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THE POLITICS OF MINORITY MADHHAB HEGEMONY: THE FATIMID DYNASTY AND THE STRATEGY OF SHI'A RULE IN SUNNI EGYPT (969-1171)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty, an Ismaili Shia political power, established and maintained political and ideological hegemony in Sunni-majority Egypt between 969 - 1171 AD. It addresses the historical paradox of how a religious minority built a durable political order in a society where Sunni institutions were already deeply entrenched. Using a historical-critical approach, the study analyzes primary sources, including al-Maqrīzī's al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-Iʿtibār, Ibn al-Athīr's chronicles, and Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān's Daʿāʾim al-Islām, supported by relevant modern scholarship. The data were examined through historical criticism, interpretation, and Gramscian discourse analysis to identify mechanisms of coercion, consent formation, ideological production, organic intellectuals, and historical bloc formation. The findings show that Fatimid hegemony was built through three interconnected strategies. First, political hegemony was secured through military authority, diplomatic accommodation, administrative consolidation, and alliances with local elites. Second, ideological hegemony was produced through al-Azhar, networks of daʿī, religious texts, and symbolic practices that converted political authority into religious legitimacy. Third, Fatimid authority was continuously negotiated through Sunni resistance, accommodation, and counter-hegemonic responses. The study argues that Fatimid rule rested not on coercion alone but on ideological consent and institutional legitimacy. From a Gramscian perspective, the Fāṭimiyah case demonstrates how minority groups can construct hegemony by integrating coercion, consent, intellectual leadership, and symbolic power. Nevertheless, the dynasty's decline shows that hegemonic systems become vulnerable when historical blocs fragment, ideological institutions weaken, and social consent erodes.

Keywords: *Fāṭimiyah Dynasty, Gramscian hegemony, Ismaili Shia, Sunni Egypt, political ideology.*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Sunni and Shia communities in Islamic history has been shaped by complex interactions involving theological debates, political legitimacy, and struggles over religious authority. The disagreement regarding leadership after the death of Prophet Muhammad became one of the historical foundations that influenced the formation of different political identities within Muslim society. The supporters of Ali bin Abi Ṭālib emphasized the authority of Ahl al-Bayt based on the tradition of Ghadīr Khumm, while the Sunni political establishment developed different interpretations of legitimate leadership (Shahawy, 2020). These tensions developed into political conflicts, particularly during the Battle of Ṣiffīn (657 AD), which strengthened competing narratives regarding authority and legitimacy (Madelung, 1997). The tragedy of Karbala

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in 680 AD further shaped Shia collective memory regarding injustice and the suffering of Ahl al-Bayt (Setiawan, 2019).

Over time, Sunni–Shia relations became intertwined with broader political and institutional struggles. The Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties implemented political arrangements that affected the position of various Shia groups through symbolic, administrative, and ideological mechanisms (Masykuroh et al., 2024; Seiawan & Sodikin, 2023). During the Umayyad period, religious spaces became arenas for political contestation, including the symbolic representation of Ali ibn Abi Ṭālib in public sermons (Hawting, 2000). During the Abbasid period, several Shia movements, particularly Ismailiyah and Zaidiyah, continued to experience political pressure because their claims of religious authority challenged Abbasid legitimacy. These historical experiences encouraged Shia communities to develop strategies of survival through intellectual networks, religious organization, and symbolic practices, including the concept of *taqiyah* as a mechanism for protecting identity under conditions of political pressure (Momen, 2017).

The emergence of the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty (969–1171 AD) represents a significant transformation in the political history of Shia movements. Unlike previous Shia groups that often existed in marginal positions, the Fāṭimiyah succeeded in establishing a centralized state in Egypt, a region where Sunni traditions had already been deeply institutionalized. Before the Fatimid conquest, Egypt was strongly influenced by Sunni scholarly networks, particularly the Shafi'i and Maliki schools, which were supported by mosques, educational institutions, and administrative structures (Lapidus, 1988; Brett, 2001; Lev, 1991). Nevertheless, the Fāṭimiyah successfully developed political institutions, economic networks, intellectual centers, and da'wah structures that enabled them to maintain authority for more than two centuries (Halm, 2001).

The success of the Fāṭimiyah in establishing authority within Sunni Egypt raises an important historical and theoretical question: how could an Ismaili Shia minority regime construct and maintain political and ideological dominance in a society where Sunni institutions had already become socially established? This question cannot be explained solely through military conquest or coercive domination. The durability of Fatimid rule was also related to their ability to produce legitimacy through institutions, knowledge production, religious symbols, and intellectual networks. The establishment of institutions such as Dār al-'Ilm during the reign of al-Ḥākim bi Amr Allāh and the development of al-Azhar as a center of intellectual activity demonstrate that Fatimid authority operated through ideological strategies as well as political administration (Daftary, 1998).

This study employs Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony as an analytical framework because it provides a more comprehensive explanation of minority political rule. Unlike approaches that focus primarily on military domination or formal political authority, Gramsci explains power as a combination of coercion and consent, in which ruling groups maintain authority through intellectual leadership, cultural institutions, and ideological production (Gramsci, 2020). In the Fatimid context, this framework enables

an analysis of how institutions such as al-Azhar, religious scholars, *daʿī* networks, legal texts, and political symbols functioned as mechanisms for producing legitimacy and social acceptance. Therefore, Gramscian theory is suitable for examining how a minority religious group transformed political authority into a hegemonic order.

Previous studies have examined the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty from various perspectives. Manan, (2017) discusses the complex position of al-Azhar as both a center of Islamic scholarship and an institution connected with Fatimid ideological interests. Daftary (1990) analyzes the development of Ismaili ideology and the intellectual foundations of Fatimid political authority, while Lewis (2003) discusses the relationship between religion and political legitimacy in Islamic history. Brett (2019), highlights the role of diplomacy, economic patronage, and institutional strategies in strengthening Fatimid power. These studies provide important historical explanations; however, most previous works tend to examine Fatimid political institutions, Ismaili theology, or administrative structures separately.

This study extends previous scholarship by interpreting Fatimid rule as a process of hegemonic formation in the Gramscian sense. Rather than viewing Fatimid authority merely as sectarian expansion or political domination, this research emphasizes how power was constructed through ideological production, institutional control, symbolic legitimacy, and negotiated relationships with Sunni society. The study contributes to the broader discussion of minority political rule by demonstrating how a minority group can establish authority through the interaction between coercive capacity, social consent, intellectual leadership, and institutional networks.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty constructed and maintained political and ideological hegemony in Sunni Egypt through institutional strategies, symbolic practices, intellectual networks, and political negotiation. Furthermore, this study examines how Sunni society responded to Fatimid authority through resistance, accommodation, and negotiation, as well as the factors that influenced the strengthening and decline of Fatimid hegemonic power.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a historical approach to analyze the construction of political and ideological hegemony of the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty in Sunni Egypt. This approach is used to examine not only historical events but also the ideological structures, institutional mechanisms, and power relations that enabled the Fāṭimiyah to establish and maintain authority (Tosh & Lang, 2006).

The historical sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include classical historical chronicles and Fatimid intellectual works, particularly al-Maqrīzī's al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-Iʿtibār, Ibn al-Athīr's historical accounts, and Daʿāʾim al-Islām by Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān. These sources were selected because they provide direct information regarding Fatimid political authority, religious ideology, institutional practices, and social conditions during the medieval Egyptian period. Secondary sources include modern scholarly works on Fatimid history, Ismaili ideology, Sunni–Shia

relations, and political power, particularly studies by Halm, Daftary, Brett, Lev, and Manan. The selection of secondary sources was based on their academic relevance, historical contribution, and ability to provide critical interpretations of Fatimid political and ideological development.

The collected data were analyzed through historical criticism, interpretation, historiography and discourse analysis (Abdurrahman, 2011; L. R. Gottschalk, 1953). Historical criticism was applied to examine the authenticity and credibility of historical sources, while interpretation was conducted by considering the socio-political context of medieval Egypt. The analysis was guided by Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony through several indicators: coercion was identified through military power, political control, and administrative regulation; consent through elite cooperation, symbolic acceptance, and social accommodation; ideological production through educational institutions, religious texts, sermons, and rituals; organic intellectuals through the role of scholars and daʿī networks; and historical bloc through the relationship between rulers, intellectuals, bureaucratic officials, and economic actors (Bates, 1975; Gramsci, 2020). Through this analytical framework, the study examines how the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty transformed political domination into ideological hegemony by combining coercive authority, institutional control, intellectual leadership, and the production of social legitimacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constructing Political Hegemony: Fatimid Strategies of Power Consolidation in Sunni Egypt

The establishment of Fāṭimiyah political authority in Egypt in 969 AD occurred within a context of weakening political legitimacy of the Ikhshid Dynasty (935–969 AD). Before the arrival of the Fāṭimiyah, Egypt was governed by the Ikhshidid rulers who formally recognized the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad while maintaining autonomous control over Egypt and surrounding regions. The dynasty was founded by Muḥammad ibn Ṭughj al-Ikhsyīd, a military officer of Turkish origin who received authority over Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz from the Abbasid caliph in 939 AD (Kennedy, 2022). However, after his death, political authority gradually weakened as power shifted to court elites and military commanders, particularly Abū al-Misk Kāfūr, who became the de facto ruler of Egypt (Lev, 1991).

The weakening of the Ikhshid regime was not only caused by political instability but also by economic and social crises. Historical records from al-Maqrīzī describe that Egypt experienced severe difficulties during the final period of Ikhshid rule, including low Nile floods, agricultural failures, and famine that affected Fustat and surrounding areas (al-Maqrīzī, 2021; al-Maqrīzī, 2022) These conditions reduced the capacity of the ruling authority to maintain social stability and weakened public confidence in the existing political order.

From a Gramscian perspective, this condition can be understood as a crisis of the previous hegemonic structure. A political regime does not maintain authority only

through administrative control, but also through its ability to produce social consent and demonstrate effective leadership. The economic crisis and political fragmentation experienced by the Ikhshid regime indicate the weakening of both coercive capacity and ideological legitimacy, creating a space for the emergence of a new hegemonic project introduced by the Fāṭimiyah.

The Fāṭimiyah took advantage of this political opportunity by sending an expedition led by Jauhar al-Ṣiqillī from Ifriqiyah to Egypt in 969 AD. The conquest was facilitated by the internal weakness of the Ikhshid government and the inability of existing political institutions to provide stability (Lev, 1991). However, the Fatimid strategy was not limited to military expansion. Jauhar combined military power with diplomatic negotiation to reduce resistance and secure acceptance from local communities.

According to al-Maqrīzī, before entering Fustat, Jauhar al-Ṣiqillī issued a security guarantee (‘ahd al-amān) that promised protection of life, property, and religious practices of the Egyptian population (al-Maqrīzī, 2021). This policy allowed the Fatimid transition of power to occur with relatively limited conflict. Halm (2007) explains that the diplomatic approach of Jauhar was an important factor in facilitating Fatimid political consolidation, while Lev (1991) emphasizes the importance of maintaining administrative continuity during the transition.

This strategy demonstrates that Fatimid political consolidation operated through a combination of coercion and consent. Military force provided the ability to seize political authority, but diplomatic guarantees and accommodation of local interests transformed conquest into accepted governance. In Gramsci’s framework, this process represents an attempt to convert domination into hegemony, where political authority becomes sustainable because it receives a degree of social acceptance.

After establishing control over Egypt, Jauhar al-Ṣiqillī founded al-Qāhirah al-Muʿizziyah (Cairo) as the new political center of the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty. The establishment of Cairo was not merely an administrative relocation but also represented the creation of a new political and symbolic center. The city was designed as a royal and governmental space that separated the Fatimid ruling structure from the previous Ikhshid capital of Fustat (Raymond & Wood, 2001).

The construction of Cairo reflects the symbolic dimension of hegemonic formation. For Gramsci, political authority becomes stronger when it is represented through institutions, symbols, and social practices that communicate legitimacy. Cairo functioned as a physical representation of the new ruling order and provided the Fāṭimiyah with a political space through which their authority could be displayed and normalized.

The consolidation of Fatimid authority continued through administrative and economic restructuring. The government secured agricultural resources from the Nile Delta, reorganized taxation systems, and strengthened control over important economic centers, including Alexandria and Damietta. These policies provided financial stability and supported state projects, including the construction of political and religious institutions (Bloom, 2008; Lev, 1991, 2022).

Economic management was therefore not merely an administrative strategy but also part of the process of producing political legitimacy. The ability of the Fāṭimiyah to provide economic order and social stability contributed to the formation of consent among segments of Egyptian society (Ehrenkreutz & Bacharach, 1992). In this sense, material governance complemented ideological strategies in constructing Fatimid hegemony.

The Fatimid administration also developed a bureaucratic structure that integrated political authority with religious legitimacy. Important positions such as qāḍī al-quḍāt were assigned to scholars who supported Fatimid religious interpretations, while communication networks such as the postal institution (ṣāḥib al-barīd) were controlled by officials loyal to the regime (Halm & Bonner, 2021; Lev, 1991).

The integration of political, administrative, and religious actors illustrates the formation of what Gramsci describes as a historical bloc. Fatimid authority was not sustained only by the caliph or military forces, but through cooperation among rulers, bureaucrats, scholars, and economic actors. This network enabled the dynasty to reproduce its authority across different social institutions.

Thus, the political consolidation of the Fāṭimiyah in Egypt was achieved through a multidimensional strategy combining military power, diplomatic accommodation, administrative restructuring, economic management, and symbolic representation. Rather than representing simple minority conquest over a majority society, the Fatimid case demonstrates a process of hegemonic construction in which political domination was transformed into a more stable order through the production of consent and institutional legitimacy.

Producing Ideological Hegemony: Institutions, Intellectual Networks, and Religious Symbols under the Fāṭimiyah

The political consolidation of the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty in Egypt was followed by a systematic effort to transform political authority into ideological legitimacy. The establishment of power in a Sunni-majority society required more than military control and administrative organization. The Fāṭimiyah developed intellectual institutions, religious networks, legal discourse, and symbolic practices that enabled the dynasty to present its political authority as a legitimate religious order. Through these mechanisms, Fatimid rule operated not only as a political system but also as an ideological structure that sought to shape social understanding of authority.

The ideological foundation of Fatimid authority was closely connected with the doctrine of the Imamate. The primary intellectual source of this doctrine can be found in *Daʿā'im al-Islām* by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, a major Fatimid legal work that connected religious practice with recognition of the Imam's authority (Al-Tirmiḏī, 1998). Through this work, the relationship between religious obligation and political legitimacy was formulated within the framework of Ismaili thought (Al-Nu'mān, 1974)). The text functioned not only as a legal reference but also as an ideological foundation for understanding the position of the Imam as the legitimate religious and political leader.

Modern studies explain that Fatimid political legitimacy was inseparable from the doctrine of the Imamate. Halm (2001) emphasizes that Fatimid authority was constructed through the integration of religious doctrine and political power, while Daftary (1998) highlights the importance of Ismaili intellectual traditions in strengthening Fatimid ideological claims.

From a Gramscian perspective, *Daʿā'im al-Islām* represents a form of ideological production because knowledge and religious interpretation became instruments for constructing legitimacy. The Fāṭimiyah did not rely solely on coercive power but attempted to create consent by presenting their political authority within a religious and intellectual framework accepted by their supporters.

The institutionalization of Fatimid ideology was further strengthened through educational and religious institutions, particularly al-Azhar, which was established in 970 AD during the early period of Fatimid rule. Initially functioning as a mosque, al-Azhar developed into an important center of education, religious instruction, and intellectual activity. Historical information regarding Fatimid institutions and urban development in Cairo is recorded by al-Maqrīzī in *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-Iʿtibār bi Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa al-Āthār*, which describes the development of Fatimid religious and political spaces in Egypt (al-Maqrīzī, 1997;Al-Athīr, 1987).

Modern scholarship explains that al-Azhar became closely associated with Fatimid intellectual and religious activities. Masterton (2014) discusses the role of scholarly gatherings (*majālis al-ḥikmah*) in transmitting Ismaili teachings, while Halm (2001) and Bloom (2008) emphasize the importance of Fatimid institutions in connecting knowledge production with political authority.

In Gramsci's framework, al-Azhar can be understood as a hegemonic institution because it functioned as a space where knowledge, religious interpretation, and political legitimacy were produced simultaneously. The institution did not merely transmit religious teachings but also contributed to the formation of social understanding regarding the legitimacy of Fatimid authority. Through educational institutions, the ruling group attempted to transform its ideology into a socially meaningful worldview.

Another important instrument in maintaining ideological influence was the Fatimid *daʿwah* network. The development of this network was connected with the role of *daʿī*, who acted as religious representatives and intellectual agents of the dynasty. The primary historical work *Iftitāḥ al-Daʿwah* by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān provides an account of the early development of Ismaili missionary activities and the process through which religious claims were organized before and during the establishment of Fatimid political authority (Al-Nuʿmān, 1974).

Jiwa (2017) explains that the Fatimid *daʿwah* system developed into a structured network under the leadership of *dāʿī al-duʿāt*. These networks operated across Egypt and other regions, including Syria, Yemen, North Africa, and India. The *daʿī* played a role not only in religious teaching but also in transmitting the ideological foundations of Fatimid authority.

Within Gramsci's concept, the *da'ī* can be interpreted as organic intellectuals because they acted as intermediaries between the ruling ideology and society. They translated the political claims of the Imam-Caliph into religious discourse that could be communicated and internalized among communities. Through these intellectual networks, Fatimid ideology was reproduced beyond the formal institutions of the state.

The production of ideological legitimacy was also expressed through public symbols and religious practices. One important example was the use of the Friday sermon (*khuṭbah*) as a representation of political authority. After the establishment of Fatimid rule, the name of the Fatimid caliph replaced the Abbasid caliph in public religious ceremonies, including sermons in major mosques (Lev, 1991, pp. 66-68). This practice represented a symbolic declaration that political authority had shifted from Abbasid to Fatimid leadership.

The transformation of the *khuṭbah* demonstrates how symbolic practices functioned as mechanisms of hegemonic power. In Gramsci's perspective, political domination becomes more stable when authority is embedded within everyday cultural practices. Religious rituals and public symbols enabled Fatimid political claims to appear as legitimate expressions of religious order rather than merely political decisions.

The same strategy was also reflected in Fatimid monetary policy and public rituals. Fatimid coins contained the names and titles of the Imam-Caliph, allowing political messages to circulate through economic activities (Halm & Bonner, 2021). Religious celebrations associated with Ahl al-Bayt and Fatimid traditions also contributed to the construction of collective memory and political identity (Sanders, 1994).

These symbolic practices demonstrate that Fatimid hegemony operated through everyday experiences. Coins, sermons, institutions, and religious ceremonies became channels through which political legitimacy was repeatedly reproduced. Therefore, the strength of Fatimid authority was not based only on military control but also on the ability to create ideological consent through knowledge, symbols, and social practices.

Counter-Hegemony, Negotiation, and the Crisis of Fatimid Hegemony: Sunni Responses and the Decline of Fāṭimiyah Authority

The ideological and political dominance established by the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty was never completely accepted by all segments of Egyptian society. Although the dynasty succeeded in constructing political authority through administrative institutions, religious discourse, and symbolic practices, Sunni communities continued to preserve their own religious traditions and intellectual networks. The existence of these alternative structures demonstrates that Fatimid hegemony operated within a contested social environment rather than through complete ideological domination.

From a Gramscian perspective, hegemony is never an absolute condition because every dominant order generates possibilities of resistance and alternative interpretations. The attempt of the Fāṭimiyah to establish ideological leadership was therefore continuously confronted by Sunni intellectual and social responses that sought to preserve existing religious authority.

Sunni resistance primarily emerged among scholars who rejected the legitimacy of the Ismaili doctrine of the Imamate. These scholars maintained Sunni theological traditions through teaching activities, scholarly writings, and religious networks. Daftary (2007) explains that Sunni opposition toward the Fāṭimiyah was expressed through intellectual criticism of Ismaili theological claims and challenges toward Fatimid political legitimacy.

The primary historical evidence regarding the religious and social tensions of the Fatimid period can be traced through historical accounts preserved by chroniclers such as al-Maqrīzī. In *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-Iʿtibār bi Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa al-Āthār*, al-Maqrīzī records various social and political developments in Fatimid Egypt, including conflicts, institutional changes, and crises that affected relations between ruling authorities and Egyptian society (al-Maqrīzī, 1997).

The existence of Sunni scholarly networks indicates that Fatimid ideological domination was challenged by alternative systems of knowledge production. While the Fāṭimiyah developed institutions such as al-Azhar and the *daʿwah* network to reproduce Ismaili ideology, Sunni scholars maintained their own intellectual traditions through mosques, private teaching circles, and scholarly transmission.

In Gramsci's framework, Sunni scholarly networks can be understood as a form of counter-hegemony (Bates, 1975; Gramsci, 1971). These networks did not simply reject Fatimid political authority but attempted to maintain an alternative moral and intellectual leadership within society. Therefore, the Fatimid period represented a competition between two hegemonic projects: the official Ismaili ideology promoted by the state and Sunni traditions maintained by independent scholars.

However, Sunni responses toward Fatimid authority were not always characterized by direct confrontation. The Fāṭimiyah administration also developed strategies of accommodation by incorporating certain Sunni elites into administrative and judicial structures. Some Sunni officials maintained cooperation with the Fatimid government while continuing to preserve their religious identity (Brett, 2001; Lev, 1991).

This accommodation demonstrates that hegemonic relations are not based only on domination and resistance but also on negotiation. In Gramscian terms, consent may emerge through political compromise and practical interests rather than complete ideological agreement. The Fāṭimiyah attempted to expand their hegemonic base by incorporating groups that could contribute to political stability.

The relationship between Fatimid authority and Sunni society became increasingly complex during periods of political crisis. During the reign of al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (996–1021 AD), tensions increased due to policies affecting religious practices and public expressions of Sunni identity. These developments intensified opposition and contributed to a weakening of social acceptance toward Fatimid authority (Hamès, 2008).

The experience of al-Ḥākim's reign illustrates the limits of coercive strategies in maintaining hegemony. According to Gramsci, political authority becomes unstable when coercion increases while social consent declines. The Fatimid state could maintain control

through administrative power, but excessive pressure on social groups weakened the legitimacy that had previously been constructed through ideological institutions.

The decline of Fatimid hegemony became more visible during the eleventh century when internal political fragmentation weakened the unity of the ruling structure. Competition among military factions, including Berber, Sudanese, and Turkish forces, reduced the effectiveness of central authority. Al-Maqrīzī records the severe crises experienced during the later Fatimid period, including social and economic difficulties that affected Egypt (al-Maqrīzī, 1997).

Ibn al-Athīr also provides accounts of broader political developments affecting Fatimid Egypt, particularly the increasing pressure from regional powers and conflicts that influenced the stability of the dynasty (*Ibn al-Athīr*, 1987).

From the perspective of hegemony theory, these developments represent a crisis of the historical bloc that had supported Fatimid authority. During its period of strength, the dynasty successfully connected political rulers, religious scholars, administrators, and economic actors into a relatively stable alliance. However, internal conflicts weakened these relationships and reduced the capacity of the state to reproduce ideological and political legitimacy.

The weakening of ideological institutions also contributed to the decline of Fatimid authority. The intellectual networks that had previously supported the dynasty's legitimacy gradually lost influence as political instability affected state patronage and institutional effectiveness. The decline of the *daʿwah* network weakened the ability of the dynasty to reproduce its ideological message among broader communities (Daftary, 2007).

This condition confirms the importance of intellectual leadership in maintaining hegemony. The Fatimid experience demonstrates that ideological authority requires continuous reproduction through institutions and intellectual actors. When these mechanisms weaken, political domination becomes increasingly dependent on coercive power and loses its hegemonic character.

The final collapse of the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty occurred in 1171 AD when Ṣalāḥuddīn al-Ayyūbī ended Fatimid rule and restored Sunni political authority in Egypt. The replacement of the Fatimid caliph's name with the Abbasid caliph's name in Friday sermons symbolically marked the end of Fatimid political-religious legitimacy (Holt, 2009; Shahawy, 2020).

The collapse of the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty demonstrates that political authority based on hegemony requires continuous maintenance of the relationship between power, ideology, and social consent. The dynasty succeeded in transforming minority political power into a hegemonic order for more than two centuries, but its inability to preserve institutional cohesion and ideological legitimacy eventually resulted in the decline of its authority.

The Fatimid experience demonstrates that minority political power can achieve stability when supported by institutions capable of producing legitimacy. The novelty of this study lies in its analytical integration of institutional, intellectual, and symbolic

mechanisms within a single Gramscian framework applied to a pre-modern Ismaili state. Existing work has examined the Fatimid state through the relationship between historiography and power in Ismaili discourse (Babaei Siab, 2022), while Gramscian analysis of Islam has largely focused on contemporary actors, such as revolutionary Islamist and Salafi movements (Merone, 2021; Ramaioli, 2023), and on modern Middle Eastern popular politics (Chalcraft, 2021; Ó Rálaigh, 2026). In the literature reviewed for this study, the Fatimid case has not been analyzed systematically through the concepts of ideological production, organic intellectuals, historical bloc, and consent formation. By doing so, this study shows that al-Azhar, the daʿī network, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, the *khuṭbah*, and coinage operated as an interconnected hegemonic apparatus rather than as separate instruments of religious dissemination. The study thus extends the Gramscian framework to medieval Islamic history and offers a historically grounded account of how a minority regime converted political authority into social consent.

Beyond the Fatimid case, these findings carry broader implications for the study of religion, power, and legitimacy. First, they indicate that the durability of authority in plural societies depends less on the numerical strength of the ruling group than on its capacity to build institutions, intellectual networks, and symbols that make its rule socially meaningful, an argument consistent with recent Gramscian analyses of how religious actors negotiate historical blocs and construct consent (Merone, 2021; Ramaioli, 2023). Second, the study supports the view that Gramsci's concepts are analytically portable beyond their European origins and can illuminate Middle Eastern and Islamic contexts (Chalcraft, 2021; Chalcraft & Marchi, 2021), including pre-modern ones. Third, for Islamic history and civilizational studies, the findings encourage reading institutions such as al-Azhar as sites where legitimacy was produced and contested, rather than as neutral centers of learning, in line with research that links knowledge production and power in Ismaili discourse (Babaei Siab, 2022). Finally, the decline of the dynasty, which coincided with the fragmentation of its historical bloc, offers a cautionary lesson for religiously plural societies today: legitimacy built through institutions requires continuous renewal and inclusion, or consent will erode. Future research may compare the Fatimid case with other minority-led or contested regimes, such as the Buyids, to test how far this model can be generalized.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the Fāṭimiyah Dynasty constructed and maintained its political and ideological hegemony in Sunni Egypt through the integration of institutional consolidation, religious symbolism, intellectual networks, and political negotiation. Administrative continuity, cooperation with local elites, and the strategic utilization of al-Azhar, Ismaili legal scholarship, and daʿī networks enabled the dynasty to transform political authority into broader institutional and ideological influence. Sunni society responded through diverse and interconnected forms of resistance, accommodation, and negotiation, reflecting the persistence of competing religious identities and political interests. Fatimid hegemony strengthened when political stability, institutional

effectiveness, and negotiated social consent reinforced one another, but gradually declined as internal fragmentation, military conflicts, weakened ideological influence, and external pressures undermined these foundations. Through Gramsci's theoretical perspective, these findings establish that the sustainability of Fatimid rule depended on the continuous interaction between coercion, consent, intellectual leadership, and symbolic legitimacy, while the persistence of Sunni counter-hegemony revealed the limits of ideological domination within a religiously diverse society.

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