

Egypt; between state and Islam

*The rise of Islamism in Egypt during the
Sadat and Mubarak regimes, 1970-2011*

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Introduction

When revolution broke out in Egypt against Hosni Mubarak's regime in the late winter of 2011, one of the most prominent things that was introduced to the western onlookers was the power and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although it had initially taken the side line in the conflict, when it became clear that the Mubarak regime was destabilizing, the Brotherhood sent their people to the Tahrir Square to put their organizational talent and resources to work. The Muslim Brotherhood had been banned and forced underground during much of its existence. Regardless, it had been able to grow and become organized. When the Mubarak regime fell, the Brotherhood was one of the key parties to fill the power vacuum he left behind, showing off its support base and appeal by winning the various elections that were held after the revolution. From a western standpoint, this rise to power might have seemed to have come out of the blue. It was somehow reminiscent of the 1979 Iranian revolution, in which a similarly popular uprising led to the installation of an orthodox Islamic regime. In Egypt, too, an Islamist movement took power – at least for a while – and would use the religion as the primary guideline in governance.

The link between Islam and politics not an unlikely one. On the contrary, they have been interwoven in Islamic society since its inception and many would argue that they would be inseparable. This argument goes back to the birth of Islam. Unlike Christianity, which had been subjugated to state prosecution for the first two centuries of its existence, the rise of Islam coincided with the rise of an Arabic empire. And while early Christians developed a hierarchy of bishops and patriarchs that was separate from the state, Islam and the Arabic empire were ruled by the same person; the prophet Muhammed and the *caliphs* ('successors'). Although the rapid and extensive conquests required for the Arabs to employ civil administrators and accommodate for the existing non-Islamic inhabitants of these new territories, the state ideology always had Islam at its core. In return, the Quran and *Hadith* (tradition) covered not only purely spiritual, but also societal, practical and political matters, for it reflected not only the teachings of Muhammed as a spiritual leader, but also as a worldly ruler. Even when the empire broke apart and the title of caliph became merely symbolic, the political and societal guidelines continued to be applied to Islamic societies. In essence, this meant that a good person should be a good Muslim, and while this was true in practice, it was what most Islamic rulers propagated to justify their rule. Therefore, religion would continue to play an important role in governance as well as society. With the advent of the modern age and the rising power of the European states, the Islamic status quo was called into question. Islamic states were put on the defensive (and often downright colonized) by western powers and as a result Islamic societies and institutions were increasingly considered stagnant and obsolete in the face of the western ideology that is generally referred to as modernism. Many in the Islamic world rejected modernism as a detrimental to their system of beliefs and existing way of life. Modernism supported the separation of public and private spheres, the freedom of religion and expression and a separation between state and religion, in which impersonal civil or common law was meant to replace legislation and justice based on the Sunnah (Quran and Hadiths). There was also much objection against the impersonal commercial practices of western capitalism, and of course, rejection of western imperialism and dominance.

In order to discuss and debate Islamism as a phenomenon, it is very important to first establish what we would consider Islamism to be. The terminology is flawed, as it often is, and many authors and scholars have proposed alternative terms and different definitions. Islamism is, by its very nature, the marriage between modern politics and the religious teachings of Islam. Most scholars agree that Islamism is a modern phenomenon, that takes place on the modern political stage and that is, in fact, a product of modernism itself. The religious aspect is also evident, although as in every other religious tradition, the actual meaning of which is usually molded by the individual interpretations

of those who partake in it. It is for this reason that Islamism spans the breadth of the religious spectrum, from moderate/liberal to strictly orthodox. Not only will this paper try to include the whole of this breadth into our discussion, it will also be used as a scale to perceive the position that leaders and their following hold and how this shifts over time. Within the terminological debate about this issue, Islamism is often equated with Islamic fundamentalism. The term Fundamentalism, although originating derived from conservative Protestant Christianity, has come to mean any kind of scriptural literalism. With many Islamists claiming their basis to be Quranic literalism and often believing these literal interpretations to hold the keys to solving the problems in their societies, this argument seems to hold some merit. However, these movements are not always political and instead often place a lot more emphasis on the social aspects, focusing on the private rather than the public spheres (especially in societies where these are in fact separated). The Salafiyya movement, which is most frequently linked with conservative Islamic fundamentalism, can hardly be considered a political movement despite its obvious popularity – especially in Egypt. For this reason, fundamentalism should not be equated with Islamism, and it will be regarded as its own ideology in this paper.

Thesis setup

The studying of religions, and Islam in particular, has always appealed to me. With international events having brought Islamism to the forefront in the recent years, there is little question to the validity of this ideology as a topic of study. Not only an academic interest, but also a sincere practical desire to understand a relevant present-day phenomenon has therefore compelled me to choose the rise of Islamism in Egypt as my topic of study. Egypt itself was an obvious choice for the setting of this study as well. It underwent the rise and fall of an Islamist regime only a few years ago. The country's long history with both Islam and modernism, as well as its central role within both the region as well as the religion have also made Egypt an obvious object of study. Finally, Egypt has long been studied by many scholars before me, resulting in a sufficiently large body of academic work and debate to build upon.

The goal of this thesis is the researching of the growth and development of Islamist movements in Egypt during the regimes of Sadat and Mubarak. As was discussed in the introduction, Islamism has had been all but marginalized during the Nasser regime and would be strongly discouraged by his successors. Regardless, the different Islamist movements would be able to grow and gain in popularity, to the extent that they would pose an acute threat to the state, and the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, would gain enough support and popularity that it was able to take over on a popular ballot after the 2011 revolution. The reason why this was possible is not clear, though, and many different theories exist, explaining the rise of Islamism from various standpoints. What I aim to accomplish in this thesis is to test a number of theories that have been proposed in order to approach the matter from different angles. By gathering the various theories and opinions, I hope to be able to come to some comprehensive conclusions that should allow me to make a clear and concise analysis of the rise of Islamism in modern-day Egypt. While the stated goal is to include as much different visions as possible, the wide range of voices on this matter within the confines of academia has forced me to set some boundaries. A lot of matter cannot be studied in this thesis, but I hope to cover as wide a scope as possible, discussing orientalist as well as revisionist scholars, as well as primary writers such as Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb.

As was discussed, this thesis will study the question from the basis of three different approaches, which will consist of a single chapter. The first chapter is built on the premise that the Egyptian society is conservative Islamic and therefore naturally inclined towards Islamism, so that that the rise of Islamism in Egypt is the logical development of these existing values. I will therefore first

look at the character of Islam and Islamism within the setting of modern society, in order to be answer the question to what extend is Islamism actually conservative. The so-called Islamic Revival will also be discussed, which might form a link between Islamism and modern society. There will furthermore be a historical analysis of Egyptian history and its relationship with Islamism. I will then finally discuss the present-day Egyptian society and the place of Islam therein, in order to determine whether it is actually conservative and what its commonalities are with the Islamist ideology.

In the second chapter will discuss the idea that Islamism has replaced Arab Nationalism as a popular ideology in the Arab world, and Egypt in particular. The theory in this is that both ideologies stem from the same commonly-held believe in the *Umma*, the pan-Islamic community. This again goes back to the pre-modern era, but while it originally stems from the notion of a 'world community of believers', non-religious nations such as the Arab language or common culture and practices have also deeply affected this believe of 'national unity'. In this chapter I will look at the development of the Arab Nationalist ideology and its commonalities with Islamism in order to seek credence for the claim that the latter 'succeeded' the former as the main popular movement in Egypt. I will also discuss the development of the Egyptian state under Sadat and Mubarak and their subsequent departure from Arab Nationalism in favor of 'state' nationalism. This shift, which has been built on the existence of an Egyptian national identity, had let to a changing relationship with Islam and Islamism. I will finally look at the changing government policies that happened under these two regimes and how they affected support for Islamist thought.

The third chapter will look at the socio-economic aspects of post-Nasser Egypt and how these affected the role and potential of Islamist movements in the country. I will look at a variety of social and economic circumstances such as overpopulation, unemployment, income disparity and urbanization and try to determine how these might have contributed to an increased appeal towards the Islamist ideology. In this aspect, I will also look at the role and position the government has had in these matters, particularly from the perspective of increased liberalization of government policies and government inadequacies regarding corruption and lack of capacity. Finally will be discussed the role that the Islamist charity organizations have in these circumstances, how their approach to dealing with these challenges affected their relationship with the state and the general populace and what their potential is within the socio-economic and political spheres.

It is my believe that the three approaches will allow me to establish a number of different factors that can be used to explain the rise of Islamism in this period. I hope to use these factors to create a comprehensive explanation for this rise in the conclusion of this piece.

A socio-historical approach

In this first chapter we will discuss the theory that the rise of Islamism in Egypt can be explained from a cultural and historical perspective, by proposing that present-day Islamism is the product and continuation of an existing conservative society. In other words, Islamism was able to flourish because its conservative religious background meshed well with the perceived inherently conservative Egyptian culture. The basis for this theory is built around the Orientalist idea that Islamic society is inherently stagnant. They insist on the inherent primacy of militant, fundamentalist and conservative ideas in middle-eastern thought, often being declared the product of frustration and rejection of these perceived notions of backwardness within element of middle-eastern society.¹² Furthermore, these is the historiographical notion of continuation and tradition, whose cause-and-effect mechanism also seems to support the idea that modern-day Islamism is the product of existing historical ideas and practices. It would make sense to suppose a predecessor to such a movement, after all. While it is important to stay away from value judgment in debates such as these, the notion does provide a useful starting point for studying the relationship between religion and society from a historical perspective.

In the first part of this chapter, I will investigate the origins of Islamism and will consider the value of the terms 'conservative' and 'fundamentalist' within the subject of Islamism and its pertaining discussion. This part will cover a number of different interpretations of the Islamist movements, as well as the question how different interpretations of Islamism do themselves redefine definitions of terms such 'conservative'. Secondly, I will discuss the question to what extend a society as a whole can be considered progressive or conservative, and what kind of approaches can be used to determine to what extend modern Egyptian society can be considered conservative or progressive. Finally, we will discuss the role of Islam and Islamism in Egyptian society, how these came into being and how they projected themselves into the progressive-conservative debate.

Islamism as an inherently conservative movement?

In order to determine whether Islamism is inherently conservative, we must first ask the question; what constitutes conservative? The traditional meaning to the term implies an inherent resistance to change, as well as an antonym to progress. The word itself infers the desire to conserve that was presently exist, to maintain the status quo. In the case of Islam, 'conservative' therefore seems to apply to a movement that seeks to retain the religion 'as it has always been'. M.A, Zaki Badawi defines conservative Islamism as the school of thought that considers the medieval scholars as having provided the final and definitive interpretation of Islam and thus seeing revision as corruption of true Islam. Conservatives, by this definition, hold a static world view and would, according to Badawi, rather withdraw themselves from the modern world rather than seeking to change it.³ This literal application of the meaning of the term 'conservative Islam' certainly exists and is valid, but in our discussion is does not provide a very satisfying baseline. As this is limiting to only the direct theological part of Islam, Islamism is instead the political and social application of Islam, and as we will discuss later, has little purpose discussing theology. On a political and social level, conservatism means more than protecting religious orthodoxy, but also actively promoting a 'traditional' way of life in the face of progress and change. In the case of Islamism, this challenge is issues by modernist, western culture and ideology. On the other hand, Islamism is an inherent modern movement, the product of modernism itself as much as it is of traditional reactionism.

1 Haj, Samira; *Reconfiguring Islamic tradition; reform, rationality and modernity* (Stanford 2009) 193

2 Lewis, Bernard; *The roots of Muslim rage (1990) in: From Babel to Dragomans, interpreting the middle east* (New York 2004) 328

3 Badawi, M.A. Zaki; *The reformers of Egypt* (London 1978) 13-14

In the introduction to *The Reformers of Egypt*, M.A.Zaki Badawi lists three different Islamist movements that had arisen to answer to the 'modernism' challenge.⁴ The first one is the conservative reaction. Conservatives oppose change or reform and instead favor maintaining the status quo. They consider the medieval scholars as the definite and defining authorities on the key religious matters. Although this school rejects modernism, it believes that these ideas will disappear on their own in the face of Islam, and thus do not sanction tampering with the 'eternal message'. This school of thought, Badawi proposes, holds a static world view and would prefer withdrawing from the modern world rather than seeking to change it. He places certain *Sufi* leaders amongst this group and it could be argued that most conservative *ulama* should be considered members as well. The second school is the revivalist reaction. This movement believes that a return to the fundamentals of the Quran and the *Hadith* is the key to repairing the *Umma*. Furthermore, they believe that Islamic society should be rid of modernist influences and strive for a restoration of what they perceive to be a pure Islamic society based on that of the Prophet and his closest kin. Badawi points out that revivalism is not a modern occurrence, but that it has appeared throughout history, usually as the result of internal factors. He lists Hassan al-Banna and Maududi amongst this group, and it is clear that the so-called *salaffiya* (ancestral) and *Wahhabi* movements fit in this group as well.⁵ As the third Islamist reaction, Badawi named the reformists. Unlike the previous two, reformists do not reject modernism itself, but appreciate the elements that they may find beneficial to their society. The degree to which reformists accept social or political aspects differs from person to person, as comparability with Islamic theology, ethics and law is often controversial. Badawi lists al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida as followers of this school. The inclusion of Rashid Rida (who is considered to be a key founder of Salafism) in this group seems to suggest that there is a matter of overlap between these last two schools.

One of the most evident representations of 'conservative' Islamism in Egypt is the al-Azhar mosque and university which, being one of the oldest surviving centers of learning in the world, has had over ten centuries of experience regarding theological debate and establishment of dogma and orthodoxy. As an institute of learning, it has had a large influence in shaping the beliefs of many preachers and other clergymen. Its place in the Egyptian political system is reinforced by its relationship with the Egyptian state and an increasing approach of one and another to fulfill each other's political agenda. The Egyptian state has over time granted considerable power to al-Azhar to police the public space concerning matters of public morals and perceived religious orthodoxy, especially in the wake of the 1979 Camp David accords that will be discussed next chapter. It's Islamic Research Center has played a leading role in convictions by various court cases against breach of morality or orthodoxy (such as apostasy).⁶ Although actual censorship still falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture rather than al-Azhar, there has been a clear transfer of power from the state authorities to that of religious ones, concerning matters of public morality. The main reason for this alliance is the creation of a state-supported religious narrative that provides for a conservative but passive alternative to the various radical Islamist narratives. The purpose of this alternative would be to fulfill the public need for moral policing of culture and mores without having all the additional ideology attached to it, like the dismissal of the secular state. In practice, this meant that the Egyptian government relied on al-Azhar preach opposition against religious violence and radicalism in return for freedom of speech on other matters.

As militant violence came to a climax in the 1990's, al-Azhar's leverage onto the Mubarak regime,

4 Badawi 13-16

5 Some, like Febe Armanios, argue that these two are one and the same and that the difference is only what term is preferential. Armanios, Febe; *The Islamic traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya*, CRS Report to Congress (2003) though: <http://fas.org/irp/crs/RS21695.pdf>

6 Ismail, Salwa; *Rethinking Islamist politics: culture, the state and Islamism* (London 2003) 66

and thus pressure to consider their stances, increased.⁷ What should be kept in mind, however, is that while the al-Azhar *ulama* claim to represent the Egyptian religious orthodoxy, their legitimacy is not without question. A core tenant of Islam is that there is no supreme religious hierarchy and that all Muslims are able to interpret the Quran themselves. Al-Banna himself has consistently questioned the value of the *ulama*, stating that their 'religious authority' had no meaning in a religion where all adherents are their own authorities.⁸

Oliver Roy separates Islamists from traditionalists and establishes Islamism as a pure product of the modern world from both a sociological as well as an intellectual point of view. Unlike traditionalists, Islamists re-appropriate modern society and technology rather than wanting to return to a mythical past. That is not to say Islamists do not utilize constructed history in order to further their message. They are also mostly city-dwellers and thus more cosmopolitan rather than pastoral, as well as part of a consumerist society, according to Roy.⁹ A clear example of expression of this application and integration of Islam in modern society can be seen in the so-called Islamic Revival movement. This movement came into prominence in the 1970's as a reaction to increased contact with western culture, whose conflicts with traditional Islamic views and mores led to renewed awareness of corruption and decadence. The seminal political event that propagated the movement was the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which established a viable Islamist alternative to the existing western-based states and societies.¹⁰ Taking place in the public sphere, the Islamic Revival should also be considered a very urban expression of religiosity. With the strongly growing urbanization in most of the third world during the second half of the century, many people from traditionalistic rural backgrounds came into contact with modern culture and consumerism and adopted a strong religious identity to manage these new circumstances. The increased need for charity must have also triggered renewed interest in the charitable aspects of Islam.

The Islamic Revival can be seen as an important cultural and societal indicator for the interplay of modernism and religion in present-day Middle-eastern society. The Islamic Revival is a renewal of religious piety and insistence of religious morals, certainly, but it transcends these in their application in every-day life. More than anything, Islam has become an identity for people to adopt, but one that is not incomparable with modern-day conveniences or even commercialism. As Salwa Ismail observed in the streets of Cairo, Islam has also become something that has become marketable, be it in the form of religious verses on decorative lamps or as subjects of articles or items in magazines, television shows or internet blogs. Ismail presents the example of the hijab as a fashion item as well as a religious one, often worn with western-style clothing such as jeans and high heeled shoes, as the ultimate integration of Islam with modern society. She therefore also argues it to be proof of Islam as a discursive tradition, being changed and molded by the people who partake there in.¹¹

If we consider the Islamic Revival to be the application of Islamism in the civil sphere, we will be coming around to the question of whether or not Islamism can be considered inherently conservative. It was previously established that Islamism was inherently linked to the modern world and modern society. The question has therefore become to what extent do Islamists allow the adoption and integration of these various modern aspects into their own (traditional) foundation. This does not only include straight-forward aspects such as modern science, technology or

7 Zeghal, Maïka; Religion and politics in Egypt: the *ulama* al al-Azhar, radical Islam and the state (1952-94) in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 (1999) 371-399, 389

8 Al-Banna, Hassan; Towards the light (1947) in: Euben, Roxanne L., Zaman, Muhammad Qasim (eds.); Princeton Readings in Islamic Thought (Princeton 2009) 72/3

9 Roy, Oliver; *The failure of political Islam* (London 1994) 3

10 Demant. Peter R.; *Islam vs. Islamism: the dilemma of the Muslim world* (Westport 2006) 119-20

11 Ismail *Rethinking* 173-4

institutions, but also cultural and societal ones like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph. On the other hand, Roy uses the non-adoption of these as one of the arguments for the failure of a possible true Islamist society, stating that “there are no 'Islamic leisure activities.’”¹² In reality, modern media and culture are very prevalent and thoroughly adopted by Islamic societies (as most other societies) and that it is inconceivable for most Islamic people to go without these. That these mediums are so willingly adapted and re-evaluated for religious practices is therefore a sign in favor of the 'discursive tradition' theory. There is no doubt that there are many criticisms of decadency and immorality regarding western culture itself, but these generally only concern the actual content and not the channels of culture.

Islamism is a very broad and interpretive movement that has spread itself across the political and societal stage. It is therefore very difficult to generalize, as it is subject to changes and different interpretations not just as the result of progressing technology and shifting cultural norms, but also through the varying application by individual Islamists, based on their personal mores and their station in life. It is also very difficult to disentangle these various expressions of Islam itself from Islamist society. While some groups who might claim guardianship of what they consider to be orthodoxy can be labeled as inherently conservative, the reality is that much of this work is done in a reactionary matter, reacting to a different world and thus having to adapt to accommodate these changes. It should therefore be questioned to what extent the concept of conservatism could be applied to the real world. The line between conservatism and reactionarism is very thin in some of these areas. What we can see however, is that Islamism and the Islamic Revival as a whole can be considered as the adoption of an identity. As we will see later on, this is often done as part of a rejection of the state. Islam's strength lies in the religious believe that it is infallible. This has in practice means that it simply cannot be held to the same level of scrutiny or criticism any form of government is subject to and thus can be seen as an ideal.

Historical Egypt and conservatism

From a historical perspective, we can see that Egypt as a country has had a long and complicated relationship with modernism and has often been the center of the modernist-traditionalist debate. Napoleon's short Egyptian campaign (1789-1801) is generally considered to be responsible for introducing the country to western culture and science, as the result of the train of European scholars and artists that had been shipped in behind the army. Although the French were soon defeated, they were replaced by Mohammad Ali, who was one of the first non-western leaders to realize the potential of modernization as a means to resist foreign domination. By seeking aid from British and French investors and industrialists and keeping foreign advisors, he and his son Ismaïl were aiming to make Egypt a modern state in its own right, independent from their nominal Ottoman overlords as well as the western powers. During their rule, industry was developed, widespread commercial cotton farming was introduced and the Suez Canal was built. In addition, they adopted western customs, reforms, ideas and institutions in education, administration and the armed forces. While this was initially successful, the continuous investments that were required also resulted in an increasingly large debt, and as a result being increasingly financially dependable on the western powers. The accumulation of this debt crisis eventually led to the country becoming a protectorate under British rule in the 1880's and the Egyptian *Khedives* becoming little more than puppets. It can therefore only be called ironic that Egypt was one of the first countries in the Middle East to come under European rule. Under tutelage from the British consul-generals modernization continued and western ideology and culture grew influential as British officials held control over the country.

¹² Roy 196

Although Egypt has, as we have seen, been under modernist and western influences for almost two centuries (significantly longer than most of the Middle East), this did not necessarily add to the appeal of modernist thought in Egyptian culture, for western culture and the results of modernization (such as industrialization, commercial agriculture, administrative jobs) were almost exclusively to the benefit of the elites. Especially amongst the lower classes, which made up the vast majority of the population, the early adoption of modernism most certainly was detrimental, as resentment towards it had an equally long time to develop. The differences between the traditional society that these lower classes had been familiar with and the western-based culture that the elites and Europeans enjoyed became increasingly obvious. Especially the Egyptian *ulama* being seeing modernism as a threat to traditional society and its morals and institutions. There was objection to western law replacing Sharia law, western-style 'secular' education and the rejection of the primacy of Islam in favor of a pluralistic religious and cultural environment.¹³ There was also rejection of capitalist venues in lieu of the traditional family-based economy. Perhaps most prominent was the rejection of western imperialism and western dominance over what was widely considered a very ancient (and distinct non-western) nation-state. Many scholars, especially from the orientalist spectrum, have made this last point the spearhead for their explanation of the rise of Islamism and anti-westernism. For instance, Bernard Lewis states that it is not necessarily because of domestic reasons but rather the disgust or embarrassment of being dominated and superseded by unbelievers that has led to the Islamist anti-imperialist and anti-western views. He argues that having Muslims ruled by non-believers rather than the other way around is viewed as unnatural and, again, an affront to the perceived primacy of Islam as the true source of morality and truth.¹⁴

However, when we look at the history of open revolts against British imperialism in Egypt, we find that these were almost exclusively conducted by movements bearing distinct nationalistic agenda's rather than religious ones. The first open defiance of British rule was the Urabi Revolt (1881-2), in which an attempt by the Egyptian military to dispose the puppet-Khedive Tawfiq was supported by a large popular uprising. When an actual national movement began to emerge in the 1890's, most of its supporters were intellectuals who had often enjoyed western-style education and who wanted to model their nation a liberal parliamentary democracy, inspired by the likes of Great Britain or France.¹⁵ This Wafd party would be instrumental in the disestablishment of the British protectorate in 1922 and who would receive popular support through elections throughout the 1920's and 30's. Clerics and religious institutions, as well as early Islamist advocates like Abduh and al-Afghani had often been background supporters to the independence movements, but they never took the main stage. In fact, it could be argued that Islamists didn't become politically active until the advent of the Muslim Brotherhood during the interbellum, *after* Egyptian independence. The liberal prominence was greatly diminished when it became evident that the democratic political system could be a hotbed for corruption and abuse of power, and that its liberal ideals were out of touch with popular sentiment.¹⁶ Revolts and repression in Syria during the 1920's and troubles between Jewish settlers and Arab natives in neighboring Palestine, which led to revolt in 1936-39 and war in 1947-49, played a large role in strengthening both Islamist as well as pan-Arabist sentiment in Egypt. In this atmosphere, Hassan al-Banna himself took to write the Khedive Faruq in 1947, addressing him as a possible 'shepherd' against dangerous foreign and liberal influences and pressing him towards reforms in the political as well as the social spheres.¹⁷ However, it was not a religious nor a popular movement, but rather a small cadre of military officers that had led the next revolt and disposed the monarchy in favor of a republic. This 1952 revolution, as well as the 1956 Nasserist 'coup d'état' that followed it, were secular and nationalistic and distinctly non-Islamic in

13 Demant 191

14 Lewis *Roots* 325

15 Goldschmidt jr., Arthur; *A brief history of Egypt* (New York 2008) 95

16 Goldschmidt 128

17 Al-Banna 57

nature. This nature and its relationship with the Islamists will be discussed in the next chapter.

Conservatism in Egyptian society

It is again difficult to apply an abstract label such as 'conservatism' to a broad group of people, especially if this group constitutes about 80 million whose only obvious similarity is residence within the borders of the country. With that said, the Egyptian population appears to be fairly homogeneous. Ethnic Egyptians constitute the vast majority of the population, and minorities make up only a few percent. Arab is spoken almost exclusively, although religion dialects exist. Finally, Sunni Muslims make up around 90% of the Egyptian population. The only significant religious minority, the (Christian Eastern Orthodox) Copts, are considered an integral part of Egyptian society from a historical standpoint. While this perceived homogeneous does not in any way presume a national consensus, it does show the prominence of a single ethno-religious group. Based on this, I will attempt to follow a few venues that can at least give some insight in Egyptian society.

One obvious quality that the Egyptian society seems to possess is a deep-rooted statism. Ideas like state and nation are well-established in the country, especially in comparison to other states in the region. The legacy of six thousand years of almost continuous statehood surely plays a role in this, but it is most likely the popular awareness of this legacy that might be more important. Various authors have commented about the Egyptian willingness to defer to central authority to keep order and their disinclination to revolt, or even their ability to passively endure hardship or repression.¹⁸¹⁹ And while these comments would seem stereotypical or anecdotal, it is difficult to repute a general trend of popular support for centralized government that is unheard of in the rest of the Middle East. The geographical circumstances of the country lend very well for this as well. After all, the vast majority of the 80 million Egyptians (around 98% or so) live in the Nile valley and delta, which together make up only about 3,5% of the country and are thus some of the most densely populated areas in the world. This concentration of people both required and enabled a concentration of power, in the past as well as today. In most middle-eastern societies, qualities such as political freedom and democracy have traditionally not been considered as important as they have in the west. These societies have rather put more emphasis on justice within the public sphere, while valuing private freedom within the private sphere.²⁰ These preferences have also been shown in recent Pew Polls, in which a fair judiciary (79%) and law and order (63%) were answered to be very important to the future of Egypt, rather than the freedom to protest peacefully (29%) or a civilian control of the army (26%). However, when asked whether they preferred a democratic or non-democratic regime, 71% always preferred a democratic one and 64% chose a democratic government over a state with a strong leader.²¹

The Egyptian population has also been rapidly increasing from 36,3 million in 1970 to 79,3 million in 2011, almost consistently growing by a million annually.²² Together with the limited habitable space and the general economic and technological changes that decreased demand for agricultural labor, this led to a very strong and clear urbanization rate. Cairo, for instance, grew from 2,4 million in 1950 to 5,3 million in 1970 and 12,3 in 2010.²³ These rapid population shifts have made it impossible for authorities to keep up with development of services and infrastructure, leaving many

18 Hopwood, Derek; *Egypt: politics and society 1945-1990* (London etc. 1991) 6

19 Goldschmidt 228

20 Roy 10

21 Pew Research Center "One Year after Morsi's Ouster, Divides Persist on El-Sisi, Muslim Brotherhood" (May 22, 2014) <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/22/one-year-after-morsis-ouster-divides-persist-on-el-sisi-muslim-brotherhood/>

22 World Bank – World Development Indicators (April 2015) per: <http://knoema.com/atlas/Egypt/Population>

23 http://books.mongabay.com/population_estimates/full/Cairo-Egypt.html

of the newly-migrated poor city-dwellers to both fend for themselves and rely on local charity networks. The rapid population growth also led to a surplus of labor, both in the countryside as well as in the cities. Three-quarters of the Egyptian population is below the age of 25. Unemployment or having to rely on odd jobs is therefore very common, thus creating a large group of people with no reliable income. It is in these kinds of vulnerable socio-economic groups that religiosity usually blooms, as people seek an anchor or an assurance in their existence. More often than not, they also rely on patronage and charity to make due. Due to the emphasis of charity and compassion in Islamic dogma, benefactors (both individuals as well as organizations) also are often driven by religious motivation. Finally, the incapacity (and unwillingness) of the state to provide welfare for this growing number of marginalized people creates a vacuum where large charitable organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood could easily settle and provide welfare from a religious standpoint. These matters will be discussed further in a later chapter.

As discussed earlier, there is an obvious connection between urbanization and the so-called Islamic Revival, which saw a renewed interest in- and adoption of- the religious identity by the urban youth. Part of this shift was the need to join modern cultural expressions with existing traditional ideas as a part of integrating into urban society. In addition to this, we can see an actual theological shift taking place amongst these migrants from 'rural' Islam, which still uses a lot of folk-like customs (such as saint-veneration) to 'urban' Islam, which is much more in line with the orthodoxy established by the al-Azhar university and similar conservative bodies and sheiks. In addition to these, Egypt has always been a center of Islamism. Early Islamists like al-Afghani and especially Abduh and Rida all spent much of their careers writing and working in Egypt. As the birthplace of the Muslim Brotherhood, this movement has also always had a very dominant place in Egyptian society. While it is of course difficult to ascertain to what extent the Egyptian population actually shares the orthodox ideologies, public opinion polls conducted by the Pew Research Center generally reflect a popular support for conservative morality. For instance, moral objection to homosexuality, extramarital relations or premarital sex are very high (95%, 92% and 90% respectively), and this appears to be in line with other Islamic countries that were polled (Jordan, Tunisia and Turkey).²⁴ Another poll also reports that 85% of the Egyptian population believes that Islam has a positive influence on politics, and when given the choice, 59% would identify themselves as a fundamentalist rather than a modernist.²⁵ Despite possible misgivings regarding the value of such, there is no denying that they seem to be representing a general trend amongst the Egyptian population. It is therefore not difficult to conclude that Egyptian society might indeed be considered conservative, although such a qualification remains a subjective value judgment.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to investigate similarities between the nature of (conservative) Islamism and the nature of Egyptian society, in an attempt to find a possible causality for the rise of Islamism in Egypt. In the first part of this chapter it was established that Islamism as an ideology is too broad to be generalized as conservative but that conservative movements certainly existed. Furthermore, I discussed the discursive alternative, where traditionalist interpretations change with time in order to accommodate modern society. In the second part we saw that Egypt had historically been an early subject to western and modernist influences and that these were often willingly adopted by the ruling elites and sometimes even the general populace. I also established that religious dissent and (later on) Islamist opposition mostly developed as a reaction to these modernist regimes, and that they remained confined to a position of opposition. Finally, I concluded that despite Egypt's long

24 Pew Research Center "Global views of morality" (2013) <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/04/15/global-morality/country/egypt/>

25 Pew Research Center "Egypt, democracy and Islam" (2011) <http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/01/31/egypt-democracy-and-islam/>

history of (semi-)secularist governments, Islam still keeps a very prominent place within Egyptian society and that its morality and its conservative proponents have a large say in public consciousness.

It therefore appears that there is a clear connection between the tenets of Islamist dogma and ideology and the existing morality and world view of the Egyptian populace. However, it would go too far to assume the rising popularity of Islamism simply from this foundation. The mainstream Islam that is dominant in Egypt is of a passive nature. Without active triggers, a political movement like Islamism would not become as popular as it has. Therefore, it should instead be proposed that the conservatism amongst the Egyptian population forms fertile grounds for Islamism and that its conservative nature has enabled it to grow as much as it did, when the population became politically aware and entered opposition against the secular state. However, its ingrained nature of Islam within Egyptian society has made it difficult to distinguish the two. The perceived primacy of religious tenets has also made it very hard to be criticized and therefore by extension has made it hard to criticize Islamic groups or movements in the eyes of some people. Both the Egyptian government as well as populist groups have used this to their advantage. On the other hand, many Muslims have systematically dismissed claims of religious fervor by groups or individuals who did not match their own personal interpretation of Islam. Religious mores and beliefs generally hold no set value themselves, but are different from person to person; their respectable value is only as much as the individual is willing to attribute to them.

A political approach

In this chapter, I will look at the theory that the rise of Islamism as a mass movement can be explained as the result of the collapse of Arab nationalism and socialism in the 1970's. This assessment seems to be fair one, as Nasser's Arab nationalist regime had been very popular in Egypt (and around the Arab world). The movement's rapid collapse between the lost Six-day War of 1967 and Nasser's death in 1970, and the obvious resurgence of Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 70's seems to suggest some causality. This is strengthened by the number of obvious ideological similarities, including a desire for Arabian unity and social welfare, which seemed to appeal to a similar wide audience. This theory therefore proposes that Nasserist Arab nationalism has received widespread popular support by appealing to ingrained societal values and that Islamism was able to become so successful by catering to those same values after Nasser's death, essentially filling the political vacuum that the Arab nationalist movement had left.

In order to study the validity of this theory, I will first look at the rise and fall of Arab nationalism in Egypt, and its relationship with Islamism, especially during the Nasser era. I will then try to put both movements into perspective in order to discuss the validity of the similarities in ideology. Of particular importance here will be the question where these movements came from and where they based their beliefs upon. After this will be a discussion on the popularity of both movements within the context of the time. Finally will I be discussing the development of the Egyptian state during the Sadat and Mubarak eras and the relationship their regimes had with the emergent Islamist movements. The question here is what manner government policy influenced the rise of Islamism in this period. Taking these matters into consideration, I hope to finally discuss the reality of causality.

Arab nationalism

Tradition portrays a very obvious example of an early nation-state in the first Caliphate, that was established by the prophet Muhammed, which linked religious (early Islam), nation (tribal Arabians) and state (the Caliphate itself) together. After the death of the prophet, the state expanded to incorporate most of what is now considered the Middle-East, including Iran, Egypt and Morocco, and this original link began to dilute as more ethnicities and religions came within its constituency. Furthermore, the state itself began to fall apart as the Umayyad dynasty (661-750) was removed from power and declared a rival caliphate in Cordoba. Under the Abbasids (750-1258), North Africa (including Egypt) and Iran broke away, as well as Oman and Yemen. But while the Caliphate collapsed fairly quickly, the Arab language and Islamic religion remained important in the conquered areas. Often, the new rulers had been Islamic Arabs as well and through affirmative action or coercion, the number of converts kept growing and the Arab language became a *lingua franca* in most of the region. This brings up the question; has this spread of the language and Arab culture led to an actual spread of what could be called an Arab 'nation'? This is, of course, mostly an issue of identity.

Awareness of an Arab national identity in the modern sense most likely came into being during Muhammed Ali's reign in Egypt. His modernist policies allowed the introduction of many western ideas, and Egyptian intellectuals began studying in France in the 1820's. The foremost of these students was Rafa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi, who was the first to coin the name '*watan*' (nation) in a secular sense and to whom '*wataniyya*' (patriotism) was a prime virtue in modern society.²⁶ However, he sought to link these new modernist thoughts to religious scripture, thus he would not separate the Arabian identity from Islam. Instead, his writing should be considered a predecessor of Islamism as well as Arab nationalism. The birth of actual secular Arab nationalism should instead be found

²⁶ Tibi, Bassam, *Arab nationalism, between Islam and the nation-state* (London 1997) 87

elsewhere, namely the Christian populations in Lebanon and coastal Syria. Although they had not been prosecuted by the Ottoman Empire, their exclusion from the *umma* left them unable to obtain political power. This changed when Muhammed Ali invaded Syria and added it to his state. This meant the introduction of secular laws that endorsed the emancipation of all inhabitants as equal citizens rather than as subjects. Furthermore, it resulted in the replacement of the existing feudal system for a civil administration. Finally, the regime allowed French and American missionaries to set up schools, and established secular education to educate the new social strata. Syria was brought back into the Ottoman Empire in 1840, but this did not mean the end of modernist policy. A year prior, the Ottomans had begun the so-called Tanzimat Reforms, which intended to modernize and centralize the imperial administration and thus introduced the modernist ideology to the entire empire. This meant a continuous dismantling of feudal power and a push for civil administration. Furthermore, the reforms included modernization of the military and reformation of the officer corps, allowing entry to officers of a bourgeois background.

While the reforms were abolished in 1878, its products would remain. Westernized Turkish officers formed the Young Turk movement, which propagated a western-style, secular multi-national state. Alongside this, Arab officers formed the Committee of Union and Progress. It would become clear over time, however, that the Young Turks envisioned their centralized state to have a clear Turkish supremacy. When they came to power in 1909, they began repressing Arab nationalist activities by banning the literary clubs and secret societies that Arabs had set up in the previous years. Their clandestine nature allowed for several of them to persist though, and others were set up abroad, particularly in France. An Arab National Congress was held in Paris in 1913, in which the movement's political views and goals were established. Many Arab nationalists still adhered to their support of the Ottoman Empire and they pressed for a place for the Arab nation within the empire, as equals alongside the Turks. They also considered the Arab nation as limited to the empire's borders, that is to say, excluding Egypt and the Maghreb. Finally, they established the movement to be a secular one, with no religious character at all.²⁷ Although the Young Turks were quick to come to an agreement with the National Congress for autonomy of the Arab regions, they were even faster to rescind on these promises when the First World War saw the Ottoman Empire engaged in adversary against France and Great Britain. Being suspected of holding secret ties with the French, many members of the Paris Congress were arrested and executed in 1915 and 1916. This broke any possible agreement between Arab and Turkish nationalists. Aware of the strategic value of the Arabs as assets against the Ottomans, the British and French pushed for an alliance between the nationalists and the feudal lords, led by Sharif Husayn of Mecca, promising an independent Arabian kingdom after the war. While the resulting Arab Revolt played a large part in wresting the Arab-speaking territories away from the Empire, the British and French refused to follow up on their promises and instead divided the territories amongst themselves. Having been betrayed by their supposed patrons, the Arab nationalists began to turn their backs not only against the French and English, but also to the liberal, democratic ideology that they represented. Instead, the Arab nationalists became anti-imperialist and anti-western.²⁸ It should be emphasized, though, that both modernism and secularism remained important pillars of the movement.

The formation of the short-lived Kingdom of Syria by Husayn's son Faisal in 1920 and its subsequent dissolution by the French had led to a surge of nationalism and insurgency in the Levant. It wasn't until 1923 that the French mandate had been enforced fully, and it would again be challenged by the Druze-led Great Syrian Revolt between 1925 and 1927. Although sparked by violation of this minority's historical autonomy, the revolt was eagerly joined by disgruntled

27 Tibi *Arab nationalism* 110-11

28 Kramer, Martin: *Arab nationalism: mistaken identity*, in: *Arab Awakening & Islamic Revival* (New Brunswick 1996)

nationalists and feudal notables alike. While the brutal repression of this revolt was initially successful in restoring order, it led to the French abandonment of direct rule and the establishment of the semi-autonomous Syrian Republic in 1930, though it would not be fully independent until 1946. In 1943, a group of former Sorbonne students led by Michel Aflaq founded the Ba'ath (rebirth) movement. Aflaq and his compatriots had been inspired by Hitler's national-socialist ideology to merge the previously liberal Arab (and Syrian) nationalist dogma with what they considered a social, anti-capitalist policy. The Ba'ath would become popular amongst the Syrian military and would dominate the Arab nationalist spectrum in the country from that moment on, playing a central role in Syrian politics either from the main stage or the background. The Ba'ath also brought Arab nationalism into what can be considered the 'revolutionary' stage, in which the perceived weaknesses of the Arab world (which had been the result of imperialist injustices or conspiracies) would have to be overcome through a social revolution.²⁹

Bassam Tibi identifies two different varieties of European nationalism. The first was based on French revolutionary thought and its opposition to the feudal state. This kind of national state was based around the bourgeois class and it saw as its goal the struggle for freedom against tyranny. Furthermore, this has also extended to a desire to spread their liberal ideology, assisting other people in emancipating themselves and constituting their own nations. The second variety came about in Germany, more or less as a reaction to the first one. Due to the sentiment that a revolutionary France had humiliated Germany during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, German nationalists were very Francophobic and thus anti-liberalist because of this. Rather than embracing the rationality of the enlightenment, they followed romantic ideals based on (idealized) history. These gave birth to an ideology of national superiority and xenophobia, often aimed at disguising or distracting from actual socio-economic shortcomings within the nationalist communities.³⁰ Arab nationalism seemed to have threaded a middle path between the two. On the one hand, there was a strong emphasis on emancipation and freedom from foreign oppression, as well as a drive to 'export' these freedoms to those the nationalists as their oppressed brethren. An example of this was the wide popular support for both the Syrian and Palestine revolts amongst Arab populations. On the other hand, there is an irrational, romantic foundation behind these ideals, and a large emphasis on autonomy and self-strengthening in the face of the specter of western dominance.

Another distinction in forms of nationalism is made by Adeed Dawisha, who differentiates between *al-qawmiya* (Arab nationalism) and *al-wataniyya* (state nationalism).³¹ The first one, again, was based on the German romantic national idea of the unification of an entire *volk* (nation/people) into its borders. The unifying factor here is the common language and perceived historical connection. The second one Dawisha links to the Anglo-French tradition, in which the state historically incorporated other *nations* with other ethnicities and languages (e.g. Bretons, Scots), states were formed through institutions. In our case, *wataniyya* meant the establishment of national governments within sovereign states, in practice often within borders established by the (former) imperial powers and often having their power built upon institutions and networks established during colonial rule. Many post-colonial states fit this mold and attempted to follow the classical, western-based form of statehood. It is not difficult to see why Arab nationalists and Islamists both hold very antagonistic views towards the *wataniyya*-state.

An important distinction between Islamists seeking an Umma-based state and Arab nationalists seeking an Arab nation-state is the way they define the borders of their state. According to Hassan

29 Martin Arab 32

30 Tibi Arab nationalism 36

31 Dawisha, Adeed, *Arab nationalism in the twentieth century* (Princeton 2003) 219

al-Banna, the Islamists sought to unify all those who followed the Muslim creed, whereas the nationalists were limited by territorial borders and geographical boundaries. Al-Banna states that for Islamists, the 'nation' and the *umma* are essentially two sides of the same coin, a much broader concept in that sense that it should encompass all of mankind.³²³³ Here is implied the Islamists' dismissal of all national borders as creations of western imperialism and the subsequent dismissal of the nationalist ideology as western-based and therefore un-Islamic. Another obvious distinction between the two was the place of religion. Arab nationalism had been secular and had traditionally been supported by Christians as well as Muslim, such as Michel Afleq himself (who was an Orthodox Christian) as well as many Copts. Ba'athism and Nasserism also brought socialism into the mix, which is generally critical of religion. While these regimes never actually became atheist, their dismissal of the primacy of Islam was a key point of antagonism with the Islamists.

Arab nationalism and Egypt

As was mentioned before, Egypt holds a somewhat unique position in the Middle-East, as being one of the only states that can boast an independent national identity. This identity originated from its millennia-long tradition of governance and it was very strongly propagated by Muhammed Ali's administration. The tradition itself, which promoted a centralized state with a strong man on top, would eventually be coined 'pharaohism'. Although the nationalistic ideology was introduced to Egypt by western-educated scholars such as al-Tahtawi, this early form of Egyptian nationalism was mostly a political tool to be wielded by the government, and it was profoundly non-secular. We saw that al-Tahtawi himself sought to link his nationalistic ideas with this Islamic (one might argue; Islamist) ideas.³⁴ It wasn't be until after the establishment of the British protectorate that a popular nationalistic movement came into being in the form of the Wafd Party, which sought to represent the whole of the Egyptian population in the face of the Western powers. The fact that Copts as well as Muslims have played prominent roles in the Wafd was exemplary for the secular nature of the movement. The Wafd was a national movement first and foremost, and thus it had little interests outside of Egypt. The Interbellum years were a period of important political awakening in the Middle-East, though, and the Egyptian population at large became increasingly aware of the plight of fellow Arab-speaking populations who remained under colonial rule. An important example of this was the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-27, in which Wafd leader and former Prime Minister Saad Zaghloul equated the struggle for Syrian freedom with the Egypt's own strife for independence and turned to plea to the nation for compassion with their eastern brethren.³⁵ The Wafd-controlled Egyptian government would also support the 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine and participated in the 1948-49 Arab-Israeli war. These conflicts, which were very close to home, led to an increasing political awareness of the Egyptian population. The plight for help from their Arab brethren, along with the current regime apparent inability to aid them, led for many Egyptians to seek for alternatives.

It is therefore not surprising that this period also saw the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood as a major societal factor in Egypt. The Brotherhood had been founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928 as a conservative Islamic alternative to the leading (Wafd-based) liberal mores of the time. Like earlier Islamists like al-Afghani and Abduh, al-Banna saw these western influences as the main cause for the economic and social problems of the time, and believed that a return to more traditional Islamic morals and values through the renewed emphasis of Quranic scholarship would turn the country to its proper path. Though unlike his predecessors, al-Banna sought to 're-Islamize' from the bottom

32 Dawisha 104

33 Al-Banna 63

34 Tibi *Arab nationalism* 88

35 Cury, Ralph M., Who invented Egyptian Arab nationalism? Part 1, in: *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (1982) 252

up, working through scripture schools and local charities and networks rather than working on the political field. The Brotherhood had therefore been a societal and educational movement since its inception, which was most familiar with working from the street level. As the Wafd lost popularity, the Brotherhood took the form of a mass movement through the establishment of branches throughout Egypt, growing from 150 chapters in 1936 to between 1000 and 1500 at the end of the Second World War, with an estimated membership between 100.000 and 500.000.³⁶ The large and influential network allowed al-Banna to push his political agenda to the Khedive and the rest of the political elite. In 1947, he wrote a missive in which he set out his vision of a post-war Egypt that was distinctly Islamic and free from imperial influence. He called out for Islamization of the law and the state, an end to corruption and adherence of Islamic mores and values in all public circles, as well as a removal of foreign culture and influences in favor of the Islamic and Egyptian through education, social reform.³⁷ This would become the de facto political agenda of the Brotherhood in decades to come.

Thus far, we can see that while the Egyptians had certainly expressed sympathy for the Arab nationalist movements and had supported their anti-colonial struggles, Arab nationalism would not take root in Egypt – at least not to the extent it would supplant Egyptian nationalism. The 1952 military coup, which propelled Gamel Abdel Nasser to the political foreground, did not change this. Although initially reluctant to take charge, the regime would quickly set itself up as a one-party dictatorship that sought to eliminate its political rivals, most importantly the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wafd, and to a lesser degree the communists. The Brotherhood had been a supporter of the coup when it took place, sharing their hatred for the Wafd-dominated political elites and the westernized king, whom they still considered a British puppet. Their relative political power and clout with the populace had made them the main political contender to the successive regimes since the 1930's. This also made them their biggest threat to the new regime though, and thus it would also suffer the strongest repression, leading to much of its leadership incarcerated, the movement decapitated but not fully incapacitated. Within prison, many previously moderate Muslim Brothers would begin to radicalize, often influenced and encouraged by their radical compatriots. The most obvious example of these was Sayyid Qutb, who wrote most of his commentaries on the Quran from prison, as well as *Milestones*, in which his accumulated ideology would take the form of a political manifest against non-religious government.³⁸

Nasser and Arab nationalism

Nasser's position within the Middle-East dramatically shifted during the 1956 Suez Crisis, in which Egypt successfully nationalized the Suez Canal and survived a military stand-off against Great-Britain, France and Israel. This defiance of western power was widely considered to be a great blow against western imperialism in the region, and in doing so it had unwittingly made Nasser the de facto leader of the Arab world. Nasser's new-found influence and his charismatic leadership got the attention of the Syrian Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, who saw him as the pivotal leader around whom they could push for the unification of the Arab world. Nasser himself saw the Ba'ath's Arab Socialist ideology as a good ideological basis from which to establish his own regime domestically and as a tool to legitimize his reach abroad. Socialism was considered a good alternative to capitalism, which was associated with the colonial powers. Furthermore, its insistence on humanitarianism and social justice appealed to the ideological foundations of the Islamic population. In 1958, the Syria

36 Lia, Brynjar; *The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The rise of an Islamic mass movement* (Reading 1998) 151-154

37 Al-Banna 74-78

38 John Calvert argues that his popularity abroad, as well as his contractual obligations to his publisher, forced Egyptian authorities to grant him these significant liberties. Calvert, John, *Sayyid Qutb and the origins of radical Islamism* (Oxford 2013) 225

Ba'athists pushed for the unification of Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic (UAR), relying on Nasser's personality to carry their program. The UAR has gone into the annals of history as a foolhardy and impulsive union of incomparable systems. Nasser saw the UAR as a tool to extend Egyptian hegemony rather than an embodiment of Arab unity, and Egypt's comparative political, demographic and economic power led to the de facto colonization of Syria by the Nasserist administration.³⁹ From an outsider perspective, the establishment of a pan-Arabist state seemed like a landmark victory for Arab nationalism and it won popularity amongst the general Arab populations, although only Yemen would move to federate itself with the UAR. Inability to attract more (oil-rich) member states, Egypt's imperialist sentiments and economic mistreatment and ideological differences between Ba'athists and Nasserists eventually lead to the secession of Syria from the union in 1961, three years after its establishment. In the end, it had turned out that the massive differences had outweighed any perceived (ideological) similarities between the member states.⁴⁰ Nasser did not abandon the Arab socialist ideology or even the name of the union (which would not be reverted until 1971), but instead continued to establish a socialist state domestically.

The Nasserist state was paradoxically both a revolutionary state as well as a 'neo-patrimonial' one. Rather than having to rely on cooperation with the existing liberal elites that had controlled the political and economic scene, Nasser had established the primacy of his own supporters, which consisted mostly of military officers and their families. These would form a 'new elite' class that was loyal to the state and the party. Through administrative and agricultural reforms, Nasser had intended to restructure the countryside and mobilize the rural population in support of the state through land reforms and the introduction of cooperatives. In practice, however, these new elites would quickly fall into the old socio-political hierarchy, filling up the vacuum that bourgeois opponents had left but requiring patrimonial networks and marriage connections in order to rule the reformed countryside.⁴¹ The maintenance of an adversary image was also a key policy in perpetuating the regime. Previously, the general vocabulary of anti-imperialism had been sufficient. After all, it had only been a few years after World War 2 that most Arab states were granted their independence. By the late 50's, the 'specter' of imperialism had little legitimacy left and Nasser had to turn to local adversaries. Besides the obvious example of Israel, these included Jordan, Saudi-Arabia and royal Yemen, who held close relations with Britain and the United States and whose traditional monarchies had been long-time opponents of revolutionary Arab nationalism. The Nasserist state needed a continuous threat of war – and an enemy – to maintain its hold over a reluctant nation, and to deflect its attention to internal problems.⁴² Having visited Egypt in 1969 – just two years after the disastrous Six-day War, Bernard Lewis writes that the country had experienced more openness and that public criticism of the Nasser regime had become commonplace. However, Lewis argues that this perceived freedom was in fact working in favor of the regime, allowing freedom of speech but not freedom of deed in order to more easily detect and repress actual resistance against the regime. This had led to a purge of critics from Nasser's inner circle and thus a more closely controlled state.⁴³

Despite earlier support for Arab Socialism amongst the population, most Egyptians had become disillusioned by the time the Six-day War took place. The commercial- and middle class had already opposed the left-wing policies, being the major victims of Nasser's economic policies. The Leftists themselves had considered Arab Socialism as a half-hearted and ineffective compromise to

39 Goldschmidt 166

40 Martin *Arab* 187

41 Zubaida, Sami, *Islam, the people and the state* (London/New York 1993) 134

42 Lewis, Bernard; *Return to Cairo (1969) in: From Babel to Dragomans, interpreting the Middle East* (Oxford 2004) 254

43 Lewis *Cairo* 247/8

capitalism and considered 'full' socialism as the only alternative. Arab Socialism was considered to be a pragmatic and hollow term that was whatever the regime required it to be. In principle, it had often simply been used as an excuse to confiscate Islamic property. Finally, most Egyptians had become tired of Nasser's political and military adventures, such as the short-lived United Arab Republic, his dealings with Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, the North Yemen Civil War and the Six-day War. Although popular demonstrations in his favor had resulted in his return after resigning in the wake of this latter war, Bernard Lewis explains these as not being a sign of his popularity, but rather a popular demand for Nasser to take responsibility for the mess he had left the country with.⁴⁴

Nationalism and Islamism after Nasser

Nasser's death in 1970 also effectively meant the death of Nasserism and the foothold the Arab Socialist ideology had held in Egypt. While most of it had already lost credibility in the wake of the Six-day War, much of Sadat's early reign was marked by its departure from Nasser's economic, social and political policies. In order to break the military-based Nasserist centers of power, Sadat pushed for a return to civilian control and even instituted rudimentary democracy. One approach that had quick and far-flung repercussions was the support and strengthening of Islamist student movements on university campuses. Many imprisoned members of the Muslim Brotherhood were released, and others were allowed to return from their exile abroad. Sadat had hoped to counter the communist and socialist influences within the academia. Many of the Islamists had become radicalized in prison and abroad and they were unlikely to dance to the tune of the Sadat regime. Instead, these Islamists would quickly take the space that the relaxing of repression allowed, and once again became one of the regime's main critics and contenders for power.⁴⁵

Both Sadat's domestic and foreign power seem to have been connected with the perception of Egypt's self-worth, especially in relationship with Israel and its occupation of the Sinai after the 1967 war. Although Sadat's early years had consisted of consolidation of power and refutation of Nasserist policy, he only won true popularity with a military victory against Israel by crossing into the occupied bank of the Suez Canal. Not only did this expedition restore the honor of the Arab military, it put Sadat into a good position to negotiate for a lasting peace treaty with the Israelis for the first time since that country's foundation in 1947. In doing so, Sadat inadvertently alienated his Arab allies, who had pushed for a continuation of the war, in favor of a better relationship with Israel and the United States, thus breaking with the last vestiges of Arab nationalism. After signing the Camp David Accords that signified the peace in 1979, Egyptian relations with the Arab nations worsened to the point that it was suspended for the Arab League (which had its headquarters moved from Cairo to Tunis) in that same year. This also meant the forced return of hundreds of thousands of expatriate Egyptians working in the Gulf States, who had been an importance source of foreign income and whose absence had relieved the burden on the always-strained labor market. In exchange for this de facto pariah status, Egypt was able to establish economic relations with Israel and the west, and would receive up to 2 billion US Dollars in economic support through USAID, making the country the second biggest beneficiary to American development aid (next to Israel). While Sadat's shift was received better at home than abroad, it did antagonize most Islamists. Not only did they object to the peace treaty with their perceived enemies, they also resented the breach with their foreign brothers. In domestic policy, the shift would also have further implications. Before the treaty, the regime relied mostly on aid from the Muslim nations, most importantly Saudi-Arabia. Sadat had felt pressure to placate his supporters by calling for more Islamic legislation, such as the banning of alcohol, execution of apostates, or corporeal punishment in line with the Sharia law, although in truth none were ever introduced, nor would they have been accepted by the

44 Lewis *Cairo* 248

45 Sullivan, Denis J., Abed-Kotob, Sana, *Islam in contemporary Egypt, civil society vs. the state* (London 1999) 72

Egyptians. With the signing of the treaty, Sadat also felt no further need to keep up this facade of piousness. Instead, he turned to al-Azhar to support his policy and the peace treaty and took their consent as legitimation. While he rewarded the Islamic orthodoxy with a constitutional amendment that would (at least in name) make Sharia law the source of legislation, the country would more or less return to a state of secularism.⁴⁶

With the collapsing popularity of Arab socialism, the ruling regimes also faced a crisis of identity. The Iraqi and Syrian Ba'ath parties and especially the Nasser regime itself had been personified with Arab nationalism, but they quickly began to shift towards state-nationalism. Saddam Hussein in Iraq (effectively in power since 1968) and Hafez al-Assad in Syria (from 1970) were clear authoritarian nationalists who built their own militarized state around a cult-of-personality. Sadat more or less inherited the Nasserist regime intact but began a campaign of renouncement of the Nasserist ideology and a retraction of much of the economic policies. He had shifted his allegiance from Moscow to Washington during his regime, after all, unlike Hussein and al-Assad who had remained at least nominal Soviet allies. Finally, while both Hussein and (to a lesser extent) al-Assad kept a lot of their pan-Arabist rhetoric, Sadat and Mubarak maintained an Egypt-first policy. Thus they fairly replaced one form of nationalism for another.

Like the Nasser regime, which was built on the principle of anti-imperialism, the post-Nasserist regimes also seemed to rely on an enemy in order to subsist, namely (militant) Islamism. This enemy was considered an internal rather than an external threat, which has been the basis on which the Sadat and Mubarak regimes found their legitimacy for establishing an increasingly repressive authoritarian regime. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Egyptian society traditionally displayed an inherent passive and resilient way of facing adversity, and has always leaned towards order and statism. As Denis Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob observed, however, the Sadat and Mubarak regimes appear to have squandered the political successes of stability, social order and even regime maintainable by reforming active policies and by allowing arbitrary exercise of state authority.⁴⁷ This is exemplary in the crackdown of Islamists, which got underway at the end of the Cold War but got up to steam after failed assassination attempt aimed at Mubarak in 1995. Rather than employing the security apparatus to identify actual threats to the regime, they instead declared a quasi-war on all Islamist movements, non-violent as well as militant, which led to the detainment, harassment and interrogation of thousands of Islamist activists and their family members. The purpose of these is most likely to demonstrate the state's dedication to stability and vigilance against terrorism. However, this blunt approach can only be assessed as harmful, not just for the Egyptian population at large or even the affected families, but also for the regime itself as it increasingly alienates itself from society.

The Mubarak regime has lost all serious legitimacy according to Sullivan and Abed-Kotob. The Egyptian tolerance for governmental repression is explained as a 'social contract' that was established during the Nasser period. However, this tolerance is only granted while the populace is guaranteed that basic economic needs are met and personal and societal liberties remain relatively unharmed by the security apparatus.⁴⁸ This economic factor is the reason why the Egyptian government has historically gone through great lengths in subsidizing food- and fuel prices. Attempts to liberalize the economy or introduce austerity measures - often on the behest of international fiscal organizations like the IMF or the World Bank - have led to food riots in 1977 and demonstrations in 1984 and 2008. Similarly, financial crises in 1991 and 2000 forced the regime to take a number of unpopular austerity measures that revoked price control and subsidies of

46 Hopwood 119

47 Sullivan 121

48 Sullivan 128

consumer goods and led to the privatization of state enterprises.⁴⁹

It cannot be overstated how resilient the ideas of nationalism and the nation-state are in Egypt. Again, this might be because of the country's historical legacy, but the strength of the Egyptian state and the Egyptian identity appear in shrill contrast to most other post-colonial nations, many of which have to deal with what many call the 'crisis of the nation-state'. That fact that Egypt has a very concentrated and relatively homogeneous population has certainly played a role in this, but more than anything, it had been the state itself that has been able to strengthen itself through a long practice of nation-building and adopting new ideologies into its body. At least on a superficial level, the Egyptian regimes had always been able to shift its policies to whatever would be popular at the time, be it social pan-Arabism in the 1950's under Nasser, increased public practicing of religion in the 1970's under Sadat, or 'democratic' elections in the 1990's during Mubarak's regime. And while the sincerity of these shifts should be questioned, and they certainly did not lead to an increase in popularity, they definitely allowed the regimes of the time an extended lease on life. In all these instances, they were initially accepted enthusiastically by the population, and this enthusiasm would only wane over time, as expectation turned to disappointment and then discouragement. Regardless, it is rarely the nation-state that is opposed by critics, and thus its legitimacy and that of the institutions that are closely tied to it (the armed forces, for instance) have remained intact and untouched for nearly two centuries.

In the post-Cold War especially, liberal and democratic opposition against authoritarian regimes was on the rise as many former socialist states had their donor collapsed and their ideology discredited in favor of western-style democracy. In Egypt, this meant increased liberties and the opening of the political system through democratic parliamentary elections. However, the power of Islamists grew accordingly, as they drew legitimacy from these elections. While the Muslim Brotherhood held no official political party, a noticeable number of prominent members were able to candidate themselves as independents, winning 17 seats (out of 454) in 2000 and even 72 in 2005. Similarly, former members of the Brotherhood established the moderate Islamist Hizb al-Wasat al-Jadid (New Center Party) in 1996, which was set out to release itself from the limitations of the Brotherhood in order to establish a moderate and democratic but distinctly Islamic political party.⁵⁰⁵¹ The Brotherhood's leadership has reluctant to make the movement a political party, as this would mean that it would be considered just one of many parties. As a political party it would be difficult to proclaim the 'one, universal truth', rather making it part of the political debate and thus open to scrutiny. Perhaps more importantly, it would lose its position as an overarching popular movement. Therefore, the Brotherhood remained true to their mantra that legitimacy could only be derived from consent of the masses, and that it would act on the political field through subsidiaries.⁵² Throughout its history, its size and position within the Egyptian society has always made it a force to be reckoned with by the succession of regimes, and it has always been willing to take the political and societal space that had been granted by these regimes. Its willingness to skid the ruled in able to be able to influence the political stage can be seen as indicative for its desire to be part of the Egyptian society as a whole.

49 Goldschmidt 222

50 Ismail *Rethinking* 163

51 Jawad, Haifaa; *Islam and democracy in the twenty-first century*, in: Marranci, Gabriele (ed.); *Muslim societies and the challenge of secularization* (New York etc. 2010) 72/3

52 Elad-Altman, Israel; *The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after the 2005 elections*, in: *Current trends in Islamist ideology* 4 (2006) 7

Conclusion

It seems like a reasonable assessment that Islamism has not come in place of Arab nationalism, but rather that it has been one of the few political movements that have managed to survive while others – such as Arabism and socialism – had become effectively extinct. Islamism as an ideology had existed before the rise of Arab nationalism in Egypt and it had grown in popularity before the Nasserist coup of 1952, thus being firmly established within Egyptian society. When we look at the period around World War 2, we can see that multiple ideological parties were contending for power through popular support and that the Muslim Brotherhood might have actually held the best position. It was this position that had made the Brotherhood the biggest threat for the regime and therefore the biggest recipient for repression. As we saw, this had led to the radicalization and politicization of Islamism by the time Sadat came to power and relaxed restrictions. As popular support for the state failed, more people flocked to the Brotherhood. It therefore again became the main contender for power in the country. As we have seen, co-existence between the Egyptian regime and the Brotherhood has been problematic, resulting in waves of either increased repression or relaxation. Assassination attempts and militant attacks on the tourist industry increased the regime's wariness of all Islamic groups, which led to an increasingly arbitrary and violent approach by police and security forces.

In the end, it should be pointed out that there had not really been a conflict between Islamism and Arab nationalism in Egypt, and that one's demise would not lead to the rise of another. Islamist movements in Egypt, chief amongst whom the Muslim Brotherhood, are generally Egypt-centric in nature and seemed to have embraced operating within the borders of the Egyptian state. Therefore, the contention instead seems to be between Islamism and Egyptian nationalism. As we saw in the first chapter, these two have played an equally large part in forming the Egyptian identity, and Egyptians themselves have identified themselves with both, rather than Arabism, despite Nasser's efforts. From its foundation, the Egyptian state has evolved over the twentieth century to take various forms, but it had to continuously face the challenge Islamism posed. In return, critics of the state turned to the Islamist alternative. Peter Dermant states that Islamism's resilience is the result of its immunity to rational critique.⁵³ The reasoning behind that argument is that, with the large percentage of Muslims in countries such as Egypt, there is a very large chance that political opponents to Islamist movements would still be Muslim themselves. Denouncing the Islamist ideological foundation would require denouncing the Quran and while individuals might have personal misgivings about certain messages, voicing these in public would mean sure political suicide. Therefore we can see that, although the Egyptian leaders have often employed repression to battle Islamic opposition, they have also increasingly attempted to co-opt Islamist morals and ideas into policy, placating conservative leaders and organizations and seeking cooperation and support from the Islamic orthodoxy. Although these measures help keep the regime in place, these policies allowed the Islamists more space and a bigger stage. It can therefore be argued that early-20th century Egypt was a more Islamic society than during the reign of Nasser, or even the 1930's. But as the aftermath of the 2011 revolution has shown, while regimes might change, the Egyptian state itself is to stay and contention between the two forces seems to be continuous reality.

53 Demant, 33

A Socio-economic approach

As was discussed in the first chapter, Egypt has held a unique position within the Middle East due to its long history of civilization and its well-developed national identity. These were at least partly the result of the country's geographical features and the fact that its large population is very concentrated. These circumstances have also had a profound effect on Egypt's society and economy. In this chapter I will look deeper into these socio-economic factors in determining whether they could be held at least partially responsible for the rise of Islamism during the mid-to-late twentieth century.

The first part will discuss the country's demographics and the question how a large population and a high population density would affect a society such as Egypt's. I will also be discussing the matters of urbanization as the result of demographic and economic circumstances and how these have affected the Egyptian people and their relationship with their state. Secondly, there will be a discussion of the economic policies during the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak era's and how these affected economic development. This includes the discussion of the role and place the (urban) poor have held as the result of these developments, and how these have again affected their relationship with the state. Finally will we look at the social factors that these previous matters have affected and how the Egyptian society has reacted to far-reaching changes. After these considerations, I intend to come to a conclusion on whether these socio-economic circumstances can be used to create a proper and satisfactory explanation for the growing popularity of Islamist movements and Islamist ideology in Egypt.

Demographic pressure

Perhaps the most prominent and obvious socio-economic circumstance in Egypt is its overpopulation. Back in ancient times, the Nile valley's fertility and the country's relative political stability had made Egypt one of the most populated areas in the world, having an estimated population of as much as 9 million during the height of the New Kingdom (ca. 1300 BCE) and still even 6 billion by the end of the Roman Era. While famine and war dropped this number in subsequent centuries, Egypt's population once again grew during the industrial era, five-folding between from 2,5 million in 1801 to 12,7 million around its independence in 1917. However, growth did not stop there, but would instead again six-fold within a century, to 77,8 million in 2010.⁵⁴⁵⁵ This rapid and fairly consistent population growth is in line with similar developments in most of the third world, but its early industrialization and large initial population seems to have made this growth even more dramatic. The fact that 99% of Egyptians live in the 3,5% of the country that isn't desert, namely the Nile delta and valley (an area of around 35.000 km², approximately the size of the Netherlands) is what has turned explosive population growth into overpopulation. This has made Egypt de facto one of the most densely populated countries in the world. In the following paragraph, we will discuss the effects of this overpopulation on the Egyptian economy and society.

Traditional family values, in which a large family is considered a symbol of fortune and (male) virility, are considered to be the main reason for the consistently high population growth. Access to modern medicine, sanitation and varied nutrition has cut into child mortality and raised life expectancy from 50,4 years in 1970 to 73,3 in 2011.⁵⁶ This has led to a relatively steady annual increase of about a million people during the second half of the twentieth century. Several

54 Ibrahim, Faoud N., Ibrahim, Barbara; Egypt, an economic geography (London 2003) 29

55 IMF World Economic Outlook (October 2014) per: <http://knoema.com/IMFWEO2014Oct/imf-world-economic-outlook-october-2014>

56 World health Organization (2011) per: <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/country-health-profile/egypt>

government programs have existed since the Nasser era to encourage the use of birth control and make the population aware of the problems caused by overpopulation. However, few are able to compensate for the societal and religious pressure to produce large families. Especially in the rural areas, where these values are still prevalent and the effectiveness of state programs is even more limited, it is not uncommon to see five children per mother. But despite these reservations, the population growth has been dropping down from 2,8% in the 1980's to just 2% by 2000. It has become apparent to religious and community leaders that the overpopulation is damaging society, and an increasing number have endorsed birth control and family planning. A recent Pew poll has shown that only 7% of the interviewed Egyptians find the use of contraceptives morally unacceptable.⁵⁷ Other societal changes have also influenced the birth rate. The growing living costs have forced an increasing number of women to work, therefore limiting their maternal capabilities. Urbanization has also played an important limiting role due to the increased cost of living and restrictive living spaces in the urban environment. However, this slowing down is by no way a stagnation of population growth, and due to the large number of existing couples, the absolute annual number of births is still rising.

As was discussed previously, the Egyptian population boom has mostly taken place in the countryside, where lower cost of living and existing family networks allowed for larger families. Yet it is still in these parts of the country that the population surplus is most acutely felt. Rural Egypt is still very much an agrarian society, where families generally hold small plots of land to sustain themselves and their relatives. Through land distribution during the Nasser era, the number of landless families had been limited and the previously powerful large land owner class has been practically destroyed. However, after the land distribution, the vast majority (95%) of farmers held less than 5 *feddan* (2,1 hectares), and often a lot less.⁵⁸ Population growth has played a major role in this, as tradition dictated that the land would be divided or shared between children and that it would often be part of a girl's dowry. Egypt's climatological situation has also made the development of new areas very difficult. Attempts to bring some oases and desert valleys under cultivation have been lackluster at best, requiring a lot of irrigation and fertilizers. Many farmers have shifted away from self-reliant agriculture to growing cash crops, often as the result of Nasser-era attempt to set up cooperatives in order to modernize and improve efficiency. While certain crops such as cotton and sugar reeds and beets have been very popular and profitable, they have also made the farmers reliant on the market for their basic needs. This has raised the rural cost of living. In practice, young men often find themselves selling their lands to their relatives and selling their labor to other farmers. However, the large number of these unemployed and landless men has resulted in an acute surplus of labor, which not only makes it very difficult for them to find employment, but also keeps wages precariously low for the few who do find work. The surplus of labor and low wages are a key reason why, despite its relative level of development, Egypt's agriculture is still very much reliant on manual labor rather than mechanization.

It is therefore expected that many of these unemployed young men eventually leave their home village to try and find their fortunes in the cities. This resulted in an increase in urbanization level from 13,6% in 1897 to 44% in 1976.⁵⁹ Interestingly, this number has become somewhat stable ever since. Alexandria and Cairo, being by far the largest cities in the country, have simply become too overpopulated themselves. Greater Cairo had a population of upward 15 million around 2010, but its infrastructure and services had been designed to serve about 2 to 3 million. Education and health care have become completely strained by the population pressure, leading not only to poor services

57 [Pew Research Center "Global views of morality" \(2013\) http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/04/15/global-morality/country/egypt/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/04/15/global-morality/country/egypt/)

58 Hopwood 126

59 Ibrahim 30

(if any at all), but also to increased corruption as, for example, parents were expected to pay 'fees' to be able to have their children come into classes. Traffic seems to exist in perpetual gridlock, although the number of privately owned cars is fairly limited. Transportation and commuting time and costs have become an additional burden on many urbanites. Finally, the cities have suffered a critical housing shortage, as planned construction programs for the poorest segment have been limited and have never been enough to fulfill demand. This has led to a large increase in housing prices, making them affordable to many potential new migrants. The housing shortage and unemployed might be the main reasons for the relative drop in urban migration. This is relative to the past, of course. As rural birth rates remain higher than those in the cities, migration also remains, and of course the urban populations grow through natural means. Much of the poor migrants live in the so-called 'new quarters', which are little more than self-built slums that have organically grown alongside the few government efforts at public housing. More often than not, apartments are built on top of each other as families and communities grow. It is also common to have migrants from one area or village move into the same neighborhood, relying on existing acquaintances and friends to make a living for themselves, resulting in self-organizing communities that seem very detached from the official societal services. It has been argued that in these 'new quarters', one does not speak of the urbanization of rural people, but the 'ruralization' of the city. According to Derek Hopwood, the cities will continue to absorb new people by continuously lowering its standards.⁶⁰

With urban migration somewhat slowing down, another kind of migration has grown in its stead from the 1960's on; labor migration abroad. Most Egyptian migrants have moved to other Arab-speaking countries such as Iraq, Libya and the Gulf States. The number of migrant workers is estimated to be between 1.5 and 4 million, and the remittances that they bring in form an important source of wealth and especially a key source of foreign currency.⁶¹ Especially members of families with little land, those who are employed outside of agriculture and those who with a high school diploma – that is to say members the educated lower middle class – are more likely to work abroad. Especially for low income families, remittances provide a serious boost to their welfare, with wages abroad commonly being around four times higher than in rural Egypt, raising the average income of families with members abroad to 130% that of families that have not.⁶² Yet while this has alleviated the labor surplus somewhat, these migrants are vulnerable and have become victims of political or economic developments in the past. For example, a million Egyptian farmers were forced to return from Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War, as the Iraqi government needed to create employment for its soldiers after the war. The diplomatic relations of Egypt with these host countries have affected the employment of Egyptians multiple occasions, such as in the aftermath of the 1979 Camp David Accords or its erratic relationship with Libya's Muammar Gadhafi. Finally, the declining oil prices and the resultant reduction in opportunities caused many Egyptians to return from the Gulf States in the 1980's. In short, while labor migration forms a clear and welcome (although insufficient) relief from the labor surplus, it offers little stability. Instead, it has led to a brain drain from Egypt, as in practice it is often only the skilled labor and educated who are able to retain their employment abroad.

Economic circumstances

During the Nasser era, the Egyptian government adhered to the economical ideology of Arab Socialism, which had in practice been a 'light' version of the socialist policies that had existed in the

60 Hopwood 175

61 Ibrahim 101

62 Adams, Richard H. jr.,; *The effects of international remittances on poverty, inequality and development in rural Egypt*, International Food Policy Research Institute, report 86 (1991) 27

Communist Bloc at the time. They were aimed at the economic emancipation of the least fortunate through the establishment of social security and socio-economic reform. One of the most successful examples of this was the aforementioned land reforms and establishment of local agricultural collectives, which provided land and assistance to millions of impoverished peasants. While these programs have not been as successful or effective as envisioned, it should be argued that they had been more beneficial than their communist counterparts. On the other hand, despite active government interference and cultivation projects, Egypt's population outgrew its historical self-sufficiency and became an importer of cereals. Another important aim of Arab Socialism had been the nationalization of strategic industry and the establishment of a state-owned industrial foundation which would strengthen national self-sufficiency and provide employment for the masses of unskilled labor. In practice, corruption and mismanagement hurt efficiency. More importantly in the long run, Nasser's nationalization policies appear to have had a very adverse effect on the private sector, having effectively destroyed the *petit bourgeoisie* (represented on the political theater by the Wafd party) that had existed before the 1952 revolution, thus removing the entrepreneurial foundation of the private sector economy. While Sadat had attempted to undo this through his *intifah* policies, Sami Zubaida argues that the entrepreneurial class never really returned. Instead, the privatized former state companies and factories would be run by a 'parasitic' business class that mostly lived off the state and its resources, rather than take private initiative.⁶³ It is clear that only a select group of people actually benefit from the liberalization and the privatization of the economy, and that social- and income disparities have returned to pre-revolutionary levels. The significance of these effects is not lost on the Egyptian population.

An additional problem that became increasingly evident during the Sadat era was Egypt's increasing debt. A large portion of this debt was incurred from social programs such as housing projects, basis needs subsidies and social welfare. These would, again, get bigger as the population grew. Egypt had been granted a number of much-needed large loans as the result of the Camp David Accords. However, interest rates had been unusual high in the late 70's, adding disproportionately to the debt burden in the long run. Intervention by the IMF subverted bankruptcy in 1991, but the government was formed to commit to further liberalization and privatization. Price control on goods like wheat, rice and cotton was lifted, as were subsidies on most consumer goods. With the 1977 bread riots still being a recent memory, the IMF and the Mubarak regime decided to maintain subsidies on wheat, sugar, edible oil and fuel, acknowledging them as an absolute prerequisite for maintaining order. As we discussed in the previous chapter, popular support of the government had already waned towards apathy amongst much of the general populace, and such subsidies were one of the few direct benefits that the government could provide to these people. If these were scrapped, it was argued, this would most definitely have led to renewed rioting, and possibly worse. These considerations were also a major reason for the American foreign aid program (USAID) to expand its programs significantly after the Camp David Accords (which had been signed only shortly after the bread riots), making Egypt the second largest beneficiary of American aid. But while America's aid and alliance with the Sadat and Mubarak regimes had led to resentment and accusations of neo-imperialism, USAID has generally maintained a much more positive reputation. Besides direct aid to the government, USAID has set up or funded local schools, hospitals and literacy programs of their own on a local level, thus making them more visible to the Egyptians. Furthermore, they have made the granting of micro-credits a core tenant of their economic development policy. Micro-credits have made it possible for the urban poor to become their own entrepreneurs, becoming peddlers or investing in domestic crafts. Through individual initiative, the poor would become less reliant on the state or companies for employment, nor the communities and (Islamic) charities for financial aid. USAID's promotion of entrepreneurship, empowerment and autonomy is in line with the popular notion of self-reliance and the need to provide for the family. Furthermore, as Salwa

63 Zubaida 165

Ismail has pointed out, micro-credits have de-politicized poverty by simply reducing it to the lack of credits.⁶⁴ Alongside the local charities and familiar social networks, these have made it possible for the (urban) poor to subsist in the liberalized Egyptian economy, by effectively working within the liberal/capitalist market while relying on semi-traditional safety nets to provide the services that the government had previously provided. As we discussed previously, the inability to compensate for population growth, alongside forced liberalization and austerity has seriously hampered the government's ability to operate on the social stage, and where they lack behind the vacuum is generally filled by local initiatives that generally hold allegiance to Islamist, local networks or foreign development programs rather than the state. The government's inability to provide adequate support to the poor therefore seems to be a self-perpetuating motion; the less support they receive, the less these people become to have need for their government. It is therefore, again, very understandable that the regimes have held onto the food subsidies as they did, as it has increasingly become the state's only trump card over a significant portion of its population.

Regardless of this, the cost of living has exponentially grown for the Egyptian population. The problem is most evident in the cities, where the scarcity of living space, transportation and education put such a strain on a family's finances that some families in the poor quarters increasingly choose not to send (at least some of) their children to secondary school, believing this would have not benefit their employment chances anyway.⁶⁵ Additional to these fixed expenses are medical and pharmacy bills, as well as fees and bribes that must often be paid to even be receiving service by schools or hospitals, feeding the corruption that this scarcity had bred. Finally there is the cost of food and other consumer goods, which are subject to heavy inflation. Annual inflation rates have been between the 15-25% during the 1980's and despite a significant drop between 1993 and 2003, this once again rose up to 16,24% over 2009. Overall, the price of consumer goods has twenty-folded between 1980 and 2010. In comparison, the per-capita GDP has only five-folded in the same period. Especially after the 1991 crisis, per capita GDP dropped and would remain stagnant, not reaching 1989 levels again until 2008.⁶⁶ Taking into account the large wealth disparity in the country, as well as the assumption that the benefits of economic growth are typically only enjoyed by those endorsed by the political elite, it is not very difficult to see the position of the lower classes and understand their dependency on charity and informal networks to subsist.

Societal circumstances

We previously discussed the reasons for the declining influence of the government on the social stage. This has largely been in line with the shift from a socialist to a liberal, market-based economy as well as the government's inability to accommodate for the rapidly growing population. For many people, especially the poorest classes, the role of the government changed from ideological caretaker to a corrupt and self-perpetuating body that provided little to no benefit. Again, this is in line with the shift from the Arab Socialist Nasser regime to that of Mubarak, which had increasingly become a police state. As we discussed in the previous chapter, this is exemplified by the 'state enemy' that the regimes propagated. Under Nasser this had been the capitalist west and its allies (Israel and the liberal elites), which were foreign enemies. During Mubarak's regime, this had changed to the radical Islamist movements, which existed mostly as a domestic threat. This shift therefore also entailed the strengthening of the military, police and intelligence services, which have been given extended authority under the guise of protection of the nation. While there was certainly an acute threat in these militant groups, it is also evident that many measures taken in the name of order and security were in fact primarily meant to service the power and control of the regime over

64 Ismail, Salwa; *Political life in Cairo's New Quarters, Encountering the everyday state* (Minneapolis 2006) 91

65 Ismail *Political life* 74

66 IMF World Economic Outlook (October 2014)

its citizens, leading to the de facto establishment of the aforementioned police state. Although the Nasserist state had itself been a restrictive state, it is evident that the subsequent regimes had to increasingly rely on repression and arbitrary police action to enforce state authority, as its alternative avenues of influence extension eroded.

Official statistics have shown annual Egyptian unemployment rates to be somewhere between 7,69% and 11,47% between 1990 and 2010, which are average compared to some other third world nations.⁶⁷ These numbers only tell half of the story, though. Much hidden employment problems exist amongst those who have to subsist on seasonal labor and odd jobs. Furthermore, a lot of employment positions are also seriously overstaffed. Family companies often hire family members without actually needing the actual labor, often resulting in businesses like family stores having more people than would actually be necessary or indeed effective. During the Nasser era, it had been standard practice for the government to guarantee a job for all college graduates, in order to encourage education and alleviate unemployment. This has also led to a serious over-employment of government workers, resulting in a ballooning bureaucracy and increased possibility for corruption. Although these policies have since been repealed, government jobs are still fairly easily acquired through connections and bribes, again leading to a surplus of bureaucrats. Societal expectations have put a lot of pressure on young Egyptian men to acquire enough income to keep a family. In a patriarchal society such as Egypt's, men are expected to be the stalwart provider, and as Ismail points out, many of them consider the inability to fulfill obligations to their family as an insult to their masculinity and therefore their standing in society.⁶⁸ There is therefore an obvious stigma here that has led a lot of men to frustration and desperation. Especially those who have migrated from the countryside in search of a better life, but became estranged and removed from the familiar community, who find themselves forcefully detached from society and its harsh liberal market and may find the appeal of radical groups. Often, though, local safety nets exist where the disenfranchised might be able to get charity. Although there is the common stigma of receiving charity support, there also appears to be alleviation from this stigma when charity is put in a religious context. Islamic teachings put great emphasis on aiding the less fortunate and charity workers would often find their work to be a religious duty rather than a social service. Charity in this context has therefore become an expression of piety.

The Muslim Brotherhood had been on the forefront as an Islamic welfare and social organization ever since its inception in the 1920's and 30'. Although initially aimed at Quranic instruction and education, it became increasingly involved in societal matters as it became evident that an increasing number of Egyptians objected to the liberal Waqf, believing that abandoning traditional Islamic values and practices had been the cause of many contemporary problems. The Brotherhood hoped to restore an Islamic society by building it from the ground up, by providing help for the needy through the establishment of pharmacies and hospitals and the collection and distribution of *zakat* (alms-giving). Its network was able to grow through the establishment of chapters by local groups and by cooperating and absorbing existing local Islamic welfare programs.⁶⁹ Its grassroots origins and its objection of the liberal elites through constructive example gained the Brotherhood a lot of support from the lower and lower middle classes, who had felt disenfranchised by the elites both economically and politically. This made the Brotherhood the de facto spokesman and institutional representative of these lower classes. Another important reason why the Brotherhood has become and maintained so popular amongst the Egyptian people was its rejection of violence as a means of achieving its goals as a key pillar of its ideology. Several militant groups have had their origins in the Brotherhood, such as al-Jema'ah al-Islamiyah and al-Takfir al-Hijra, but these broke

67 IMF World Economic Outlook (October 2014)

68 Ismail *Political life* 100

69 Lia 134

away because of their rejection of the party ideology. Similarly, while the Brotherhood acknowledges ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb as part of their legacy, they reject his teachings as part of theirs. This has in the past put them at odds with other important, more militant Islamist movements such as the aforementioned and al-Qaida, who had wished for the Brotherhood to put its weight in for 'the jihad'. Within Egypt, militant and radical groups have received consistently low approval by the Egyptian population, as seen after violent terrorist attacks, and they are seen as illegitimate and unpopular, an anathema to Egyptian Islam.⁷⁰ Along those lines, Denis Sullivan and Sana Abed-Kotob believe that the Brotherhood's popularity should not be explained from an active sense of religious fundamentalism or 'born again Islam', but because of corruption, oppression and negligence on behalf of the government, and the MB's willingness to make meaningful and peaceful contributions to their communities in the face of unemployment, poverty and neglect.⁷¹

As we saw in the previous chapter, this has made the relationship between the Brotherhood and the succession of governments very precarious, as it formed an alternative power bloc that could not be ignored, nor fully repressed. Successive regimes have therefore attempted a number of different approaches in dealing with the Brotherhood, ranging from open cooperation and placation in the post-revolutionary years to harsh repression under Nasser, reconciliation during the Sadat era and a wide range of meandering approaches by the Mubarak regime. At the same time, it is evident that these regimes have attempted to 'win back' support from the Brotherhood by adopting parts of their ideology and tapping into populist approaches. As was discussed previously, it is not difficult to find similarities between the economic ideologies of the Brotherhood and Arab Socialism, such as rejection of market capitalism and emphasis on social welfare and self-sufficiency through the nationalization of industry.⁷²⁷³ Equal similarities can be seen in Nasser's anti-western stance. While Sadat challenged and changed most of these policies, he instead approached the Brotherhood supporters by emphasizing and encouraging the country's Islamic identity and by actively supporting Islamic movements. Mubarak in turn has again taken a somewhat more erratic and arguably more confrontational approach by endorsing the orthodox *ulama* of al-Azhar and accepting moderate Islamist stances and policies into legislation, while increasing pressure onto the various Islamist movements. Through democratic reforms, the regime also allowed groups like the Brotherhood a way into politics, although again to certain extent and under the constant threat of repression. As we have seen previously, in practice most of these reforms have happened only haphazardly. Typically, they have provided groups like the Brotherhood with new reasons for opposition and perhaps most importantly; new avenues to voice this opposition through. After the 2011 revolution, Islamist parties have indeed been doing very well once 'free' elections had been held. In the 2011 parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood-backed Freedom and Justice Party won 223 out of 498 contested seats in the People's Assembly, followed by 111 seats for the salafi-based al-Nour party. Counted together, Islamist parties and party blocs has received 72% of the votes, the largest secular party (the New Wafd Party) only got 7,6%.⁷⁴ These numbers have shown a great potential support for Islamist parties in a democratic setting, especially on a local level. However, considering the situation surrounding the Morsi presidency the next year, it is obvious that a truly Islamist state is still a step too far for many Egyptians.

70 In a recent Pew Poll, 75% of Egyptians expressed concern about Islamic extremism and 81% held an unfavorable view of al-Qaida. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/01/concerns-about-islamic-extremism-on-the-rise-in-middle-east/>

71 Sullivan 23

72 Lia 210

73 Al-Banna 75-78

74 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/01/20121248225832718.html>

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the various social and economic developments that have been influential during the Sadat and Mubarak regimes, and how these have influenced Egyptian society and its people's outlook on the state and its role. I first discussed the population growth during the twentieth century, which made the Egyptian Nile valley and delta some of the most densely populated areas in the world. It was shown that this has affected the availability of land and labor in the Egyptian countryside, and the subsequent labor migration and low wages this has resulted in. This in turn has resulted in a weakened and unstable socio-economic position for the poorest classes. Population growth and migration furthermore led to a continuous strain on the cities and its services, which in turn reduced living standards for its inhabitants. In the second sub-section we discussed Nasser's Arab Socialist economic legacy and how its dismantling during the Sadat regime led to a semi-capitalist market economy where the government and its direct accomplices still reaped in most of its benefits. Again, it was clear that the poorest classes have had the last to benefit from this. However, we have also seen that the distribution of micro-credits by (amongst others) USAID has allowed some of the urban poor to become economically self-sufficient. I additionally discussed the price control and food subsidies and their role in the government's attempts to keep the favor of the people and therefore the peace. Here it became evident that the cutting of these as the result of austerity measures has also led to a visible change in relationship between the government and its people, with the dramatic example being the 1977 Bread Riots. The last part was further exploration of the matter of a changing relationship and its public reception. I discussed the societal effects of the previously discussed economic developments and their influence on the position of marginalized people in society. Finally was discussed the role of charity, especially that of the Muslim Brotherhood, within the economic and societal context laid out in this chapter. Here we saw that the merit of these charities and movements was mostly based on their contribution to society in relation to state efforts, rather than their ideological background. However, there is a clear link between the Brotherhood's adherence to peaceful contribution and their favorable position in Egyptian society.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, a lot of Egypt's problems could be traced back as the result of the country's rampant population growth, be it low wages, urban slums or brain drain. It is therefore hard to underestimate the social and economic impact of this. However, while the arbitrary and (for the lack of a better word) biological nature of population growth make it a difficult issue to solve or conciliate, it is too easy to blame Egypt's socio-economic circumstances on this. Often, these problems have multiple causes, with population pressure simply amplifying the severity. We have seen that in many circumstances, the Egyptian state and the local authorities are simply unable to keep up and provide an adequate response to alleviate these problems. Authorities often seem to be victims of circumstances themselves, for instance by having their budget bound by external parties. Finally we should not dismiss corruption and willful negligence on the part of the various authorities, which have often seemed more concerned with retention of their position rather than serving their communities. These have, as a whole, all brought the state out of favor with the Egyptian people. And in many of the fields where the state has dropped the ball, the Islamists have simply been able to file in and provide an alternative. It is therefore very understandable that Islamist movements have become very popular in the areas where they service the local societies. Despite these important factors, we should not simply pin this popularity solely on socio-economic circumstances. Islamism would not have taken hold in the country, in particularly on the countryside and in the poor quarters without a firmly established religious and moralistic common ground. Secondly, many of the social and economic problems cannot be explained without taking into consideration the politics driving them.

Conclusion

In these past three chapters, I have tried to investigate the matter of the rise of Islamism in Egypt during the Sadat and Mubarak regimes. In this endeavor, I have mostly looked at the interplay between the Islamist movements, the Egyptian society and the Egyptian state. Because of this, many venues of inquiry were not considered and thus I am not under the impression of having solved this matter entirely. Nonetheless, it is my belief that this project has revealed some clear results that should make it possible to construct a wholesome thesis for the question how these movements have become so influential in Egypt during this period.

The first chapter was spent discussing the role of Islamism in society. It was discussed that for the most part, Islamism should be seen as a tool or a method for adapting Islam to the modern age and make it viable in a present-day setting. We saw how Islamism in particular saw modernism as a challenge and that it often adopted modernistic aspects in order to strengthen its own validity and appeal. I also discussed the so-called Islamic Revival that mostly took place during the studies time period, in which practice and expression of an Islamic identity was renewed, more or less as an expression of Islamism in the social sphere. In both movements, the adoption of a certain identity took precedence, often in opposition to what was considered the corruptive influence of western culture. On a national level, Egypt's early contact with modernism mostly allowed for anti-modernism to flourish on various levels. The government itself has employed religious rhetoric and policy, mostly through the conservative *ulama* of al-Azhar, in order to temper militarism and present a broad party line. However, attempts to control religious discourse have been of limited result due to the decentralized and un-hierarchical nature of Islam. I concluded that while the individual interpretation of Islam has varied from Muslims, there appears to be a clear tendency within the Egyptian society towards conservative and religious mores and values, that are often in line with Islamist ideology. It was therefore determined that while both Islamism and Egyptian society might not be inherently conservative, there are still a lot of overlap between the two and that Egyptian society itself would be a fertile soil for Islamist movements to sprout and grow in. However, due to its passive nature of Islam in Egypt, it would not have come into being without triggers.

In the second chapter I investigated the theory whether the popularity of Islamism, which became most evident from the 1970's on, was related to the collapse of the Arab Nationalist movement that had happened in the same period. It was determined that both movements had been born from the same innate opposition to western imperialism and culture and that they had developed alongside each other. Both movements had a lot of ideology in common, although this was mostly because of their common rejection of imperialism, capitalism and liberal political and social thought. Also was put into question the presumption of the wide popularity of Arab Nationalism, instead suggesting that this was instead the result of traditional nationalism, combined with a mass rejection of western imperialism that goes back to the 1879 Urabi Revolt. In this chapter I also discussed the subsequent relationship between the Islamist movements and the post-Nasserist state. It became clear that in this instance that over time, the Islamists were able to win considerable support and favor through their continuous opposition to the regimes, as these themselves began to fall out of favor with the Egyptian populace. During the Mubarak era in particular, the regime had to increasingly rely on repression in order to safeguard its position, but in the process losing its legitimacy. It was finally concluded that a large part of this appeal for the opposition partially laid in its Islamic ideology, or more specifically, the popular believe that Islamic rhetoric were very hard to challenge or criticize without criticizing Islam itself. Those who employed Islamist rhetoric where therefore, to some extent, above beyond reproach.

The final chapter was used to cover a series of social and economic factors that might have influenced the rise of Islamism. We first saw that Egypt's overpopulation has created a difficult and pressured socio-economic situation, through unemployment, low wages and rampant urbanization. These factors have weighted especially heavy upon the poorest segments of Egyptian society, who have often become dependent on private charity organizations. I have also discussed the impotence of the government in these matters due to financial pressure and changing political ideologies and the changing relationship this had caused between the state and its citizens. Liberalization of the economy, alongside rampant corruption and an increasing reliance on force and repression to keep order have also demised the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the people. As a final factor I discussed the position of the Muslim Brotherhood as a long-standing critic of the Egyptian state, and its method of propagating social change through grassroots charity and educational programs. These constructive contributions have added to the appeal of the Brotherhood and their ideology as viable alternatives. However, the Brotherhood's position in Egyptian society, their religious stances and their reluctance towards entering the open political theater have made their actual political value questionable.

When looking at these different factors, it is not very difficult to have a number of pieces fall into place. The political changes that have taken place during the Sadat and Mubarak regimes have had serious repercussions for the country's economy and social wellbeing. As we have seen, A lot of Egypt's social and economic problems have been amplified through the neglect or impotence of the government in providing sufficient and constructive aid. The general worsening of living conditions, or rather the perception of such, added to the a social atmosphere in which oppositional voices were more readily heard than those of the state authorities. In environment such as these, radical and alternative movements have the room to flourish. And as we have seen, the foundation was already there for an Islamist reaction, requiring only enough triggers. I would argue that these worsening living conditions provided just such triggers.

We have also seen throughout this work that a lot of the support for the Islamic movements came in response or opposition to the state and its policies. While it would go too far to say that people backed Islamists out of spite, it can and has be argued that it has instead led to people limiting contact to the state as much as possible. As we have seen, the urban poor quarters had often developed networks, services and institutions without government interference, often going back to more traditional modes of communal life. The private charity initiatives are another example of this. It is within these circumstances where movements or organizations who appeal to the traditional, religious mores and values, and who themselves oppose the government and the cultural elites, would thrive.

There finally is the case of identity. As we have identified, Egyptian Muslims have been juggling around at least three distinct identities; the Arab, Islamic and Egyptian identity. During the studied period, these identities have somewhat changed their meaning, though. With the collapse of the Arab Nationalist movement, the Arab identity lost some of its prominence, but I would argue that a lot of its characteristic were shared with the Islamic, and these became more divined in this. So in a sense, Arab Nationalism *was* succeeded by Islamism, though as a vessel for the Egyptian people's connection with its neighboring people and their shared culture. We have also seen an increasing overlap between the Egyptian and Islamic identities. Egyptian Islamist movement, most evidently the Muslim Brotherhood, have always endorsed the character of the Egyptian state and, by extension, Egyptian nationalism. While they might have touted the Quranic line for a transcendence of national borders in favor of a single *umma* nation, in practice they have never challenged the Egyptian state itself, just its leadership. In return, we have seen that the government has gone through increasingly big strides in cooperating with the orthodox and non-militant Islamists in an

attempt to placate the religious and maintain order. This has therefore led to an increasing Islamization of Egyptian society from the top down. This approach has often been into conflict with grassroots Islamism and movements such as the Islamic Revival. In the end, however, it can be argued that the Islamic and the Egyptian identities have been growing increasingly closer together.

In the introduction of this piece, I asked the question how Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood were able to become so influential in Egypt, despite apparent continuous government opposition. It has now become clear that this growth had not been despite government control, but it has largely been because of it. When taking all the matters together, it would seem that the rise of Islamism in Egypt has been more or less inevitable, or rather; that it has been an unstoppable process. As we have seen, the government has mostly been in a position where it could only respond to developments, trying to slow them down, neutralize them or even incorporate them into policy. But as Islamist ideology is often considered to be above reproach, its secular alternatives would always lose. Therefore, the only way the state could ultimately survive was to effectively endorse Islamism and its ideology and walk the thin line of self-preservation when everything is out to get you. The biggest mystery in this whole situation is therefore arguably how the Mubarak regime was able to sustain itself as long as it did.

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