

**Univerzita Karlova**  
**Fakulta sociálních věd**  
**Institut politologických studií**  
**Diploma thesis project**

**The unintended metamorphosis of Political Islam  
in Egypt: Al Azhar, Salafism and Muslim  
Brotherhood**

Name: Marika Pianese

Academic advisor: Mgr. Jan Daniel Ph.D.

Study program: International Security Studies

Year of project submission: 2020

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague 21.05.2020

Marika Pianese

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## ABSTRACT

### ENGLISH VERSION

The topic of Political Islam or more specifically, the role of religion in politics is becoming crucial in the Arab World, specifically in the North African democracy of Egypt. Because of its 94.7 million of people and its role as the Arab League headquarter, the country still holds power in the region despite not being as strong as in the past. Since the 1970s, Egypt has used religion as an instrument to achieve political ends with different aims. In the 70s, it was to counterbalance the left, in the 80s to co-opt Islamist political groups into formal politics, and in the 90s to contain the Islamist challenge and legitimize authoritarianism. Television started airing more religious programs and lots of aspects of everyday life changed according to conservative Islamic values, giving thus, more importance to Islamic Law. Even if the state wanted to calm the fervent spirits of the conservatives, it didn't achieve its goal, as they only emphasized more the Islamist norms and pressured moderate forces.

The dream of establishing an Islamic political and social order has faded with the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and fragmentation in the country. Despite the increased force of Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood could still manage a comeback if they play their cards right and find a balance between their original ideology and nowadays Egyptian social context. The research questions that will be answered are: *is possible for other currents, like Salafism and Al Azhar to take control of political Islam and keep fighting to make the transformation in the country possible or on the other side, political Islam might not be part of their political program and ideology?* And **what happened to the different groups such as Al Azhar, Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists once that the Revolution started?** Compared to the literature above, my work will focus more on a comparative analysis between the characteristics that made the Brotherhood the sole representant of Political Islam in Egypt for years, and those of Al Azhar and Salafists and together with this, it will discuss the behavior of the two during and after 2011 to check if the groups have followed their original ideas or have shifted to gain more support from the revolting population.

Moreover, the relationship of the two with Al Sisi will be crucial to understand the link between them and the state and the concept of moderation. Moderation will appear a lot, especially in these cases where a group might take over and needs to adapt its views to the historical conditions of the country, therefore I will show whether Al Azhar or Salafists went through a moderation process and on which level. Most literature only discusses political Islam as something that disappeared after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. But maybe, it has not disappeared, but it has only mutated through the political transformation in the country. Salafism and Al Azhar might modify its features according to their own ideology. For the first time we could see a successful case of incorporation of political Islam in a way that might not threaten democracy, seen the moderate ideas of both groups who recently decided to enter politics. Might this cause political Islam to have a new face, survive in the country more than the Muslim Brotherhood did and create new alliances with the West? Not only I will talk about the what but also of the why and the how, in our case not only will I talk about political Islam, but also why it is important, and it is given so much power and how it became so. Mixing a predictive method with an explanation method will allow the thesis to cover both the explanation of the content analysis and the prediction of the results, by focusing on the different approaches of the topic which will help me to prove my point of political Islam not only being a prerogative of the Muslim Brotherhood.

## CZECH ABSTRACT

Téma politického islámu, přesněji řečeno, role náboženství v politice se v arabském světě, konkrétně v severoafrické demokracii Egypta, stává klíčovou. Vzhledem k 94,7 milionu lidí a roli Arabské ligy se země stále drží v regionu, přestože není tak silná jako v minulosti. Od 70. let minulého století používá Egypt náboženství jako nástroj k dosažení politických cílů s různými cíli. V 70. letech to mělo být vyvážením levice, v 80. letech kooptovat islámské politické skupiny do formální politiky a v 90. letech omezit islamistickou výzvu a legitimizovat autoritářství. Televize začala vysílat více náboženských pořadů a spousta aspektů každodenního života se změnila podle konzervativních islámských hodnot, čímž se islámskému zákonu přikládal větší význam. I když stát chtěl uklidnit vroucí duchové konzervativců, nedosáhl svého cíle, protože pouze zdůrazňovali více islámské normy a vyvíjeli tlak na umírněné síly.

Sen o vytvoření islámského politického a sociálního řádu vybledl pádem muslimského bratrstva a roztříštěností v zemi. Navzdory zvýšené síle islamistů by muslimské bratrstvo mohlo stále zvládnout comeback, kdyby hrálo správně své karty a nalézalo rovnováhu mezi svou původní ideologií a dnes egyptským sociálním kontextem. Výzkumné otázky, na které bude zodpovězeno, jsou: **je možné, aby jiné proudy, jako je Salafismus a Al Azhar, převzaly kontrolu nad politickým islámem a pokračovaly v boji za umožnění transformace v zemi nebo na druhé straně, politický islám nemusí být součástí jejich politický program a ideologie? A co se stalo s různými skupinami jako Al Azhar, Muslimské bratrstvo a Salafisté, jakmile revoluce začala?** Ve srovnání s výše uvedenou literaturou se moje práce zaměří více na komparativní analýzu mezi charakteristikami, díky nimž je Bratrstvo po léta jediným zástupcem politického islámu v Egyptě, a charakteristik Al Azhara a Salafistů a spolu s tím bude diskutovat o chování během roku 2011 a po něm zkontrolovat, zda skupiny sledovaly své původní myšlenky nebo se posunuly, aby získaly více podpory od vzbouřeného obyvatelstva.

Kromě toho bude vztah obou s Al Sisi rozhodující pro pochopení jejich spojení se státem a pojmu moderování. Mírnost se objeví hodně, zejména v těch případech, kdy by skupina mohla převzít a musí přizpůsobit své názory historickým podmínkám země, proto ukážu, zda Al Azhar nebo Salafisté prošli procesem moderování a na jaké úrovni. Většina literatury diskutuje pouze o politickém islámu jako o něco, co zmizelo po pádu muslimského bratrstva v Egyptě. Možná ale nezmezela, ale zmučovala pouze politickou transformací v zemi. Salafismus a Al Azhar by mohli upravit své rysy podle své vlastní ideologie. Poprvé jsme mohli vidět úspěšný případ začlenění politického islámu způsobem, který by neohrožoval demokracii, viděl umírněné myšlenky obou skupin, které se nedávno rozhodly vstoupit do politiky. Může to způsobit, že politický islám bude mít novou tvář, přežije v zemi více než muslimské bratrstvo a vytvoří nové spojení se Západem? Nejen, že budu mluvit o tom, co, ale také o tom, proč a jak, v našem případě nejen o politickém islámu, ale také o tom, proč je to důležité, a je jí dáno tolik moci a jak se to stalo. Smíchání prediktivní metody s vysvětlující metodou umožní, aby se práce zabývala jak vysvětlením obsahu, tak predikcí výsledků, a to zaměřením na různé přístupy k tématu, které mi pomohou dokázat můj názor na politický islám nejen být výsadou Muslimského bratrstva.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Islamists emerged in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became increasingly important in the 1920s with Al Banna and Qutb, but the real change started in the 1960s, when the legitimacy of the regime was undermined, and Israeli forces won against Nasser in 1967. The left was not able to provide an alternative and that is why the Islamic awakening started in this year but was reinforced by Sadat in the following years. However, Islamists did not like his peace initiative towards Israel and his economic policies. Ideologies appear as a response of a clash between two state models, a stronger and a weaker one and in case of Islamism, it dates back to the clash between Europe and the Islamic world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

The topic of Political Islam has gained more and more importance after the beginning of the Arab Spring. Egyptians finally came to terms with years of colonization and together with the feeling of detachment from the real principles of Islam, they decided to revolt against Mubarak's authoritarian government. This perceived injustice has driven Muslims to act and even resort to violence. Political Islam and, the Muslim Brotherhood, provided for Egyptians a sense of belonging to a community and finally the feeling of being heard. Islamists supported the population living in poverty as they represented their ideas and also played a big role in social welfare and development of ordinary and people in need. Very important to underline is also that the community of believers is global, transnational and cosmopolitan and therefore more charismatic than regional actors.<sup>2</sup>

The thesis outline will consist of several points. The first one will be the introduction, where I will focus on a brief outline of the phenomena of its history. I will then highlight how political Islam is

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<sup>1</sup>Soage A., Introduction to Political Islam, Religion Compass, September 2009, pp. 887-896

<sup>2</sup>March A.F., Political Islam: Theory, Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 18, pp.103-123

shaped in Egypt, how and when it began its rise in the country and who are the main actors supporting it or not, from Mubarak, to the Arab Spring, Morsi's election supported by the Brotherhood, its fall and the following election of Al Sisi. The main body will be focused on the transformation of Political Islam in time, first with the 2011 Revolution and then with the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and therefore of the concept of Political Islam itself. Is it possible for other currents, like Salafism and Al Azhar to take control of political Islam and keep fighting to make the transformation in the country possible or on the other side, political Islam might not be part of their political program and ideology?

Finally, I am going to show how the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists and Al Azhar movements reacted to the Arab Spring, but also to the fall of the Brotherhood's leader Morsi. Linked to this event, I will prove if Al Azhar or Salafists will take over the Brotherhood's legacy in Egypt and support political Islam. In both cases this would mean a change, as both Salafists and Al Azhar had never been involved much into politics before 2011. I will explain what changes are needed and whether the two groups managed to achieve them after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and the path ahead of them.

## **Literature review**

Regarding the literature and the sources that will be used to write this thesis, I'll mainly focus on documents written in English as unfortunately my basic knowledge of Arabic wouldn't allow me to understand more complex texts. There might be some sources in Italian as I am a native speaker, but I found that most relevant sources for this thesis are in English, as most of the Italian ones do not discuss in depth these issues. This lack of Arabic texts, though, might influence the overall perspective of the thesis, giving it a focus on more of a Western approach. It would be ideal to be able to rely on Egyptian sources, or generally in Arabic, as to understand what the region believes about this changing political and social situation in the country. Sources in the languages listed below

might be biased, as often Western governments believe that the Muslim Brotherhood is linked to terrorism, that political Islam is wrong and must be fought to preserve laicity. Moreover, they tend to complain about Mubarak, Morsi and Al Sisi, all of three considered as authoritarian leaders with no intentions of bringing democracy to the country. Luckily from the end of the Arab Spring in Egypt, a lot of scholars have been focusing on the country's history, and many are still doing it nowadays. Many of them are writing for Western newspapers or agencies but are Egyptian or Middle Eastern, which offer another view on the country from a national living abroad and writing about the issues of Egypt. At the same time Western sources might provide a background of possible outcomes regarding cooperation with Egypt with different countries, according their support regarding its political and social situations. Some sources are discussing Al Azhar's choice to help Al Sisi<sup>34</sup> and for this reason, it will crucial to explain the reason of this choice, despite the two having completely different ideologies. I believe there is a lack of literature regarding political Islam under military autocracy and about the post-Muslim Brotherhood period. Some texts link political Islam to the Muslim Brotherhood and highlight the fact that the current is over with their fall.<sup>567</sup> That is why I will focus on its transformation, whether this is possible, how, and when it can happen. Regarding the type of sources that will be used, I will use secondary sources such as research papers, journals, books and articles that interpret original work and comment on it. We can start by dividing the thesis by themes and then analyze the most important texts that are going to be used as sources.

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<sup>3</sup>Abdallah B., Al Azhar and Sisi's Regime: Structural Roots of Disagreement, Atlantic Council, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, Last accessed on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/al-azhar-and-sisi-s-regime-structural-roots-of-disagreement/>

<sup>4</sup>Fick M., Al Azhar takes centre stage in struggle for Egypt, Reuters, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, Last accessed on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-politics-azhar-idINDEE9BJ03H20131220>

<sup>5</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the Future of Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 21<sup>st</sup> 2014, Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/21/muslim-brotherhood-andfuture-of-political-islam-in-egypt-pub-56980>

<sup>6</sup>Al Anani K., Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Middle East Journal, Vol 69 n.4, Autumn 2015

<sup>7</sup>Monier E.I. & Ranko A., The Fall of the Muslim Brotherhood: Implications for Egypt, Middle East Policy Council, Volume XX, N.4

Regarding the broader conceptualization of Political Islam, I am going to use two papers by Ashraf Sherif, one called *Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads*<sup>8</sup> and the other one called *The Muslim Brotherhood and the future of Political Islam in Egypt*<sup>9</sup>. The first one was written in 2015 and deals with the post-Morsi situation which provoked a debilitating blow to the Islamist project and left fractures in the Salafi movement. The second one was written in 2014 and analyzes the turmoil in Egypt and how it can be a potential cause for Islamist integration and the regime's possibility to achieve political stability. It is important to underline that we will find Ashraf Sherif's papers in following chapters of the thesis as well, as he is Egyptian, based in Egypt and an expert in political Islam, state-religions relations, democratic transitions, social movements in Middle East and North Africa. It is interesting to underline that the majority of his papers are translated in English and Arabic, therefore proving to be more objective than those aimed only to an English-speaking audience.<sup>10</sup> My thesis thanks to this paper will be able to discuss why Salafi joined politics and whether this move was right for their political development in the country and also the possible end of political Islam in Egypt. Another importance source for the first chapter is *Temptations of Power* by Shadi Hamid which deals with how Islamist groups change over time, such as how repression made these groups more moderate, meanwhile democratic openings in the 80s pushed Islamists back towards their past conservatism.<sup>11</sup> This view that repression can help with moderation is going to be highlighted and put in contrast against Wickham's view that inclusion can help with moderation instead. Both approaches will be analyzed to discuss the relations and behavior of Islamist groups towards states. Volpi and

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<sup>8</sup>El Sherif A., *Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads*, Carnegie Middle East Center, April 29th 2015, Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/29/egypt-s-salafists-at-crossroads-pub-59928>

<sup>9</sup>El Sherif A., *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Future of Political Islam in Egypt*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 21st 2014, Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/21/muslim-brotherhood-andfuture-of-political-islam-in-egypt-pub-56980>

<sup>10</sup>Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Ashraf Al Sherif, last accessed on March 27<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/experts/884>

<sup>11</sup>Hamid S., *Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East*, Oxford University Press, pp. 38-50

Stein in *Islamist and the State after the Arab Uprising: Between People Power and State Power*<sup>12</sup> show an interesting comparison between statist and non-statist Islamism mainly in the sphere of democratization. For this thesis, this paper will be resourceful to explain how the two groups shaped Egypt's history before and after the Arab Spring. It will be important to underline the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood after 2011, and the successes of the Salafists and why this happened. Carrie Wickham in *the path to moderation: Strategy and learning in the formation of Egypt's Wasat Party*<sup>13</sup> offers an interesting view on moderation. This process is not necessarily linked to the process of democratization and it shows that some groups have managed to become more moderate thanks to internal political changes and incentives of the government. This shows that even without democracy, a country can have moderate parties to increase their prospects for the future. This analysis on moderation is going to be very useful while discussing the reasons why Al Azhar and Salafists might or might not represent Islamism.

For the comparison between the actions of Muslim Brotherhood, Al Azhar and Salafists after the end of the Arab Spring, I will continue to use the fascinating paper by El Sherif, called *The Muslim Brotherhood and the future of political Islam in Egypt*<sup>14</sup>, which will be the main text used to explore the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood before and after the Revolution. This text focuses on possible future outcomes after the fall Morsi such as a possible come back for the Brotherhood or Political Islam. I am mostly going to focus on how the group failed to achieve its goals in Egypt and how there is no possible comeback for them due but rather for other actors. Two papers by Nathan Brown will

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<sup>12</sup>Stein E. & Volpi F., Islamism and the State after the Arab Uprisings: Between People Power and State Power, Democratization 22, no. 2, 2015, pp. 276–293

<sup>13</sup> Wickham C.R., The path to moderation: Strategy and learning in the formation of Egypt's Wasat Party, Comparative Politics Vol.36 N.2, 2004, pp. 205–228

<sup>14</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the Future of Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 21st 2014, Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/21/muslim-brotherhood-andfuture-of-political-islam-in-egypt-pub-56980>

be used especially for the analysis of Al Azhar, the first one called *The Battle Over Al Azhar*<sup>15</sup>, which deals with the effort to restrain the Islamic institution's autonomy. In this text, the fluctuation of the role of Al Azhar is clear and visible, and that is why I will use it to prove that Al Azhar, being so flexible and having supported every kind of government, might be ready to take over Islamism in Egypt and change its structure again. The second text is called *Post-Revolutionary Al Azhar*<sup>16</sup> that explains the post-revolutionary struggle of the organization and the fight for its autonomy of the most central institution in the state-religion relationship. This text will show how Arab Spring influenced the group and began a wave of activism and inclination for autonomy which might be at the roots of the desire to replace the Brotherhood to take up the reins of the society. For the investigation regarding Salafism among the sources we find two interesting papers, the first called *Pious Way to Politics: The Rise of Political Salafism in post-Mubarak Egypt*<sup>17</sup> by Al Anani and Malik which explains the rush into politics of Salafi parties after the Arab Spring, and their change towards a more pragmatic and practical discourse. This, and the process of Salafization expressed by the authors will be useful to prove that they are not ready to be the representant of Islamism in Egypt despite their growing power. This is understandable in *Egyptian Salafism in Revolution*<sup>18</sup> by Hoigilt and Nome that similarly deals with the transformation of Salafism from an apolitical form of activism to an active political actor in the Egyptian scene. Due to its internal and external conflicts towards other groups, Salafists show that they don't have a disciplined organization and their ideology stayed the same, radical and focused on Islamic Law with no discussions of more moderate reforms to accommodate most of the population.

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<sup>15</sup>Brown N.J. & Mariam G., *The Battle Over Al Azhar*, Carnegie Middle East Center, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, last accessed on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/70103>

<sup>16</sup>Brown N.J., *Post-Revolutionary Al Azhar*, The Carnegie Papers, September 2011

<sup>17</sup>Al Anani K. & Malik M., *Pious Way to Politics: The Rise of Political Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt*, *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 22 n.1

<sup>18</sup>Hoigilt J.& Nome F., *Egyptian Salafism in Revolution*, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 25 n.1, 2014

For the the analysis of Salafists and Al Azhar as representant we have Belal Abdallah, an Egyptian scholar, with his *Al Azhar and Al Sisi regime: structural roots of disagreement*<sup>19</sup>, which deals with the challenges that created the tensions between the country's political and religious leadership represented by Al Sisi and the Grand Imam Al-Tayyeb. This will help in the discussion of the relationship between the two actors that have been different depending on the subject, they agreed against Morsi for example, but they did not agree on the law regarding divorce in the country. Their co-existence is impossible as they both represent different ideals and for this reason, exploiting the unhappiness of the population with Al Sisi's regime, Al Azhar could steal the power. A special report called: *Egypt deploys scholars to teach moderate Islam, but skepticism abounds*<sup>20</sup> was written by Yara Bayoumy and Mahmoud Mourad in 2015 and it focuses on the desire from Al Sisi to start a religious revolution in Egypt to achieve moderation, with the help of Al Azhar against radicalism. Al Azhar had always been against the Brotherhood's ideology but despite this, they have always strived for moderation and flexibility, two of the pillars of Islamism. Regarding Salafism, the literature consists of mainly articles more than papers. Among them we find *The Salafi Nour Party in Egypt*<sup>21</sup> published on the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies which is a report that deals with the Nour party and its position in the post-revolutionary Egypt, the changes, the alliances and the possible pressure from the Gulf. This report is very useful to understand the true ideology of Salafism, not a true Islamist group even if considered so, but more influenced by Wahabism and Jihadism. It is important to underline that Islamist has gained so much power because it represented the will of the people who had been forced under colonization and Mubarak's authoritarian regime. Surely, Wahabism and

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<sup>19</sup>Abdallah B., *Al Azhar and Sisi's Regime: Structural Roots of Disagreement*, Atlantic Council, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, Last accessed on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/al-azhar-and-sisi-s-regime-structural-roots-of-disagreement/>

<sup>20</sup>Bayoumy Y. & Mourad M., *Special report: Egypt deploys scholars to teach moderate Islam, but skepticism abounds*, Reuters, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2015, last accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-islam-azhar-special-report/special-report-egypt-deploys-scholars-to-teach-moderate-islam-but-skepticism-abounds-idUSKBN0OG07T20150531>

<sup>21</sup>McTighe K., *The Salafi Nour Party in Egypt*, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2014

Jihadism will not be able to gain as much support in the population and on the contrary people will be less likely to be supportive as the links to these currents have not been clearly declared. At the same time, links with Jihadi groups could impact the relationship with outside Western actors. Another text is by Lacroix with the title being *Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The Politics of Hizb-Al-Nour*<sup>22</sup> and talks about Al-Nour not even being an Islamist party in its current form because for Salafis politics is just a mean to an end, therefore, to strengthen their movement. From the same author, who is well-known regarding Middle East politics and Salafism, there is also another text: *The Rise of Revolutionary Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Egypt's Revolutions*<sup>23</sup> that he wrote with Ahmed Zaghoul Shalata highlights the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements' approach after the Arab Spring and how they acted to overthrow Mubarak and after him, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces. Especially important is that while for the Brotherhood only took a few days to intervene in the revolution, the Salafis took way longer to show their support in the protests and. With the Brotherhood's rule, they first supported Morsi because of his lack of leadership. An interesting paper written by Al-Anani, a scholar who specializes in Political Islam and Salafism is *Political Salafism in Egypt*<sup>24</sup>, which underlines the issue of the Al-Nour party after the January 25 uprisings. What made Salafi, whom thought politics was haram, to change their mind about it and join the elections. Their willingness to step into politics provoked issues with other political actors because unlike Al Azhar, they did not rely on a strong electorate since they were the most recent group that got into politics after the Arab Spring. I would say that the most important source for this part of the chapter is without a doubt *Crossing the Ideological Divide? Egypt's Salafists and the Muslim*

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<sup>22</sup>Lacroix S., *Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The politics of Hizb Al Nour*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, last accessed on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/01/egypt-s-pragmatic-salafis-politics-of-hizb-al-nour-pub-64902>

<sup>23</sup>Lacroix S. & Shalata A.Z., *The Rise of Revolutionary Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Egypt's Revolutions*, Chapter 8, 2016, pp. 163-178

<sup>24</sup>Fahmi G., *The Future of Political Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia*, Carnegie Middle East Center, November 16<sup>th</sup> 2015, Link: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/11/16/future-of-political-salafism-in-egypt-and-tunisia-pub-61871>

*Brotherhood after the Arab Spring*<sup>25</sup> by Annette Ranko and Justyna Nedza. This was a great paper as it analyzed the distinction between the Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood and that of the Salafist movement and examines the shifts in the who groups since the Arab Springs regarding strategies and actions to achieve their Islamic goals. Moreover, especially important is the creation inside Salafists, of a Salafi Jihadi group, which has detached itself from the Brotherhood's Islamist ideology.

A text that is common to the whole thesis, and not specific themes is *The awakening of Muslim Democracy* of Jocelyn Cesari<sup>26</sup> investigates on the relationship between modernization and Islam in Muslim-majority countries that have undergone secularized politics. She argues that nation-building processes have brought to the politicization of Islam by modifying it into a modern national ideology. It also discusses Islam's impact on emerging democracies in contemporary Middle East and that if new democracies appear, they will probably be unsecular. Summarizing, the book offers an interesting perspective on the relationship between religion, politics and secularism that might be useful for those with a Western non-Arab background.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, these are only a small part of the whole bibliography, as the sources that can be found on the internet are countless, especially collective volumes publications and a few interesting books. Also important to underline is that all of the sources mostly were written after 2011, after the Arab Spring, but some of them regarding political Islam in general, or the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood, could belong to the pre-2011 period. Moreover, important is to underline the availability of texts because for some currents such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists, finding sources regarding their pre and post 2011 have been quite easy, while for Al Azhar the majority of them focused on their relationship with Al Sisi and not with other actors, or on its internal fragmentation

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<sup>25</sup>Nezda J., & Ranko A., Crossing the Ideological Divide? Egypt's Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, December 11<sup>th</sup> 2015

<sup>26</sup>Cesari J., *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy*, Harvard University and Georgetown University, Cambridge University Press, 2014

<sup>27</sup>Ibid

and issues. I believe that since Al Azhar is a very old institution in the country that has historically sided with any regime in power, the common belief is that they would adapt to any political situation in the country by giving their support. The only clear opinion about it was that Al Azhar supported Al Sisi against the Brotherhood, so it could also be implied that Al Azhar was against the Islamist ideology articulated by the Muslim Brotherhood, which can be proven wrong by its involvement in both politics and religion. In any case, this thesis will be analyzed and proven thoroughly in the next chapters, despite the difficulty in the lack of sources which means that I will have to interpret the results of the findings in the best way possible.

Compared to the literature above, my work will focus more on a comparative analysis between the characteristics that made the Brotherhood the sole representant of Political Islam in Egypt for years, and those of Al Azhar and Salafists and together with this, it will discuss the behavior of the two during and after 2011 to check if the groups have followed their original ideas or have shifted to gain more support from the revolting population. Moreover, the relationship of the two with Al Sisi will be crucial to understand the link between them and the state and the concept of moderation. Moderation will appear a lot, especially in these cases where a group might take over and needs to adapt its views to the historical conditions of the country, therefore I will show whether Al Azhar or Salafists went through a moderation process and on which level.

## **The behavior of Islamists towards states**

Islamists developed relationships with other regional and international actors from the 1930s up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They navigated this relationship differently, and building it was not an easy process as its development had three stages. The first one is the Islamists' absence of a methodological view of international relations, the second is a shift towards understanding and adopting the regional and

international relations doctrine and the third is finally the leaning towards a theory and a framework for international relations while participating in the regional and international environments.<sup>28</sup>

But what happens to mainstream Islamist groups? As regimes became more radical, the groups accepted many of the foundational tenets of democracy such as popular sovereignty and alteration of power. There are proofs that Islamists moderated not only in the absence of democracy but also when repression got worse despite the majority of the academic literature believes otherwise.<sup>29</sup> But ideological parties grow in open and participatory politics by moving in the center and trying to reach the broadest part of the electorate.<sup>30</sup>

Egypt, specifically, contradicts the conventional way of how Islamists change. Islamist groups in the country, in only three decades, have embraced some un-Islamic positions in the context of the absence of democratization. The leader at the time, Hosni Mubarak, decided to exclude the Islamists not only from the power but also from the decision-making process and they were therefore subjected to mass arrests and detention. But as regimes continued with their repression, Islamists affirmed their commitment to a moderate cause. They believed that democracy could be their call to arms, and they started introducing themselves as responsible actors on the regional and international stage. In this situation there was a tradeoff: Islamists promised to follow the rule of the regime and give up their extremist ideologies and in exchange they were promised a stake in the regime such as the permission to form legal parties. Nonetheless, in Egypt, the tradeoff was accepted with the Islamists' hope for an

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<sup>28</sup>Hamid S., The Islamist Response to Repression: Are Mainstream Islamist Groups Radicalizing, Brookings, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2010, Last accessed on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-islamist-response-to-repression-are-mainstream-islamist-groups-radicalizing/>

<sup>29</sup>Ibid

<sup>30</sup>Hamid S., Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East, Oxford University Press, pp. 38-61

improvement in their political situation, which never happened, and on the contrary, their situation deteriorated dramatically, creating problems in the bargain previously accepted.<sup>31</sup>

The word moderation has become a cliché as in popular discourse it translates into doing things that we want Islamist groups to do. It is often confused with pragmatism and non-confrontation even if they are two completely different ideas. Pragmatism entails flexibility and willingness to compromise and it is more about the means than ends. It also requires taking on political positions despite the beliefs, therefore leading moderates to take on conservative or radical positions, or radicals taking moderate positions. For example, if an Islamist party in a conservative country decides to pass a law banning alcohol consumption could be seen as a pragmatic political winner with a large segment of the population, and in this case being pragmatic could help them move towards their goal of a strict Islamic state.<sup>32</sup>

Moderation is often characterized by non-confrontation and the willingness to play the “rules of the game”, even if there are no clear proofs that it is the case. Moreover, it is often considered a positive term as something that can and needs to be pursued. The goal is to capture a progression in how Islamists relate to their environment, with a move towards reform and democratization. In this case, moderation takes place then Islamists refuse the application of Islamic law and commit to foundational ideals of democracy. Over decades, Islamist groups not only became more moderate, but their orientation shifted, and their priorities changed, especially at the beginning of the Arab Springs.<sup>33</sup>

To understand more deeply the moderation issue of Islamist groups, it is important to think of them on a different level than a political party. They could be described as “subversive parties”, that are

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<sup>31</sup>Hamid S., *Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East*, Oxford University Press, pp. 38-50

<sup>32</sup>Ibid, pp.38-50

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, pp 50-61

interested not only in replacing the current order but also in transforming it and that is why it needs to strengthen its position in the society. Islamist groups have always tried to achieve legalization and legitimization from regimes to fight the fear of repression and they go out of their way to portray themselves as democratic, pluralist and focused on women's rights. This might help fortify their political position with liberal parties whose support they could need in the future or even reformers and sympathizers.

To explain the process of moderation in the absence of democracy we can use several key factors. The first one is moderation as protection, as Islamist groups can't afford to be isolated and that is why they form coalitions against government crackdowns so they wouldn't appear extremists. The second one is democracy as something worth fighting for, as in the absence of it, it makes sense for these groups to support and fight for democracy. Calling for democratic principles such as the separation of powers, only makes sense in case of a lack of it.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, regime repression might unite the opposition together as this could apply not only to Islamists but also to other political groups who have the regime as their only common enemy. The third one is base-leadership gaps. In Egypt the Islamist base was not happy about the participation in elections and its moderate views that would undermine the Islamic Law. In fact, several studies show a discrepancy between the beliefs and the actions of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership and its base. This division is not exactly surprising as the leadership is not directly affected by the repression while the base, as it doesn't participate actively in politics and is the main victim or the repression is more likely to escape the regime's wrath. The fourth one is international factors, as Islamists are interested in what Western countries and especially United States think of them. In the 90s, the Muslim Brotherhood had to distance themselves from the perpetrators of the attacks during the Algerian civil war because they feared a public attack and the

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<sup>34</sup>Hamid S., *Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East*, Oxford University Press, pp. 38-50

risk of being associated with extremism and terrorism. After September 2001, it was even more important for Islamists to present themselves in the most moderate way possible in a region of extremism and instability because that was what they wanted the world to believe.<sup>35</sup>

As an example, after the opening of the 80s, the Brotherhood in Egypt was caught by surprise when a turn to repression happened and was therefore followed by a violent strategy of moderation. After violent conflicts with the regime intensified, the Brotherhood wanted to clarify its positions and condemned the attacks. This was not enough for the regime, that accused the group of supporting terrorism and therefore the group found itself in a quite unstable situation. As the regime repression intensified, the Islamist group had to declare publicly some its positions on the controversial issues such as women's rights, Christians, democracy, pluralism and violence, that were a reassessment of the ideas of Hassan Al Banna.<sup>36</sup>

Before and after 2011, statist and non-statist Islamist groups had been fighting to shape the political landscape. Some of these divisions coexist in the same organization. It is believed that statist Islamists can contribute to the stabilization and democratization if they are helped by other actors in politics. When this does not happen, democracy is not likely to happen and interactions worsen, non-statist Islamism takes the lead and they prioritize religious community over the state.<sup>37</sup>

Statist Islamism is the institutionalized participation in the politics of the state, and it can be exemplified by the Muslim Brotherhood. Statist Islamists have not aimed at overturning the social order but at reforming through activities to connect with a bigger constituency.<sup>38</sup> The main goal of these groups was moderation, mainly regarding their political programs, which had been a growing

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<sup>35</sup>Hamid S., *Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East*, Oxford University Press, pp. 38-50

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, pp. 38-50

<sup>37</sup>Stein E. & Volpi F., *Islamism and the State after the Arab Uprisings: Between People Power and State Power*, *Democratization* 22, no. 2, 2015, pp. 276–293

<sup>38</sup>Ibid

trend in Islamism since the 80s and 90s. They softened their ideological goals and embraced ideas regarding human rights and democracy. This moderation was criticized by internal Muslim Brotherhood groups but also by Salafis. Non-statist Islamism is not apolitical but infra-political, with a stronger focus on local organization, charity and proselytizing and is more focused on the conservative interpretation of the fundamentals of Islam like in Salafism. These groups give more importance to the community than to the state and they have a strong ability to insert their ideology into pre-existing religious practices of local communities. Often regimes can't reach peripheral or rural areas and for this reason, the field becomes more open for Salafis.<sup>39</sup>

After the Arab Spring, statist Islamism believes to be responsible for the expansion of the political sphere in the Arab world to help democratization. The uprising of 2011 also challenged statist Islamism because in Egypt the Brotherhood no longer had the political field to itself, because they struggled to win the support of other (especially secular) actors and struggled to consolidate support. For non-statist Islamists the situation post-2011 was different.<sup>40</sup> The Jihadi trend strengthened because of numerous civil conflicts and reduction of state capacity. Therefore, operations moved to areas where resistance was needed and necessary. The failure of statist Islamism and democratization have ensured the relevance of Jihadi ideology which had previously been threatened when it was believed that Islamists could gain power democratically.<sup>41</sup>

For others, moderation does not only occur in case of democratization. Political openings can encourage Islamist leaders to moderate their tactics. When authoritarian leaders have opened to Islamist parties, many have renounced to violence. Moderation refers mainly to domestic politics, refers to changes relative to the group's positions in the past and it can be even across areas. An

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<sup>39</sup>Stein E. & Volpi F., Islamism and the State after the Arab Uprisings: Between People Power and State Power, *Democratization* 22, no. 2, 2015, pp. 276–293

<sup>40</sup>Ibid

<sup>41</sup>Ibid

example of moderation not due to democratization is the Wasat party in Egypt which shifted its ideology because of three arguments: political learning by its leaders, facilitation of interactions with other Islamists and secular opposition leaders and institutional opportunities and incentives. They cultivated a moderate image to gain power and eventually win through elections.<sup>42</sup>

## **Methodology**

The research question, or better, questions, that this thesis is going to focus on will be on the role of political Islam in Egypt. More specifically it will focus on the its nature, regional and international, and on its survival in the country after the Revolution and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood. *What happened to the different groups and approaches such as Al Azhar, Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists once the Revolution started?* I will therefore proceed to analyze the three different currents and how they behaved after the end of the Arab Spring in Egypt. Did they radicalize even more? Did they become more moderate? What happens with the deposition of Mubarak and its authoritarian rule? What are the main unchangeable characteristics of the three groups that transitioned through the before and after revolution? With the rise of Salafism in Egypt, more issues emerged such as the need for a creation of a comprehensive model of governance, the necessity to gain the trust of the youth and maintain some influence in the political process and counterbalance the rise of Salafi jihadism. Before the Arab Spring, the military regime nurtured its illiberal opposition in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, and then when the Islamists came to power, they inadvertently paved the way for the return of the generals. Moving forward historically, *what happened to the different currents after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, which of them strengthened their role in the country and which were on the contrary, banned and lost power?*

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<sup>42</sup>Wickham C.R., The path to moderation: Strategy and learning in the formation of Egypt's Wasat Party. Comparative Politics Vol.36 N.2, 2004, pp. 205–228

Thanks to a few sources, I can underline that even though the majority of the sources deal with political Islam, do it in a Muslim Brotherhood-focused way. Among them, El-Sherif, who even though will be often cited in this thesis, focuses a lot of his work on Political Islam linking it to the Brotherhood. Therefore, after the fall of Morsi, he almost implies that there could be no future for the movement in the country.<sup>43</sup> The majority of the sources used don't mention explicitly what could happen to political Islam after 2013 but they leave it up to the reader. For this reason, there is no clear proof that other movement might want to pursue the Brotherhood's legacy and what will happen to Islamism.<sup>44</sup> For example, Knudsen believes that political Islam could be a spent force, seen that its most charismatic period has passed.<sup>45</sup>

Al Azhar or Salafists could, on the opposite side, show that, the phenomena could hide different sides and faces to it which could include more groups with similar aspirations. It could show that these groups are ready to take the lead in Egypt, especially since they have both gained importance, especially after 2011, Salafists with their win in the elections, and Al Azhar by being the most important Islamic institution in the Arab World. There is a doubt that they are not ready to be flexible and to modernize to adapt to the historical and social changes that happened after the end of the Arab Spring and that is why that is one point that needs to be analyzed. These groups might want to achieve the same power through different methods, even by fighting against the conservative and deep-rooted Muslim Brotherhood. A conceptual framework will be used, more precisely a method of explanation and prediction. The type of research will be of course qualitative and explanatory, because it is aimed at increasing understanding of a concept not well researched before in a detailed manner.<sup>46</sup> This type

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<sup>43</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the Future of Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 21st 2014, Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/21/muslim-brotherhood-andfuture-of-political-islam-in-egypt-pub-56980>

<sup>4444</sup>Tadros S., Islamists Respond to the end of Islamism, Hudson Institute, March 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

<sup>4545</sup>Knudsen A., Political Islam in the Middle East, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2003

<sup>46</sup>Yousaf M., Explanatory Research Definition, Explanatory Research Types, Comparison, Advantages, Disadvantages, Scholarship Fellow, Last accessed on September 1st 2019, <https://scholarshipfellow.com/explanatory-research-definition-types-comparisonadvantages-disadvantages/>

of research is ideal, as explained before, political Islam has only been explained through the lens of the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and has been completely ignored under military autocracies, Salafism and Al Azhar.

Both the research questions will help in the task of analyzing political Islam, with the aid of the relevant sources such as books, publications, collective volumes and websites that will provide the right conceptual framework for the explanation of the research question. A framework will be used, made up by characteristics that Islamist need to survive in the Egyptian society such as the need to support a democratic regime, the change from Islamic identity to Islamic values, the change in their philosophical approach from the Sharia to a more modern one, the move towards pragmatism and away from dogmatism and symbolism against the West, the need to work on their credibility.<sup>47</sup> These points will be used as a framework in the two following paragraphs, to compare the actual behavior and the desired one, after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood to check if any of these groups will be able to carry on the Brotherhood's legacy.

The data will be extracted from the sources that I discussed in the previous chapter, and will be analyzed according to the research questions, following an existing data investigation in the case study on Egypt. A process of case study aimed at finding correlation and patterns in concept and understand on secondary data sources allows a reliable and unobtrusive data collection without the involvement of participants.<sup>48</sup> As the thesis will be a qualitative research through patterns, themes and relationships, the data analysis can't be as precise and universal, like quantitative ones. This allows me to compare the different sources coming from different backgrounds to look for eventual differences or similarities.

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<sup>47</sup>Khan M., Islam, Democracy and Islamism after the counterrevolution in Egypt, Middle East Policy Council, 2013

<sup>48</sup>Luo A., What is content analysis and how can you use it in your research?, Scribbr, July 18th 2019, Last accessed on September 4th 2019, Link: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/content-analysis/>

Despite this, it is important to underline a lack of references for Al Azhar in general, its behavior after the Arab Spring and with the Muslim Brotherhood, because despite its influence in the society, the group has never been an active participant in politics. For this reason, thanks to the sources I found, I managed to understand the struggles and beliefs of the group and try to find similarities and differences with the Brotherhood thanks to a comparative approach. Also difficult was to find a common definition for political Islam as every writer has a more or less politicized version of it but for the purpose of this thesis I focused on the definition that best describes political Islam as a moderate political and religious movement as many papers but unfortunately most articles often written in the West, linked it to radical Islamism. For Salafists, I was forced to ignore all the sources who dealt with the group in a biased way, considering them on the same levels of Jihadists and not agreeing with their support of Al Sisi. In the first chapter I focused on a general overview of political Islam. Then for all three groups I researched their behavior during and after the Arab Spring but also after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and the results can be seen in chapter two. Then I moved onto analyzing if Al Azhar and Salafists can be linked to political Islam by researching their relationship with the characteristics shown in the framework and showing the results. Not only I will talk about the what but also of the why and the how, in our case not only will I talk about political Islam, but also why it is important, and it is given so much power and how it became so.<sup>49</sup> An explanation method will allow the thesis to cover both the explanation of the content analysis and the prediction of the results, by focusing on the different approaches of the topic which will help me to prove my point of political Islam not only being a prerogative of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>49</sup>Bhat A., Qualitative Research, definition, types, methods and samples, QuestionPro, Last accessed on September 4th 2019, Link: <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/qualitative-research-methods>

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A definition of Political Islam**

Over the last decades Islam has become a point of reference for many political activities and opposition movements. The definition of Political Islam has been used more and more to identify the irruption of Islamic religion into the secular domain, therefore using religion for political purposes. Political parties have been doing this for year as they base their appeal on Islamic credentials such as Hizb al- ‘Amal in Egypt or Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria.<sup>50</sup>

Many Islamist (not to be confused with Islamic, which only refers to a refers to Islam as a religion and culture, while Islamist refers to the religious/political phenomenon) movements have emerged with the goal to revive the Ummah, reform and restore Muslim societies to bring them back to their past glory. It is important to underline this aspect as it shows why the influence of religion in politics has widespread support in many countries. Islamist movements think that Muslims have abandoned the path of Sharia, even if this means that they have just modernized and believe in religion in a less strict way that in the past. This justification for their behavior tries to explain why it is necessary to come back to the past glory, why the present society is corrupted and why stricter policies must be implemented. Most of them such as the Muslim Brotherhood believe in the implementation of the religious law that could restore leadership and sovereignty to Muslims and overcome modernity.<sup>51</sup>

Generally, the end of Pan Arabism is marked by the defeats of Arab countries against Israeli forces in 1967. But this year also marked the beginning of an Islamic revival rooted in the ideology of the

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<sup>50</sup>Hirschkind C., What is Political Islam?, Middle East Report No.205, Middle East Studies Networks: The Politics of a field, pp.12-14

<sup>51</sup>Khan M., What is Political Islam?, E-International Relations, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014, link: <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/10/what-is-political-islam/>

Muslim Brotherhood which is the major representant of Political Islam in the world. The group was founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna and soon became a religious and political force. They created a system that offered an alternative to Westernization, secularization and materialism and that is why Al-Banna always advocated a return to the roots of religion. They created several religious, welfare and educational organizations that sustained the Muslim Brotherhood through difficult years of suppression after the assassination of its leader in 1949 and imprisonment of its members. In the 50s, despite Nasser's repression, the movements grew to become classless and populist and extended beyond Egypt towards Jordan, Syria and Palestine. Nonetheless, a part of the group radicalized under the leadership of Sayyid Qutb, who became the new ideologist. While Al-Hudaibi, Al-Banna's successor, promoted a gradual agenda with reforms and education, Qutb aimed at overthrowing the un-Islamic governments and rulers to resurrect the force of Islam. He was therefore a threat to the Egyptian regime and was imprisoned for more than decade and then executed in 1966. When in prison, Qutb created a number of influential works such as his book Signposts, a commentary on the Quran which is nowadays considered one of the most important radical Muslim texts where he established the difference between "a decant or ignorant order" and "Islamic order" and that the only way to achieve the latter would be a holy war called Jihad. Therefore, while Al-Banna supported a gradual change within society, Qutb wanted to overthrow the power to establish an Islamic state and by the 60s political developments in the Middle East set the stage for the above mentioned Islamic revival based on the politicization of religion of either Qutb or Al-Banna even though, generally the charismatic period of political Islam can be placed around 1970–82 with the Iranian revolution as its highest point.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Knudsen A., Political Islam in the Middle East, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2003

Political Islam was defined by Charles Hirschkind as “an illegitimate extension of the Islamic tradition outside of the properly religious domain it has historically occupied”.<sup>53</sup> Islamist movements are defined by three traits, the first is that they refer to themselves as an “Islamic movement”, second is that they call for an Islamic state ruled in accordance with Sharia and third is that they organize themselves to achieve certain goals. Islamists embrace the concept of *ijtihad*, independent reasoning and interpretation of Quran and Islamic traditions based on the Holy Scriptures and applied to the present. Political Islam is based on critiquing three things: modernity, the West and the state, therefore the *ijtihad* process is aimed at that, to translate key Islamic concept and transform them into practical policy.<sup>54</sup> More easily, political Islam can be defined as the interpretation of Islam as not only a source of religious identity. Islam becomes a political ideology and its supporters believe that Islam should not only order how religion should be but also politics and society. Religion, therefore, becomes a form of instrumentalization by individuals or organizations that pursue political objectives.<sup>55</sup>

In the late 80s, when religious movement started exploring the possibility to enter the political realm, Islamist groups decided nonetheless to put little focus on democracy and political reform as they were mostly religious movements and politics only served religious ends at this point. For a group with a suspicion of being multipartite, the jump into politics was controversial. With time, they realized that democracy could help them fulfill their goals and that is why they committed to this cause and transformed themselves from niche parties to national ambitious parties. State repression on Islamist groups could explain what they do what they do. These groups would always show calm and caution and when the repression ceased, they would show their willingness to take power so that the party could become an end or a mean to their goals. Often, Egyptian and Tunisian Islamist movements such

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<sup>53</sup>Hirschkind C., What is Political Islam?, Middle East Report, 1997, N.205, pp. 12-14

<sup>54</sup>Knudsen A., Political Islam in the Middle East, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2003, p. 2-3

<sup>55</sup>Ayoob M., Political Islam: Image and Reality, World Policy Journal, Vol.21 N.3, Fall 2004, p. 11-14

as the Brotherhood and Ennahda would force their members to join their political parties and the fact of being entrenched between a party and a movement is really the problem.<sup>56</sup>

The role of Islam in government is an important issue in many Muslim societies, especially since the demands for change following the Arab Spring. Islam is politicized and is used as a basis for governance. Movements that are trying to politicize Islam have different methods to achieve its aim. Extremist groups such as ISIS or Al Qaeda politicize Islam through the use of violence, while the Muslim Brotherhood have taken a more gradual approach, working with existing political structures for a long-term goal of an Islamic society.<sup>57</sup>

It must be underlined that there were structural factors that led to the rise of political Islam such as:<sup>58</sup>

- Islamist groups were suppressed by authoritarian leaders backed by the West so when these dictators were removed, Islamists managed to gain freedom and participate in politics.

- Elections would allow the poorer part of the country to express its views through political Islam.

- Islamists played a role in social welfare and development, gaining the support of ordinary people.

- A large part of the society supports Muslim identity and culture and the Islamist parties prioritize this conservatism.<sup>59</sup>

For this reason, Islamism remains the dominant political ideology in the Middle East even if it looks different today than before the Arab Spring. Since 2013 there has been a fragmentation within the

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<sup>56</sup>Hamid S., *Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East*, Oxford University Press, p. 13-16

<sup>57</sup>Politicizing Islam: exploring means and objectives, The Stimson Center, November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016

<sup>58</sup>Madaman P., *Arab Spring and the Rise of Political Islam in Egypt*, Rangsit University, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2017

<sup>59</sup>Ibid

Sunni Islamist political spectrum between the older and the younger generation or simply because of different political and historical circumstances they must face. The end of political Islam depends on the adoption of an alternative project that puts at the first place the wellness of its own people.<sup>60</sup>

Three important claims are necessary to make when we talk about politicization of Islam: the first one is that for ordinary Muslims, Islam is not a framework for a political state order but for Islamists, religion translates as shari'a based state. The second one is that Islamism is offensive for ordinary Muslims as it is an exclusive ideology that creates problems to the development and cultural change of a country. The third one is that while democratization of Islam is possible, Islamization of democracy is generally not, as it is based on values that most Islamists rejects such as pluralism.<sup>61</sup> Of course there might be situations such as Tunisia and Morocco where such situation happened but generally pluralism does not receive much support from Islamists, especially in Egypt.

The politicization of religion following the exposure to modernity might also lead to religious fundamentalism. There is also the need to underline that Islamists are not one homogenous group, but they are divided into institutional, jihadist but also Salafists and they all use different means to achieve their goals. That is why it is important to highlight the need to analyze the transformation or lack of it, of the various currents of Political Islam in Egypt. Some of them could even become more radicalized after the Arab Spring, or on the contrary, become more institutionalized.<sup>62</sup>

An institutional approach to the study of religion has also the advantage of highlighting the correlation between state action and the creation of political forms of Islam. Most approaches to Political Islam focus on the dichotomy between a secular state and political groups that use Islam as an oppositional

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<sup>60</sup>Moss K., Sunni Political Islam: Grasping the emerging divide, GIGA Focus Middle East, N.7, November 2017

<sup>61</sup>Tibi B., The Politicization of Islam into Islamism in the context of global religious fundamentalism, Journal of Middle East and Africa, 2010, pp.153-170

<sup>62</sup>Ibid

tool, but the institutional one shifts this polarity. It focuses instead on complex interactions between the two actors such as adaptation, cooperation and competition and it believes that state-Islam relations are a precondition and a condition for its politicization. Islam, therefore, is not antidemocratic but certain interactions with the state could influence certain behaviors.<sup>63</sup>

In this chapter I discussed the definition of political Islam that will be used as a framework to analyze the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood in the pre and post Arab Spring and of the other two groups, Salafists and Al Azhar after the 2011 revolution. The definition of Political Islam has not been an easy process and in fact an early analysis of the significance of what will later be called Political Islam started in 1942 even if scholarly recognition came later. In the 1960s new groups started voicing their Islamic identification and in the 1970s scholars discovered Islamic expression in the political arena. The Islam revival is at the roots of this ideology since the beginning and based on the group, they entered the political realm in a moderate or more radical way. For example, Salafists, as we will see, develop a more extremist view on religion while the Brotherhood focuses on a moderate one to attract more supporters. The range of advocates of Political Islam, whether they are groups or individuals, range from supporters of an Islamic republic, monarchy or even caliphate to liberals, conservatives, moderates, radical or militant.<sup>64</sup> More specifically, within Islamist there are three different currents: political, missionary and jihadi. The first one comprises Islamist political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood which aims at political goals and generally refrains from violence. In the second group we find Salafists before the Arab Spring, without a full participation in the political realm and focused on proselytizing. The third group is made up by jihadi groups that only refer to violence such as Al Qaeda, but it is important to underline that these group still have members

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<sup>63</sup>Cesari J., *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy*, Harvard University and Georgetown University, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp.15-18

<sup>64</sup>Kramer G., *Political Islam*, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Vol. 6, 2004, last accessed on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/political-islam>

that are more radical or more moderate within them.<sup>65</sup> This will help us explain how these groups behave in different ways but they all still could represent Political Islam in Egypt.

## **Political Islam in Egypt**

### **Political Islam and the Egyptian state**

The topic of Political Islam or more specifically, the role of religion in politics is becoming crucial in the Arab World, specifically in the North African democracy of Egypt. Because of its 94.7 million of people and its role as the Arab League headquarter, the country still holds power in the region despite not being as strong as in the past. Since the 1970s, Egypt has used religion as an instrument to achieve political ends with different aims. In the 70s, it was to counterbalance the left, in the 80s to co-opt Islamist political groups into formal politics, and in the 90s to contain the Islamist challenge and legitimize authoritarianism. One of the state's responses to political Islam was an attempt to portray itself as almost as Islamic as the Islamist opposition. Television started airing more religious programs and lots of aspects of everyday life changed according to conservative Islamic values, giving thus, more importance to Islamic Law. The Ulama, religious scholars, started to be consulted on political, social and even economic matters. This process of instrumentalization of Islam was aimed at calming the militant Islamic groups, but even if the state wanted to calm the fervent spirits of the conservatives, it didn't achieve its goal, as they only emphasized more the Islamist norms and pressured moderate forces. The regime's reluctance to make genuine reforms strengthened the opposition. In 2005, the events in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq, together with regime's failure to improve living conditions, helped reduce Egyptians' fear of political change and would provide an ideal environment for producing extremists. With the win of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 2005 elections, the issue of the

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<sup>65</sup>Koehler K. & Warktosch J., Egypt and North Africa: Political Islam and Regional Instability, Writenet report by the UNHCR, emergency and technical support service, January 2009

link between religion and politics has been revived as the last decades witnessed a resurgence of religious ideals and the importance of politico-religious movements.<sup>66</sup>

The state, with its instrumentalization of religion, also played a role in laying the ground for the acceptance of these politico-religious ideas. In fact, after almost three decades, the beneficiaries are mainly religious political movements by contributing to the success of these movements through preparing an Egyptian mind receptive to Islamist ideals. Not only secular activists disagreed with the state's manipulation of Islam, but also the Coptic community was not happy to see their own country being re-Islamized and this created tensions between Christian and Muslims communities.<sup>67</sup>

We will see that in the following chapter I am mainly going to focus on the Muslim Brotherhood as the sole bearer of Political Islam and briefly on Salafists regarding the rivalry with the Brotherhood and its internal divisions. It must be considered, of course, that this is only one of the studied currents within the movement of Islamism and is the one that this thesis will focus on. The reason for this choice is the prominence of the Brotherhood in the Egyptian political, social and religious sphere compared to others and its link to the two actors that will be introduced in the thesis subsequently: Al Azhar and Salafists.

## **The Muslim Brotherhood**

Al Banna's strategy for restraint produced dissension in the ranks of the movement, causing the secession of the most zealous dissenters that preferred a strategy of militant activism, creating internal debates over the proper strategy as well as the attempt of the leadership to handle a minority that supported a different approach.<sup>68</sup> Despite many scholars and observers have judged the group's words

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<sup>66</sup>Abaza K., Political Islam and regime survival in Egypt, Washington Institute, January 2006, Link: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/PolicyFocus51.pdf>

<sup>67</sup>Ibid

<sup>68</sup>Salwan S.F., From Pulpit to Party: the evolution of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers Strategy, The University of Pennsylvania

and deeds towards democracy, liberal values and violence, most internal debates have centered on a broader concern with the role of politics, how can and should political efforts help the advance of the Brotherhood's broad agenda in Egypt after the political shift?

The current internal debate within the Brotherhood mainly deals with concepts such as "leadership change," "institutionalization," "amending the bylaws," and "rejecting individualism," but foundational questions and talks over the group's long-term objectives remain absent from the debate. Some believe that with a change of leadership an internal discussion on these issues will begin and an internal dialogue can develop around a unified stance.<sup>69</sup>

Another crucial debate is for the position of women and Copts that should be excluded from senior positions in any state. The argument for this ban is based on a legal Islamic principle that should not be transgressed. For others, instead, this was an outdated and unnecessary rule but the debate was ambiguously resolved as the leaders insisted that their position banning women and Copts was definitive but could accept a defeat as long as it came through legitimate procedures.<sup>70</sup>

The main goal of the organization was to fund a broad reform agenda, which over time could take on personal, religious, social and political matters and that is why one of the subjects of debates centers on how much to stress political participation. Support for a total withdrawal from politics is heard only on some margins of the movements, meanwhile there is broad consensus that the Brotherhood should remain partly engaged in politics. Despite this statement, the leadership have never found an agreement about how extensive participation would be, its forms, how to connect politics to the group's long-term goals.

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<sup>69</sup>Fayed A., Is the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood pushing the group towards violence?, Brookings, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016, Last accessed on March 14<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/is-the-crackdown-on-the-muslim-brotherhood-pushing-the-group-toward-violence/>

<sup>70</sup>Brown N.J. & Hamzawy A., The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood: Islamist participation in a closing political environment, Carnegie Middle East Center, 2010

These internal debates over specific issues come from the fact that the Brotherhood has been facing an internal dispute between two Guidance Bureaus, which are executive bodies, that formulate the policies of the organization. For example, the historical leadership led by Mahmoud Ezzat rejects any use of violence while the new leadership accepts violence under certain limits to weaken the current regime.<sup>71</sup> Even though the historical leadership had managed to restore its authority over most of the offices in Egypt, most of the movement had been unhappy about both leaderships and decided to take a step back from the struggle with the risk of the more violent group in the Brotherhood, the Jihadi, to prevail. More and more members decided to defect to join these more radical and violent groups, posing a threat to the regime itself. For this reason, the Brotherhood and the regime had both interest in preventing the worsening of this phenomenon. There was the need for a compromise to end the dispute between the two leaderships to establish the legitimacy of the Brotherhood in the eyes of its members. Moreover, a different strategy was needed to isolate different branches that have been appearing the last year and have attracted numerous young members, and particularly those inside prisons and that created a totally different more violent current within the Brotherhood that can't be considered as "Islamist" in its pure meaning.<sup>72</sup>

Egyptian Political Islam has always been about anti-colonial or anti-governmental movements (except for Al-Azhar and some other groups under Sadat in the early 70s) and contemporary Political Islam in its origins and manifestations has strong roots in the Egyptian experience. That is why, despite the Muslim Brotherhood has always been a symbol of Political Islam globally, it is indeed a result of nationalism. Political Islam in Egypt has three forms: the first one is traditional and state-authorized Islam, such as Al Azhar, one of the oldest Islamic institutions, the second is more modern

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<sup>72</sup>Fahmi G., The debate over the use of violence within the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after 2013, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Middle East Directions Programme, 2018

and popular represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and the third is the more radical and fanatic of Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>73</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood's quest was based on the teachings of Islam but mediated by Hassan al-Banna, while Al Azhar's wanted to make Islam influential in shaping the lives of Egyptians. The only characteristic that could bond them was their dependence on politics to spread their ideas and their affiliation with the state. The newer radical Islamist movement that was born in the 70s, decided to pursue a violent confrontation with the state instead. Most of these radicals are people that detached themselves from the Muslim Brotherhood and organized in cells. Among the most important groups there is the Islamic Liberation Party, Al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, Al-Jihad and al-Jama'a al-Islamiya and they refused the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood because of its compromises and accommodation with the Egyptian government. The power of Islamic militants grew with the creation of Islamized zones, controlled neighborhoods in Cairo where these groups imposed their own social and moral code and welfare services. At the moment it seems hard to imagine such groups taking power in Egypt, as they lack social and material infrastructure, mass support and a charismatic leader but Political Islam is still a rising ideology among common people as most of their interests are domestic and not international. Political Islam in general, despite the particular current, have gained cultural legitimacy by becoming a part of the life of a common Muslim, not only those of marginalized groups. Secular institutions are threatened by violent Islamic groups and that is why the Muslim Brotherhood have often become the dominant voices. Their accomplishment is to have created a normative order, motivated not only by religious ideas, but also political, economic and social considerations. The government, on the other side, sees moderate Islam as a critique of its failures and a challenge to its legitimacy and stability. Despite their fight against radical and violent Islam, moderate Islamists such

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<sup>73</sup>Kikkawa T., Bibliographical Essay on Egypt's Political Islam, Ritsumeikan University, Link: [http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/ir/isaru/assets/file/ronsyu/ronsyu-02\\_04kikkawa.pdf](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/ir/isaru/assets/file/ronsyu/ronsyu-02_04kikkawa.pdf)

as the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Azhar are still attacked by the institutions because of the willingness to push their Islamic agenda forward despite the secular state institutions, without understand their position against radical and confrontational means.<sup>74</sup>

Before the Arab Spring in Egypt, President Mubarak established an autocratic rule in the country, especially aimed towards lower classes in order to gain obedience and discipline. Under him, Islam was not considered the religion of the state anymore and women and Christians were allowed run for the Presidency. This move was a response against the rising threat of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country.<sup>75</sup>

## **Salafists**

The military regime has always been fighting a battle against Muslim Brotherhood's political Islam, especially on media and social networks. Rulers like Nasser had tried to fight political Islam with poor results as the movement is popular and not political, with beliefs that can't be defeated. Even now, with the political defeat of the Muslim Brotherhood, the ideology hasn't disappeared. The history of the Muslim Brotherhood is a history of failed opportunities because it failed to seize power, and when it did, for two years, the result was not as expected. The Muslim Brotherhood, after their failed government, left a hole in Political Islam in Egypt that could be filled by Salafism. Salafism is followed by about 5-6 million of people in Egypt and was tolerated by the Mubarak regime because of its lack of history of violence, structure and political ambitions and even benefitted financially.

Since 2011 it has been very dynamic and decided, against their principles, to enter politics in a pluralistic and modern system. They were going through some difficult times with Mubarak's

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<sup>74</sup>Kikkawa T., Bibliographical Essay on Egypt's Political Islam, Ritsumeikan University, Link: [http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/ir/isaru/assets/file/ronsyu/ronsyu-02\\_04kikkawa.pdf](http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/ir/isaru/assets/file/ronsyu/ronsyu-02_04kikkawa.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Mandour M., The tentacles of autocratic regimes: the case of Egypt, OpenDemocracy, January 18th 2018, Last accessed on August 28th 2019, Link: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/tentacles-of-autocratic-regimes-case-of-egypt>

presidency, but despite the hard times, they managed to form a new party in 2011, participate in the parliamentary elections, parliamentary elections and the Constitution-drafting process even if they officially declared to be strongly apolitical. Indeed, they always focused on preaching their ideals and focusing on social welfare but decided to make a comeback in the biggest democracy in North Africa.<sup>76</sup>

The wave of Salafism that filled Egypt comes from the Sahwa movement, started by religiously inspired actors for the goal of the revival of the central role of Islam in Egyptian life following a literal approach to Islam. This has placed the group in clear contrast with Al Azhar as it has always been anti tradition. After 2011, participating in the new system was preferable to dictatorship as democracy would provide for freedoms that Salafis needed for their proselytism.

When the group decided to enter politics, it was divided into three sub-groups:

- Unorganized Salafists who allied with the Muslim Brotherhood against secularism, because they feared internal competition. This group believed in a united front with the Muslim Brotherhood, despite ideological differences between the two, for a united goal. This was obviously hard to achieve as the two groups never managed to get over these differences since the 1970s and it would mean to join the Brotherhood's cause in a subordinate position.

- Organized group that went against the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology. This was mainly made up by radicalized youth or ex-Jihadists and Qutbist that opted for revolutionary protest. This approach, as stated after, would be the most appropriate as even if this group was made up by ex-Jihadist, their aim was to create a party that could compete with the Brotherhood in elections even if it meant being co-opted by the state to secure their own existence.

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<sup>76</sup>El Sherif A., Egypt's Salafits at a Crossroads, Carnegie Middle East Center, April 29th 2015,Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/29/egypt-s-salafists-at-crossroads-pub-59928>

- Disaffected Islamists who acted alone through violent jihadism or revolts.<sup>77</sup> This approach was hard to support, as not many Egyptians would help violent individuals in their goals but more importantly, in their means to achieve these goals.<sup>78</sup>

## **The dynamics after the Arab Spring**

Seen the history of contrasts between the Brotherhood and Salafists, they finally decided to create a political party, Nour, with the goal to endorse Sharia'a as a framework, apply it following local conditions, safeguard Salafist rights and discredit violent confrontations among Islamists and in society. They keep believing that they are the only guardians of Islamic law and that is why they extensively critique the Brotherhood in religious and political matters, such as in their support for democracy or gender equality that according to Salafists, goes against Islamic principles.<sup>79</sup>

The presence of Salafi parties changed the dynamics in the country, but also the process of democratic transition. Despite being conservative, they accepted peaceful political action and refuse violence. That is why since 2014 Salafists have been trying to cut ties with a violent branch of their group, the Salafi Jihadi. The main parties in the country are Nour and Watan. The former one since 2013, has loose ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and indeed intervened against Morsi, who was backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, while Watan stayed close to them. Salafism must face numerous challenges, among them avoid the rising prominence of Salafi Jihadism which could be solved with rebuilding their image as legitimate and independent actors, create ideas for young people to uphold Sharia'a through peaceful political action, find a balance between religious and political activities and expand their scope to non-Islamic circles.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>El Sherif A., Egypt's Salafists at a Crossroads, Carnegie Middle East Center, April 29th 2015,Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/29/egypt-s-salafists-at-crossroads-pub-59928>

<sup>79</sup>Ibid

<sup>80</sup>Fahmi G., The Future of Political Salafism in Egypt and Tunisia, Carnegie Middle East Center, November 16th 2015, Link: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/11/16/future-of-political-salafism-in-egypt-and-tunisia-pub-61871>

The win of Morsi in Egypt has hit Salafist quite hard because it confirmed the Muslim Brotherhood, that backed him up, as the most important political party. Since the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group in 2013, Salafists have supported the re-election of the President Al Sisi who successively, asked for their help to eliminate the Muslim Brotherhood. The Nour party gradually disappeared, to leave space for Al Azhar's elite that always contrasted Salafism and leans more towards Sufism.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, there are two issues that prevent the growth of Salafism, the first one being Al Sisi's restrictions to opposition and the second being the silent alliance between the political establishment and the Islamic one, represented by the Al-Azhar network. The two need each other, as the government needs to find legitimization and Al-Azhar needs to extend its influence in society and education. In fact, the Al-Azhar networks enrolls half million students and make up a big part of the country's future workforce.<sup>82</sup> Al-Azhar moral authority has been under pressure since its nationalization in 1961 and even more recently, after their alliance with Al Sisi that can put at risk its position as a leading center of moderate Islam. The dream of establishing an Islamic political and social order has faded with the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and fragmentation in the country. Despite the increased force of Islamists, the Muslim Brotherhood could still manage a comeback if they play their cards right and find a balance between their original ideology and nowadays Egyptian social context.<sup>83</sup> Also important is the relationship between political Islam in the North African country and Western institutions such as the European Union and countries like United States. The latter has been funding military authoritarianism through concessions to Egypt to pursue their interests domestically and regionally despite their human rights violations and authoritarian rule and

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<sup>81</sup>Jamestown Foundation, Salafists Challenge al-Azhar for Ideological Supremacy in Egypt, September 16th 2010, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 35, Link: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c9c50952.html>

<sup>82</sup>Campanini M., Islamism in Egypt: the Emerging Divide, ISPI, March 15th 2018, Last Accessed on August 27th 2019, Link: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/islamism-egypt-emerging-divide-19868>

<sup>83</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the Future of Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 21st 2014, Link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/10/21/muslim-brotherhood-andfuture-of-political-islam-in-egypt-pub-56980>

despite having put the Muslim Brotherhood in the list of terrorist organizations.<sup>84</sup> Apart from the academic definition of Political Islam and the different currents that decided to implement it for their political program, it is important to underline what definition of Political Islam will be used throughout this dissertation, therefore a political program with Islam at the center and as a source of identity and action.

## **CHAPTER 2**

This chapter is going to examine the behavior and practices of the three most important political and religious group of the Egypt: in order, Al Azhar, Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood especially in the post-2011 period. For Al Azhar and Salafists, it is also important to analyze their general behavior through the years, to find patterns or interesting actions that could lead us to think of them as representant of political Islam, or also internal fragmentations that could represent a threat. For the Muslim Brotherhood, it will be useful to understand the reasons behind its rise and fall. The behavior of an organization, whether it stays the same throughout the years, or it changes, can show a lot about its strength, its popular support grows if people realize that the group only has one course of actions and keep its reputation intact.

### **Al Azhar**

Al-Azhar in Arabic means “most luminous”, and in Egypt this term represents the world’s oldest mosque, university and Islam’s most important seat of learning. During the early years of Islam, the Quran was studied in the mosque together with the hadiths and the Islamic jurisprudence, making the

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<sup>84</sup>Aloush A., Should Washington accept the rise of political Islam in Egypt?, The Globe Post, June 24th 2018, Last accessed on August 28th 2019, Link: <https://theglobepost.com/2018/06/24/muslim-brotherhood-egypt-us>

mosque become the first step in the development of a college. Indeed, Al Azhar flourished into a college and, later, a university, while other mosque-based institutions of learning became extinct over time.<sup>85</sup> To understand the role of the institution before and after the Revolution, it's important to underline that its role fluctuated with time. For example, when the state was weaker or stronger, all institutions were affected, including Al Azhar.<sup>86</sup>

It is widely believed that in Egypt, Al Azhar should be more independent from the regime and that the events over last year's events showed struggles between Al Azhar's leadership and its role in the Egyptian society. The organization is a very central element in the state-religion complex in Egypt as the country has a deep-rooted apparatus that links religion and state. In this sense, none is arguing for a separation between state and religion but more about the ways in which the two institutions interact. The members of Al Azhar want more powers and believe that the group should be more authoritative and autonomous.<sup>87</sup>

Al Azhar's campuses remained outside the revolution as university politics had become depoliticized by 2011 with sporadic demonstrations in the years before.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, some of the scholars decided to participate in the revolution while the shaykh took a cautious pose by discouraging demonstrations but hardly giving the regime an unconditioned endorsement, which left him a little less politically exposed when the revolution triumphed.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the cautious pose, after the fall of Mubarak, Al Sisi showed himself in television and the grand imam of Al Azhar was there next to him. The institution has always balanced itself between the government and the protests during the 2011 Revolution and it also has a decades-long practice

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<sup>85</sup>Encyclopedia, Al-Azhar, February 27<sup>th</sup> 2020, last accessed on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, link:

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/al-azhar>

<sup>86</sup> Brown N.J. & Mariam G., The Battle Over Al Azhar, Carnegie Middle East Center, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, last accessed on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/70103>

<sup>87</sup>Brown N.J., Post-Revolutionary Al Azhar, The Carnegie Papers, September 2011, pp. 1

<sup>88</sup>Ibid,pp.1

<sup>89</sup>Ibid, pp.9

of lending its prestige to those in power. The imam, for this unpopular support, had soon to face a protest in the main campus in Cairo where students demanded the reinstatement of Morsi, a Brotherhood leader, that Al Sisi tried to wipe away. This mood contrasted with the extensive Al Sisi support in Egypt, especially in areas where the Brotherhood failed to mobilize popular support.<sup>90</sup>

One of the outcomes of the revolution has been the departure of the President Mubarak with the promise of parliamentary and presidential elections with a new constitution. These attempts have not been easy and often escaped attention because of the huge political problems that followed the forced resignation and broke the authoritarian regime. Defining the relationship between religion and state has been central to examine Egypt's political transformation because religion is a part of the educational curriculum and many mosques are managed through the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Al Azhar is a very complex institution which began as an important mosque and center of Islamic learning, while now it has developed into the educational apparatus of the country. That is why a lot of people have been discussing about its role in society and politics. The final decision of the struggle will shape the role of religion in Egyptian public life. The group always had a difficult relationship with Islamist movements in the country. Since the 1970s, Al Azhar developed links with other movements with more Salafi inclinations but also with the Muslim Brotherhood as the latter had advocated for a stronger public role for Al Azhar. Other members of the group decided to take instead a more strict, Salafi approach.<sup>91</sup> While Al Azhar does not differ much from the Brotherhood ideologically, it is strictly opposed to the ideology of their Salafi allies, which poses a challenge between the relationship of the government and Al Azhar.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Fick M., Al Azhar takes centre stage in struggle for Egypt, Reuters, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, Last accessed on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-politics-azhar-idINDEE9BJ03H20131220>

<sup>91</sup>Brown N.J., Post-Revolutionary Al Azhar, The Carnegie Papers, September 2011, pp.6

<sup>92</sup>El Masry S., Al-Azhar of post-revolutionary Egypt, Daily News, March 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, last accessed on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.dailynewssegypt.com/2013/03/20/al-azhar-of-post-revolutionary-egypt/>

Not only Al Azhar's reputation and credibility was ruined because of their support to Al Sisi after the revolution, but the group also backed the Mubarak regime while most Egyptians were trying to depose him. They believed that the protests were not religiously acceptable and were indeed haram. It is important to note that many members of Al Azhar participated in the demonstrations with other Egyptians, nonetheless. After the fall of Mubarak, Al Azhar realized that the institution could finally express its ideas without pressure from the government and had the possibility to become an important pillar for the post-Mubarak Egypt.<sup>93</sup>

Seen that the institution lies in a limbo, after the Revolution, three main ideas were developed about how Al Azhar should manage its role in Egypt. The first one is called the "shaykh's wasatiyya", wasatiyya is an approach that believes that divine instructions were given to human beings in their own interest and therefore the interpretation of Islamic teachings are very beneficial to the believers. This is a modernist approach that goes against the textualism of Salafism as it wants to help Egyptians to interpret religious texts to apply them to the present times.<sup>94</sup> The second approach is the liberals', they worry about Islamist forces pushing to make Egyptian public life more religious. They think on one side, that Al Azhar has always been a strong censorship authority, but it also represents a bulwark against Islamist social and political movement and that is why on the liberal side, there was support for the group against more radical religious ones. The third approach is to give Al Azhar fiscal and administrative autonomy and is supported by militant traditionalists who want a powerful Al Azhar to discredit those who try to attempt to understand and interpret Islamic teachings. They want an institution who could speak unitedly and take a leading role.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Telci I.N., Positions of Social Actors in the Egyptian Revolution: A Micro level Analysis, Sakarya University, Journal of Academic Studies, 2011, pp. 193-195

<sup>94</sup>Brown N.J., Post-Revolutionary Al Azhar, The Canergie Papers, September 2011, pp.10-15

<sup>95</sup>Ibid, pp.10-15

If we talk about the likeliness of these approaches to be put into practice, it is not possible to use the two more extreme ideas of the liberals and of the militant traditionalist, but on the other side, the outcome might be a powerful religious establishment who could finally strongly influence certain areas of public life, and ideally create a country where state relations would be separated from the religious establishment.<sup>96</sup>

Al Azhar had limited effect on the revolution, but the revolution, instead, greatly affected the group. A new wave of activism reached the institution where employees demonstrated, and students took up the revolution's cause. The struggle for the governance of Al Azhar in Egypt started right with the 2011 Revolution. Despite other issues such as the strength of Islamists, the public presence of Salafis, the legalization the Muslim Brotherhood, all got public attention, the changes in Al Azhar could influence the country just as much or even more.<sup>97</sup>

Despite the difficulties that the group faced, the post-Revolutionary al Azhar mainly focused on its autonomy, authority, distancing itself from other currents and internal balancing. The most important change after the Revolution is the fact the group got involved in many different and social matters. Its role was concentrated on three main focuses: the national one because of its concern with the affairs of the nation, an Arabic and Islamic one because it had been trusted by Islamic countries, and a global one where it represents Egypt on the international scene.<sup>98</sup>

In 2012, a new law that put Al-Azhar under the control of the state and made it part of the presidential Institution, was amended, For this reason, a new body that was previously disbanded in the 1960s was re-created and it was called the Body of Senior Scholars, with its role being overseeing Al Azhar.

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<sup>96</sup>Brown N.J., Post-Revolutionary Al Azhar, The Canergie Papers, September 2011, pp.16-17

<sup>97</sup>Ibid pp.9-10

<sup>98</sup>Ibid pp. 9-10

At this time, the Muslim Brotherhood was about to take up a parliamentary majority, not long after the decree was issued, so this legislation was to prevent the Islamist movement from transforming the institution to its own image.<sup>99</sup>

This law granted it greater autonomy from any political authority, but at the same time, putting the autonomy of the group at risk as it could be penetrated by the Brotherhood and Salafis. Therefore, the ouster of Mubarak gave the group the possibility to declare its autonomy from state and giving it a more significant role. Al Azhar continues to play a crucial role in politics and finally its religious authority has been determined. Despite this, it is internally challenged by its own structure and externally by the competition with the Salafis.<sup>100</sup>

## **Salafists**

The history of Salafism dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Egypt. Old and current Salafism are quite different, as the latter is conservative and to some extent even Saudi-Wahabi centric, focusing on a orthodox approach and the return to the literal interpretation of the Quran, while the former had a more modernist approach. The current trend only started developing in the 1970s in Alexandria. One of the main factors of the divide from other Islamist currents were the political and ideological differences. Thanks to its religious education network, the organization spread its ideology across the country in the 80s and 90s. Before the revolution, many Salafi leaders were arrested and tortured despite their political disinterest as the movement kept a low profile to avoid repression.<sup>101</sup> The movement gained importance in the 1990s, during the mass imprisonment on Jihadist in Egypt and the suppression of

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<sup>99</sup>Brown N.J. & Mariam G., The Battle Over Al Azhar, Carnegie Middle East Center, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, last accessed on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/70103>

<sup>100</sup>El Masry S., Al-Azhar of post-revolutionary Egypt, Daily News, March 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, last accessed on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.dailynewssegypt.com/2013/03/20/al-azhar-of-post-revolutionary-egypt/>

<sup>101</sup>Al Anani K. & Malik M., Pious Way to Politics: The Rise of Political Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Digest of Middle East Studies, Vol. 22 n.1, pp.57-73

the Muslim Brotherhood, which gave them the opportunity to expand the presence and gain more visibility across the country.<sup>102</sup>

The politicization of the movement after 2011 is quite significant because it represents a shift and highlights new dynamics for the prominence of Islamic authority in the country. Up until the 2011 protests the movement was only known for their intransigence and refusal to be involved in politics, but when they decided to join politics, they adapted to a pragmatic behavior that did not quite fit into their previous beliefs.<sup>103</sup>

Salafis became very important actors in Islamist politics in Egypt after the revolution. From the fall of Mubarak in 2011 they actively participated in the political process forming three political parties: Al Nour, Al Asala and Al Fadhila which won many seats in the first parliamentary elections in the country after 2011. Since the revolution, the Islamist scene became more diverse and a new process of “salafization” that already overshadowed the country, started in Egypt. This process started a few years before the Arab Spring, when the country witnessed a big wave of Salafism that ended up dominating the religious sphere by the end of the decade.<sup>104</sup>

When Morsi served as president, the Salafis were in a delicate situation because on one side they still saw themselves as a part of the opposition, but on the other they generally supported the Islamist side against liberals or the former regime. In fact, during the constitutional referendum of 2012, while most Salafis believed that the constitution was too secular and promilitary, they still avoided criticizing it in public.<sup>105</sup> Salafists became sort of a united front only with the leadership of Abi Ismail,

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<sup>102</sup>Al Anani K. & Malik M., Pious Way to Politics: The Rise of Political Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Digest of Middle East Studies, Vol. 22 n.1, pp.57-73

<sup>103</sup>Ardovini L., Islamist movements in post-2011 Egypt: Old Actors, New Dynamics, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, February 2019

<sup>104</sup>Al Anani K. & Malik M., Pious Way to Politics: The Rise of Political Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Digest of Middle East Studies, Vol. 22 n.1, pp.57-73

<sup>105</sup>Lacroix S. & Shalata A.Z., The Rise of Revolutionary Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Egypt's Revolutions, Chapter 8, 2016, pp. 163-178

but that didn't stop some Salafi supporters to join Morsi's side, if they felt a lack of leadership from their own party. This situation showed that many of those who demonstrated against the old regime and supported Morsi, were not only from the Muslim Brotherhood but also Salafis.<sup>106</sup>

The Salafists made good use of the liberties won in the revolution, despite not having a big role in the demonstrations that deposed Mubarak. They held conferences all over the world to establish their course for the future.<sup>107</sup> Another consequence of the entry into politics in 2011 has been internal conflicts. Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists don't have a disciplined organization as it comprises many different groups. This situation enabled some flexibility and pragmatism when they mobilized for elections in 2011, as they often recruited local notables who didn't have any affiliation with the group, and they didn't have to follow any organizational procedures. At the same time, the lack of control caused some problematic episodes that put their image at risk.<sup>108</sup>

Salafism's tensions towards other groups started after the overthrow of Mubarak and concerned the referendum of 2011.<sup>109</sup> The Islamists, including Salafis, voted for a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to amend the constitution, while the secularists voted against. The Islamists wanted to safeguard a clause which states that Islamic Law is the main source of legislation and they managed to win the vote. This struggle started the rise to political power for Salafis, as the fight over the Constitution accelerated their entry into politics. They even won 25% of the votes in the 2011/2012 parliamentary elections. Salafis have moved closer to the secular and leftist trends more than one might expect from a highly conservative group and there are different reasons for this course of

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<sup>106</sup>Lacroix S. & Shalata A.Z., The Rise of Revolutionary Salafism in Post-Mubarak Egypt, Egypt's Revolutions, Chapter 8, 2016, pp. 163-178

<sup>107</sup>Nasira H., Salafists, Copts and Sectarianism in Egypt after the Revolution, The Jamestown Foundation, June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, last accessed on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://jamestown.org/program/salafists-copts-and-sectarianism-in-egypt-after-the-revolution/>

<sup>108</sup>Hoigilt J.& Nome F., Egyptian Salafism in Revolution, Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol. 25 n.1, 2014, pp.33-54

<sup>109</sup>Ibid

action.<sup>110</sup> The first one being that they have tried to ally with other forces in the Parliament to counter the threatening dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood and that is why they called all the non-Islamist forces to create a cooperation bloc. Their endorsement for Abd al-Munim Abu l-Futuh in 2012 is another example of this program. Abu l-Futuh was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood but his leftist political identity caused his dismissal from the organization, therefore the Salafis decided to support him instead of Morsi.<sup>111</sup>

They also changed their position towards the military, in the beginning they accepted the SCAF as a legitimate authority but then increasingly started to criticize it. The Salafi movement in Egypt doesn't have the democratic credentials of the Muslim Brotherhood that they acquired through years of opposition to Mubarak. Salafis mostly stayed out of politics and focused on Islamic doctrines and rituals and their only reason to enter politics was to defend the Sharia, even if Islamic law clashes with the idea of democracy. This suggests that when Salafis entered politics, they changed their course of action and started navigating in the political landscape in a complex way and they began to be more ideologically flexible in order to achieve their political interests and advantages. Personal ambitions of politicians and preachers have emerged more than theology after 2011 and this is a reminder of how variable Islamist ideology and movements are.<sup>112</sup>

Since 2013 Al Nour has not made any significant political moves and did not contribute to any challenges that Salafism is facing. These are: identity-based, as al Nour needs to find a way to balance its political engagement with its Salafist nature. Strategic because now al Nour is not putting forward a coherent political front and tactical because the group needs to produce a rational political manifesto

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<sup>110</sup>Hoigilt J.& Nome F., Egyptian Salafism in Revolution, Journal of Islamic Studies, Vol. 25 n.1, 2014, pp.33-54

<sup>111</sup>Ibid

<sup>112</sup>Ibid

to avoid fragmentation. One could say that Salafism was impacted way more than the Muslim Brotherhood after the 2011 popular protests because while the Brotherhood had always been involved in politics, the Salafis experienced a quick politicization that led to strategic difficulties.<sup>113</sup>

Three years after the revolution, with Al Sisi, the Salafis were dissatisfied with the political situation in the country. It was clear that the regime had no intention of giving them a political prominence, but worse, they had no representation in the transitional government with therefore no way of influence the new Constitution. What the group did not consider was that with the Brotherhood not being a contender anymore, another player gained importance in the mosques: Al Azhar. The two organizations always opposed each other as they both have different views on social, political and religious issues. The new regime decided to rely on Al Azhar to regain the support, which represented a threat to the Salafis<sup>114</sup>

Despite the disappointment of the group towards Al Sisi after his coup, in 2013 and years later, in 2018, they decided to support his re-election. The reason for change of mind, is that Salafists remain the most organized Islamist political force after the ban of the Muslim Brotherhood, considered a terrorist organization and that them and Al Sisi managed to agree on several matters. Moreover, Al Sisi welcomed the alliance with the Salafists because he wanted to discredit claims by the Brotherhood that believed that by fighting against Morsi, the army of Al Sisi was instead fighting a war against Islam itself.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Ardovini L., Islamist movements in post-2011 Egypt: Old Actors, New Dynamics, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, February 2019

<sup>114</sup>Lacroix S., Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The politics of Hizb Al Nour, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, last accessed on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/01/egypt-s-pragmatic-salafis-politics-of-hizb-al-nour-pub-64902>

<sup>115</sup>Emam A., Why are Egypt's Salafists backing Sisi?, The Arab Weekly, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, last accessed on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://thearabweekly.com/why-are-egypts-salafists-backing-sisi>

Brotherhood after the 2011 popular protests because while the Brotherhood had always been involved in politics, the Salafis experienced a quick politicization that led to strategic difficulties.<sup>116</sup>

## **The Muslim Brotherhood**

After Morsi got elected in 2012 a new chapter for the Muslim Brotherhood's history was starting. The organization was in power, but not in full control of the state apparatus as the group failed to make a transition from an opposition movement to a ruling party. Moreover, it encountered political, social and economic challenges that required changes in the movement itself. Many factors contributed to the downfall of the Brotherhood, including the resistance of the "deep state" and the regional hostility towards the group, while the loss of power was facilitated by: the burden of conservatism and lack of revolutionary agenda, the organizational stagnation and the lack of governance experience for the leaders and in particular, Morsi.<sup>117</sup>

As their first move right after the end of the Arab Spring, the Muslim Brotherhood accepted the SCAF's project that called for elections and legal reforms rather than radical changes. They gradually became conscious of their own political weight and stabilizing force and therefore on February 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood announced the creation of their political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and appointed Morsi as the President of the party. When Morsi was declared President, his powers were limited until June 2011, when an agreement between the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood was found. Morsi's coup in 2012 started a new phase for Egypt full of limitations and uncertainties and his government saw the light only on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012. When pursuing its strategy,

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<sup>116</sup>Ardovini L., Islamist movements in post-2011 Egypt: Old Actors, New Dynamics, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, February 2019

<sup>117</sup>Al Anani K., Upended Path: The Rise and Fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Middle East Journal, Vol 69 n.4, Autumn 2015

the Muslim Brotherhood faced resistance from state institutions and members of the old regime, but it also had internal problems, among them its own unpreparedness. The group never expected to be a governing party and for this reason it didn't have a proper political program, administrators and statesmen. Moreover, their experience under authoritarian rule shaped a secretive organization based only on loyal members which took decisions in a non-transparent way. Finally, there has always been an imbalance between the Muslim Brotherhood and other political forces regarding social base which didn't include the broader Egyptian civil and political society. They soon appeared to be incompetent and were blamed for the deteriorating living conditions in the country. They also turned their back on many opportunities to halt the revolt and kept their conservative strategy, seeking compromises with the former regime.<sup>118</sup>

From 2011 to 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to lead a democratic transition and failed to understand the need for a completely different political culture. The leaders did not take care of the resources, networks and knowledge necessary for the implementation of effective reforms and these failures were the results of complex relationships between the state and the leadership. Two conditions that were necessary for democratization were not fulfilled, the first being a consensus on new rules of the political game and the second being an ideological and organizational transformation embracing new principles.<sup>119</sup> During the revolution, the Brotherhood made sure that it was not perceived as taking control of the protests and the leaders were aware that the people were guided by goals of freedom and social justice. They knew that other political groups were mobilizing supporters and that is why the Brotherhood decided not to alienate any other ideology by expressing their Islamist views right away. After Mubarak's fall, though, they decided to show their political capacities and

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<sup>118</sup>Pioppi D., Playing with fire. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian Leviathan, *The International Spectator*, Vol. 48 n.4, December 2013, 51-68

<sup>119</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the future of political Islam in Egypt part 1 on a series on Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2014

started to look down on other movements, therefore becoming the only negotiator with the military and representants of the old regime. Some of the factors that led this shift were the group nonrevolutionary character, the fear of being sidelined in a constitution writing process led by liberals and leftists and the belief that the representants of the old state preferred to negotiate with more conservative actors like the Brotherhood. Moreover, the leadership strongly undermined the importance of the Arab Spring, believed it to be a gift to reward them for their past decades of efforts against Mubarak. They, therefore, focused on seizing the opportunity without caring about long-term interests, even though taking full responsibility for the whole post-Mubarak political situation in Egypt was a political suicide.<sup>120</sup>

Terrorist attacks numbers have been rising in Egypt since 2013 with the cause being the fracture of the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi's failure to govern. This has allowed parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood to radicalize and divide itself. A growing number of members started calling for the use of violence to protest after the Al Sisi declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in the late 2013.<sup>121</sup> Even if the threat mostly comes from the Qutbist in the organization, it is also important to underline that the movement divided itself in two factions: one that advocates a peaceful confrontation and the other that supports a revolutionary path. The latter invokes concepts that are more compatible with the mainstream Muslim and has proved itself willing to cooperate with other groups to confront the government. This struggle is unlikely to end soon as the peaceful group

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<sup>120</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the future of political Islam in Egypt part 1 on a series on Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2014

<sup>121</sup>Velez-Green A., From Reform to Revolution: A schism in the Muslim Brotherhood and the rise of homegrown Jihadism in mainland Egypt, Center for a new American Security, August 8<sup>th</sup> 2017, last accessed on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/from-reform-to-revolution>

believes that the other is deviating from the Brotherhood's tradition and should create a new organization, while the revolutionaries are trying to interpret Al Banna's militant episodes.<sup>122</sup>

Terrorist attacks escalated in Egypt after the fall of Morsi and it was believed that these acts would stop as soon as Morsi returned to the government even though it seems oversimplified to think that radical groups directly emerged after Morsi's rule. The situation has been in chaos since the fall of Mubarak, creating therefore a favorable environment for the emergence of Jihadi movements as it was confusing whether political life would come back to normality.<sup>123</sup> Many people wondered if political Islam would make a comeback since the Brotherhood and the Salafis joined the revolution.

Ideological shifts in the organization are some of the consequences of Morsi's ouster. Traditionally, the Muslim Brotherhood spent time in political activities and charity at the expense of proselytizing, which would have been more useful to win votes. This course of action strengthened their electoral power, but it damaged their identity as an institution. Since Morsi's overthrow the group decided to return to their traditional doctrine, and this has been a crucial decision for the Brotherhood's future. The organization has been adapting quickly to the regime, but it has slowly reformulated its strategy, especially regarding intellectual and doctrinal adaptations, becoming more and more vague and therefore, undefendable.<sup>124</sup>

The Brotherhood's ability to survive lies in the characteristics of its organizational structure, but also in its consistent social and political vision. In difficult times this vision was crucial to mobilize the population against the regime, it reinforced its unity and willingness to carry on. After Nasser's

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<sup>122</sup>Ranko A. & Yaghi M., Organizational Split and Radicalization Within Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, The Washington Institute, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2019

<sup>123</sup>Rabie A.H., Radical Islamist Movements in Egypt, The Rise of Religious Radicalism in the Arab World: Significance, Implications and Counter-strategies, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Jordan & Iraq, 2015, pp. 85-92

<sup>124</sup>El Sherif A., The Muslim Brotherhood and the future of political Islam in Egypt part 2 on a series on Political Islam in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2014

repression in the 50s and 60s and decades of antagonism from Sadat and Mubarak, the group gained experience that it used to oppose Al Sisi, showing that it can't be stopped with prison walls and exiles.<sup>125</sup>

Years later, in 2019, after hundreds of people marched through Cairo for Al Sisi to step down, he assessed the explosion of anger against his rule stating that if political Islam movements will aspire to power, the region will remain unstable. The Muslim Brotherhood is the country's bigger threat and he is the only man who can guarantee stability. The group has often been falsely accused and used as a scapegoat for the regime's repressive measures and if once it was the most influential non-state movement, it has now been reduced to a divided and weak organization.<sup>126</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood also changed its strategy in 2020 when it agreed to cooperate with Mohamed Ali against the President Al Sisi. This move is a turning point and it is in contrast with the group's approach during the last six years, but since Morsi's overthrow and death, the organization has been trying to find its way out of a difficult situation. By accepting Ali's strategy, the group agrees to cooperate with other groups and form alliances and to help the unification of all the forces against Al Sisi, without being the lead of this movement. The Muslim Brotherhood, therefore, gives up the lead of this operation and declares that it is willing to be only one of many actors in Egyptian's civil society, and that only unity can help to establish a modern Egyptian state.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Zollner B., Surviving repression: How Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has carried on, Carnegie Middle East Center, March 11<sup>th</sup> 2019, last accessed on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/11/surviving-repression-how-egypt-s-muslim-brotherhood-has-carried-on-pub-78552>

<sup>126</sup>England A., A broken Muslim Brotherhood struggles for relevance, Financial Times, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019, last accessed on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.ft.com/content/e1448ada-e39b-11e9-b112-9624ec9edc59>

<sup>127</sup>Anadolu Agency, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Changes Course, January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, last accessed on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/egypts-muslim-brotherhood-changes-course/1690891>

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we discussed the reaction of Al Azhar, Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood to the end of the Arab Spring and subsequent rule of Morsi. For Al Azhar this change resurfaced internal issues regarding the lack of authority and autonomy of the organization, but at the same time its willingness to keep its power and adapt by aligning itself with Al Sisi after Morsi's fall and also Mubarak in the pre-Arab Spring period. Salafists on the other side, decided to enter politics to take advantage of the Arab Spring in the country but did not adapt and decided to keep pursuing their strictly religious ideas, despite their growing support and success in the elections. The Muslim Brotherhood failed to achieve a democratic transition because of the difficult situation between state and institutions. Moreover, the group expected to be handed the power just because it led the Arab Spring and spent decades to fight against Mubarak meanwhile situation provoked a rising number of terrorist attacks in the country.

## **CHAPTER 3**

This chapter is going to analyze two important groups: Salafists and Al Azhar, in the post-2011 Egypt and their behavior in this time frame. We will be able to check for any similarities with the behavior of the Brotherhood, therefore leading the hypothesis that one or both of the two groups could continue to honor the legacy of the more famous Egyptian-born organization since its repression under Al Sisi and its fall after 2013. Indeed, after the Arab Spring, statist Islamism represented by the Brotherhood, is responsible for the expansion of the political sphere in the Arab world to help democratization. The uprising of 2011 also challenged statist Islamism because in Egypt the Brotherhood no longer had the political field to itself, because it struggled to win the support of other (especially secular) actors and struggled to consolidate support. For non-statist Islamists the situation post-2011 was different.<sup>128</sup> The failure of statist Islamism and democratization have ensured the relevance of other groups such as Al Azhar and Salafists.<sup>129</sup>

After the Brotherhood's ouster, a new history began in Egypt. A history where other actors in the country could find their place in politics and establish their authority. Could Salafists and Al Azhar support Political Islam even if none of them originally backed that idea and even if they were both against the Brotherhood's rule? Or, on the other hand, they stayed loyal to their principles and managed to acquire a spot in politics without changing their course of action? The vacuum left by Political Islam could be filled by Salafism, as it is today a growing phenomenon thanks to its propaganda and its ideas. Some issues prevent Salafists growth in Egypt nonetheless, the first one being the little room Al Sisi grants to the opposition, especially if religious, and the second one being

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<sup>128</sup>Hamid S., *Temptations of Power Islamists & Illiberal Democracy in a new Middle East*, Oxford University Press, pp. 38-50

<sup>129</sup>Stein E. & Volpi F., *Islamism and the State after the Arab Uprisings: Between People Power and State Power*, *Democratization* 22, no. 2, 2015, pp. 276–293

the silence between the Egyptian government and the Islamic establishment, represented by Al Azhar. In fact, the government and Al Azhar need each other to extend their influence on the country.<sup>130</sup> Al Azhar have as a bonus, its dominant religious position in the country which could back them up in case they decided to enter explicitly into politics.

Future Islamists need some shifts to survive in the Egyptian society. First, they need to support democracy as it is compatible and necessary for modern Islamic societies. Second, they need to change from Islamic identity to Islamic values because unfortunately the consequences of the unification of political Islam against the West have been the reduction of faith to an identity and ideology. It is no more seen as a set of values but as a political ideology that a group seeking power believes in. Third, they need to change their philosophical approach to the concept of Sharia, try to approach it in a more modern way rather than putting into place a centuries-old understanding of it. Fourth, they need to move towards pragmatism, away from dogmatism and symbolism such as anti-Western slogans and demonization. Lastly, they need to work on their credibility as between 2011 and 2013 the Brotherhood broke many of their political promises and the support is not balanced throughout the country.<sup>131</sup> These points will be used as a framework in the two following paragraphs, to compare the actual behavior and the desired one, after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood to check if any of these groups will be able to carry on the Brotherhood's legacy.

## **Al Azhar**

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<sup>130</sup>Campanini M., Islamism in Egypt: the emerging divide, ISPI, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2018, last accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/islamism-egypt-emerging-divide-19868>

<sup>131</sup>Khan M., Islam, Democracy and Islamism after the counterrevolution in Egypt, Middle East Policy Council, 2013

After the end of Morsi's rule in Egypt, Al Azhar developed a close relationship with the new elected President Al Sisi. This relationship, from 2013 to today, hasn't stop developing and certainly has been subject to different changes in the perspective of the two actors. As previously stated, when Al Sisi appeared on television saying that he deposed Morsi, the grand imam of Al Azhar was there next to him.<sup>132</sup>

Al Sisi's campaign to put himself at the head of a moderate revolution started indeed in Al Azhar university, therefore confirming it as an integral part of the regime. The control over Al Azhar has been, nonetheless, one of the pillars since the 1950s. In fact, the country political authorities even decided whom to appoint as the head of the institution up until 2011, when talks started about an increased autonomy and independence of the group. Al Azhar for Al Sisi has always been an important instrument for the nationalization of Islam, meaning the exportation of a certain model of relationship between religion and state and the diminishment of the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>133</sup>

The presence of Al Azhar after Morsi's deposition next to Al Sisi, despite looking as a clear move towards a "friendship", was in reality just to prevent a greater harm and accept a lesser harm, therefore accept early elections and the deposition of Morsi to prevent a bloodshed. This move showed Al Azhar's support to the President, but at the same time it absolved the group from the blame in case things escalated into violence.<sup>134</sup> Traditional powers are one of the sources of authority in Egypt and Al Azhar is not an exception to this, as it has penetrated local communities all over Egypt representing

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<sup>132</sup>Fick M., Al Azhar takes centre stage in struggle for Egypt, Reuters, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, Last accessed on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-politics-azhar-idINDEE9BJ03H20131220>

<sup>133</sup>Caridi P., Consensus-building in Al Sisi's Egypt, Insight Egypt n.7, February 2015

<sup>134</sup>Abdallah B., Al Azhar and Sisi's Regime: Structural Roots of Disagreement, Atlantic Council, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, Last accessed on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/al-azhar-and-sisi-s-regime-structural-roots-of-disagreement/>

traditional thinking. But it needs to be underlined that there is not a good relationship between Al Sisi and traditional political forces, and he had always opposed the rules of Egypt's National Democratic party and had even stated that he does not want a return to Mubarak's times. Because of this, most traditional political powers decided to boycott the elections to punish him with empty polling booths. The overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood didn't help the formation of an alliance between Al Azhar and the new regime, but it was a turning point as religious leaders and officials tried to find a common ground on how to manage affairs after the end of the Muslim Brotherhood's rule.<sup>135</sup>

Al Sisi has often manipulated Al Azhar for his own gains. He made several calls to reform, to modernize but also accused the group of supporting ISIS by not declaring it *takfiri*. He presented himself with the Sufis during his first days as a President, showing that his religious legitimacy didn't only rest in the hands of Al Azhar. At the same time, he tried to manipulate state institutions to ensure that Al Azhar kept a high level of legitimacy, because a lack of legitimacy for Al Azhar would lead to a difficult situation for the upcoming project of political legitimization. The state ensures that Al Azhar retained some moral legitimacy by exploiting the response of the three institutions, Al Azhar, Dar-Ul-Ifta and The Ministry of Awfaq, who wanted control over the religious sphere, despite Al Sisi being the responsible to decide on the matter. This situation created a perception that Al Azhar is now just a lesser evil due to the lack of alternatives in the country and that brought younger Al Azhari graduates to create new institutions to revive the old spirit.<sup>136</sup>

The Grand Imam of Al Azhar and Al Sisi have often quarreled about different issues. The latter often accuses the former of spreading extremism and misinterpreting the ideals of Islam, pushes the

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<sup>135</sup>Abdallah B., Al Azhar and Sisi's Regime: Structural Roots of Disagreement, Atlantic Council, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2017, Last accessed on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/al-azhar-and-sisi-s-regime-structural-roots-of-disagreement/>

<sup>136</sup>Bano M. & Benadi H., Regulating religious authority for political gains: Al-Sisi's vof Al-Azhar in Egypt, Third World Quarterly, pp.1604-1621, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Egyptian security services to ignore statements and news by Al Azhar, and prohibited the issuance of publication of a report where Al Azhar called for equality regarding inheritance for men and women. Even if the Grand Imam had been a supporter for the 2013 coup, right after that date he started receiving signs of dissatisfaction from the group.<sup>137</sup>

The relationship deteriorated even more in 2020, when Al Azhar organized an international conference of Islam thought. This conference was organized with the auspices of Al Sisi and that is why participants were chosen not to oppose the President's views. This conference had been used by Al Sisi to expand his control over the institution after a series of failed attempts. The Grand Imam of Al Azhar, the same one that stood next to him after Morsi's ouster, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, decided to undermine the President's plan and change the subject of the conference.<sup>138</sup> It must be noted that Mubarak himself appointed Al-Tayyeb as Grand Imam as they were members of the same party, therefore, politically, as a member of Mubarak's party, he had to be against the Brotherhood. Knowing that the Muslim Brotherhood could easily gain support of Muslims around the world, the Grand Imam supported Al Sisi's military coup against Morsi in 2013 and stayed unperturbed when opponents were injured by the regime during the protests. When killings began, the Grand Imam denounced it, called for authorities and threatened to remove his support for the battle against Morsi. Al Sisi ignored him, got rid of the opponents and became the President. At this point the Grand Imam neither befriended him nor refused his rule, as often he saluted Al Sisi referring to him as the President, but at the same time criticizing his views on Islam. Al Sisi tried to make several changes in the religious and political sphere in Egypt, spheres where Al Azhar is highly entrenched and

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<sup>137</sup>MEMO Middle East Monitor, Egypt: Al-Sisi cracks down on Al-Azhar Grand Imam, December 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, last accessed on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20181201-egypt-al-sisi-cracks-down-on-al-azhar-grand-imam/>

<sup>138</sup>Dalloul A.M., A Clash of Former Allies: Al-Sisi and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, MEMO Middle East Monitor, February 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, last accessed on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200205-a-clash-of-former-allies-al-sisi-and-the-grand-imam-of-al-azhar/>

therefore won its case against the President. The main differences are that Al Sisi believes he is the only one who can solve Egypt's problems while Al Azhar believes it has the duty to protect the role of the most senior positions in the Muslim world.<sup>139</sup>

During the previously mentioned conference, many Muslim scholars, led by Al-Khisht, adopted Al Sisi's ideas and supported him against the Grand Imam. On the other side, Al-Tayyeb made some comments that helped him get praise not only from Egyptians but Muslims around the World who hope he repented for helping Al Sisi in his coup. In this clash of former allies, the President is unsure about himself and his regime, while the Grand Imam could lead a coup against him.<sup>140</sup>

Al Azhar has kept a façade with Al Sisi, at least at the beginning of its mandate, but when things started to look bad for its reputation in the country, the Grand Imam clearly expressed his disappointment towards the regime. The institution also had a difficult relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, which could lead us to think that they would never support Political Islam as it is one of the key pillars for the ideology of the Brotherhood. It had indeed publicly supported Al Sisi's crackdown against the Brotherhood from the beginning. Al Azhar has always been a moderate institution and that is why Al Sisi relies on them to counter radicalism in the classes.<sup>141</sup>

Al Sisi had been advocating for a religious revolution, where the religious scholars could fight radicalized thinking. This view left Al Azhar speechless and worried about the magnitude of this process ahead, especially because the institution had refused to recognize terrorist as *takfir*, therefore

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<sup>139</sup>Dalloul A.M., A Clash of Former Allies: Al-Sisi and the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, MEMO Middle East Monitor, February 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, last accessed on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200205-a-clash-of-former-allies-al-sisi-and-the-grand-imam-of-al-azhar/>

<sup>140</sup>Ibid

<sup>141</sup>Bayoumy Y. & Mourad M., Special report: Egypt deploys scholars to teach moderate Islam, but skepticism abounds, Reuters, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2015, last accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-islam-azhar-special-report/special-report-egypt-deploys-scholars-to-teach-moderate-islam-but-skepticism-abounds-idUSKBN0OG07T20150531>

putting its reputation at risk and because it had often been accused of promoting terrorism through its curriculums.<sup>142</sup> The sheyk believed instead that an economic reform and the implementation of democracy would guarantee order in Arab countries. In the meanwhile, the relationship between Al Azhar and the Brotherhood was not a good one, Al Azhar kept supporting the exclusion of the group from the public realm, to strengthen its own status. The Brotherhood saw the institution as outdated, highly involved in the religious discourse and just a tool in the hands of the regime. Despite the fights between Al Sisi and Al Azhar, the Egyptian institution became the most important religious and political player in the country, reaching Muslim communities in other countries which could lead us to think that it would be a good representant of political Islam in the country because of its reputation, support and long history, even if it has to face difficult internal situations and has to solve the status of its authority and autonomy.<sup>143</sup>

Many scholars believe that political Islam was not defeated in Egypt as the Arab world still believes in Islamic values since the invasion of modernity and elites. Modernity drove Islam on the margin and promised projects that failed on the level of freedom, development, justice and unity. Political Islam is not in a state of decline, but in the process of correcting its mistakes and preparing for a new phase of a better governance because Islamism is deeply rooted in Arab societies.<sup>144</sup> This new phase could make changes in some characteristics that were important for the Muslim Brotherhood, and therefore make Al Azhar gain a better reputation. Such issues are:

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<sup>142</sup>Bayoumy Y. & Mourad M., Special report: Egypt deploys scholars to teach moderate Islam, but skepticism abounds, Reuters, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2015, last accessed on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-islam-azhar-special-report/special-report-egypt-deploys-scholars-to-teach-moderate-islam-but-skepticism-abounds-idUSKBN0OG07T20150531>

<sup>143</sup>Barak M., The Al-Azhar institute: a key player in shaping the religious and political discourse in Egypt, IDC Herzliya, March 28<sup>th</sup> 2016, last accessed on April 4<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.ict.org.il/Article/1647/The-Al-Azhar-Institute#gsc.tab=0>

<sup>144</sup>Tadros S., Islamists Respond to the end of Islamism, Hudson Institute, March 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

The differences between the Brotherhood and Al Azhar are not only doctrinal. The former claimed to be a centrist movement and called for the independence of Al Azhar and restoration of its prestige.<sup>145</sup> The latter saw the Brotherhood more of a political movement than a religious one and they were scared that it would place its figures in key positions in the state religious establishment. And indeed, while Morsi was President, the process of “Brotherhoodizing” brought the group to fill ranks with its own figures. Al Azhar presents an alternative to Islamist political groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafists because unlike them, Al Azhar is not directly mired to politics and its approach to religion is more flexible to 21<sup>st</sup> century society needs. Not only Al Azhar has gained coherence, but it has been able to improve its prestige and centrality in politics and enhanced its position in the country. For the population, the institution represents the true face of Islam, how it should be understood and practiced and that is why the current moment represents a big opportunity.<sup>146</sup>

Coming back to the points that we highlighted at the beginning of the chapter on the shifts that future Islamist group need to face and comparing them to Al Azhar’s behavior, we can say that there might be a link between the two. First of all, the institution has always supported a sort of democratic regime as they believe that there is no conflict between democracy and Sharia and Al-Tayyeb himself has always called on the necessity to pay attention to important issues in the Islamic world.<sup>147</sup> Secondly the group mainly focuses on Islamic values, and has made sure that these values are not reduced to an ideology but are independent from politics and are personal to every believer. Thirdly, they’ve always supported a more modern interpretation of Sharia so that religion could get closer to people

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<sup>145</sup>Brown N.J. & Morsy A., Egypt’s Al-Azhar Steps Forward, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 7<sup>th</sup> 2013, last accessed on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/11/07/egypt-s-al-azhar-steps-forward-pub-53536>

<sup>146</sup>Ibid

<sup>147</sup>Al-Masry Al-Youm, Al-Azhar supports Grand Imam’s call to pay attention to democracy, Egypt Independent, February 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, last accessed on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.egyptindependent.com/al-azhar-supports-grand-imam-s-call-pay-attention-democracy/>

and its popularity could rise. Moreover, the group always showed himself as a representant of the moderate spirit of Islam to fight extremism. Fourthly, Al Azhar's success of modernism is due to its pragmatism and moderation. In fact the group has asserted its influence without using anti-Western slogans and symbolism but only by criticizing the purists during the 2011 revolution.<sup>148</sup> Lastly, they have always had a huge support and credibility in Egypt as the oldest Islamic institution in the country, which made them gain enormous support in all parts of the population. For these reasons, Al Azhar could be representing political Islam in Egypt after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, not as a single voice but as the official voice.

## Salafists

Salafism emerged in the political scene after the January uprisings of 2011. In this period, Salafi groups managed to advance their agenda through politics despite declaring it profane a few weeks before. After winning 24% of the parliamentary seats in 2011/2012 elections, it participated with the Brotherhood in the drafting of the new Constitution.<sup>149</sup> The Al-Nour party was founded right after the fall of Mubarak in February 2011 by members of the Salafis. It had three aims: to ensure that the period after the fall of Mubarak would not become a period where bearded men and veiled women were arrested and tortured and to make the Egyptian government Islamically legitimate.<sup>150</sup> The three main principles for the Al-Nour party were adopting the Sharia as a framework, applying it and following it no matter the circumstances. The political activism of the group revealed some issues such as the failure to separate religion and politics or its popularity among other non-Salafi Islamists since its views were still conservative and rigid. The group, and in particular, the Al-Nour

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<sup>148</sup>Hashim Kamali M., Al-Azhar stands for moderation of thought, New Strait Times, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018, last accessed on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/03/340471/al-azhar-stands-moderation-thought>

<sup>149</sup>Al-Anani K., Political Salafism in Egypt, Orient II, 2016

<sup>150</sup>Brown J.A.C., The Rise and Fall of the Salafi Al-Nour party in Egypt, Jadaliyya, November 14<sup>th</sup> 2013, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/29813>

party has become more vulnerable since the coup and it is undermined by other political actors.<sup>151</sup> Despite Al-Nour being an allied of the Muslim Brotherhood at the beginning, it started supporting Morsi's ouster in 2013. When Al-Sisi announced the fall of Morsi's government, Younes Makhyoun was there, the chairman of Al-Nour despite being, nine months before, an important partner for the Brotherhood and its Constitution. This was a smart move for Al-Sisi, who needed to have at least one Islamist party on his side and if he lost this support, all Al-Nour members would support the Brotherhood instead. Al-Nour was to gain most voters during Egypt's first elections without the Brotherhood, since in the past they always came second. At the same time, rejecting Morsi could have backfired against them as they were both Islamists.<sup>152</sup>

After backing the first elections, in 2018, Salafists also backed Al-Sisi's second re-election because they believed that the President was the only one who could bring stability and protection to the country. Moreover, he could enhance cooperation amongst state institutions and protect the country from outside and inside dangers. The elections held will see only him as a candidate since his regime removed other candidates with threats or arrests. Salafists, through their Al-Nour party urged the citizens to participate in the elections.<sup>153</sup> It needs to be underlined that Al-Nour is an ultra-conservative Islamist party that believes in the implementation of Sharia law and ran as the only Islamist party still active in Egypt following the fall of the Brotherhood in 2013.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Al-Anani K., Political Salafism in Egypt, Orient II, 2016

<sup>152</sup> Kingsley P., Egypt's Salafist al-Nour party wields new influence on post-Morsi coalition, The Guardian, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2013, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/07/egypt-salafist-al-nour-party>

<sup>153</sup>Egypt Today, Salafist Al-Nour party supports Sisi for second term in presidency, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/41266/Salafist-Al-Nour-party-supports-Sisi-for-second-term-in>

<sup>154</sup>Sakr T., Egypt's Salafi Al-Nour Party supports Sisi's 2<sup>nd</sup> Presidential Bid, Egypt Independent, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://egyptindependent.com/egypts-salafi-al-nour-party-supports-sisis-2nd-presidential-bid/>

Salafists believe that this support is the only choice to take if they want to survive in a country where Islamists are a target for the army and that is why it broke its relationship with the Brotherhood after realizing that the party couldn't stay in power.<sup>155</sup>

Salafists don't even want to discuss democracy as they consider it a Western system. Moreover, even the Muslim Brotherhood is more flexible on their approach of Sharia while the Salafis defend that it should be the only source of law. The Brotherhood also recognizes different political parties that do not adhere to Islamic ideologies while Salafis think that the existence of these political parties is against Sharia.<sup>156</sup> Some members believe that Al-Nour had always been worried about the political rivalry with the Brotherhood and to show itself as an alternative to them. They have nonetheless many challenges internally, as some members have refrained from taking part in any political activity and are not happy with the position taken by the party because they believe that Salafis are becoming more politically pluralistic since the January uprising. At the same time, Al Sisi has negative opinions regarding Islamists and has not feared to attack these groups by saying that in the post-elections order political parties would not be allowed, especially if they follow Islamist trends.<sup>157</sup>

Two reasons why Salafism would not work to replace the Brotherhood are: the relationship it might have with Wahabism and violent Jihadism. The rapid ascent of the Al-Nour party has posed questions about its founding particularly because its Constituency mainly came from poor regions in Egypt. For this reason, many are led to believe that the group is receiving funds from another country with a similar ideology: Saudi Arabia. The links between the two countries are clear because the Saud family

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<sup>155</sup>Awadalla N., In survival mode, Egypt's last permitted Islamists back Sisi, Reuters, March 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-election-islamists/in-survival-mode-egypts-last-permitted-islamists-back-sisi-idUSKBN1H42Q4>

<sup>156</sup>Inanç Y.S., Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood: Egypt's Rival Islamist Groups, Daily Sabah, May 7<sup>th</sup> 2014, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.dailysabah.com/feature/2014/05/07/salafis-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-egypts-rival-islamist-groups>

<sup>157</sup>Bayoumi A., Egypt's Salafi party faces growing isolation, Al Jazeera, May 18<sup>th</sup> 2014, last accessed on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/05/egypt-salafi-party-faces-growing-isolation-201451411139164795.html>

in Saudi Arabia has always been interested in exporting Wahabism, which contrasted with the Muslim Brotherhood's version of Islamism. Salafi networks have received funds from Gulf states, and in particular from Saudi Arabia for decades to support infrastructures and the population. Saudi Arabia alone, according to the Egyptian Ministry of Justice, donated more than 70 billion dollars to promote Wahabism.<sup>158</sup>

This issue raises the question of how much money has been sent to Al-Nour to help it in its electoral success. Even if Al-Nour has never agree to have received money from Saudi, they have never disclosed publicly the sources of their funding. At the same time, no one in Saudi Arabia can donate large sums of money without the approval of authorities, therefore these funds even if they are not coming from the government itself, are gaining approval from the regime.<sup>159</sup> This situation certainly does not look good for the Salafis, especially if their aim is to replace the Brotherhood in Egypt, as their reputation could diminish among the population. Not only questions about the funding were raised but it is also important to underline the similarities between Wahabism and Salafism as ideologies. Wahabi ideology started with Al Wahab in the Arabian Peninsula, and like Salafism, aims at the purification of Islam from innovations. This current is mainly found in Saudi Arabia and is one of the most influential branches of Salafism. Salafism itself belongs instead to a school of thought following the early Islamic age and nowadays it aligns with the doctrine of Wahabism regarding its views.<sup>160</sup>

After the end of the Arab Spring in Egypt, a part of the Salafi detached from the main group and decided to form a violent and radical Salafi group called Salafi Jihadi. In fact, there is some variation in the thought of Salafism parties and also internal debates. All of them have the main objective of

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<sup>158</sup>McTighe K., The Salafi Nour Party in Egypt, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2014

<sup>159</sup>Ibid

<sup>160</sup>Bavarian State Government, Salafism: Prevention through Information Questions and Answers, November 2016

protecting Egypt from Western influences and secularization. They support the Revolution against corruption and dictatorship in favor of popular sovereignty with elections and separation of powers. They have been engaging more and more with democratic principles (except for militant Salafists who believe that democracy is un-Islamic) in coexistence with Islamic thought.<sup>161</sup> The internal groups in the Salafi movement took different approaches towards the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Nour and Al-Raya decided to set themselves apart from the Brotherhood with a more genuine Salafi vision of the state, while Al-Watan and Al-Fadila that moved closer to the Brotherhood. At the end of the spectrum we find the militant Salafis such as Ansar Bayt Al-Maqdis, Jund Al-Khilafa, Ansar Al-Jihad and Ajnad Misr which also differ within each other.<sup>162</sup>

Salafi-Jihadism is an approach to jihadism adherent to Salafism. The members of this group tend to enhance the military success of the early generations of Muslims to “excuse their violence”. Most Jihadi groups today can be considered Salafi-Jihadi, including Al Qaeda and ISIS. They even justify violence towards other Muslims by excommunicating them and therefore considering violence against them legal.<sup>163</sup>

If an Islamist movement believes that Islam is a base for politics and wants to create an Islamic state, then Al-Nour cannot be described as Islamist. There are differences, in fact, between the Brotherhood and the Salafi party mainly according to their approaches to politics. The Brotherhood is the archetype of Islamist movement as it wants to seize power to implement Islamic political views but does not care about theological disputes in Islam but supports plurality with a conservative message. Al-Nour,

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<sup>161</sup> Nezda J., & Ranko A., Crossing the Ideological Divide? Egypt’s Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, December 11<sup>th</sup> 2015

<sup>162</sup>Ibid

<sup>163</sup> Dar R. & Hamid S., *Islamism, Salafism & Jihadism: a primer*, Brookings, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2016, last accessed on April 14<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/>

instead, was established with the aim to achieve religious purity of Islam and Muslims while politics was just peripheral to their main aim.<sup>164</sup>

Using the framework of the beginning of the chapter, firstly Salafists would need to support democracy. As previously stated, some groups within the Salafi conglomerate support democracy. That does not imply a support for pure democracy, but it is more like a compromise of democracy and Islamic thought, meaning mixing the two but always with the aim to achieve an Islamic country in spirit. Despite the acceptance of democracy is in itself a big step forward for the group, who has always supported a more religiously strict vision of the world, this change is not enough especially after the end of the Arab Spring.<sup>165</sup> People during and after the Revolution aimed at pure democracy and not a hybrid between that and Islamism, especially after the fall of Morsi and the Brotherhood. Secondly, the group firmly believes in Islamic identity, religion is what Salafis give importance to and spend their time on. Islam is not only seen as a set of values, but a real and inherent way of living characterized by hate towards the West and modernization. Thirdly, they definitely didn't change their conceptual understanding of Sharia. While for the Brotherhood tried to approach it in a more modern way and tried to give it a secondary importance, for Salafis Sharia is the first thing to put into consideration in everyday life. Every action and behavior should be done following only Islamic law. Fourth, pragmatism has always been a constant for Al-Nour even if it changed in 2012. In 2011 and 2012 its pragmatism was comparable to the one found in typical Islamist parties, meaning that they gave up some of their ideological views to adapt to politics. This phase did not push the group to give up their original doctrinal views, but it created a more secular discourse, that years later ended up forming their own party called Al-Watan. In 2013, Al-Nour's pragmatism derived from an

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<sup>164</sup>Lacroix S., Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: the Politics of Hizb-Al-Nour, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, last accessed on April 13<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/01/egypt-s-pragmatic-salafis-politics-of-hizb-al-nour-pub-64902>

<sup>165</sup>Nezda J., & Ranko A., Crossing the Ideological Divide? Egypt's Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, December 11<sup>th</sup> 2015

instrumental approach to politics. This approach was explained by the Saudi support of Al-Nour and the ties of the Salafi with the security apparatus of Mubarak which showed that defending Islam was the only interest of Al-Nour, whatever the political cost. In fact, in the times when Salafis were forced to adopt stances that contradicted their beliefs, they would justify them out of necessity.<sup>166</sup> Lastly, they need to work on their credibility. The group is divided into smaller factions with its own ideas and unfortunately the reputation of the Salafi has decreased since violent terrorist attacks done by the Salafi-Jihadi. Despite being a different faction and having a more violent and radical ideology (in contrast with the Brotherhood's belief of non-violence), often the word Salafist is mistakenly exchanged for Salafi, therefore making people believe that Salafi=terrorist and unfortunately demising the group's credibility despite having quite a consistent electorate.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up this chapter, after analyzing the behavior of Salafists and of Al Azhar, we can come up with the results of our study. Salafists after entering politics were thought to be a good alternative only if they managed to change their radical policies and embrace a more modern view on religion and politics. This change did not happen though, and for this reason they have been a bit marginalized in Egyptian society and does not have a support from most of the population. Al Azhar, on the other side, has never stopped gaining support from Egyptians which has helped its reputation as a historic institution in the country. Considering the framework of the beginning of the chapter, Al Azhar has proven to be more flexible to change and to adapt to the population's requests such as the support of democracy.

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<sup>166</sup>Lacroix S., Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: the Politics of Hizb-Al-Nour, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, last accessed on April 13<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/01/egypt-s-pragmatic-salafis-politics-of-hizb-al-nour-pub-64902>

## CONCLUSION

Turning back on our two research questions: *What happened to the different groups and approaches such as Al Azhar, Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists once the Revolution started?* and *what happened to the different currents after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, which of them strengthened their role in the country and which were on the contrary, banned and lost power*, we can give our final remarks. For the first research question we discussed the reaction of Al Azhar, Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood to the end of the Arab Spring and subsequent rule of Morsi. Al Azhar reacted by resurfacing internal issues such as its lack of authority and autonomy, but at the same time showed its desire to gain and hold power, adapt itself and align with Mubarak in the pre-2011 period and Al Sisi after Morsi's fall. Salafists decided to enter politics to take advantage of the Arab Spring in the country but unlike Al Azhar, did not adapt and decided to keep pursuing their strictly religious ideas, despite their growing support and success in the elections. The Muslim Brotherhood failed to achieve a democratic transition because of the difficult situation between state and institutions. Moreover, the group expected to be handed the power just because it led the Arab Spring and spent decades to fight against Mubarak meanwhile situation provoked a rising number of terrorist attacks in the country. For the second research question, two different approaches were shown regarding the attitude towards Islamism and power. After entering politics, Salafists lost power because despite looking like a good alternative at first, they did not manage to change their radical policies and failed embrace a more modern view on religion and politics. For this reason, they have been marginalized in Egypt and do not have full support from the population, but only from the more extremist groups. Al Azhar managed to gain major Egyptian institutional help, which has supported its reputation as a historic institution in the country and has proven to be more flexible and willing to change, willing to adapt to some of the population's requests.

Needless to say, the Arab Spring changed the Islamist landscape in Egypt. Two variables affect Islamist movements' political outlook and that is perceived identity threat and political opportunity. The first one varies depending on the ideological orientation the presence of it leads Islamists to detach from society, while the second leads to inclusion due to the presence of more forms of Islamic identity. The revolution pushed Islamists beyond identity politics, and they realized, through interactions that other political and social organizations were not hostile towards Islam and they were not anti-Islamic. This period of inclusion had an impact on all groups but especially the Muslim Brotherhood, as they based their organizational unity on identity politics. After the end of the revolution, there had been a split in the public sphere where political actors were considered either Islamist or secular. Islamists have answered differently to the post-2011 questions, Salafis have refused the term "civil state".<sup>167</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood presented the vision of a civil state with an Islamic frame of reference while distancing itself from Salafis and becoming a mainstream movement. Al Azhar, due to its limited political experience, just accepted the political system and for this was highly criticized by Islamists. Moreover, attitudes towards democracy and the state are also different: for Al Azhar, there are principles of Islamically acceptable political system while Salafis keep promoting an Islamic state and theoretically, a rejection of the civil state even if they still participate in the elections. This scene suggests that Al Azhar, with the Muslim Brotherhood would be more able to navigate this path, because of its historical legacy, authenticity, moderation and social reconciliation with the help of the Brotherhood's political experience, even if practically, its problematic relationship with Al-Sisi makes this difficult to happen.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup>El-Houdaiby I., Islamism Now, The Cairo Review of Global Affairs, Summer 2012, last accessed on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/islamism-now/>

<sup>168</sup>Ibid

Since the end of the Arab Spring, many Islamists have adopted more progressive views on politics and governance.<sup>169</sup> They also reach out to minorities and secular Muslims, and the reason for this move is pragmatism. After seeing the failure of the Brotherhood in reaching out to minorities and secular Muslims and the defeat of other Islamist groups, many Islamists are aiming at more moderate views to gain and hold power. At the same time, other Islamist group believe that this move is caused by an ideological shift towards the recognition of religious tolerance and political pluralism. For example, in Tunisia, Ennahda pushed for gender equality laws, in Morocco the Justice and Development Party started speaking about democratic reform and human rights, and also in Jordan the Brotherhood started a new slogan saying mentioning popular sovereignty, civil state and reforms. In Morocco and Jordan, Islamists separated religious activities and proselytizing and some of them in Tunisia eliminated their religious activities and considered themselves as Muslim democrats.<sup>170</sup>

This move is not only a political shift but also a survival strategy to ensure their power in a changing political environment especially after the failure of Egypt. After Morsi's election the group hadn't done much to calm the fears of minorities and secular Muslims and hadn't shown transparency which led to the fall of the Brotherhood in the country.<sup>171</sup> Regarding the possibility of the acceptance of a secular state, which would represent a first step towards moderation, political Islam but in general all the three groups that we analyze do not aspire and support secularism. Even Al Azhar, which as previously stated, might embrace a more democratic regime is not ready for a separation between State and religion which is showed by its attachment to the government despite many attempts to achieve more independence. Salafists do not support democracy as it is not the form of government states in the Sharia and even the Muslim Brotherhood never detached the idea of religion from that

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<sup>169</sup>Luck T., Can Islamist moderates remake the politics of the Muslim World?, The Christian Science Monitor, September 19<sup>th</sup> 2018, last accessed on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020, link: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2018/0919/Can-Islamist-moderates-remake-the-politics-of-the-Muslim-world>

<sup>170</sup>Ibid

<sup>171</sup>Ibid

of state. Despite this, the group has often been seen as secular and secularized for two reasons. The first one is that their vision is that their ideal society and politics only deals with areas of public life that have nothing to do with religion. The second one is that it treats Islam as a set of beliefs to be put into practice by the believer who adheres to them in a subjective way.<sup>172</sup>

Meanwhile, there is virtually no possibility of conviviality with the regime of Al Sisi, especially after the policies and measure that he put into practice with the Muslim Brotherhood. His regime, more and more authoritarian, does not leave space to some kind of moderate Islam which could be represented by political Islam despite his call for more religious tolerance from Al Azhar. His attempts to entrench authoritarianism in the Constitution such as the extend of presidential term, the consolidation of military power and the limitation of judicial oversight are some of the attempts made since the removal of Morsi in 2013.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup>Dalacoura K., Islamism, secularization, secularity: the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a phenomenon of a secular age, *Economy and Society*, 2018

<sup>173</sup>Rezk D., Sisi's Attempts to Entrench Authoritarianism in Egypt Reveal Regime's Fear, *The Globe Post*, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2019, last accessed on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020, link: <https://theglobepost.com/2019/03/15/egypt-sisi-authoritarianism/>

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