

# WHAT'S UP, BROTHER? ISLAMIC RESURGENCE IN EGYPT (METAMORPHOSIS OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD)

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## *Introduction*

*Islam and fundamentalism – a necessity for terminological consistency*

*Islamic radicals vs. moderates*

*Some factors contributing to increase in radicalism*

*Socio-economic factors*

*Political factors*

*Islamic radicalism in Egypt*

*famĀl ʿAbd al-NĀʿir and Muslim Brotherhood (1952 – 1970)*

*AnwĀr al-SĀdĀt and the Muslim Brotherhood (1970 – 1981)*

*Husnā MubĀrak and the Muslim Brotherhood (1981 – now)*

*Nineties*

*First decade of 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

*Present and possible future scenarios*

*Conclusion*

*“The Muslim Brothers believe that when Allah most High revealed the Quran and order this worshippers to follow Muhammad, He placed in this true religion all the necessary foundations for the renaissance and happiness of nations ... globalism, socialism, capitalism, Bolshevism, war, the distribution of wealth, the relationship between producer and consumer and everything near and afar to these concerns that preoccupy the politicians of nations and philosophers of society. We believe Islam has gone to the heart of all these issues.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

This paper aims at outlining the political situation in Egypt and identifying certain socio-economic factors leading to a phenomenon which Western media, somewhat incorrectly call Islamic fundamentalism. Therefore, we assumed that for the purpose of this study, certain terminological consistence and semantic analysis of term, which Western Orientalism understands, as political Islam is necessary. We proceeded from the hypothesis that increase of radicalism in a society is an answer to certain socio-economic conditions, which are inevitably linked to domestic, and foreign policy of the respective country. For our research

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<sup>1</sup> AL-BANNĀ, ʿ. : Maʿūmāʿat al-rasĀʿil al-imĀm al-šahād ʿasan al-BannĀ. Beirut. DĀr al-ʿĀḍĀra al-IslĀmĀa. 1985. p. 118.

we applied chronological perspective and consulted various sources. Basis for our argumentation is derived both from referential works on political Islam but also from sources in the Arabic language presenting the opinion of Arabs on this subject. However, the significant portion of this paper is dedicated to the elaboration of the author's hypothesis. Its main aim is to identify and describe factors that have led to the Islamic resurgence in Egypt as represented by the Muslim Brotherhood.

### **Islam and fundamentalism – a necessity for terminological consistency**

Islam is one of the three great monotheistic world religions and despite the fact that is often perceived as a static monolith and Arab-Islamic society as essentially homogeneous, Islam has got many ramifications and currents. Western media often tend to present only the extreme poles having nothing in common with the spirit of true religion.

In the context of the contemporary history, politically charged Islam emerged in the international scene during or after the period of certain mono-polarity in the international relations, when instead of antagonistic axis Communism – Capitalism a rather new dynamics came into a being - the axis Islam – West. The term Islamic fundamentalism appeared for the first time (1965) in the dissertation thesis of the Egyptian sociologist Anwār ʿAbd al-Malik: *Materials for studying the contemporary Arab thought: Egypt*.<sup>2</sup> In congruence with terminological semantics, this phenomenon is perceived as a return back to the roots of ancestors and linking to the message of ʿamīr al-Dīn al-Afḡānī<sup>3</sup> and Muḥammad ʿAbduh<sup>4</sup>, who called for purification of Islamic faith. These thinkers launched a reformist movement named (*salafīya*) or return to faith and manner of life of honorable ancestors. As will be shown later, the aforementioned authors and their notions have exercised a great influence on Islamic resurgence and religious fundamentalism especially in Egypt.

Western scholars instead of Islamic fundamentalism often use the following terms: Islamic resurgence, revival or awakening. These terms have also their Arabic counterpart, which is

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<sup>2</sup> ʿABD AL-MALIK, A.: *Anthologie de la littérature arabe contemporaine. Les Essais*. Paris, 1965. In Kropáček, Luboš: *Islámský fundamentalismus*, Praha. Vyšehrad. 1996. p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Afḡānī, ʿamīr al-Dīn (b. 1838, Asadābād, Persia [now Iran]—d. March 9, 1897, Istanbul), Muslim politician, political agitator, and journalist whose belief in the potency of a revived Islamic civilization in the face of European domination significantly influenced the development of Muslim thought in the 19th and early 20th centuries. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/299778/Jamal-ad-Din-al-Afghani>

<sup>4</sup> ʿAbduh, Muḥammad (b. 1849, Nile Delta area, Egypt—d. July 11, 1905, near Alexandria), religious scholar, jurist, and liberal reformer, who led the late 19th-century movement in Egypt and other Muslim countries to revitalize Islamic teachings and institutions in the modern world. As *mufīī* (Islamic legal counsellor) for Egypt (from 1899), he effected reforms in Islamic law, administration, and higher education although resisted by conservatives, broke the rigidity of Muslim ritual, dogma, and family ties. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/892/Muhammad-Abduh>

largely a *calque* from European languages (*œa#wa islĕmáj a, nahæa* etc.). Fundamentalism as such is grouped under a generic term (*uoãlája*), which could be rather loosely rendered as a return to the roots or basis.

### **Islamic radicals vs. moderates**

According to O. Caré, fundamentalism means a call to: “absolute return to Scripture as the sole base for critique and renewal.”<sup>5</sup> It is practical to remind that for a true believer Holy Quran is timeless, uncreated and eternal. Besides religious recommendations it also contains system of governance and legal basis. Highly selective and specific understanding of Holy Quran is typical for various extremist groups, which aspire to ownership of the absolute truth while denying other exegetic means. A typical fundamentalist strives for a return to the roots of Arab-Islamic society, a certain ideal condition that existed during Prophet’s times, whereas Islamic radical/political Islamist pursues power attempting at transforming the society along the strict Islamic lines. Islamic radicals are often very active in the political sphere. Political Islam as a phenomenon is a subject to various influences ranging from socio-economic factors to Islamic jurisprudence and in this respect especially rigid and strict Hanbalá rite. This school of law also represents the permanent fundamentalist pole in the history of Islam. Proponents of this school of thought always insist on the literal approach to Quran and basic *sunna*<sup>6</sup> coupled with rejection of any foreign elements.<sup>7</sup> This radical teaching is embodied in the person of Mu#ammad b. °Abd al-Wahhĕb (died 1792). A radical movement, which carries his name - *Wahhabism* is spread especially in Saudi Arabia, the country which is often depicted as the oldest fundamentalist state.

The most (in)famous proponents of fundamentalism in Arab – Islamic world such as H. al-Bannĕ, Mawdãdá or A. Khomejná were not so much interested in spiritual renaissance and reforms but rather focused on uprooting the contemporary society from the sinister Western influence. Some authors do discriminate between various strands in the Islamist thought perceiving it as a single project with multiple variants, in which similarities are more important than differences. In this view the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaida represent two points on a common spectrum divided by tactics rather than goal. The second approach sees consequential distinctions in the ideology and behavior of various Islamist strands.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CARÉ, O.: *Mystique et politique: lecture révolutionnaire du Coran par Sayyid Qutb, frère musulman radical*, Paris. 1984. In Kropáček Luboš: *Islámský fundamentalismus*. Praha. Vyšehrad. 1996. p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Religious traditions (Prophet’s statements and habits).

<sup>7</sup> KROPÁČEK, L.: *Islámský fundamentalismus*. Praha. Vyšehrad. 1996. p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> LYNCH, M.: *Veiled Truths* in Foreign Affairs, July/August, 2010. p 2.

## Some factors contributing to increase in radicalism

### Socio-economic factors

This part of our paper concerns phenomena that lead to, or are directly linked, to Islamic resurgence in the Arab-Islamic society. We shall limit ourselves, when considering the identification of socio-economic factors leading to Islamic resurgence to Egypt under the reign of three Egyptian presidents - f. °Abd al-NÆœir, A. al-SadËt and É. MubËrak. This chapter presents a brief sketch of the political-societal condition of the Egyptian society in the last century. The chronological order with particular regard to the Muslim Brotherhood will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters.

Bitter defeat of Arabs in Arab-Israeli war in 1967 and disenchantment from Arab socialist and nationalist projects created a vacuum in the Egyptian society. Egyptian scholar and renowned expert on Muslim brotherhood even speaks about value disintegration (*inhijËr al-sillim al-óabaqá al-taqládá*).<sup>9</sup> His analyses show that there is a direct relation between religious insurgence, political Islam and societal class. The poorer the citizen, the more probable are his/her radical leanings.<sup>10</sup>

Ideas of the old world ceased to appeal and the Egyptian political course, which the country was taking during SËdËt's time contributed to the increase in Islamism. The regime was suitable only for certain societal strata, with social differences deepening and along with foreign investments as a result of *infitË#*<sup>11</sup> policy, a *nouveau riche* people appeared among the Egyptian *milieu*. SËdËt's period is also characterized by the gradual disappearance of the middle class. NÆœir was in favor of common people thanks to his socially oriented politics that attracted large masses of population. During his reign the country suddenly experienced period of welfare after long years of British occupation. Faced with unfavorable conditions during the sixties, the middle class could opt for either emigration or involvement in various leftist organizations or religious movements.

For of our paper, Egyptian middle class is especially interesting. During the unfavorable conditions of the sixties/seventies of the last century many middle-classed Egyptians went to

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<sup>9</sup> °INéNë, È.: *Al-i†wËn al-muslimân fi micer. Šaj†ã†a tuœËri' al-zaman?*. Maktabat al-šurãq al-dawlája. Misr. 2007. p 35.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p 40.

<sup>11</sup> Opening a country to the influx of foreign investments.

Persian Gulf and especially Saudi Arabia to make a living. At the same time the Gulf petro monarchies, even though abundant in oil and oil revenues, were suffering from shortage of qualified labor force. Many middle class Egyptians – teachers, engineers or doctors found their work in Saudi Arabia, where they could amass necessary capital to fulfill their Egyptian dream. Towards Saudi Arabia went weaker socio-economically positioned true Muslim believers, back came wealthy Egyptians soaked in the strict doctrines of *Wahhabism* thus adding yet another radical element to already Islamicized Egyptian society.

On the one hand, there are Egyptian workers coming back from Gulf and bringing home pure *Wahhabist* doctrine, while on the other hand with advent of *Sādāt* increasing activity of Muslim Brotherhood activity was increased after it went underground during Nūr's era. It is worth mentioning that political systems in Arab countries are often crippled by a single-party representation combined with suppression of opposition. Therefore, Islam provided the necessary umbrella for any opposition forces and became highly politically charged thus relegating its religious essences into mosques and *madrasas*. Islam nowadays is (mis)used to achieve goals that are political in their nature, not religious, although using various means to this purpose. Muslim Brothers claim that they want a religious reform under the banner “*Al-Islām huwa al-ḥall*” (Islam is the solution).

When analyzing socio-economic factors that formed Islamic resurgence, it is interesting to note that many Islamist leaders have not come from religious background having rather studied traditional Islamic sciences. They were not *ʿulamāʾ*<sup>12</sup> in the strict sense of the word. This supports our hypothesis that Islam is not *inherently* radical or fundamental but it takes color according to interpretation and more often than not provides solace from the everyday harsh realities. New radicals in the Arab-Islamic world are not poorly educated and poor *fallāḥ* from God forgotten village somewhere in the Upper Egypt, quite the contrary. They are representatives of the educated urban middle class who are not satisfied with *status quo*. Political Islam thrives at universities, among juvenile urban intelligentsia and urban popular districts.

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<sup>12</sup> The learned of Islam, those who possess the quality of “learning,” in its widest sense. From the *ʿulamāʾ*, who are versed theoretically and practically in the Muslim sciences, come the religious teachers of the Islamic community—theologians, canon lawyers, judges, professors—and high state religious officials. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/613126/ulama>.

‘*Ulamā*’ with traditional education face very difficult situation. They inhabit the gray zone between Islamic extremism and often largely secularized establishment. These scholars are in principle against modernization of society but because they are paid by the regime, they are not able to execute any political activity with factual impact. ‘*Ulamā*’ are thus relegated to the zone, where they issue religious opinions (*fatwā/fatāwā*) supporting the regime. Examples are numerous – in Libya and Turkey ‘*ulamā*’ in fact do not participate in the public life.

### **Political factors**

No study concerning political Islam and its role in the Arab-Islamic world would be complete without at least brief analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood. Only fraction of leaders in the Arab world gained such respect and fame as the (in)famous leaders Ḥasan al-Bannā<sup>13</sup> and Sajjid Quṭb.<sup>14</sup> The latter is known for his ideas that subsequently inspired a whole range of terrorist organizations, like al-Qaida.

Various socio-economic factors that could trigger extreme phenomena were dealt with in the previous chapter. This part of our paper briefly analyses political changes and their influence on the conditions in society and their impact on Islamic resurgence.

Egypt has undergone many transformations especially in the last century that left deep imprints in the minds of common Egyptians. The overthrow of the monarchy and advent of Nḥūr in 1952 started many reforms that permanently changed the geo-political map of Egypt and also part of the Middle East. The period of the sixties is marked by popular ideas of Pan-arabism and increase in popularity of Nḥūr, who even during his life became some sort of hagiographic legend. Moreover, Nḥūr became the embodiment of hope of many Arab socialists.

Sentiments in the society at that period were rather optimistic and Islam played only a marginal role. Emphasis was put on nationalism and Arab unity. If Islam was mentioned at

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<sup>13</sup> Ḥasan al-Bannā . (b. 1906, Egypt—d. February 1949, Cairo), Egyptian political and religious leader who established a new religious society, the Muslim Brotherhood played central role in Egyptian political and social affairs. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/256466/Hasan-al-Banna>

<sup>14</sup> Sajjid Quṭb (b. Oct. 9, 1906, near Asyut, Egypt—d. Aug. 29, 1966, Cairo), Egyptian writer who was one of the foremost figures in modern Sunni Islamic revivalism. He was from a family of impoverished rural notables. For most of his early life he was a schoolteacher. Originally an ardent secularist, he came, over time, to adopt many Islamist views. Following a brief period of studying in the United States (1948–50), he became convinced of the corruption of Western secularism and on his return to Egypt joined the Muslim Brotherhood (1906 – 1966) <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/487747/Sayyid-Qutb>

all, it was always in connection with reforms, meaning the kind of Islam, which did not oppose modernization and secularization efforts of the regime. Moderate currents of *sunná* Islam represented by al-Azhar university came under close control of the ruling establishment fulfilling the role that did *‘ulamā’* in the past – issuing religious-legal statements, which supported the ruler’s reforms.

## **Islamic radicalism in Egypt**

### **ʿAbd al-Nūr and Muslim Brotherhood (1928 – 1970)**

No study of Islamic radicalism or Brotherhood would be complete without stopping at its crucial element, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood - Ḥasan al-Bannā. Originally from a rural background, he moved to Cairo, which for him represented also metaphorically the first encounter with the West. Cairo was the place where gradual Westernization of traditional society was taking place at that time. Confronting with these phenomena, he gradually became convinced that the society is in a dire need of change. The Islamic reform was supposed to take place at all levels, political and economic included. To this purpose he founded in 1928 the *ʿaṣṣat al-Itwān al-Muslimān* in Ismāʿīlīya after he moved to Cairo where he established its headquarters. When trying to understand the activities and philosophy of Brotherhood, a short excursion to the Islamic political thought at that time is necessary. The main intellectual strands of thinking may be divided along the following lines:

- (1) The traditionalists, or conservative elements of al-Azhar, who theoretically refused any compromise with modernization and secularization, but who, pragmatically dealt and compromised with the Egyptian crown and British authorities.
- (2) The modernizers, or the students of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, who tried to modify the tenets of Islam to the requirements of Western “modernizing” norms, and their logical end, the secularization of Islamic society.
- (3) The conservative reformers (the students of Rašād Riḥānī), who agreed with the second “school” (i.e. modernizers) on the necessity of purifying Islam from innovations (*bidʿa*) which made Muslims depart from the “true” Islam on opposition to *taqlād* (accepting previous scholarly opinion as binding) and on

following the path of *i, tihEd* (personal interpretation of the basic elements of the faith)<sup>15</sup>.

Éasan al-BannÉ was attracted to the latter school. His main objectives were freeing the country from the British and responding to the failure of the liberal institutions (which emerged from the Egyptian Constitution of 1923). The atmosphere into which al-BannÉ's rhetoric was born was already fervent and abounding with reformist thinking. However, al-BannÉ sought the action that could leave an impact. As is often the case with Arabs and Muslim, in order to search for the solution he gazed towards the glorious Islamic past. The ideal state for him was represented by the first generations of Muslims.

Even though the Muslim Brotherhood existed already during the years of the Egyptian monarchy, its critical phase did not come into prominence until the reign of NÉœir, who was famous for his adversity towards the Brotherhood. Some analysts believe that in the 1950s, the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by NÉœir, combined with the rise of Sajjid Qúób, created a schism that was pivotal to the evolution of modern Islamists. Whereas al-BannÉ contested seats in the legislature and maintained an organized armed wing, much as did other political parties at the time, Qutb's generation had to choose between fleeing Egypt or suffering the torture of its prisons.<sup>16</sup>

NÉœir always feared Muslim brothers and perceived them as a threat. Nevertheless, he was neither in a position to directly attack Islam nor to execute separation of religion and state as did Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Yet, NÉœir took one important measure: newly amended Constitution from 1956 indicates that Islam is a state religion, but the same year *šarâ'c*<sup>17</sup> courts were banned. This step was very damaging to Islam. NÉœir also took by storm the university and mosque of al-Azhar, the seats of traditional teaching and attached it to the Presidency of the Republic. These acts, combined with verbal assaults against the *ulamÉ'*, were supposed to bring religion closer to the control of the state. However, no matter how hard NÉœir tried to use Islamic principles, he never sought to establish a theocratic state in Egypt. Rather, he promulgated ideas of Arab Socialism and Pan-Arabism. The fatal defeat of Egypt in the war with Israel gave the final blow to these ideas and created a suitable environment for the radical notions of Islamism.

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<sup>15</sup> AL-MONEIN, S.A and WENNER M.: Modern Islamic Reform Movements: the Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt. In *The Middle East Journal*, volume 36, no. 3, summer 1982. p. 336.

<sup>16</sup> LYNCH, M.: Veiled Truths. The Rise of Political Islam in the West. *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2010. p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> MENDEL, M.: *Islámská výzva*. Atlantis. Praha. 1994. p. 111.

The periods of coexistence between the Egyptian government and the Brotherhood are usually divided into three periods:

- 1) The period between July 1952 and March 1954 was a stage of conciliation between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers. Conciliatory gestures were adopted by the regime, such as releasing all the Brothers who had been imprisoned under the old regime.
- 2) The period between 1954 and 1970 was a period of tension in the relationship between the movement and Nasser. In 1954, six members of the Brotherhood were executed, the Supreme Guide Ḥasan al-Huwaybā was condemned to labor for life and more than 800 Brothers were given long prison sentences.
- 3) The period from 1970 to 1981, when the Muslim Brothers were allowed to play an increasing role in Egyptian political life.<sup>18</sup>

In the atmosphere of encroaching state power over its subjects and mushrooming state administration apparatus, the Brotherhood started to be more active. Its popular mass supporters during the first decade of Nḥḥir rule were rather benign, but the end of the sixties is by many analysts considered as a milestone in the Islamic resurgence in Egypt. This was also linked to economic decline. According to the economic indicators, the economic growth after 1964 stagnated and income per capita ceased to increase.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that during the Yemen War, President Nḥḥir and King Fajḥal were on the opposite sides of the war thus creating a major split in the Arab world, with the Brotherhood supporting Fajḥal. As a reward for this position, Saudi Arabia was more than happy to provide Muslim Brothers with the necessary support in terms of funds and arms to wage their campaign in Egypt. Nḥḥir was confronted with increasing popular masses' dissatisfaction, when the last blow came in 1967 after Egypt's defeat by Israel, which proved to be fatal for Nḥḥir. Exactly three years after that Nḥḥir died.

The sixties were marked also by hard repressions against the Brotherhood when thousands of its supporters ended up in desert detention camps. These events left a deep imprint in the Egyptian public psyche and discredited Arab socialism.

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<sup>18</sup> AL-MONEIN, S.A and WENNER M.: *Modern Islamic Reform Movements: the Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt*. In *The Middle East Journal*, volume 36, no. 3, summer 1982. p. 342.

<sup>19</sup> HOURANI, A.: *A history of the Arab peoples*. Faber and Faber. 1991. p. 407.

### **Anwar al-Sādāt and the Muslim Brotherhood (1970 – 1981)**

The most favorable period that witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism are the seventies and eighties of the last century. During these two decades, Islam becomes an important factor of regional and world politics. In order to better understand the dynamics of relations and power distribution in the Arab world then, a short digression into the events predating Islamic resurgence is necessary.

During the sixties, it was obvious that ambitious socio-national projects were deemed a failure. What's more, Arab defeat in the war with Israel (1967) provided necessary legacy for all voices calling to return to old values and models. Thus, the gradual islamization in society roughly coincides with Islam's entry as a real power in politics. Only two years after the humiliating defeat with Israel, the Organization of Islamic conference was formed.

The seventies brought numerous events that outlined the course to be taken by an Arab-Islamic society in future. Shocking victory of Islamic revolution in Iran (1979), announcement of people's power in Libya with Holy Quran as their Constitution (1977), Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the rise of Islamizing repressive regime in some countries of the region (Ziya-ul-Hakk in Pakistan, Nimayir in Sudan). The signing of peace treaty with Israel in Camp David further undermined the lack of trust in the rule of Sādāt's regime.

The seventies foreshadowed a whole new era in the contemporary history of Egypt. After Nēḥr's death and bitter disillusionment with Pan-Arabism and Arab socialism, the new era was marked with foreign investment influx and the freezing of relations with USSR. The era was characterized by a conscious effort to neutralize everything that Nēḥr had built. Sādāt even began cautious rapprochement with the Brotherhood, even legalized its activities. Sādāt's speeches were replete with Islamic-Nationalist rhetoric purposefully employed to gain trust of the disillusioned popular masses and Egyptian entrepreneurs. Yet he was consciously following his own objectives. Islamists were particularly happy also by Egypt's rapprochement with Saudi Arabia (1974 – 1975). Even discussions relating to implementation of *šarā'ā*<sup>20</sup> as the only legislative source were quite common.

A classical referential paper on Islamic movements and Muslim Brotherhood indicates several possible factors for the revival of the Brotherhood under Sādāt. Some are external in origin, whereas the others are domestic:

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<sup>20</sup> MENDEL, M.: *Islámská výzva*. Atlantis. Praha. 1994. p. 114.

External factors:

- (1) the aftermath of the Egyptian participation in Yemen war (1962 – 1967)
- (2) the aftermath of the Egyptian defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War
- (3) the role of Saudi Arabia and its relationship with the Brotherhood.

Internal factors:

- (1) the continuing economic crisis which has plagued the Egyptian economy for more than a decade.
- (2) The role of the Egyptian Left in domestic politics since the death of Nēceir.<sup>21</sup>

One of political factors, which further contributed to the Islamic resurgence in the Egyptian society were infamous “bread riots”, when the government succumbed to pressure of International Monetary Fund and stopped subventions for basic foodstuffs. This was a colossal mistake of Sēdēt, who seriously underestimated his own folk. Foreign diplomats even today exchange at reception anecdote on the nuance of governing Iran and Egypt:

“In order to rule Iranians, one has to starve out the local population, whereas to govern Egyptian masses, one has to feed them.”<sup>22</sup>

However, Sēdēt made couple of welcoming gestures towards the Brothers. Unlike his predecessor Nēpir, he was skillful in using the Islamic rhetoric in his speeches. Thus began the gradual rapprochement with Brothers, whom Sēdēt wanted to use as leverage against the increasing influence of the Left. In a friendly gesture, he released the Brothers from prisons, including the Supreme Guide, Éasan al-Huæajbá and even invited Brothers to help him draft the New Constitution for Egypt.<sup>23</sup> During this era, we also witnessed the launching of the monthly journal of Brotherhood under the title of *al-Da<sup>c</sup>wa* (the Call) in 1976, which presents a rich source for the study of the development of Brotherhood’s ideas and opinions.

The last drop was Sēdēt’s journey to Jerusalem and signing the Camp David peace accord. In this moment, the people lost their trust in the ruling regime and the Muslim Brotherhood skillfully used this momentum for mobilizing the masses. To add to this, the Egyptian economy went into further decline and Sēdēt was quickly loosing both local and foreign

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 344.

<sup>22</sup> Personal interview of the author with members of diplomatic corps in Cairo. 2008.

<sup>23</sup> MENDEL, M.: *Islámská výzva*. Atlantis. Praha. 1994. p. 348.

support. The world was shocked at the display of brutal violence between Coptic Christians and Muslims. On top of everything, SĒdĒt banned student Islamic groups. These developments and the ever-increasing number of *nouveau riche* in the Egyptian society created resentment among both urban poor and the urban middle class, which was quite an unusual combination. One analyst has noted that although the Brothers had a large rural and urban class membership, the middle class, white-collar professionals dominate the activist membership.<sup>24</sup>

As was mentioned in the previous paragraphs, gradual radicalization of the society was also influenced by socio-economic factors, which in combination with unlucky political course triggered in Egyptian society retrogressive and revivalist tendencies. This part of our paper dealt predominantly with historical relations and political atmosphere in Egypt. President SĒdĒt's mistakes finally cost him his life. He died after assassination attack of IslĒmbālá during military parade in Cairo. Maybe it is worth noting, that right next to him was a very scared then Vice-President and nowadays autocrat, who has been in power in Egypt for almost three decades – Muᄥammad Ēusná MubĒrak. All obstacles and challenges were to be transferred to another decade this time under the fourth Egyptian president H. MubĒrak. Actually quite several studies dealing with the problem of Islamic resurgence in the Middle East published during the seventies and eighties seems to reiterate the same question regarding the future of Egypt. Looking at what had happened to Shah in Iran in 1979, is there any possibility that Egypt might befall the same fate sometime in the future? As the upcoming paragraphs show the regime of Mr. MubĒrak has been more or less successful in taming the religious zeal and political Islam within the Egyptian society for three decades. What will happen after the long awaited presidential elections in 2011, only Allah knows.

### **Husná MubĒrak and the Muslim Brotherhood (1981 – present)**

Whereas the seventies were marked with influx of foreign investment and regime change, eighties, besides MubĒrak's regime brought less transparent activity of radicals, economic decline and one of the greatest world's financial debts.<sup>25</sup> However, the more important than the aforementioned factors was the gradual islamization of the society that largely happened without state supervision. Local or independent mosques (*ahlā*) were gradually to become

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 346.

<sup>25</sup> ALTERMAN, J.: *Egypt: Stable but for how long?* Washington Quarterly. 2000. p. 107.

more independent and slowly drifted away from state religious supervision. As was mentioned earlier, Egyptian citizens coming back from work stints in the Gulf region represented yet another danger, which in combination with religious subventions for a certain type of project, further exacerbated the already tense atmosphere in the society.

### **The nineties**

When military attacks in Egypt at the beginning of the nineties shook the world, Mubarak's regime finally realized that militants represent a real existential threat for the establishment. In response to this, the regime employed two strategies how to deal with insurgency. One could be termed "absorptive" and the second one "repressive." It is necessary to realize that Egypt is the country in which the Emergency Law granting large powers to police and repressive elements of state has been in power since 1981. The "absorption" option was employed by the regime to try to win the hearts of radicals friendly towards regime. The state also acted decisively in crucial periods (parliamentary elections in 1995) and executed massive detainment of Brotherhood members. This period also witnessed an assassination attempt on the first Nobel Prize winning Arab author – Naûáb Ma+fãz with many perceiving this attempt as a direct attack on Egyptian identity.

Return of political Islam back on the scene could be predicted after the short-lived romance of NËeir and the Brotherhood and its subsequent repression coupled with SËdËt's amnesty was supposed to serve as leverage against leftist forces. The regime also took effective measures against its political opponents. The regime-friendly elements penetrated Islamist organizations and often successfully dissolved them. Moreover, the domestic political scene witnessed a new coalition composed of the ruling NDP party, leftist Taûamm<sup>c</sup>u and neo-liberal Wafd in order to create a block against Islamists. The only real remaining power hostile to the regime – were the Islamists. Within the framework of these effective measures, the government started to execute supervision checks at independent mosques and to coordinate Friday sermons (*tuóba*).

### **First decade of 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

This period is marked with the colossal success of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2005, they were able to penetrate Egyptian parliament as independent candidates. It is moreover important if one realizes that this is the movement with illegal status. However, the results of the parliamentary elections showed that Muslim Brotherhood enjoys a wide political and

societal support. The movement has always been rooted in popular Egyptian masses, which supported Brothers thanks to their outreaching social and charity projects.

The success in the aforementioned elections proved that legal framework and official status do not always guarantee success. Thus, the year 2005 is the year, when the Brotherhood's presence made itself felt very vividly. It also shows that Muslim Brotherhood is the real opposition force representing the "Egyptian street" that need to be reckoned, especially that it holds at its disposal various means to undermine the authority of the regime raising their main aims for political and constitutional reform.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that the success of Muslim Brotherhood came about by the combination of various factors. On the one hand it demonstrated the impotence of the regime to provide for the needy, and uncovered the shaky position, marked by lack of popular support of the ruling NDP (National Democratic Party) on the other hand. Despite the majority of parliamentary seats taken by NDP allowing for continuation of legislative and legal acts according to their wishes, the penetration of Muslim Brotherhood into the parliament was rather alarming for the regime.

### **Present and possible future scenarios**

Political life in Egypt has been in the state of paralysis for three decades. The year 2011 will witness presidential elections, as well as a possible change of status quo for the impoverished masses of Egyptians. The future of Egypt is misty not only because of the unknown successor to the president H. Mubārak, but also because radical tendencies are rampant throughout the Egyptian society. Even though the regime managed quite successfully to navigate through the muddy waters of Islamism, elections results in 2005 shocked everybody. The Muslim Brotherhood candidates were able to penetrate parliament on an independent ticket. Therefore, the future of Egypt can witness three possible scenarios provided that H. Mubārak will not be sworn into presidency again (*taûdád*): the power will stay in Mubārak family in case that the power will be transferred from father to son and the future president will be famĀl Mubārak (*tawráð*), or other possible probable candidate for the post is chief of intelligence services will be ʿUmar SulajmĀn. The worst case scenario is something similar to what happened in Iran, that would turn Egypt's 80 million plus population into radical Islamists.

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<sup>26</sup> AL-ʿINĒNĕ, Ē.: Al-i+wĀn al-muslimān fá micer. Šaj+ā+a tuæĀriʿ al-zaman? Maktabat al-šurāq al-dawlāja. 2007. p. 288.

The Brotherhood's influence nowadays is slightly less visible than previous years. One decisive factor that has contributed to this is the massive arrest of Brothers that took place in the nineties. As long-term resident and expert on Cairo matters M. Rodenbeck rightly points out: "Central government vets the qualifications and pays the salaries of most of the preachers in the country's 75, 000 mosques. Egypt's president appoints the head of al-Azhar Cairo's 1, 000 year-old seat of Islamic learning, an institution that includes Egypt's largest university with 335, 000 students."<sup>27</sup>

Even though there are signs that the wave of religiosity, which started in 1970s has crested, some groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, despite operating in illegality for the most of their time in history, still represent a force that need to be taken into account.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

More than 80 years have passed since the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood. Brotherhood has more or less successfully adapted to various changes in the Egyptian government. Nowadays, it is a force that poses a great challenge to the existing regime, even though the dream of establishing Islam as the pivotal center of the Egyptian society and state is still far from being realized. Throughout its tumultuous history, Muslim Brotherhood suffered several serious blows from the ruling regime. Nevertheless, it not only survived, but even blossomed. From the hierarchical, largely anti-democratic backward orientated organization the Brothers transformed themselves into the formation that resembles multi-vocal political organization.<sup>29</sup>

The Brothers have successfully implemented number of organizational and ideological changes within their own groups and moved towards more pro-democratic direction. In a country plundered by corruption, autocratic and quasi-military rule, the Brothers have come to represent the dream of justice and equality while playing one of the most influential cards of the Egyptian identity – religion.

Nowadays, Egypt is once again approaching the end of one era after which no one can exactly tell what will happen, once the current Egyptian President is gone, or who will succeed him. One of the alternatives that are present on the current Egyptian scene, however, is the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>27</sup> RODENBECK, M.: *A special report on Egypt*. The Economist. 17th July 2010. p.15

<sup>28</sup> LYNCH, M.: *Veiled Truths. The Rise of Political Islam in the West*. Foreign Affairs Magazine. July/August 2010. p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> EL-GHOBASHY, M.: *The metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers*. In Middle East Studies. 37. Cambridge University Press. 2005. p. 373.

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