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Factors behind the Political Islamic Movement in Egypt

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Since Iran's Islamic revolution, the West became very much worried about the so-called "Islamic revival" or "Islamic resurgence". A distinguished scholar wrote about "The Return of Islam", even some Arab writers often use the term: "al-sahwah al-Islāmiyyah" (Islamic awakening) to denote the contemporary political Muslim movement.¹ It has been treated as a new-found fact about the resurrection of Islam. Obviously, this approach overlooks the inherent sociocultural and sociopolitical phenomenon peculiar to Muslim countries where religion is considered by the populace as a criterion of social order and, in many cases, as an identity. It overlooks as well the failure of modernization experiment in most Muslim countries, being turned into unsuccessful westernization, and ended up into a complete departure between secularist westernizers and Islamic political forces of various fundamental trends and movements which have been organized throughout the century.

In other words, Islam was always there with its sociocultural influence, and what occurred has been manifestation of power conflict between two co-existing forces; secularism and Islam, after being balanced for certain decades. The imbalance of power between secularism and Islam could be attributed to various common and particular factors here and there in the Muslim World according to the prevalent situation and circumstances.

What concerns us here is the case of the Islamic political movement in Egypt which became overactive in the mid-seventies. It is represented by two main trend: the moderate veteran organization of Muslim Brotherhood; and the militant radical factions of underground organizations with different titles. While the moderates

¹ See for example: Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam", *Commentary* (January, 1976), pp. 39-49; Hrair Dekmejian, "The Anatomy of Islamic Revival and the search for Islamic Alternatives", *MEJ*, 34, (Winter, 1980) pp. 1-12; the term al-sahwah al-Islāmiyya is often used by the media and intellectuals as well.

believe that they could lead the country through a peaceful transition to a Muslim-oriented regime and react in conformity with the existing political order, the radicals denounce the regime and call for its complete destruction. Thus, violence, terrorism, and stimulation of sectarian conflicts were common to the radical Muslim militants throughout the 1970's and 1980's. It is noteworthy that the moderates and radicals in the Egyptian Muslim political movement are also divided by social affiliation. While the Brotherhood's rank and file came from urban middle class, the militant factions have come almost from lower middle class of recent migrants to urban areas.

The emergence of the Islamic political movement in Egypt could be attributed to a set of intermingled and interwoven factors; some are inherent factors of sociocultural and sociopolitical nature deeply rooted in the historical experience of the country, others are created by political and socioeconomic development in the last three decades. Looking at these factors in historical perception, we try to analyze their repercussions.

I. The Strength of Religious Commitment

Any tentative observer can notice a pattern of strong religious commitment in Egypt. The idea of religion itself had been an Egyptian invention thousands of years ago with its weighty impact on social life. Under Islam, Egypt had been stronghold of the Muslim Empire and an important center of Muslim culture. It was the seat of two Caliphates; the Fatimids, and the Abbasids, served as major defender of Islam against the Crusaders and the Mongols. This positive role played by Egypt in the history of Islam fostered a common feeling of affiliation to a wider Muslim world, though the Egyptians had had a sense of collective identity since ancient times. Such inherent sense had been asserted by a certain degree of self-consciousness within the realm of Islam based on the frequency of Misr (Egypt) in several verses of the Qur'ān, and the allegation that the Prophet highly esteemed the Egyptians as the best soldiers of the world (*khayr ajnād al-ard*). Mixed with a collective sentiment of a mission within the Muslim Ummah (nation), this self-consciousness made the average Egyptians believe in a special role destined to Egypt to safeguard Islam as it had been the custodian of the holy shrines of Islam for centuries.

Due to the overwhelming religious commitment supported by mysticism deeply rooted the ancient Egyptian culture, an indigenous formula of Islamic faith had been developed to characterize a peculiar folk religion. Muslim religious events such as Mawlid al-Nabī (birthday of the Prophet), Āshūrā' (commemoration of tragic death of al-Husayn), al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'rāj (ascension of the Prophet to the seven Heavens), the Ramandān fasting month, etc., are commonly and specially

observed in Egypt with particular folklore. The saints (al-Awliyā) are highly revered by both urban and rural masses, and the sufi order have millions of adherents from all classes.

Until the end of World War I, Islamic orientation was dominant. When the Egyptians reacted to the Western encroachment on their country, Islamic slogans were implemented together with the concept of Jihād and martyrdom, from the French Expedition (1798-1801) to the British Occupation (1882).² In the last two decades of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the western domination was interpreted by some writers as new Crusades aimed at the destruction of Islam. The idea of Pan-Islam was cordially supported by the Egyptian nationalism movement and reached the peak during World War I. The abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 was received in Egypt with deepest grief that had been stimulated by the political maneuvers aiming at the restoration of the Caliphate.³

Being inherent factor, the religious commitment of the Egyptians was strengthened by a high rate of illiteracy,⁴ and a limited political awareness due to the failure of the idea of territorial nationalism in building a national ideal based on a secular prospect.

II. The Fragile Foundation of Secularism

This noticeable failure could be attributed to the fragile foundation of secularism in Egypt. When Muḥannad ‘Alī (1805-1848) laid the foundation of a modern state in Egypt, he was more successful in tearing down the traditional structure than building modern one. Economic development under the auspices of étatism was largely responsible for the long delay in the development of an indigenous mercantile and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, a responsibility shared by the European capitalism after the integration of the Egyptian economy in the world market subsequent to decline of the experiment of Muḥammad ‘Alī. When the nucleus of this indigenous bourgeoisie was shaped by the end of the nineteenth century, it had no alternative but to be associated with the dominant foreign capital and, to a great extent, had been dependent on the European realm of business,

² For further details see Gabriel Baer, “Islamic Political Activity in Modern Egyptian History: A Comparative Analysis”, in G.R. Warburg & U.M. Kupferschmidt, ed., *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, Praeger, NY 1983, pp. 42-45.

³ For further details see Nabīh Bayyūmī Abdallāh, *Tatawwur Fikrat al-Qawmiyyah al-‘Arabiyyah fi Misr*, Cairo 1975; Muḥammad Muḥammad Husayn, *al-Ittijāhāt al- Watanīyyah fi al-Adab al-Mu’āsir*, vol. I, Cairo 1980; Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the search for social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muḥammad Husayn Haykal*, State University of New York, Albany 1983.

⁴ It was estimated that 56 percent of all Egyptians over the age of ten were illiterate in 1984. See Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Mustaqbal al-Mujtama’ wa al-Dawlah fi al-Watan al-‘Arabī*, Arab Thought Forum, Amman 1988, p. 318.

satisfied with its lot. Even the group who initiated Bank Misr to be an exclusive Egyptian financial base for potential economic autonomy, have been forced in the 1930's to accept foreign partnership in certain business activities.

In other words, the modern premature sector of economy was initiated from above by an autocratic leadership, and sounded like a cosmetic surgery changed the features of the infrastructure but not the essence, leaving behind a wider base of the traditional economic sector in existence. A trend that had been emphasized by the European encroachment on the country and subsequent integration of Egypt's economy in the world market. Within this context, Egypt had witnessed a lopsided economic development in which the traditional sector gained enough strength to influence social structure and preserve correlated traditional institutions, intellect, and value systems.⁵ Lopsided economic development was responsible for a sociocultural dichotomy between rural and urban areas, even between modern westernized and old traditional districts in major cities.

This pattern was emphasized by the State in the development of both judicial and educational systems. In both cases, the State recognized the existence of the traditional institutions and refrained from encroachment on them, and had been satisfied with a certain degree of control over them. Leaving them behind, parallel modern institutions had been established by the State.

In the case of judicial system, penal and commercial codes were promulgated based on the Code Napoléon and the French commercial code. Simultaneously, the traditional Islamic Sharī'ah was applied without serious attempt of codification. National courts of law were established beside the traditional Sharī'ah Courts and al-Majilis al-Milli which acted as court for the Copts in charge of family disputes. Dualism in judicial system lasted for almost a century, when a new quasi-secular national courts of personal status, al-Ahwāl al-Shakhsiyyah, were established in 1955 applying a special family code based on Islamic sharī'ah.⁶

The educational system presents a similar pattern of the contradictive co-existence of traditional and modern, but with more serious repercussions as far as the fragility of secular foundation of Egypt is concerned. When the foundation of modern education had been laid by the State,⁷ the creation of a national-oriented education was not concerned, but the need for modern trained personnel was the

⁵ For a documented study on this matter, see Ahmad Hasan al-Damāsī, *Siyāsat al-Ihhtilār al-Iqtisādī fi 'Asr Muhammad 'Alī*, M. A. Dissertation, Faculty of Arts, Cairo university, Cairo 1985; see also Muhammad Diwidar, *al-Iqtisād al-Misrī bayna al-Takhalluf wa al-Tatwīr*, Alexandria 1978, pp. 159-161.

⁶ For further details see Latīfah Muhammad Sālim, *al-Nizām al-Qada'ī al-Misrī al-Hadīth*, Centre for political and strategic studies of Al-Ahram, 2 vols, Cairo 1986.

⁷ See Heywarth J. Dunne, *An introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, London 1939.

real motive behind this development. Hence, modern education was limited to the production of officials and government employees and its development has been influenced by the State's demand of personnel. Though the modern education sponsored by the state was relatively expanded since 1920's, and reached wider dimension since the 1950's, it never been liberated from such influence. In addition, foreign missionary schools had been active in Egypt since the 1850's, providing a different type of modern education through the media of various European languages. Nevertheless, the overwhelming traditional education centered around al-Azhar, the most prestigious Muslim school and stronghold of 'ulamā', was left behind without serious attempt to modernize its traditional system until the early 1960's. Being difficult to attempt any change without causing mass agitations, the government refrained from enforcing drastic changes on al-Azhar, and was content with the control of its administration and funds.

Thus, from the early decades of the nineteenth century Egypt had two parallel education systems: modern secular education represented by national schools and foreign missionary schools with different orientation; and a traditional Islamic education of al-Azhar public schools and colleges. Certainly, dualism in education has been heavily contributing to the division of Egyptian opinion. It was responsible for the weakness of national consciousness and the impediment of secularization.

III. The Dilemma of National Identity

Due to the fragility of secular foundation in Egypt, it was difficult to create a national ideal that could gain consensus. Regardless their collective image of a territorial affiliation and self-awareness, Egyptians could not resolve the crisis in national identity which occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, being a reflection of both political and intellectual developments. The dilemma of orientation derived from the uncertain future of the Ottoman Empire, the European encroachment on Egypt, and the British Occupation, has been emphasized and stimulated by the decline of the Empire after World War I. Hence, the ambiguous hybrid Egypto-Muslim sentiment clinging on the Ottoman sovereignty had lost ground for a territorial Egyptian nationalism in the political and intellectual spheres, but the latter could not dominate both.

Politically, the liberal regime launched by the Egyptian territorial nationalist élite 1923-1952 could neither realize complete national independence, nor could it liberate the economy from foreign domination or initiate policy of social reform. This failure could be attributed to the chronic weakness of the Egyptian middle class, as well as the impediment of the Muslim orientation climate created by simultaneous political maneuvers aiming at the restoration of the Caliphate. It was

aggravated by the malfeasance and inadequacy of the liberal democracy of the 1923 Constitution which was deformed replica of the Belgian Constitution, bestowed unlimited autocratic powers of the monarch, and superimposed on a society steeped for long in traditionalism and intellectual rigidity. The corrupted political system, infringements on the Constitution by the monarch, constant British meddling, factionalism of political parties, and the lack of social awareness of the ruling élite, were contributing to the failure in building an Egyptian national ideal based on territorial nationalism.⁸

In the intellectual sphere, westernized elite of intellectuals who has disseminated the idea of Egyptian territorial nationalism overlooked the sociocultural reality of the Egyptian society, and failed to accommodate their nationalist ideas within the prevalent setting. In the eyes if contemporary average Egyptians, even the literate category of lower middle class, their ideas were alien based on the arguments of western scholars, contradictive to the authentic cultural roots of Egypt, and irrelevant for building a modern Egypt. The discourse of liberal intellectual nationalist élite and their actions in the 1920's and 1930's, added to the assets of their opponents, as they have adopted an aloof manner towards the masses, thus acted as an ivory-tower intellectual élite.

Consequently, the Muslim orientation has been activated by the reaction of the fundamentalists. The movement of the Muslim Brotherhood launched in 1928, was a political stronghold of Muslim orientation. Significantly, the phenomenal growth of the movement has taken place during World War II, when the desperate and frustrated urban middle class joined the brotherhood *en masse* to channel their protest against a deteriorated social condition and drastic loosening of public morals. The Muslim Brotherhood believed that a state and society based on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah (Tradition) would resolve all the social problems, but they had never been able to formulate a program of building such a state. In their view, nationalism was responsible for all the corruption of modern Muslim society, and its growth considered as a loss of Islamic faith as well as Islamic rule, being a plot against God's religion and a restoration of pre-Islamic society.

This approach of negative nationalism adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood was widely accepted by the masses who were under the sway of traditional Islam, and emphasized dominant hybrid Egypt-Muslim sentiment based on Islamic orientation. The sweeping wave of this orientation forced the liberal élite of intellectuals to make a tactical retreat by writing on Islamic subjects thinking that they could rationalize the overwhelming Muslim trend. Nevertheless, their writings

⁸ 'Alī Eddin Hilāl, *al-Siyāsah wa al-Hukm fi Misr, al-‘Ahd al-Barlamānī 1932-1952*, Cairo 1977, pp. 109-134.

were received as a denunciation of their previous arguments of the territorial nationalism orientation and a return to Islam. With such indirect support to the Muslim trend initiated by the retreat of the figures of Egyptian nationalist intellectuals, the whole Egyptian literary endeavor of the 1930's and the 1940's has been dominated by the works on Muslim subjects. Significantly, the growing popularity of Muslim orientation has been a temptation for the Egyptian Fascist organization of *Misr al-Fatāh* (Young Egypt) to use Islam as a vehicle to disseminate their political ideology.⁹

When the liberal democracy of the 1923 Constitution and the Muslim Brotherhood were eliminated by the regime of the 1952 Revolution, the new political élite sought to build a national ideal based on the sociocultural reality. In his "Philosophy of the Revolution", Gamal Abdel-Nasser had identified three circles of intertwined affinity: Arab, Muslim, and African. He maintained that Egypt should formulate a component national identity in conformity with these circles, but neither elaborated nor characterized the suggested identity. Nevertheless, the Arab affinity was emphasized by the regime subsequent to the Suez War of 1956. Two years later, Egypt emerged as a stronghold of Arab nationalism by the establishment of the United Arab Republic. The Islamic content of Arab nationalism was asserted by the government controlled media and school textbooks, together with the language and culture factors. However, limited political participation, weakness of political awareness, the lack of ideological elaboration, and the passivity of the masses, had contributed to understanding the Arab orientation within the context of Muslim Brotherly solidarity.¹⁰ Such development could not eliminate the inherent Egyptian negative collective image of the Arabs, or the traditional dominant Egypto-Muslim sentiment.

Hence, the Arab nationalist orientation which was superimposed by the regime has been among the casualties of the June 1967 War. The trauma caused by the military defeat has triggered an anti-Arab sentiment shared by the Egyptian of all classes. In his attempt to uproot the so-called Nasserism, Sadat counted on this common resentment of the Arabs in sponsoring revival of a certain Egyptian nationalism based on a limited liberal democracy. Emphasis was made on the slogan "Egypt first" in the government-controlled media and school textbooks with special focus on Egypt's Islamic roots.¹¹ Furthermore, Sadat had deliberately

⁹ Yunan Labid Rizq, *al-Ahzāb al-Siyāsiyyah al-Misriyyah 1907-1984*, Cairo 1985, pp. 104-135; Zakariyya Sulaymān Bayyūmī, *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn wa al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya*, Cairo 1979; 'Ali Shalabī, *Misr al-Fatāh wa Dawruha fi al-Siyāṣah al-Misriyyah*, Cairo 1982.

¹⁰ For further details see Tāriq al-Bishrī, *al-Dimuqratiyyah wa Nizām Yulu*, Beirut 1987.

¹¹ For detailed information about the underground militant Muslim organizations in general and al-Jihād in particular, see 'Adel Hammudah, *Qanabil wa Masahif, Qissat Tanzīm al-Jihād*, Cairo, 1985.

encouraged the return of the Muslim Brotherhood and patronized a new trend of fundamentalism, giving a crucial momentum to the dominant Egypt-Muslim orientation.

Such fluctuation of orientation between Egyptian and Arab nationalism had a depressive impact on two successive generations of young Egyptians who have been educated during the last four decades. In the meantime, it has significantly strengthened the foundation of the major arguments advocated by the fundamentalist Muslims. It has aggravated as well the dilemma of national identity.

IV. The constancy of the Utilization of Islam by the State

In a crucial way, the State had been deeply interested in the preservation of a strong Muslim orientation for political reasons. In their pursuit of legitimacy and the masses support, the rulers of Egypt had constantly utilized Islam as a political tool. Such trend had been emphasized since the early decades on the nineteenth century when Muhammad ‘Alī controlled al-Azhar, the religious endowments (Waqfs), eliminated the role of ‘Ulamā’ as leaders of the masses, and turned them into dependent religious agents of the State. The function of the ‘Ulamā’ was restricted to find out Islamic foundation for the rulers decisions, or precisely justify them on religious grounds. All the sovereigns of Muhammad ‘Alī dynasty had preserved and observed such tradition. When the Egyptian Constitution of 1923 was drafted, King Fu’ād I succeeded in including an article that mandated absolute control of al-Azhar and religious endowments to the monarch on grounds that it had been a tradition right of a Muslim sovereign.¹² Such tradition has been observed by the republican regime of the 1952 Revolution, which was much aware of the role that could be played by al-Azhar and the benefits of the religious endowments in mobilizing the masses support.

Moreover, when Muhammad ‘Alī founded the modern Egyptian army in 1820, its given title “Jihādiyyah” was formulated from the traditional concept of Jihād. In several occasions, he had instructed the imams of all mosques all over the country to persuade the people to accept military conscription as means to fulfil the religious duty of Jihād.¹³ Hence, the deserters of army service had been severely punished for the sin of escaping Jihād. It is noteworthy that Islam continued to be the core of political activity throughout the nineteenth century, served as a foundation for several mass movements such as peasant rebellions stimulated by the worsening socio-economic situation, dealing with the government’s action within the concept of Muslim religious vices, and led by Sufi leaders who claimed

¹² ‘Abdul-‘Azīm Ramadān, *Tatawwur al-Harakah al-Wataniyyah fi Misr 1918-1936*, Cairo 1982, pp. 295-296.

¹³ ‘Alī Shalabī, *al-Misriyyūn wa al-Jundiyyah fi al-Qarn al-Tāsi’ ‘Ashar*, Cairo 1989, p. 39.

Mahdism.¹⁴ Also, the concept of Jihād had been a component of the Egyptian nationalist movement from 1880's to the 1919 Revolution.

Having tremendous influence on the majority of illiterate and religious committed masses, the Sufi orders proved to be invaluable means to subjugate the masses. In pursuit of controlling the Sufi orders, the government had founded in 1895, al-Majilis al-Sūfi al-A'lā, The Supreme Council of Sufi Orders, to serve as headquarters of Sufi orders and as a vehicle for government interests in the realm of mysticism. It was decreed that the Sufi Council would have jurisdiction over the Sufi orders including the right to grant official recognition to an order. The council had been made by the heads of four officially recognized orders elected by their shaykhs, with shaykh Mashāyikh al-Tūrūq al-Sūfiyyah as its president. In practice, the presidents who were heads of al-Bakriyyah Order until 1947 and heads of other Sufi orders thereafter, directed the administration of the orders in conformity with the State politics without much recourse to the Council. This State control of the Sufi orders and use as a political tool has been a tradition observed by the regime of the July 1952 Revolution. In official events and religious ceremonies sponsored by the State and attended by the high-ranking government figures, the president of the Sufi Council was always ranked as equal to Shaykh al-Azhar.¹⁵

The utilization of Islam by the state had been highly manifested in the 1920's and 1930's through the issue of the restoration of the Caliphate which was adopted by Egypt's ruling dynasty. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, King Fu'ād I and his successor Fārūq I have sought Caliphate for themselves to strengthen their position in the struggle for power with the leaders of the Egyptian national movement and achieve high political prestige in the Arab and Muslim Worlds. In the fight with the nationalists over this and other issues, the monarchs recruited the support of the 'ulamā' who thus achieved a new political importance. A Caliphate congress was launched in Cairo in 1926 without crucial achievement, and hundreds of Caliphate committees were organized all over the country to support the monarchs claim. Within this context, the royal Palace have supported and patronized the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930's to create a political base for its aspirations.¹⁶

After the death of King Fu'ād I, the Palace has suggested a religious ceremony for the enthronement of King Fārūq I in which Shaykh al-Azhar would greet him with

¹⁴ See Gabriel Baer, *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt*, Chicago 1969, ch: 6.

¹⁵ Fred de Jong, "Aspects of the Political Involvement of Sufi Orders in the Twentieth-Century. Egypt 1907-1970, An Exploratory", in G.R. Warburg & U.M. Kupferschmidt, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 183-206.

¹⁶ E. Kedourie, "Egypt and the Caliphate 1915-1952", in *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies*, London 1970, pp. 177-207.

the sword of his ancestor Muhammad ‘Alī, to be followed by a royal Friday prayer at al-Azhar mosque. The suggestion, however, was turned down by the Wafdist government on constitutional grounds despite the successful efforts of the Muslim Brotherhood in rallying the masses support. Nevertheless, the Palace sponsored media and publications of the Brotherhood have given the young kid a title of al-malik al-sālih, the Pius King.¹⁷ Two months before the 1952 Revolution, a committee of Niqābat al-Ashrāf, a traditional institution of the descendant of the Prophet, issued a declaration that King Fārūq I was a descendant of the Prophet through his mother’s ancestors.

The religious climate created by the issue of the Caliphate and subsequent escalation of the massive Muslim sentiment, had negatively contributed to the process of secularization, being favorable for the growth of the Muslim fundamentalist movement which made the restoration of the Caliphate its main target.

Despite its obvious secular orientation, the regime of July 1952 Revolution has been aware of the political utility of Islam. As early as 1954, al-Majilis al-A’lā li al-Shu’ūn al-Islāmiyyah, The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, has been established to design the religious policies of the State, headed by the Minister of Awqāf with membership of high-ranking ‘ulamā’. It was decreed that the Council should have jurisdiction over all religious activities including publications, and that it has to make decisions on Islamic issues of common interest. Coping with the so-called socialist transformation of 1961, al-Azhar has been recognized to emerge as a modern Muslim university with new colleges for natural and human sciences. It was declared that the reorganization of the traditional Islamic school aimed at training competent Muslim professionals, i.e. engineers, physicians, teachers, etc., to launch Muslim missionary activities in non-Muslim countries, and to help the development of Muslim countries by making available a modern Muslim education for their youth.¹⁸

But, such reorganization of al-Azhar did not contribute to secularization of its education as much as it has Islamized Egypt’s secular education. It has deepened as well the dualist character of the Egyptian education, and widened the sphere of religious education as the graduates of secular secondary schools were enrolled in al-Azhar University after attending an intensive source on the Qur’ān, Hadīth, and Sharī’ah for a year. Meanwhile, a branch for women education had been founded

¹⁷ ‘Abdul-‘Azīm Ramadān, al-Sirā bayna al-Wafd wa al-‘Arsh, Cairo 1979, pp. 86-97.

¹⁸ For a detailed history of al-Azhar and its reorganization, see ‘Abdil-Mun’in Khafājī, al-Azhar fī Alf ‘Ām, 3 vols, Cairo 1955; for the developments of the 1960’s, see also Muhammad al-Bahi, al-Azhar, Ta’rikhuhi was Tatawwuruhi, Cairo 1964.

in al-Azhar University depending exclusively on the enrollment of female graduates of secular secondary schools until 1975, when it was decided to restrict enrollment to the graduates of the Azharite female public schools. Within the context of the Sadat's Muslim-oriented policies, the Azharite public schools and university colleges have been established in almost every governorate, and a project of Islamic University sponsored by Saudi Arabia was launched in Assiut, the stronghold of militant Muslim activists.

Moreover, Nasser often included Islamic religious discourse in his speeches, and has chosen to address the nation in the eve of the Suez War 1956 from the pulpit of al-Azhar mosque. The State-run media have introduced both Arab nationalism and socialism within Muslim perception. A special broadcast of the Qur'ān launched by the State-run Radio Cairo in 1961 has started with a four-hour broadcast, to be extended to ten hours in the advent of the June 1967 defeat, then to almost eighteen hours under Sadat. The Islamic subject matter in Radio Cairo, TV channels, and publications of the public sector publishing organization have been overwhelming since the 1970's

Such constant utilization of Islam by the State to serve as political means for rallying the masses support, and justifying a limited political participation, has been a crucial factor in sustaining and deepening the influence of Islam as the hard core of politics and the most convenient terms of reference. It has consolidated and emphasized as well the role of traditional religious mass leaders, such as shaykhs of the Sufi orders and imams of local mosques. It has contributed as well to the creation of a convenient climate for breeding Muslim fundamentalist movement.

V. The Trauma of the June 1967 Defeat

The June 1967 War and its tragic defeat caused a tremendous devastation of a whole set of values, and has seriously injured the national collective consciousness. One of the dramatic manifestations on the part of intellectuals was self-victimization verging on self-torture. Another massive manifestation was a noticeable and increasing trend toward the emphasis of Islamic values.¹⁹ The defeat was received by the masses as an expression of God's fury and avenge. Being plagued by misguidance, the masses believed, they have failed to adhere God thus the defeat was a divine punishment so that the Egyptians might come to their senses and return to God. Such mystical collective sentiment and religious lunacy was prevalent among the Egyptian masses including Copts. Few weeks after the defeat, the whole nation was fully preoccupied with what claimed to be the

¹⁹ Ahmad M. Gomaa, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt during the 1930's and 1970's: Comparative Notes", in G. R. Warburg & U. M. Kuperschmidt, ed., op. cit., pp. 146-147.

appearance of the image of Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, in the sky over an old church in the Zaytūn district suburb of Cairo. Thousands of Egyptians; Muslims as well as Copts, were rallying around the church for several nights to see the “divine miracle”, and the media opened a debate on the issue in which many intellectual figures of different orientation have participated.

Hence, religion and especially Islam sounded like a haven for the depressed and frustrated young Egyptian students who have frequented mosques, developed beards, and started to organize small independent limited Muslim groups in the campuses of Cairo, Alexandria, and Assiut universities. In the initial steps, these small Muslim groups have neither shown interest in politics, nor participated in the student movement which has become the center of radical opposition.

This religious upheaval has been escalated and strengthened by the actions of the regime. Religious arguments have been dominant in the political discourse, and the religious subject matter in the State-run media was soaring. The Qur’ān Broadcast has been developed and intensified to include various religious programs besides the Qur’ān, Hadīth, and Fatwā ten hours a day. The newly emerged Muslim groups, al-Jamā’āt al-Islamiyyah, has been tolerated as non-political group that might balance the radical students movement. Therefore, the Muslim fundamentalist groups could establish themselves as a potential alternative to the radical students movement. The crucial momentum for such development was created by the Sadat’s policy of condoning a revival of activities of the Muslim Brotherhood and encouragement of the Muslim groups to counter radical Nasserist and leftist student movement.²⁰

VI. The Sadat’s Miscalculated Policy of Patronizing Fundamentalists

After assuming office in 1970, Sadat badly needed to rally the masses in support of his regime and his new political approach. He was well aware of the influence of Islam on the religious-committed masses, the potential of the Muslim fundamentalist trend, and sought to mobilize both to counter the political opposition and eliminate the Nasserist activists. Based on his 1940’s experience, the Muslim Brotherhood was representing the dominant force of the Muslim fundamentalist movement, regardless the suppressive actions against them under Nasser. He freed their leaders from prison, permitted the return of those living in exile, allowed them to re-issue their magazines al-Da’wah (The Call) and al-

²⁰ For detailed information on the current activities of the extremist Muslim organizations and their political arguments, see al-Taqrīr al-Isrātīgī al-‘Arabī 1988, Center for Political and Strategic Studies of al-Ahram, Cairo 1989, pp. 510-526; see also Gilles Kepel, *The Prophet and Pharaoh, Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, tr. Jon Rothschild, London 1985; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “Anatomy of Egypt’s Militant Islamic Groups: Methodology Note and Preliminary Findings”, *IJMES* 12 (1980), pp. 423-453.

I'tisām (The Perseverance), and to associate. But, in order to limit the scope of their activities and keep them controlled, he has neither re-issued the required licenses for the magazines, nor lifted the official ban decree of dissolution which was issued by the Nasser regime in 1954.

Simultaneously, Sadat has declared faith and science as the main foundations of the regime, adopted the title “al-Ra’īs al-Mu’min” (The Believer President), and frequently used Qur’ān verses in his speeches. Religious subject matter in the media has been augmented, and the Qur’ān broadcast was extended to a regular eighteen hours a day and 24 hours in Ramadān, the fasting month. Significantly, the October 1973 War was called by Sadat and the media the Ramadan War, hailed as a token of God’s reward for the Believer President, and a divine acknowledgement of the return of faith.

The most risky tactics of Sadat’s policy of encouragement of Muslim fundamentalists was the widespread of the Muslim Groups in the universities, their encroachment on the realm of politics, and their pending violence against the leftist students who were dismissed by the regime as atheist, agents of a foreign power, and advocates of “imported thought”. Between 1971-1975, the government has encouraged the Muslim Groups to counter the radical students movement, and lent closed eyes to the apparent flow of funds from various suspicious sources to finance their activities. Hence, the Muslim Groups have taken the advantage of such favorable governmental attitude to widen their bases and increase enrollment by various means. The most effective were rendering social services to the desperate students such as free tuition, textbooks and clothes with nominal prices, and cheap transportation facilities for female students. Muslim Summer Camps sponsored by the Ministry of Religious Endowments (Awqāf), have been a convenient source of membership recruitment, and served as a platform where the groups could coordinate their activities nationwide. Between 1975-1979, the Muslim Groups gained landslide victories in university students’ unions, and have reacted as hardline Muslim opposition to the Sadats regime since his visit to Jerusalem, a fact that prompted the government to dissolve these unions by a presidential decree in the summer of 1979. These Muslim Groups acted as stimulant of sectarian conflicts, and nursery for the militant underground fundamentalist organization.

Therefore, the Sadat’s policy of condoning a revival of Muslim fundamentalist activities was a dramatic miscalculation. The lack of a charismatic Muslim leadership similar to Hasam al-Banna during the 1970’s, and the prison long bitter experience have led to a drastic change in the Muslim fundamentalist movement, undermined the position of the Muslim Brotherhood as a dominant fundamental

force. Other Muslim militant underground organizations have proliferated, some of which were splinter factions of the Muslim Brotherhood disenchanted with timidity of that organization's leadership. Sooner, these militant underground organizations have mounted their bloody violent confrontation against the Sadat regime. Even the Muslim Brotherhood did not blindly accept its role in Sadat's script to counterbalance the leftist and Nasserist opposition and to enhance Sadat's popular base. While bitterly anti-Nasserist, their magazines have gradually become more critical of Sadat's domestic and foreign policy. Almost a total break with the regime occurred over Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the signing of the Camp David Accord, and the peace treaty with Israel.

The effort of Sadat to accommodate the Muslim Brotherhood through the highly publicized amendment of the Constitution in April 1980 stipulating that "Islam is the religion of the State", and the principles of Islamic sharī'ah "the main source of legislation", did not go far enough especially when no concrete steps were taken to transform the legal system.²¹ By 1980-81, the Muslim Brotherhood embarrassed by the escalating attacks of radical militant Muslim organizations have nothing to show except severe criticism of the regime's policies. When Sadat failed to reach a compromise, and has been surrounded by the opposition of Muslim and secular political organizations as well, he decided to crackdown on them in September 1981. Few days later, Sadat was assassinated by some members of al-Jihād a Muslim militant underground organization emerged as a result of his miscalculated policy of patronizing the Muslim fundamentalists.

VII. The Infitāh Policy and the Mounting Socioeconomic Crisis

This Infitāh economic policy initiated in 1974 to liberalize the Egyptian economy has aggravated the socioeconomic crisis and triggered soaring inflation.²² The stress on commercial activities flooded the country with consumer goods, while capital investment in industrial production was far behind expectations. The manifestation of wealth by the privileged nouveaux riches who benefited from that policy contrasted sharply with the sufferings of the majority in order to make ends meet. With the absence of the State from labor market as main employer and scarcity of jobs, unemployment has taken wide dimensions, hitting severely the educated youth. The population explosion at a rate of 1.3 million a year, and the heavy burden of the State's soaring debt, have swallowed whatever increase has been achieved in the GNP. Such economic straits have mounted the chronic

²¹ Ahmad M. Gomma, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-8; John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, 2nd ed., Syracuse University Press 1987, pp. 198-209.

²² For an evaluation of the Infitāh policy, see Alan Richards & John Waterburg, *A Political Economy of the Middle East, State, Class, and Economic Development*, Westview Press, U.S.A. 1990, pp. 240-244.

problems of housing, medical service, education, and transportation, while the escalating cost of living kept the majority barely at sustenance level.²³

Such a drastic situation has nothing to promise but a dim future prospects for the youth of the lower and lower middle classes who have become target of frustration and alienation. With the absence of sense of purpose and national motivation, the Egyptian youth have to seek a solution in immigration abroad wherever they can make a career. Nevertheless, the potential labor market of the Arab oil producing countries has been gradually tightened, and the inconvenient circumstances which they have almost encountered there deepened their sense of alienation. Here comes Islam as the potential haven for desperate youth who join the Muslim fundamentalist organizations.

The negative impact of the socioeconomic crisis on the Egyptian youth was obviously illustrated by a recent survey on the trends of religious-oriented students, carried out by Hilwan University in Cairo. The survey indicates that 70 percent of the respondents are expecting to be hit by unemployment after graduation, 94 percent believe that poor wages rate is a chronic problem, 82 percent expect to have no access to a private accommodation, 88 percent expect being unable to afford marriage, and 89 percent think that they must seek job abroad. The survey reveals the Muslim fundamentalist affiliation of the respondents. Significantly, 69.6 percent believe that women must observe veil, 86.9 percent think that university education should be restricted to males, 65.2 percent disagree on women's labor, and 50 percent reject restrictions on man's right of divorce and polygamy. Thus, the survey indicates that the socioeconomic crisis has served as stimulant to the Muslim fundamentalist movement.²⁴

VIII. Shortcomings of the Mubarak Regime's Containment Policy

Despite occasional crackdown on the underground Muslim militant organizations and the counter violent confrontations, the Mubarak regime has adopted a policy of containment. Being unable to consolidate the political situation and reluctant to improve political participation, the regime has sought to rally the masses' support through patronizing the so-called rational Islamic trend. The official religious institutions; al-Azhar, the Ministry of Awqāf, and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, were entrusted to carry out this policy, thus giving the 'ulamā's role a new dimension, and providing them opportunity to make the utmost benefits out of it. Under the pretext of safeguarding righteous Islam and to counter the allegations of

²³ For information on the socioeconomic circumstances of the 1970's and 1980's, see *ibid.*, pp. 263-288 *passim*.

²⁴ This information on the survey of Hilwan University and its indications as quoted in 'Adel Hammudah, "Fitnah Taifiyyah am Fitnah Jinsiyyah", *Rose el-Yossef*, March 19, 1990, pp. 13-14.

Muslim fundamentalists who dismiss them as hypocrites and opportunists, the 'ulamā' have adopted the most conservative religious perceptions on social and ritual matters. Moreover, they utilize the jurisdiction of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs to pursue censorship on all intellectual publications, and they are pressing hardly the Ministry of Education to introduce religious subjects and Islamic sharī'ah as general requirement in all universities.

The Ministry of Awqāf has organized training courses for the imams of its mosques, an annual Qur'an contest with generous prizes including free Hajj and 'umrah visit to Mecca, and regular lecture tours of 'ulama' to the main cities. The Islamic subject matter in the mass media has become overwhelming, and the main religious events are officially celebrated and inaugurated by the President or at least, the premier with the ministers, members of the Parliament and high-ranking officials in attendance. Besides, the government encourages building of mosques, establishment of Qur'an schools, and foundation of Muslim social societies.

Though still officially banned, the Muslim Brotherhood are treated by the regime as a de facto political force, being considered as the leading reformist Muslim organization that accepts the rules of the democratic political game. The Brotherhood has confirmed this idea by adopting moderate action, and accepting to deal with the regime and the existing political order, hoping to pursue gradual change from within, without rendering to violence at least in this initial phase. Hence, they have utilized the regime's condoning liberal attitude in widening their base by controlling the strongholds of Egypt's educated middle class. Since the mid-eighties, members of the so-called al-Ittijāh al-Islāmī (The Islamic Trend), the usual label of the Muslim Brotherhood, could gain landslide victories in the unions of engineers, physicians, and the clubs of university faculties. Besides, some wealthy members of the Brotherhood have publishing houses, succeeded in flooding the market with Muslim-oriented publications on religious and political subjects with reasonable prices. Through coalition with the opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood could make their way to the People's Assembly (The Egyptian Parliament), they have gained 34 seats in the 1987 elections against ten seats in 1984. Through the foundation of Muslim social societies, the Brotherhood are working hard to marshal the support of the lower and lower middle urban classes by rendering badly needed services such as medical treatment, education, and financial aid in certain cases.

Thus, it is obvious that the policy of containment which has been designed to undermine the growth of Muslim fundamentalist movement is actually adding to its assets. For example, the Qur'an Broadcast which has wide audience and influence on the religious-committed masses, is disseminating the most rigid and

conservative argument typical to the fundamentalists, concerning crucial questions such as women status, family planning, capital investment, bank interest, and the implementation of the Islamic shari'ah. In addition, the Muslim social societies have been serving as nursery schools for breeding fundamentalists from the 1920's to the present. They are increasing in number, gaining much popularity as they render services that the government cannot provide.²⁵

Due to the lack of popularity and poor political performance, all the Egyptian political parties are speculating on the augmented popularity of political Islam. Even the veteran leftist and the Nasserist organizations have declared consent on the issue of Islamic shari'ah as the main source of legislation. In all their publications, the parties have given considerable space for religious matters. Even some parties have issued their own Muslim weeklies, hoping to get their share of the mounting popularity of the Islamic political movement.

Conclusion

Reviewing these factors, we can distinguish two categories: inherent factors of sociocultural and sociopolitical nature deeply rooted in the history of Egypt; and stimulant factors derived from the country's political and socioeconomic development in the last four decades. While the first category has made the hard core of the political Islam, the second served as a stimulant activating the current movement. But, both were intermingled and interwoven to create the Islamic political movement in Egypt which cannot be attributed to a single factor.

Significantly, this integration of factors could be noticed in the slogans and actions of the radical militant organizations in general, and the al-jihād underground organization in particular. There is consensus among them to reject all forms of secular sociopolitical order, to denounce territorial nationalism and its symbols, and to think of Egypt as the central pillar in a triangle of pillars deemed essential for building a great Muslim State, others are Iran and Afghanistan, containing all Muslim lands in between.

We can even notice this phenomenal integration of these factors in the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. In his writings, Hasan al-Banna had denounced liberal democracy and all sorts of western political order, and advocated a Muslim political order based on the Qur'an and sunnah. Furthermore, Sayyid Qutb in his book *Ma'ālim fi al-Tarīq*, which served as a blueprint for the militant fundamentalists, had rejected all the prevalent sociopolitical order in all Muslim countries, considered it a jāhiliyyah (repentance), and called for its destruction.

²⁵ It is well-known fact that one of these Muslim social societies; Jam'iyyat Ansār al- Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, has been the nursery school of the militant al-jihād underground organization.