

Governing Political Islam: An “Islamistphobic” Discourse in Egypt?*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes what I define as an anti-Islamist discourse (or an “Islamistphobia”) both as a social reality and as conceptual innovation in contemporary Egypt. The paper focuses on four interrelated actors—the current Egyptian regime and its discourse on political Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood and its historical entanglements with the Egyptian state, the Salafi al-Nūr and Rāya Parties, and al-Azhar’s relation with both the regime and the Islamists. I advance an idea that anti-Islamist sentiments channel primarily through official (state) and media discourses in Egypt, rooted in both a colonialist locale and in a contemporary religious framework and its anticolonial rhetoric. It is, however, directed primarily against the Muslim Brotherhood, rather than against all Islamist groups across the board.

Keywords: Anti-Islamist discourse, Islamistphobia, Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt, political Islam

Introduction

This work is part of an international project “INTERSECT: Global Flows of Islamophobia,” launched in 2019 at the Center for Advanced Study of Religion, at the Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society in Oslo. The INTERSECT projects seeks to analyze Islamophobia not only as a rising global phenomenon, but also as a concept that in itself is part of global flows, taking on a variety of meanings and usages.

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In this article, I address what I define to be “Islamistphobia,” an anti-Islamist discourse that is both a social reality and a conceptual innovation manifest in contemporary Egypt, in relation to the state’s handling of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwān al-Muslimūn).¹ Even though Islamophobia and anti-Islamist discourse have certain similarities, they also differ in their genealogies. While Islamophobia (through right-wing populism) targets the perceived Muslimness of an individual or a group and incorporates an array of structural and racial inequalities, Islamistphobic discourse is a rather broader conceptualization in that it is tied to mechanisms of repression, although directed against a particular group, whose political opponents can claim religious allegiance to the same faith. Islamistphobia feeds into the issue of representation and subjugation of a particular group, by constructing systematic narratives of othering; however, it arises within an Islamic framework and is hence clearly distinguishable from Islamophobia.

Such a discourse requires analyzing the modern Egyptian regime and studying broader historical narratives. The historical relations between colonialism and Islamophobia rest upon both epistemological continuity and ruptures, and often involve state actors, in that “Islamophobia has two basic causes: One is related to political attitude, and the other to the interpretation of history.”² Discerning the overlaps and differences between Islamophobia and Islamistphobia will help better account for the different positions of state officials, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Islamist parties whose interests, ideological makeup, and political outlooks vary significantly. I argue that Egypt, in light of the global war on terror and the country’s domestic campaign against Islamist fractions,³ exploits methods of suppression found also in self-Orientalist narratives that frame Islamism through the power of representation and othering.⁴ This framing is common to anti-political Islam reverberations across Europe, Asia, and the Arab world.⁵ I look at representation through its

- 1 For the purpose of the argument, I advance an idea that political Islam, often associated with Islamism, differs from Salafism in the usage of the concepts of the *political* and the state. While political Islam (as an interpretation of Islamic sources for political identity and practice) can be mostly associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, whose main aim is political participation through an Islamic framework, on the other hand, Salafism’s primary concern is the spread of Islamic (religious) liberation and maintenance of an Islamic personality, only at times achieved through political mechanisms. – It goes without saying that a study of Islamophobia in Egypt ought to also entail an analysis of the Coptic community and its responses to political Islam in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. This paper, however, does not delve into such topic, since it would require a different set of sources, methodologies, all of which go beyond the scope and aim of this paper. – Common names in Arabic are in the paper not transliterated (e.g. al-Jazeera); other names and technical terms are (e.g. *Sharī’a*).
- 2 John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, eds., *Islamophobia* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), vii.
- 3 There are extreme and more moderate Islamists. For example, Ḥasan Ismā’īl al-Ḥudaybī (d. 1973) was a moderate leader of the Muslim Brotherhood between 1951 and 1973. For more on al-Ḥudaybī, see Barbara H. E. Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2009).
- 4 In this context, “both contemporary Islamophobia and early twentieth century colonial discourse converge in the transformation of Islam into a political subject matter, the rationale of which is to define and establish political and religious subjectivities that justify and allow for governability of Muslims in the colonial and the postcolonial state respectively.” Lorenz Trein, “Governing the Fear of Islam: Thinking Islamophobia through the Politics of Secular Affect in Historical Debate,” *ReOrient*, 4.1 (2018): 4.
- 5 For more, see the Islamophobia annual reports by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, available at <https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=182&p_ref=61&lan=en>; “Muslims may be in Europe but are not of it.” Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 164.

manifold powers—not only via its semiotic and hermeneutical values, but also its political application, since regimes of power/knowledge can manifest, differently. Political Islam is not a monolithic formation and often functions within a religiously conservative framework and against state politics,⁶ which generates not only political tension but also competing variations over political subjectivity. This raises a legitimate question whether state rhetoric and epistemic violence⁷ in Egypt can be more adequately termed as a turn against (political) Islam or as a campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood,⁸ since it is not aimed to the same level toward Salafi parties. This sentiment in the post-2011 political reality relies also on the discourse from al-Azhar University, which is seen as part of a ruling alliance, as indicated in the second part of the paper. Such an approach translates into portraying Islamists and the proponents of political Islam as not only those who undermine the democratic project of modern Egypt, but also as being participatory in a violent organization and as enemies of Islam. These depictions echo colonial narrations of what is regarded as modern (and hence an accepted version of) Islam in Egyptian political life.⁹

Drawing from four specific yet interrelated formations in Egypt—the current Egyptian regime and its discourse on political Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood and its historical entanglements with the Egyptian state, the Salafi al-Nūr (Light) and Rāya (Flag) Parties and their understanding of Islam and politics, and al-Azhar's uneasy relation with both the regime and the Islamists—I advance an idea that anti-Islamist sentiments channel primarily through official (state) and media discourses in Egypt, at times adopted from their Western counterparts and are moreover rooted in a specific religious framework and its anticolonial rhetoric. While political Islam is being depicted as a threat to the flourishing of democracy in Egypt, the very term "democracy" has lost some of its normative powers in the aftermath of 2013 when then-Egyptian army chief General al-Sīsī led a coalition to oust Muḥammad Mursī from the presidency. The violent crackdown of the Brotherhood by the military during his presidency is ideologically rooted in previous decades and not simply due to the organization's support for Mursī. For, it was during this moment, when various fractions that included state elements, secular activists, and Salafis, united on an ideological level, rallying against the Brotherhood.

- 6 For more on political Islam, see, e.g., Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008); Shahram Akbarzadeh and Fethi Mansouri, eds. *Islam and Political Violence* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).
- 7 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 66-111. On violence as an "effort", see Gil Anidjar, "The Violence of Violence," *Critical Inquiry*, May 3, 2020, <https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/the_violence_of_violence/>; Talal Asad, "Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism," *Critical Inquiry*, May 3, 2020, <https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/reflections_on_violence_law_and_humanitarianism/>.
- 8 The term "Ikhwanophobia", being a neologism, is used by Brotherhood's members and their proponents to counteract the state's campaign against the organization. For more on the "Ikhwanophobia" and the OIC, see, e.g., IkhwanInfo watch dog, accessed January 22, 2020, available at <<http://www.ikhwan.whoswho/en/archives/669>> and Mohsen Saleh, "The rise of 'Ikhwanophobia': Fear of the Muslim Brotherhood," *Afro-Middle East Centre*, accessed January 22, 2020, <<https://amec.org.za/political-islam/item/1160-the-rise-of-ikhwanophobia-fear-of-the-muslim-brotherhood.html>>.
- 9 Lorenz Trein, "Governing the Fear of Islam: Thinking Islamophobia through the Politics of Secular Affect in Historical Debate," *ReOrient*, 4.1 (2018): 44-58.

This paper is divided into two parts, the first of which surveys the connection between Egypt's anti-Islamist discourse as part of the global war on terror. The second interrogates Islamophobia in Egypt on the state level, looking at how it has generated a particular narrative against Islam, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood and their political program. In this work, I look into official statements and news media coverage both, in print and online (e.g. al-Jazeera, al-Ahram, al-Masri al-Youm, etc.), of al-Sīsī's speeches on the Muslim Brotherhood, a personal interview with a senior Muslim Brotherhood member (Rashād al-Bayūmī) from 2011, and the Salafi al-Nūr and the Rāya parties. For secondary sources, literature on nation-state formation, secularism, and Islamophobia in Muslim countries¹⁰ is used to explain the intricate relations between official representations and labelling of political Islam as retrograde to the progressive orientation of Egyptian society in the context of the January 25th and June 30rd counter-revolutions.

The following questions are addressed in this work: is there a phobia/violence against political Islam (whose Islamophobia) in contemporary Egypt? Why does the state treat certain Islamists and the Brotherhood differently compared to its handling of the al-Nūr and Rāya parties? And what kind of political project are those parties promoting? By no means does this paper advocate the idea that a critique of political Islam, however antagonistic it may be to the state's modern project, can be treated as Islamophobia or Islamophobic. Rather, it claims that a particular predilection exists in how the Egyptian regime forestalls the growth of Islamist parties, far beyond their official political admonishments of certain organizations. The regulation of political Islam by the regime is, in essence, a regulation of a particular religious identity and a propagation of a particular politics of toleration, even despite the fact that political Islam is rooted in a modern discourse. By deploying mechanisms of repression that encumber Islamist mobilization, the state regime regulates its manifold manifestations. As is well reported, Egypt's anti-Islamist discourse is increasingly directed against those Islamists who openly oppose the regime—chiefly, the Muslim Brotherhood—rather than against all Salafi parties. As we shall see, some Egyptian religious scholars who have been actively opposing Salafism for decades have suddenly shifted their narrative against the Muslim Brotherhood. I argue that the systematic relinquishment of proponents of political Islam by the state prevents the development of its political subjectivity—an end similar to historical European efforts in the 20th century to curtail Muslim political participation,¹¹ despite using different means.

10 E.g. Fernando Bravo López, "Towards a Definition of Islamophobia: Approximations of the Early Twentieth Century," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34.4 (2011): 556-573; Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, eds., *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* (London: Routledge, 2019); Hussein Ali Agrama, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?"; Hussein Ali Agrama, *Questioning Secularism Questioning Secularism* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2012); Talal Asad, "Thinking About Secularism and Law in Egypt," Vol. 2, ISIM Occasional Paper. Leiden: ISIM; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003); Gil Anidjar, "Secularism," *Critical Inquiry*, 33.1 (2006): 52-77; Mahmoud Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist*, 104.3 (2002): 766-775.

11 Lorenz Trein, "Governing the Fear of Islam: Thinking Islamophobia through the Politics of Secular Affect in Historical Debate," *ReOrient*, 4.1 (2018): 44-58. For more on the threat of Muslim subjectivity, see T. Müller, "Constructing Islam and Secularism in the German Islam Conference." In *Muslims in the UK and Europe III*, ed. P. Anderson and J. Hargreaves (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2017), 48-62.

1. "Islamistphobia" and its Global Flows

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., there were many reports of rising hatred and opposition against Muslims not only in Europe and North America,¹² but also in other parts of the world, including Asia.¹³ Anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiment has been tied to the American government-led war on terror, which helped in fomenting Islamophobic reactions and speech.¹⁴ Islamophobia on the streets in Europe seems to be in part backed by a European political machinery, one that allows certain civic organizations aligned with racist objectives to continue operating and seeking political participation.¹⁵ Islamophobia has led to attacks against Muslims, internationally, and contributed toward states designing and implementing new counterterrorism policies.

The genealogy of Islamistphobia, however, can be adequately analyzed only with Islamic religious worldviews. The very regulation of political Islam and its socioeconomic program has become an increasingly viable way for Egyptian officials to define what are admissible political formations.¹⁶ Since Islamism also poses a structural challenge to the ruling elites of the secularized Arab regimes—Egypt, being one of them—Islamistphobia becomes a regulatory tool to curtail the naissance and flourishing of an Islamist political subjectivity. While Egypt's political and intellectual dependency¹⁷ is often connected to

12 For more on systemic anti-Muslim bigotry in light of 9/11 attacks, see, e.g., Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 139 f.

13 See, e.g., Mohamed Nawab Bin Mohamed Osman, "Understanding Islamophobia in Asia: The Cases of Myanmar and Malaysia," *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 4.1 (2017): 17-36; Iselin Frydenlund, "Buddhist Islamophobia: Actors, Tropes, Contexts", in *The Brill Handbook on Religion and Conspiracies*, ed. Asbjørn Dyrendal, Egil Aspren, David G. Robertson (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 279-302.

14 On the relation between war on terror and Islamophobia, see Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills and David Miller (eds.), *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

15 Organizations like Stop Islamization of Denmark, the English Defense League in Britain, the Middle East Forum in the States, Sweden Democrats, and the Alternative for Germany, for instance, maintain ties to political establishments and center-right parties across Europe. For more on the counterterrorism laws in the UK, see e.g. For the case of Britain, see the Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000, accessed May 10, 2020, available at <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/contents>>.

16 Hussein Agrama defines secularism as "a set of processes and structures of power wherein the question of where to draw a line between religion and politics continually arises and acquires a distinctive *salience*." Hussein Ali Agrama, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52.3 (2010): 500. Charles Taylor uses "secularism" as an ideology, and "secularity" as a form of differentiation, whereas Talal Asad distinguishes "secularism" as the political doctrine from "the idea of the secular" as an epistemological category that undergirds a particular perception of the world. This presupposes that the issue in Egypt is not the religious-secular divide as a nominal space between different actors who partake in political making, but rather different usages of the secular as a worldview and a form of power; see also e.g., Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation," *Public Culture*, 18.2 (2006): 323-347 and Hussein Agrama: "... secularism, as a feature of the state's growing regulatory capacity, has long been, and is increasingly, fraught with an irrevocable indeterminacy." Hussein Ali Agrama, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy: Is Egypt a Secular or a Religious State?," 500.

17 Alatas claims that the Muslim world has been made scientifically, economically, and academically dependent on the Western social norms and values of modernity and its conditions. See Syed Farid Alatas, "Islam and Modernization," in *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic*

hegemonic colonial discourse, domestic secular(ized) elites in Egypt enhanced their own visions of political Islam as a structural threat to development and progress. “What distinguishes those ‘secular–liberalists’ was that they ‘uncritically replicated European anti-Arabism and the debasement of the Arabo-Islamic culture.’” Furthermore, “...the modernization reforms were linked to a colonial discourse that exaggerated the need for cultural transformation to the point where self-denial became a prerequisite for reform.”¹⁸ A very interesting piece in this context, is Tāriq al-Bishrī’s *Al-Ḥaraka al-siyāsiyya fī Miṣr*, in which al-Bishrī, once a secularist who played down the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian political life and saw them as a foreign element, changes his opinion and in the preface to the second edition of the book clearly states that Islamists are the bearers of the democracy.¹⁹ Islamistphobia is associated with a global political context that has been structured by the post-colonial order and contemporary US hegemony. Many of the elites from the so-called global South have been either educated and/or trained in the centers of the Global North,²⁰ or they draw their political program from those centers, appropriating particular vision of vernacular politics.

The war on terror and anti-terrorism laws normalized anti-Islam discourse more broadly,²¹ while its global effects brought policies against Islamists across the Middle East, marginalizing political and religious activists, and often channeled through private media outlets, supporting state’s narratives.²² Arab autocratic regimes in the region have carefully cultivated conservative and even far-right circles in the West in order to prompt their anti-Islamist position.²³ For instance, Ḥasan Sajwānī, the Foreign Minister of UAE who in 2018 was welcomed by the United States State Department, has warned of an Islamist takeover of Europe.²⁴ On another occasion, he announced that the Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist

Challenges for the 21st Century, ed. K. S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2005), 210.

18 Abdeslam M. Maghraoui, *Liberalism without Democracy* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2006), 67, 43.

19 For more on colonialism and inherited political structures in the Middle East, see, e.g., Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Qassim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000; *Tahrīr al-Mar’a*, 1899); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1903), 4 f. See also Tāriq al-Bishrī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr, 1945–1952* (The political movement in Egypt, 1945–1952) (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2002).

20 Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, eds., *Islamophobia in Muslim Majority Societies* (London: Routledge, 2019).

21 See chapter “Islam in Europe” in Jay Winter and Michael Teitelbaum, *The Global Spread of Fertility Decline*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013), 74-109. Saba Mahmood states that “insomuch as Muslims have come to be perceived as a threat to state security, their religious traditions and practices are necessarily subject to the surveillance and regulatory ambitions of the state in which the language of public order reigns supreme.” Saba Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?,” *Critical Inquiry*, 35.4 (2009): 860.

22 See, e.g., Egyptian TV host Yūsuf al-Ḥusaynī following London mosque attack, “The Muslims Have Contributed Nothing but Terror, So Why Do You Expect Them to Love You?,” retrieved on January 22, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPr9zKjuuws>>.

23 See Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil’s Game* (New York: An Owl Book, 2005).

24 Various types of fearmongering against political Islam and Islamists have been advocated by Arab regimes. See, e.g., Ḥasan Sajwānī, via Twitter, accessed May 26, 2020, <<https://twitter.com/HSajwanization/status/1107008246202675200>>.

organization, since he has a rather narrow threshold of defining terrorism in relation to the organization.²⁵ Such statements are a convenient way to clamp down on political dissent at home and abroad. While Islamophobia in the West can be far more consequential in its vehemently open fashion directed against Muslim minority groups, affiliations between Arab autocratic elites and far-right organizations say a great deal about their continuous fight against Islamists.²⁶ The culpability of Arab governments in fueling such sentiments is part of their overall campaign to preserve a political space that is Islamist-free.²⁷ Their alliance with anti-Muslim supporters has effects beyond targeting extremists.

In Egypt, this means designating the Muslim Brotherhood (for various historical reasons explained below) and, to an extent, al-Azhar, as a political threat. With the 2013 crackdown on the Brotherhood, the Egyptian regime capitalized on the already established precedence, also playing on the Islamic terrorism card and the politics of othering. With the Arab spring in 2011, many in Egypt seized the momentum for a potential social and political emancipation from Islam-inspired sources of authority, including the Brotherhood, despite that the Islamists did well in elections, providing legitimacy for their rule. While violence and terrorist threats became more prevalent in 2013, taking place in Nile Delta, Sinai, and even in Upper Egypt by Anṣār Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), which was labeled as a terrorist organization by Egypt and the US, numerous counter-terror operations have taken place in Egypt since then-Defense Minister al-Sīsī announced "the war on terror" on July 24, 2013, asking for a mandate to fight future terrorism in the country.²⁸ By issuing anti-terror legis-

25 See Hasan Sajwānī via Twitter, accessed May 26, 2020, <<https://twitter.com/hsajwanization/status/1033133805362720768?lang=en>>. Many Muslim religious preachers in the West who are supported by the UAE believe that Islamists are a threat to Islam, and hence collaborate with Arab autocratic regimes. Also the UAE Fatwa Council, chaired by Abdullah bin Bayyah, has, in addition to Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, designated the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. "UAE's Fatwa Council Denounces Muslim Brotherhood as a Terrorist Organization," Middle East Eye, accessed April 29, 2021, <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-muslim-brotherhood-fatwa-council-terrorist-organisation>>.

26 David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan leader who visited Damascus in 2005 to show solidarity with the Syrian regime, expressed support for the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In his Twitter, he wrote: "Assad is a modern day hero standing up to demonic forces seeking to destroy his people and nation – GOD BLESS ASSAD!" <<https://twitter.com/DrDavidDuke/status/841131794942566400>>, accessed January 21, 2020.

27 Arab governments in the Gulf have spent millions of dollars on educational programs, think tanks, and lobbying firms in the West in order to shape perceptions about domestic Arab political activists opposed to the government's rule, many of whom with religious background. In addition to Assad endorsing the travel ban by Trump, he also asserted that some of the refugees from Syria might be terrorists. For his speech on the increasing number of "terrorists" in the country, see "Terrorism in Syria is Being Crushed, Place after Place," *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, retrieved on January 27, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsCi7JmCJCQ>>.

28 In his resignation speech, then Army Chief and Defense Minister al-Sīsī declared Egypt's war on terrorism. See "Sisi's resignation speech in full," *Al-Jazeera*, accessed July 12, 2020, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/03/sisi-resignation-speech-full-2014326201638123905.html>>; for the Arabic transcript of the speech, see The Official Page of the Military Spokesman for the Armed Forces on Facebook, accessed July 12, 2020, <<https://www.facebook.com/Egy.Army.Spox/posts/456639144467073>>; for the English translation, see "Translation of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's Resignation Speech," *Atlantic Council*, accessed July 13, 2020, <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/translation-of-abdel-fattah-al-sisi-s-resignation-speech/>>; for the video of al-Sīsī's speech, see *DailyMotion*, accessed July 13, 2020, <<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x1jw3wa>>.

lation in the absence of a parliament, al-Sīsī created a legal framework for the security apparatus to carry out broad operations and prosecutions. Since then, more than 1,800 security operations took place across Egypt, and over 27,000 individuals were arrested, half of which belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood as part of the counter-terror operations.²⁹ On December 24, 2013, ABM claimed an attack in the Mansoura Security Directorate, killing dozens. Even though the Brotherhood was not involved in the attack, it was declared a terrorist group the following day. Many members were arrested also for non-violent crimes, such as possession of Brotherhood paraphernalia or supporting the organization online, both of which were considered crimes under new terrorism laws in Egypt.³⁰ While Washington has continued its support for Egypt's war on terror, also the European Union has provided more than \$10 billion in arms contracts.³¹ Some of the consequences of Egypt's war on terror are curtailed human rights and undermining the rule of law, as well as extrajudicial killings that targeted primarily the Brotherhood. Counter-terror campaigns not only define political Islam supporters as possible threat by positing them in the extremist camp, but also deploy the politics of fear to create an image of groups whose main source is purely religious extremism, and an idea that the current Arab governments present the best possible solution to the problem of radical violence. If we take seriously the proposition that the very use of language is ideological³² and embedded in a culture, it seems that many state-supported media outlets in Egypt portray Islam as regressive to the modern project.³³ This rationale, initiated also by various administrations in the US since the 1980s, provides a convenient excuse for authoritarian regimes to use similar rhetoric to torture and detain their political opponents. Egypt's war on the Muslim Brotherhood serves as a good example.³⁴ Al-Sīsī's statement that "the fall of Egypt, God forbid, would mean the fall of the region" can be read as a warning that it is the Egyptian regime which has the means to prevent not only the downfall of its state apparatus but also the consequential expansion of extremists in the region and in Europe. It requires international support and ties with its secular elites, since the common enemy is political Islam and its extremist fractions, but also religion more broadly. The longstanding portrayal of the clashes between secular

29 "Egypt Security Watch: Five Years of Egypt's War on Terror," *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, accessed July 12, 2020, 10-11, 35.

30 *Ibid.*, 13.

31 *Ibid.*, 15.

32 On semiotics of language in a text, see, e.g., Yuri Lotman, "The Semiotics of Culture and the Concept of a Text," *Soviet Psychology*, 26.3 (1988): 52-58. On the ideology in language in relation to post 9/11 world order, see, e.g., David G. Butt, Annabelle Lukin, and Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, "Grammar – The First Covert Operation of War," in *Interpreting Tragedy: The Language of 11 September 2001*, special issue of *Discourse & Society*, 15.2/3 (2004): 267-290.

33 Anti-Islam/Muslim sentiments are often channelled also through private media outlets in Egypt. See, e.g., Egyptian TV host Yūsuf al-Ḥusaynī following London mosque attack, "The Muslims Have Contributed Nothing but Terror, So Why Do You Expect Them to Love You?," accessed January 22, 2020: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPr9zKjuuws>>. For more, see also the coverage of the Egyptian journalist Ibrāhīm 'Īsā and 'Amr Adīb.

34 Already Mubārak spoke of "Muslim Brotherhood Militias", see "Mubārak and the Brotherhood – Thirty Years of Experience," *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, retrieved on January 27, 2020, <<https://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/files/2011/08/201187113648385131.html>>.

forces and political Islam in Egypt may have created a precedent of a particular rhetoric against its very functioning.³⁵ Islamism can, however, be both a gateway to plural politics and radicalism.

As the current Egyptian regime gains footing in determining a new religious discourse in the country, it is inevitable to interrogate both the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian political life, as well as the Salafi parties and al-Azhar, and their relationship with the current power structures. While colonial powers and racists have been hostile to Islamists, as we shall see below, the Egyptian regime's panic about the Muslim Brotherhood, I argue, surpasses standard opposition to its Islamic ideals and constitutes a more genuine Islamistphobia because of their political program.

2. The State, Muslim Brotherhood's Political Islam, and Revolutionary Salafism—a Century in the Making

The Muslim Brotherhood has had a long and dynamic presence in Egyptian politics. From its foundation in 1928 and the social services it provided to Egyptians, alleged assassination attempts on Egyptian officials, to its participation in the 2011 elections, and the killing of more than 800 of its supporters at the Rāb'a sit-in in Cairo by the security forces in 2013, Muslim Brotherhood is not a traditional political movement.

While it started off as a religious and social movement with the aim to both battle the British occupation and reform domestic power structures,³⁶ in a few decades after its establishment, some of its members got involved in assassinating key figures in the government to express political grievances and animosity towards both a secular government and colonialism, which were viewed by the Muslim Brotherhood as antidote to their vision of society. The Muslim Brotherhood soon became perceived by the state as a culprit in causing the moral decay in the Egyptian society. In 1948, the Brotherhood members were found guilty of the assassination of Prime Minister Maḥmūd Fahmī al-Nuqrāshī Pasha. Nuqrāshī who served under King Farouk dissolved the organization and arrested some of its prominent leaders. Political assassinations increased the hate or fear towards the Brotherhood as an Islamist fraction. This for some marks the beginning of "Ikhwanophobia" in Egypt.³⁷ The Brotherhood in 1940, however, also aimed at expelling the British from Egypt and supporting the resistance movement in Palestine and was during the 1951-1954 period a strong force.

The disenchantment of Islamists and the state's treatment of political Islam, obviously varied according to different regimes of Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir, Anwar al-Sādāt, Ḥusnī Mubārak, and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī, whose onslaught on the Brotherhood's politics and

35 For more on the Islamists' threat to the entrenched elite, see Bjørn Olav Utvik, "A Question of Faith? Islamists and Secularists Fight over the Post-Mubarak State," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 10.1 (2017): 93-117.

36 On the organization and its founder's autobiographical novel, see, e.g., Ḥasan al-Bannā, *Madhkūrāt al-Da'wa wa-l-Dā'iya* (Cairo: Dār al-Tawzī' wa-l-Nashr al-Islāmiyya, 2001).

37 Unlike "Ikhwanophobia", the term "brotherhoodization" is more related to the Brotherhood's taking over the state during the 2012-2013.

faith was perceived as an attack on their very existence. To combat the emerging influence of the Islamists in the 20th century, officials have enhanced a moderate Islamic position that depends on the state support, which included support channels from the West. Thinking of the US backing of the Saud King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud against the rising Arab nationalism of Nasser, Islamists were not always seen as the enemy by the West. President Eisenhower in 1957 strategized to bolster Islamist organizations against secular nationalists.³⁸ In the 1950s in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was mobilized in part against Nasser.³⁹ One of the ways to combat pan-Arabism was the so-called pan-Islamic conservatism, also through the establishment of the Muslim World League (later renamed into Organization of Islamic Conference), which upheld the Muslim Brotherhood as a tool against Nasserism.⁴⁰ During the 70s, Sadat was more prone to the Brotherhood. While Sadat was more concerned with the rise of socialism than with Islamism, Nasser (who imprisoned Sayyid Qutb) believed that Islam could be politicized, as long as it will remain in the service of and subordinated to the state.⁴¹ The 1990s witnessed a major surge in mass arrests of Brotherhood members under Ḥusnī Mubārak's rule, in order to curb what had been a growing public presence for the Brotherhood in the 1980s. Second, the surge coincided with the height of the armed campaign of the Islamist organization *al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya*, which was utilized by the authorities to strike against the Brotherhood and accusing them of acts of terror.

More recently, from spring 2011 until July 2013, (moderate) Islamists have also been given an opportunity to establish political parties and enjoyed rights to participate in free elections. In the absence of a modern Islamic theory of the legitimacy of the state and law, it is not unusual that Islamists circles return to pre-modern texts when seeking to determine what the normative Islamic baseline on a political issue is.⁴² What was unique in 2011, however, is the exploratory moment for the Salafis to initiate a new political participation. The fear of the Muslim Brotherhood in part also emanates from its rejection of Western hegemony over the region. This was especially prompted by the 2005 parliamentary elections, where the Brotherhood presented itself as first formidable political opponent to the ruling regime, posing also a democratic political challenge to the regime and not only a religious one. It is, however, with the current government that the state has pursued the most decisive agenda to curtail the organization, often using extra-judicial executions, explicit language against its leaders and members that was often broadcasted in Egyptian media, in order to control the narrative as a security-laden discourse.

38 Even though Eisenhower's doctrine failed, Israel's victory in the 1967 Six Day War opened new channels for the rise of Islamism in the region. What shifted contradictory US politics in the region, was the rise of Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 in their campaign against "Islamic fundamentalism". Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*, 63.

39 Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game* (New York: An Owl Book, 2005), 153.

40 Azin Tadjini, "The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and Regional Challenges to International Law and Security," *Amsterdam Law Forum*, 4.2 (2012): 38.

41 For more on Egyptian politics, see, e.g., Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996).

42 Mohamed Fadel, "The future of political Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Egyptian politics," *The Immanent Frame*, 2014, accessed December 20, 2019, <<https://tif.ssrc.org/2014/03/19/the-future-of-political-islam-the-muslim-brotherhood-and-egyptian-politics/>>.

In 2011, Rashād al-Bayūmī, then the third man in the Brotherhood, asserted that it was the Muslim Brotherhood supporters who defended the January 25 revolution,⁴³ a statement that has been taken also with a grain of salt by the opposition. According to al-Bayūmī, the Brotherhood does not believe in Islamic authority as such, yet their program is based on the conviction in political and social engagement, inspired by Islamic sources that regulate also broader human relations, advocating for a civil party with Islamic worldview.⁴⁴ After the 2011 revolution the Brotherhood sought collaboration with both al-Azhar and the Salafi block, yet it was rejected by the liberal-secular forces on the basis of being an Islamist political force.⁴⁵ On 30 April 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood launched a new party called the Freedom and Justice Party, led by Muḥammad Mursī. It was supposed to be financially and administratively independent of the Muslim Brotherhood, following the idea that one cannot hold a position in the party and in the Brotherhood at the same time. On the other hand, its program stated that the party is a political wing of the organization,⁴⁶ which pointed to partisan affiliation of the Brotherhood within Egyptian politics. Consequently, many rejected its political programs, but nonetheless, the Freedom and Justice Party won 235 of the 498 seats in the 2011 Egyptian parliamentary elections, far more than any other party. In June 2012, Mursī won the presidential elections by a narrow margin over Aḥmad Shafīk, a former prime minister under Ḥusnī Mubārak. Few months later, Mursī (temporarily) granted himself the power to legislate without judicial state oversight of his decisions, on the grounds to reform power structures that took place during the Mubārak era. While public opposition gradually developed, by April 2013 the public became divided between the Brotherhood and the Salafi block, and the more liberal and secular forces, the latter of which accused Mursī of monopolizing power. In July 2013, Mursī was officially removed from office and put into house arrest by the military, shortly after mass protests against him began, and in August 2013, the interim government cleared the sight of the Brotherhood supporters at the so-called Rāb'a sit-in, a move that resulted in more than 800 deaths.⁴⁷ By the end of the summer, most of the Brotherhood leaders were arrested, including the Supreme Leader Muḥammad Badī', which was seen as a bold move against the organization. In September, following a court order, the organization was first outlawed and its assets frozen, and eventually declared a terrorist organization by the Prime Minister Ḥāzīm al-Bablāwī after a car bomb ripped through a police building, killing at least 14 people in the city of Mansoura. The government was quick in linking the event with the

43 Author interview with Rashād al-Bayūmī in hill al-Muqattam, Cairo, May, 2011.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid. Moreover, according to Ibrahim El Houdaiby (Columbia University), it is precisely this moment that gave rise to al-Azhar as a political force and later an important ally in the ruling alliance in Egypt, which went against its earlier position. It seems that the seculars needed an Islam-based legitimate force to counter the rise of Islamists.

46 See above.

47 On the violations of human rights in Egypt, see, e.g., Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Security forces used excessive lethal force," 2013, accessed January 23, 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/19/egypt-security-forces-used-excessive-lethal-force; Human Rights Watch, "UN human rights council: Adoption of the UPR report on Egypt," 2015, accessed January 23, 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/20/un-human-rights-counciladoption-upr-report-egypt.

Muslim Brotherhood, even though a Sinai-based group eventually claimed the responsibility for the terror attack.⁴⁸ In March 2014, the Egyptian court sentenced 529 Brotherhood members to death and arrested more than 16,000. In 2015, more members were sentenced to death, including Muḥammad Mursī.

Already the Mubārak government's state media portrayed the Brotherhood as illegal, while numerous TV channels vilified the organization,⁴⁹ yet the all-out violent crackdown by the military during Mursī's presidency had its ideological roots in previous decades and is not simply the result of the organization's support for the ousted president. Despite their different position on political Islam, various groups, including secular (e.g. police) and religious (e.g. Azharis and Salafis) elements joined the protest against Mursī. What united them in this very moment is not only the Brotherhood's presence in the government, but the very designation of being an Islamist party. Al-Sīsī's explicit stance against the Muslim Brotherhood is captured in the first interview during his campaign on the private television channel, whereby he states that the organization will not exist if he is elected the President of Egypt: "It is not me who will put an end to them; it is you, the Egyptian people, who will finish them... On June 30, 2013, they said no, and they will say no again... The problem does not lie with me; it lies with the Egyptian people..."⁵⁰ insinuating it is the will and decision of the Egyptian people alone to reject the Muslim Brotherhood and their program. This sentiment to "crush" the organization is rooted in an attempt to prevent its comeback and to avoid its involvement in constitutional and legislative policy-making. In other words, Muslim Brotherhood's program of expanding political Islam in the country (that includes collaboration with its allies in neighboring countries, especially in Palestine), has to be irrevocably transformed into a non-threatening fraction and eventually banned from partaking in Egyptian state-making. After the removal of Mursī in 2013 and the violent crackdown of the Rāb'a sit-in participants,⁵¹ al-Sīsī stated that

48 See al-Sīsī's condemnation of the attack in Jamāl Naẓmi, "Al-Sisi's Goals for Blowing up the Cathedral – Possible Scenarios," *Freedom and Justice Gate*, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170211235454/http://www.fj-p.com/Our_news_Details.aspx?News_ID=106033>. See the official statement of the Muslim Brotherhood condemning the church bombing in "Middle East Monitor" (in English): <<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20161216-statement-from-muslim-brotherhood-official-concerning-cairo-church-bombings/>>. See the possible connections between the bombing and Qatar in "A Sharp Exchange of Statements between Egypt and the Gulf Cooperation Council..." *Ra'y al-Youm*, 2016, <<https://www.raialyoum.com/index.php/التع-مصر-ومجلس-البيانات-بين-مصر-ومجلس-التع>>. All articles accessed December 14, 2019.

49 See, e.g. Egyptian commentator Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī's comments on the Brotherhood: "Egyptian Culture is Targeted by the Brotherhood," *Youtube*, 2013 (originally from "al-Balad TVNet"), retrieved January 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EgM19ZzxOE>; "I Thank God that the Brotherhood Came to Power, so That People Would Discover Their Truth" (originally from *al-Youm al-Sābia*), retrieved January 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDv__w55V4>.

50 For al-Sīsī's speech, see "The Muslim Brotherhood has Ended," *CBC Egypt/Aṣwāt al-Miṣriyyah*, 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKBSFTAR9Zc>> and "No Reconciliation with the Brotherhood," *SkyNews Arabic*, 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYVajPrNz04>>, both videos retrieved on January 28, 2020.

51 "Rāb'a – the Massacre of the Coup", *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, 2014, accessed January 27, 2020, <<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2014/8/12/اربعة-مجزرة-الانقلاب-تغطية-على>>.

[w]e will not accept any more attacks. We will meet [them] with full force. Attackers want to destroy Egypt. Whoever imagines violence and wants to make the state and Egyptians kneel, must reconsider, since we will never be silent in the face of the destruction of our country... [There is] room for everyone [and the security services would not] conspire [to take power]. The will of the Egyptian people is free... they can choose whoever they want to rule them, and we are the guardians of this will. The army and the police right now are the guardians of the will of the people with regard to choosing who their leaders will be. I stated before that Egyptians, if they choose to change the world, they are capable of doing that, and I tell the Egyptian people now that if you want to build Egypt and its future, you will and you can, and you can make "Egypt the mother of all nations". Egypt will be as big as the world itself, with God's will.⁵²

Al-Sīsī's speech hence reasserts the state and private Egyptian media's position on the military coup as a legitimate move against President Mursī and the Brotherhood. The anti-Islamist narrative was crucial in amplifying the resistance against Mursī's presidency,⁵³ depicting the killings of his supporters as a necessary move in the "war on terror" and national security, whilst the international community was, with a few exceptions, rather silent on the military coup.

In the dawn of the elections, non-Islamist political forces in Egypt were never able to develop a cohesive coalition that could have effectively represented and united them against the Islamists. After Mursī and the constitutional crisis of 2012, they formed the National Salvation Front (*Jabhat al-Inqādh al-Waṭani*),⁵⁴ which included more than 35 different groups. Instead of attempting to put together a comprehensive democratic oppositional program that would encompass various parties in Egyptian society and its socio-political diversity as well as to commence with the process of addressing Egypt's social, political, and economic issues, by proposing an array of political options and policy solutions to the crisis, if their true aim was to bring democratic change to the country, their main task, however, seemed to be to undermine Mursī's rule. Some Egyptians believed in their change and political unity, which was rather a smokescreen for dissolving the Brotherhood's political decisions by pursuing the politics of exclusion. Despite fierce (and at times legitimate) opposition to Mursī's rule, the Brotherhood could not have completely undermined democracy in Egypt in the long run, had various oppositional movements and

52 See al-Sīsī's speech after the removal of the Rāb'a sit-in: "Speech by General 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Sīsī — Minister of Defense," *CBC Egypt*, Aug 18, 2013, retrieved January 28, 2020: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z27UzrhZHxc>>.

53 Dalia Fahmy and Daanish Faruqi, "Egyptian liberals, from revolution to counterrevolution." In *Egypt and the Contradictions of Liberalism: Illiberal Intelligentsia and the Future of Egyptian Democracy*, ed. Dalia Fahmy and Daanish Faruqi (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 1–27; 2. See also Khaled Abou el Fadl, "Egypt's Secularized Intelligentsia and the Guardians of Truth," in *Egypt and the Contradictions of Liberalism: Illiberal Intelligentsia and the Future of Egyptian Democracy*, ed. D. F. Fahmy and D. Faruqi (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 235–252.

54 See Samīr al-Sayyid, "Al-Barāda'ī, Mūsa and Ṣabāhī Announce the Establishment of a National Salvation Front to Manage the Current Stage Politically and Popularly," *Bawwābat al-Ahrām*, November 24, 2012, <<http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/276204.aspx>>, accessed on January 28, 2020.

figures politically organized themselves to compete against the ruling regime. As a response to that inability, however, there was a return of the elements of the previous guard, an “old-new” security apparatus and the cessations of Brotherhood’s religious politics.

While al-Sīsī’s (and for the most part, President Mubārak’s) approach toward religious pragmatism and Islamism is generally highly contentious, one might assume that al-Sīsī’s position toward al-Nūr and Rāya parties would be similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood, given their adherence to the basic tenets of political Islam. Yet some of the Salafī parties seem to be enjoying certain privileges, which is predicated either upon their support of or their pragmatic collaboration with the regime. Salafists were under Mubārak’s regime not involved in politics and mainly suppressed. After 2011, however, they participated in creating a political space based on their interpretation of conservative Islam. The popularity of the Salafīs also meant taking possible votes away from the Brotherhood. Al-Nūr was one of the emerging parties, whose current President is Yūnus Makhyūn, which in the 2011-12 Egypt parliamentary elections received second most votes after the Muslim Brotherhood. The Salafīs have had an ambivalent relation with the Muslim Brotherhood, often contested by their perception of what forms the *political*. The Salafīs in principle oppose the Brotherhood’s understanding of merging civil state with Islamic authority (*dawla madaniyya bi-marja’iyya islāmiyya*), advocating for an inclusion of Islam (God’s sovereignty) into the modern state. The emphasis is here on the modern state and its democratic elements, which al-Nūr post-2011 adheres to. Al-Nūr gradually developed into a political party, while tapping into institutional politics with the state.

The Rāya Party, established in 2013, a new addition to the Salafī politics in the country, can be also considered as a splinter group. It is led by a controversial figure—Ḥāzīm Ṣalāh Abū Ismā’īl—who received as high as 28% of votes according to some polls. Abū Ismā’īl, a hardline Salafī preacher in favor of implementing *Sharī’a* law, was in 2012 disqualified from the presidential race because of the reports that his mother held a US passport, and he thus was ineligible to be considered president. As a member of the “*Sharī’a* Committee” representing the Muslim Brotherhood,⁵⁵ Abū Ismā’īl was always a fierce opponent of the military rule also during Mubārak’s presidency. On the wake of the ousting of the former President Mubārak, he stated that the Salafīs believe in democracy, as long as it is in line with God’s rule and that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces rule has come to an end. He asserted that a civil state means that “the people elect the ruler, they hold the ruler accountable [for his deeds], and they also oust the ruler if he loses his legitimacy.”⁵⁶ Due to Abū Ismā’īl’s past affiliation to the Brotherhood, his implication to cleanse the judiciary, and his blatant critique of al-Sīsī for receiving US support and for his alleged emotional appearance during the campaign on television to “win the hearts and minds of Egyptians,”⁵⁷

55 Retrieved from Abū Ismā’īl’s personal website “Al-Mawqī‘ al-rasmī li al-Ustādh Ḥāzīm Ṣalāh Abū Ismā’īl,” <<https://web.archive.org/web/20190702180852/https://hazemsalahnet.wordpress.com/>>, accessed January 22, 2020.

56 Abū Ismā’īl, “Egyptian Cleric and Presidential Candidate Hazem Abu Ismail: ‘I Am an Enemy of the Camp David Accord and the Peace Agreement,’” *Al-Mihwar TV* and *CBC TV* via Memri TV, November 2011, <<https://www.memri.org/tv/egyptian-cleric-and-presidential-candidate-hazem-abu-ismail-i-am-enemy-camp-david-accord-and>>, accessed January 22, 2020.

57 Abū Ismā’īl, “Al-Sīsī Plays the Role of the Emotional Actor,” *Youtube*, 2013, retrieved January 22, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X69-B40GLWY>>; see also Fāṭima al-Nashābī, “Abū

the regime was quick to apprehend him following Mursī's ousting in July 2013 on the charges of besieging a court in Egypt in support of the release of one of his members.⁵⁸ Despite Abū Ismā'īl's imprisonment, his legacy of political (or rather revolutionary) Salafism persevered through other up-coming movements, such as Ḥāzimūn ("Determined"), whose supporters carry on his ideological tenets.

The reason for different treatment of other Salafists by the regime in comparison to the Brotherhood members and Abū Ismā'īl, perhaps lies in the fact that the founder of the al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya, whose political wing is al-Nūr party, Yāsir Burhāmī, has voiced support for al-Sīsī since 2013.⁵⁹ Salafis also in the past maintained ties with the regime in order to undermine the politics of the Muslim Brotherhood, since they did not want the Brotherhood to contain all the power. 'Imād 'Abd al-Ghafūr, the leader of al-Nūr's splinter group called Ḥizb al-Waṭan,⁶⁰ decided to form a separate party because of the internal affairs between him and Burhāmī over the nature of al-Nūr. At first, al-Nūr party adopted a very pragmatic approach to politics⁶¹ and aimed to disassociate itself from other religious political parties. 'Abdal Ghaffūr believed that in order for al-Nūr to succeed, it has to primarily function as a political party, hence its political program and alliances, whereas Burhāmī was more prone to its religious segments as in prompting Islamic *da'wa* and *Sharī'a* legislation in the country. Burhāmī's main objective was eventually to prevent the election of Mursī, because of the fear that the Brotherhood's victory would affect al-Da'wa's operations in the country. While Burhāmī eventually supported Mursī in 2012 elections simply on the basis of being an Islamist candidate against Aḥmad Shafīq, and was keen on collaborating in 2012 on the article two of the 1980 constitution in that *Sharī'a* principles are the main source of legislation, his attitude toward the Brotherhood shifted thereafter due to Mursī's enactments of judicial immunity and his restructuring of the Ministry for Religious affairs, then mostly operated by the Brotherhood supporters, a move that caused worry for al-Nūr. By becoming more prominent in the Egyptian political arena, the Salafis, especially al-Nūr, had to adapt to the rules of political conduct and hence escaped the regime's clampdown. In 2013, Burhāmī released a *fatwā* (religious edict)⁶² that

Ismā'īl: The Minister of Defense is an 'Emotional Actor', 2013, *Al-Waṭan*, accessed January 20, 2020, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20140127144227/http://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/174775>>.

58 Currently, he is serving a seven-year sentence for falsifying his candidacy application.

59 For al-Nūr official support of al-Sīsī's presidency, see "The Moment the Nūr Party Announced its Support for President al-Sīsī in the Presidential Elections," *al-Youm al-Sābi'*, retrieved on January 12, 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXRDntIBIW8&feature=emb_title>; also posted by "AP", <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5O00yvKceA>>.

60 See al-Ḥizb al-Waṭan's official Facebook profile, accessed February 25, 2020 <<https://www.facebook.com/nabdelwatan>>.

61 For more on al-Nūr, see Stéphane Lacroix, "Sheikhs and Politicians: Inside the New Egyptian Salafism," Brookings Institution, June 2012, <<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/6/07-egyptian-salafism-lacroix/stephane-lacroix-policy-briefing-english.pdf>>; Stéphane Lacroix, "Egypt's Pragmatic Salafis: The Politics of Hizb al-Nour," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2016, <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/11/01/egypt-s-pragmatic-salafis-politics-of-hizb-al-nour-pub-64902>>.

62 For al-Burhāmī's statement, originally posted on Salafi channel, see "Mubārak's Trial and the Position of the Military Council, Dr. Yasser Burhami," *Mawqī' anā Salafī*, retrieved on January 20, 2020,

Islamists supporting Mursī should not demonstrate in the streets or clash with anti-Mursī demonstrators. From early 2013 onward, al-Nūr turned more into an opposition party, denouncing the Brotherhood's takeover of the state apparatus.⁶³ The reason for Burhāmī's support of al-Sīsī is in his own words is the conviction that voting for him will more likely help preserve rights of Muslims (and non-Muslims) and prevent possible strife between oppositional forces. At the same time, one can assume that the Salafis wanted to preserve their own political existence, however marginal or inconsequential it may be, rather than to face the Brotherhood's faith. If the Brotherhood is an Islamist party in that it acts politically in order to assert its Islamic political program, which is broader in its vision of how the message of Islam informs politics, then the Salafis, and al-Nūr in particular, are more concerned with fundamental Islamic message and personal piety, which happens to be conveniently executed by political means.⁶⁴

When discussing Islamophobia and political Islam in Egypt, one cannot avoid mentioning the position and role of the prominent traditional Sunni institution of al-Azhar. Since religious practice is controlled and monopolized by al-Azhar, which in turn is in part controlled by the regime, at times al-Azhar presents a "buffer zone" by nurturing religious devotion and engaging in political life in the state. Al-Azhar is also a source of religious and social authority in the country, presenting a more traditional outlook on Islam. This often means contention with the government and non-traditional political forces. Despite al-Azhar's cultural and social decline under Mubārak's regime, it still represents a symbolic power of Sunni authority, and the regime change meant an opportunity for al-Azhar to regain some of the coalesced religious influence. Conversely, the new regime trusted more al-Azhar than the Salafis despite its ambivalent relationship.

During al-Sīsī's speech about the removal of President Mursī, was also the Grand Imām of al-Azhar, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, whose presence sent a clear message to the Brotherhood. When responding to the question why he upheld such a position, he asserted that it was necessary in order to avoid more harm and prevent possible bloodshed.⁶⁵ While by so doing al-Azhar absolved itself from possible involvement (and blame), some of its students participated in the Rāb'a sit-it. Moreover, few weeks prior to the government's crackdown of the Rāb'a sit-it, 'Alī Gum'a, the Grand Mufti of Egypt between 2003-2013, in his speech to the Egyptian Security Forces supported the religious justification of the security's deadly

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iueo7fBHnOs>>.

63 During the then-Defense minister al-Sīsī's speech on July 3, 2013, to remove President Mursī from power, one of al-Nūr's leaders was present along with Muḥammad al-Barāda'ī, the Grand Imām of al-Azhar, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, and Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria.

64 For more on the Salafī parties in Egypt, see, e.g., Aḥmad Zaghlūl Shalāta, *Al-Hāla al-Salafiyya fī Miṣr* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 2010); idem, *Al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya al-Sakandariyya* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-'Arabiyya, 2016); Stéphane Lacroix and Ahmed Zaghloul Shalata, "Shari'a et révolution: Émergence et mutations du salafisme révolutionnaire dans l'Égypte post-Moubarak," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 181.1 (2018): 201-218; Jacob Hoigilt and Frida Nome, "Egyptian Salafism in Revolution," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 25.1 (2014): 33-54.

65 See Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib's speech on supporting the removal of President Mursī "Statement by Sheikh al-Azhar Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib after Mursī's Ouster," 2013, retrieved January 20, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RagnigwbyCs>>.

crackdown of the supporters of the ousted President Mursī.⁶⁶ Al-Sīsī's regime was keen to deprive the Brotherhood of their religious and political legitimacy, which meant strengthening the political ties domestically and internationally by combating religious extremism and offering al-Azhar a bigger platform at home. After the January 25 revolution, al-Azhar signed a document on renouncing the violence, advocating for civil freedoms and women's rights,⁶⁷ a move closer to moderate Islam. In the midst of political divisions and turmoil, to al-Azhar's benefit, this was eventually translated in attaining more rights (or rather freedom) from the government—stating that al-Azhar gains independence from state's political authority under Article 4 of the 2012 and Article 7 of 2013 constitutions, respectively.⁶⁸ Al-Azhar's main task became dealing with and interpreting matters concerning religion. Despite that more pressure was leveraged against al-Azhar on revolutionizing religious discourse (reforming Islam) in the country, al-Azhar adhered to the government's new curriculum only in part. One way of dealing with that issue was for the government to reach out to former religious scholars tied to the regime, such as the prominent 'Alī Gum'a, who was deployed to oversee some of Muslim Brotherhood's charitable organizations seized by the government, such as the Islamic Medical Association,⁶⁹ in addition of banking and providing support for al-Sīsī's presidential elections.⁷⁰ By working with the new regime, since the Ministry of Religious Affairs—headed by al-Azhar and not the Brotherhood—now controls all mosques in the country, whose imāms require official license, al-Azhar further embedded itself into the religious-social sphere managed by the state.

While al-Azhar's Grand Imām al-Tayyib was seen as an initial supporter of the regime and a counterwave against the Salafī movement, al-Sīsī blamed him for failing to address aspects of religious orthodoxy and al-Azhar's influence on extremist groups in the region. On the occasion of Mawlid al-Nabi celebration of the birth of the Prophet, al-Sīsī gave a speech discussing religious discourse and al-Azhar's involvement in upholding an erroneous image of Islam in shaping Egyptian religious identity.

We talked before about the importance of the religious discourse and I am saying that we are proceeding in this point the real religious discourse... The religious discourse that should be idolized (sanctified) is one that is relevant to our time, to renew the faith every hundred years. I am talking here to the people of religion and the people who are responsible for this faith. It is impossible that the ideas that we

66 See 'Alī Gum'a, "'Alī Gum'a's Message to Egyptian Security Forces...," *YouTube*, accessed July 14, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCQqrryBy1E>>.

67 See Bilāl 'Abd Allāh, "Al-Dawr al-Siyāsī lil-Azhar ba'da al-Thawra," *Mu'minūn bi-lā hudūd*, 2014, 1-15, available at <<https://www.mominoun.com/articles/1560-الدور-السياسي-للازهر-بعد-الثورة-الثابت-والمتحول>>.

68 Bilāl 'Abd Allāh, "Al-Azhar and Sisi's Regime: Structural Roots of Disagreement," *Atlantic Council*, 2017, accessed on January 12, 2020, <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/al-azhar-and-sisi-s-regime-structural-roots-of-disagreement/>>.

69 See 'Īd Muṣṭafā, "Seizing the Property of the Islamic Medical Association...," *Al-Shurūq*, 2015, accessed on January 12, 2020, <<https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=14012015&id=b28f6796-ccbd-47d0-9a8c-74c3d1ad4425>>.

70 Under the pressure of the Shaykh of al-Azhar, 'Alī Gum'a eventually stepped down from certain posts meant to support al-Sīsī's rule.

adhere to are ideas that promote disturbance in the world, worry and killing. I do not mean the faith, but the ideas that are idolized for hundreds of years. Discarding those ideas has become very difficult, to the extent that those ideas are the enemy of the whole world. It is not possible for 1.6 billion to kill 7 billion people. I am saying this at al-Azhar, in front of the religious scholars. I hold you responsible on the Day of Judgment about what I just said. It is impossible to comprehend the problem while one is enshrined in it—you have to (exit it to) judge it—and for one to be enlightened. We need a religious revolution. The whole world is expecting from you [to act] because this *umma* is shred [into pieces]... and this perdition is [upon us] because of our deeds.⁷¹

The verbal attack on Islam as a source of violence is generally reflected in the regime's treatment of religious sentiments and more specifically in its campaign against the Brotherhood as the progenitors of terrorism in Egypt. Al-Sīsī's controversial call for religious revolution, i.e. reforming Islam, was also supported by various Western media outlets, echoing calls to modernize Islam.⁷² Reforming Islam also means discarding centuries-old Islamic traditional learning and ways of acquiring knowledge. Four years after al-Sīsī's proposition, al-Ṭayyib, in a speech delivered in honor of Laylat al-Qadr that aired on Egyptian Channel 1 TV in June 2019, asserted that Muslim scholars and intellectuals have tried to expose Islamophobia (in the West) for more than a decade, yet to no avail, and that its existence would not have been possible without the funding and support of modern colonialism, which is often disseminated by Western media machine.⁷³ In January 2020 at the "Al-Azhar International Conference on Renovation of Islamic Thought," al-Ṭayyib himself proposed⁷⁴ to further the religious revival, commencing with the Qur'anic law to cope with social and political development in the country and the region. By slamming religious extremism, al-Ṭayyib echoed al-Sīsī's speech on renewing religious discourse five years ago, which was endorsed also by the Ministry of Endowments as part of the state's war against terrorism and religious extremism, at whose core lied the Brotherhood.

The relation between the regime and al-Azhar is understandably based on mutual benefit. The state is well aware of al-Azhar's moral role in the fight against (extremist) religious groups in Egypt, since it provides a sense of legitimacy to institutionalized Islam,

71 See al-Sīsī's speech on religious revolution on New Year's Day, "Al-Sīsī's Egypt: Islamic 'Thinking' Is 'Antagonizing the Entire World'," 2015, retrieved January 20, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=23&v=POGpIt2U4s4&feature=emb_title>.

72 Shahira Amin, "President Sisi's Promise of Religious Revolution Remains Unfulfilled," *Egyptian Streets*, 2016, retrieved January 20, 2020, <<https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/07/05/president-sisis-promise-of-religious-revolution-remains-unfulfilled/>>.

73 See al-Ṭayyib's speech during the Laylat al-Qadr celebration, Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, "The Speech of the Grand Imām, Shaykh of al-Azhar al-Sharīf Aḥmad al- Ṭayyib, During the Celebration of Laylat Al-Qadr," *Al-Hayat TV Network*, 2019, retrieved on January 28, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZKAokj5760>>.

74 Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, "The Fifth Session of the al-Azhar International Conference on Renewal of Islamic Thought," *Al-Azhar al-Sharīf*, 2020 retrieved on January 30, 2020, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-gnBeJb0BE>>.

while also refuting accusation of secularism when disapproving extreme sources of political Islam. On the other hand, in order for al-Azhar to unobstructedly assert its religious authority, it needs the government's blessing. Al-Sīsī's speech and critique of religious discourse can thus be read as the regime's encroachment on al-Azhar's religious authority when steering the country toward a new era. Because of the contentions between various (religious and political) sources of authority in the country that predate al-Ṭayyib and al-Sīsī, manifested also in the recent disputes over the Rāb'a sit-in and the controversial statement about revolutionizing religious discourse, some traditional political forces boycotted the election to undermine al-Sīsī's power. While some predicted that the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood was a momentum of collaboration between al-Azhar and the new power structure, it also brought about animosity and antagonisms between state officials and religious scholars over the questions of religious-political legitimacy in the country. In 2021, the regime aimed to take control over the country's religious affairs by stripping al-Azhar of its rule over Dār al-Iftā', an institution issuing religious edicts for Muslims in the country, which means that religious matters would be placed under the jurisdiction of al-Sīsī. Al-Sīsī clearly stated that the state should oversee all matters, including religion. Under the proposed bill, Dār al-Iftā' would have its own budget and the Grand mufti would be appointed by the President himself. Al-Azhar rejected the proposal, saying that it politicizes its role and religion in the country.

The absence of contemporary (Islamic) political theory of the legitimacy of the state,⁷⁵ means that religious scholars refer to their premodern counterparts when discussing normative issues and their possible solutions within the nation-state. While this is in many respects adequate in order to revive a cosmology and epistemology of pre-colonial Muslim societies of governance, ethical theories, and social structures, it is ineffective because the Muslim-majority countries are facing structural stalemates and are failing to produce a theory that would adequately address *Shari'a*'s rule and its oversight. If Salafi and more conservative religious scholars have no ambition in adapting to liberal political values, also the secular political forces seem to have little to no interest in accepting more religious Islamic structures of power because of their difference in imagining political and social life.

Given the profound failure of the recent Egyptian government to produce citizens capable of cooperation in the context of a common political project, it should not be surprising that some Muslims take up interpretations of Islam and Islamic law that are fundamentalist or extreme in their scope. The issue is not the impact of Islam's primary texts, including classical Islamic theology and law that are used as references by the Islamists, but the incoherent nature of Islamists' political projects and the epistemological-political divide between them and the secular forces in the modern nation-state. This divide appears to be foundational for the modern policymaking in Egypt, which was necessary for maintaining the functioning of the secular state.⁷⁶

75 For more, see Mohamed Fadel, "ISIS, Islamophobia and the End of Sunnism," *The Islamic Monthly*, accessed December 13, 2019, <<https://www.theislamicmonthly.com/isis-islamophobia-and-the-end-of-sunnism/>>. On the notion of Divine sovereignty and governance in modern Islamic thought, see Andrew March, *The Caliphate of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2019).

76 On imperial restructuring in Egypt, see, e.g., John Eliot Bowen, "The Conflict of East and West in Egypt" *Political Science Quarterly*, 1.2 (1886): 295-335; Nathan Brown, "Retrospective: Law and Imperialism: Egypt in Comparative Perspective," *Law & Society Review*, 29.1 (1995): 103-26; idem

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the state-purported Islamistphobic discourse in Egypt, channeled chiefly through the regime's gradual disempowerment of the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike the Salafi parties, the Muslim Brotherhood from its very inception remained one of the major challenges to the ruling elites in the country. Throughout the 20th century, various Egyptian regimes resorted not only to particular language when deeming the organization a violent movement, but also pursued structural changes geared toward dissolving the movement, such as imprisonment of their leaders, torture of their supporters, freezing their assets, and labeling it as a terrorist organization. The promotion of a politically neutered and state-dominated Islam by the Egyptian ruling elites serves the state's political project. While the Salafis assume political theology of Islam as centered on the sovereignty of law and respect for authority, the Brotherhood assumed a certain kind of relationship between Islamic rule as religious leadership and governmental authority.

Page | 114

While both Islamophobia and anti-Islamist discourse rely on certain mechanisms of repression, they differ in their genealogies, since Islamophobia is rooted in a religious framework. In response to the 9/11 attacks, liberal democracies devised language centered also on political Islam, characterizing its ideologies as anti-modernist, in spite of being rooted in a modernist discourse. Post-2011 Egypt enforced some of those strategies. The state's construction of the tropes, such as "war on terror", "national security", "chaos", and "Islamic reform" are not leveraged against Islam generally but are ideologically aligned with al-Sīsī's discourse on and vision of the stability of the country in the aftermath of the 2013 counter-revolution, depicting specifically the Muslim Brotherhood, and to an extent, al-Azhar, as retrograde to Egypt's modernization efforts. Casting the Muslim Brotherhood, and as of recently also al-Azhar, as undesirable while clamping down on its political representatives, enforces the state to resolve the "Islam question" by creating binaries of "us" versus "them" within the political space. Using excessive force and generating ambiguous counterterrorism laws that target its proponents by suppressing political opposition, undermines the very idea of what Arab states are in principle advocating. Egyptian regime's narrative of fighting the same enemy as their Western counterparts, namely radical Islam(ists), speaks of political perils, for such discourse uses moral grounds of the threat of political Islam to de-revolutionize Egyptian society after 2011 and to identify political opponents on the basis of their religious affiliation, despite the inadequacy of the Brotherhood's political program.

Until a new political theology is established that can adapt the historical principles of Sunni authority to the prevalent Arab-secular realities, one cannot assume a peaceful coexistence of various political-religious strands in the greater Middle East generally and within Egypt specifically.

"Sharia and State in the Modern Muslim Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 29.3 (1997): 359-76; Byron Cannon, "Social Tensions and the Teaching of European Law in Egypt before 1900," *History of Education Quarterly*, 15.3 (1975): 299-315.

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