded in a polemical tone that mosques closed by the government be reopened and, explicitly mentioning the name of the president, advised him to seriously consider the slogan "Islam is the solution" used by the Muslim Brotherhood (*Liwāʾ al-islām* 1989).

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[9] Under the column "Eternal Ladies" in the *Maǧallat al-sayyidāt al-muslimāt*, she often reported examples of women from the time of the pre-Islamic era and the first community of Muslims who distinguished themselves by their freedom of expression (al-Ghazālī 1951, 5: 9, 19). Hind bint ʿUtbah, for example, exercised her freedom of choice by telling her father that she would not have married unless she herself had chosen her aspiring husbands (1955, 3: 13-14); Wafāʾ Sūda al-Handāniyya always expressed her opinions by fighting falsehood and slander until truth prevailed (1953, 75: 16-17).

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**41**

Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale     e-ISSN 2385-3042
59, 2023, 9-44

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**42**

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