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Between Political Arena and the Mosque: Islamist Governance in Egypt and Tunisia after the 2011 Arab Uprisings

Abstract: This article presents a comparative study of political Islam in Egypt and Tunisia after the 2011 Arab uprisings. The study offers a comparative analysis of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) and Tunisian Ennahda's governance and practices in their respective countries. An insight on theoretical debates and ideological transformations across political Islam's ideology is offered, while exploring the pathways towards political moderation. By comparatively investigating various sectors, such as politics, ideology, and social agendas, differentiated political Islam trajectories are uncovered and highlighted. Specifically, MB's and Ennahda's attainments, pitfalls, limitations, and the reasons behind their successes and failures, are presented. Furthermore, despite their "demise", this article explores important strategies of survival, especially for the Egyptian MB.

Keywords: Political Islam, Religion, Politics, Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda, Egypt, Tunisia, 2011 Arab Uprisings, Islamism

I. Introduction

Despite being widely secular, religion and politics were the two most influential protagonists during the Arab uprisings in 2011 across the Middle East. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia offer two excellent case studies for the participation of the historic Islamist organizations during revolutionary and post-revolutionary transitions. Both are revealing examples of politicized Islam along the 21st century. Specifically, for many observers, Tunisia's case has been the most "successful" in sociopolitical terms. In Egypt, respectively, the MB operated both as a compass and as an ideological crucible, without, though, constituting a paragon. Both organizations activated an interesting ideologically debate which largely transformed their organizational and ideological imprint.

This transformation was bidirectional; religion transformed political culture while concomitantly, politics altered religious manifestations.

Middle Eastern Islamist movements have managed to politically affiliate to local, national and regional politics, as the Jordanian, the Lebanese or the Yemeni cases show [Browers 2009; Lynch 2016]. The 2011 experience allowed the Islamist movements to continue to participate in politics, incorporating, at least in Ennahda's case, a more pluralistic discourse. Meanwhile, as many examples demonstrate, moderate Islamist parties found themselves oscillating between violent jihadism (i.e. Islamic State) and the reformist currents of political Islam. This generated dissonance over presenting themselves as an "Islamic alternative". Subsequently, ideological shifts soon took place inside Islamist organizations. Re-modelling unleashed inter-generational conflicts related with identity and existential issues. Thus, regardless of their independent itineraries, both organizations chose, to a lesser or to a greater extent, the de-politicization of their social movements, partly uncoupling the social from the political element.

In approaching the MB as a social movement and a political party after 2011, the interest lies in the way(s) both spheres seem to overlap, generating an alluring "grey zone". The MB had an astonishing rise and a bewildering fall with no equivalent so far in the Arab uprisings. This demise of Islamist movements occurred either due to exogenous interventions (i.e. Egypt) or as a result of several domestic political rearrangements (i.e. Tunisia), or even as a result of a combination of both (which applies to both cases). A cluster of political miscalculations and ideological oversights, combined with an extreme state crackdown, drove the parties away from their calculated political activities in different periods. Therefore, political Islam is mainly defined by specific political contexts which might overlook its ideological design. However, the political context is complemented with a sequence of economic and social variables, combined with the regional and international setting.

In effect, through the comparative approach of these two organizations, the MB and Ennahda, this article will seek to uncover convergences and divergences during the 2011 period and the character of their political governance. Findings are revealing and interesting; common ideological quests, similar strategic mishaps but also different transformations and strategic alignments. This paper, apart from crucial theoretical issues, will firstly discuss some important ideological reconsiderations that took place in both organizations before the outburst of the

2011 uprisings. It will then attempt to comparatively discuss their reactions to the tectonic changes that both countries witnessed after 2011, while the shifts between illegality to legality and vice versa will also be examined.

II. Theoretical and methodological questions

Political Islam is a wide range of political, ideological and social beliefs. Since 1967, political Islam has witnessed a blossoming in its ideas, adherents and organizations. The focus in this paper is, based on Q. Wiktorowicz's [2006] distinction, the current that fuels and is concomitantly fed by politics (politicos) and contemporary social movements, in contrast with the quietists (purists) who refuse to engage with politics and the jihadists who exclusively adopt violent means to reach their goals. The political is, undoubtedly, the current that struggled most with the social and political questions of their respective societies and attempted to offer solutions to tackle malaises. In the current paper, political Islam will be analysed based on the complexity and heterogeneity that permeates its existence. Essentialist interpretations and approaches, based only on the repercussions on international relations, will be omitted. The analysis will follow the Social Movement Theory (SMT) and its dynamics. This approach allows us to detect the political, economic and identity aspects of both movements, positioning them in each context.

Correspondingly, a concentration on the rationalism that prevailed over decision making processes in both organizations will be stressed. In other words, what is significant is that the MB and Ennahda designed their political approach largely with political rather than ideological criteria. This choice is not striking; as many scholars have shown [Wiktorowicz 2004; Mandaville 2001], Islamist movements exclusively act as rational actors and, in every step, calculate costs and benefits. Hence, as we shall propose, the MB and Ennahda, already having a mature and solid organizational mechanism, sharply and quickly reacted, mobilizing resources taking advantage of the 2011 political openings.

Without totally sidelining their ideological imprint, Egypt's and Tunisia's Islamists were quick and efficient enough in building cross-ideological platforms. Undoubtedly, these synergies were programmatic and were not conveniently formed; what mostly characterized them was a temporality which was overarching and tortuous. A cross-ideological theoretical framework for the Middle East is offered by the Egyptian sociologist Maha Abdelrahman. Abdelrahman [2009: 39-40] refers to the temporary cross-ideological alliances in modern Egypt that are characterized by "cooperative differentiation", which – in turn – are permeated

by two fundamental tenets. The first is *consensus* around programmatic positions and aims while the second is *organizational and ideological independence* and freedom. In both examples, these tenets were respected, mitigating contingent radical ideological beliefs.

Organizations of political Islam are often embedded and analysed with New Social Movement Theory (NSMT). SMT analysis has avoided, especially after 1960s, traditional models of organization and identities, such as working-class affiliation. Inter alia, one of the main differentiations for groups of collective demands is the creation of a civil society and, on top of that, the inclusion of the cultural element. These "complex systems of action" [Serdedakis 2023: 227] are claiming more space politically, socially and economically through solidarity, confrontation and the disintegration of each regulatory frameworks, in other words, of each historical context. According to McCarthy and Zald [1977], political organizations and social movements have a distinctive difficulty in defining them. However, both should be separately approached and not linearly related to each other, since they constitute two distinctive observation units. Conflation may lead us to suspend the heterogeneity of both. Put differently, avoiding conflation can enable us to more efficiently tackle theoretical challenges. In this manner, personal and collective demands can be better identified and detect convergences and divergencies.

Likewise, in the cases under study, the organizations of political Islam constitute "complex systems of action" with, similarly, complex relations with social movements. Utilizing Bert Klandermans' theory [2004: 360-361] related to supply and demand processes in social movements, this paper claims that social movements in Egypt and Tunisia around 2011 offered a type of "demand" in their collective action. Meanwhile, organizations of political Islam, with their existing mechanisms and their social and political connectedness and networking, supplied organizational readiness for reaching revolutionary goals. In general, Islamist movements are distinguished by their complex and rambling internal infrastructure that distinguish social from political movements. For instance, in the MB, a strict pyramidal hierarchy, coupled with frequent internal elections, offered a sense of renewal. Yet, the scale of autonomy of local organizations and the direct connection with local civil society allowed, on the one hand, long-term resilience and on the other hand, flexibility and deterrence of a non-reversible crackdown. This connection gave the MB the opportunity to quickly mobilize their members in the turbulent days of 2011 [Lynch 2016: 21].

The issue of political inclusiveness is another theoretically debated question. Advantages deriving from political inclusiveness and political participation in constitutional democracies are plenty. These include moving away from a radical thesis, abandoning a violent response to violent suppression and also increasing constituencies. It has, at the same time, qualitative and quantitative benefits. For instance, some scholars have suggested that "entryism" has pushed Islamists in the past towards taking important steps of democratizing their political mentality. Oliver Roy [1998] coined this process as a "social democratization" of some organizations of political Islam. On the other hand, the term "post-Islamism", as sociologist Asef Bayat [2013] described it, reflects the successful adjustment of political Islamic organizations to political, social and economic desiderata. According to Bayat's conceptualization, post-Islamism is an analytical category to describe the socio-political state of political Islam in the post-modern period and the transformations observed among, mostly, secular nation-states.

Various academics [Bayat 2013; Browers 2009] have suggested that inclusion indeed leads to ideological moderation. Still, political participation does not teleologically modify radical movements to moderate ones. Each dominant political ideology, political culture and political desiderata, inter alia, occasionally amplify or mitigate radical positions [Schwedler 2013]. Revolutionary momentum is critical; as the political system changes, political moderation is not a one-way street. A (semi) autocratic political system, such as the Egyptian one, is more likely to generate a more radical political discourse or praxis. At the same time, in Tunisia, with a more open (at least for a short period of time) political system, the prospect of a moderate Islamist governance was real, and came into being for a long period after 2010. In other words, the fields of experience and the horizons of expectations of the revolutionary actors critically drove their perspectives and actions alongside each social and political context.

III. Transformations: Political Islam in a power ordeal

Before the 2011 uprisings, no actual Islamist government existed in the Arab world. The cases of Iran in 1979 and Turkey in early 2000s are two distinctive examples that do not exist in the Arab context. Algeria's Front Islamique du Salut's (FIS) Islamists in early 2000s did not manage to ascend to power. Palestinian Hamas's domination in Gaza belongs to a completely different context, given its national-liberation character under Israel's occupation in a settler-colonial context. Despite, by and large, considering MB as a model of moderate political Islam, its different national branches have historically followed diverse routes. Therefore, MB and

Ennahda are neither identical nor representative cases of political Islam. Generally, political Islamic parties have distinctive experiences with regards to the level of ideology and concomitantly to the level of institutionalization. Some accepted – after a severe crackdown – to support their national regimes (i.e. Jordan), while others – in return for political benefits – decided to restrict their actions to social work, leaving aside political criticism and opposition (i.e. Morocco) [Lynch 2016: 5]. Looking for more historical depth, many Islamist movements, including MB, FIS and Shi'a parties in Iraq (i.e. al-Daw'a) ascribed to the current of cross-ideological synergies. With strategic cooperation from a wide ideological spectrum, such cooperation aimed at opposing their autocratic regimes, demanding wider political openness and social and political rights [Lynch 2016; Browers 2009].

At the same time, another current of Islamism engaged in armed struggle against their regimes (i.e. Syria, Libya), a gesture that does not strictly lie on their decision-making but includes a range of local and regional non-state actors' involvement. Without doubt, these different strategies rendered the organizations of political Islam divided and disorientated. Besides, the MB is an organization that was formed in the context of the anti-colonial struggle in Egypt (1928), and it has travelled a long route from radicalism to moderation. On the other hand, Ennahda is comparatively young and has been widely influenced by the MB's political journey and identity. As Racheed Ghannouchi [2016] claimed, despite Ennahda being recently influenced by Maghreb intellectuals, the party's historical and intellectual roots can be traced to the MB. The shared matrix was accompanied with attempts to influence and consolidate political Islam as an ideology across social divides. For instance, many organizations and their intellectuals have participated in public debates related to the form of political organization and political ethics in the Arab world, such as the infamous debate in the Cairo Book Fair in January 1992, where Farag Fouda, Muhammad al-Ghazali and the then MB spokesman Ma'mun al-Hudaybi participated [Beinin 1996; Flores 1993].

Recurrent transformations were unsurprising. Both organizations went through long-term processes; since the 1980s, both equally demonstrated a spirit of renewal in their political and intellectual milieu. As John Chalcraft [2016: 422] has suggested, Islamists' intellectual labour throughout the 1980s and 1990s took, in Gramscian terms, hegemonic characteristics. Traditional political Islam motives, such as cultural corrosion and financial dependency, were enriched with a framework of socio-political freedoms. For example, despite the struggle between the "old" and the "new" guard in 1986 within the MB, after the death

of the MB murshid (leader) Omar al-Tilimsani, the organization chose further participation in electoral politics [Wickham 2013: 49], framing it as another form of jihad. In 1995, the *Declaration to the People* corroborated their commitment and respect for political freedoms and constitutionalism. Correspondingly, in 1981, al-Ghannouchi, respectively, expressed his intention to participate to the national elections with the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI – Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami). Since the mid-1980s, Ennahda has co-signed the petitions for political transformation and pluralism in Tunisia and the Arab world, seeking inclusion in the period's political openings [McCarthy 2018: 369-371], Furthermore, in a strategic move seeking electoral participation, MTI altered its name to Ennahda, removing any reference to Islam. Further, both parties cling to a tradition of cross-ideological alliances against their autocratic regimes. For instance, the MB occasionally cooperated with liberal parties, such as al-Wafd in 1984 and with other liberal parties in 1987, as well as throughout the 2000s [Thabet 2006: 25; Browers 2007: 69–70; Abdelrahman 2009]. Respectively, Ennahda took part in the October 18th Coalition for Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia, which was formed in order to articulate an alternative platform against President Ben Ali.

As historical processes in both moderate movements have showcased, with MB being a pioneer, a gradual de-Islamization in both movements took place. This is reflected from the priorities of their political agenda, such as the marginalization of the imposition of shari'a or Islam being the only source of law [Leigh Wilmot 2014]. Thus, notions such as democracy, political pluralism, secularity and modernism became part and parcel of the political discourse of moderate political Islam during the 1980s and 1990s [Shabana 2013]. Nonetheless, the imprint of Islamist organizations until 2011 seem to have taken the form of a "preparation" for ascending to power, regardless of whether they really believed that this day would ever come [Lynch 2016] and despite the fact that every single political opening that the Islamists witnessed was regime controlled.

IV. A road to God knows where: Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda

The Arab uprisings were not orchestrated or driven by organizations of political Islam. On the contrary, the MB and Ennahda reacted rather uneasily in the beginning. Fear of a negative outcome and stigmatization, as well as obstacles due to their own internal polyphony in both organizations, held them back from participating. For example, in Egypt, members of the MB withdrew and formed after 2011 a secular party, the Egyptian Current (al-Tayyar al-Misri) [Meijer 2014: 134]. As the revolutionary load heightened, many MB members in Egypt participated

in the protests without openly revealing their affiliation. Eventually, both parties were somehow obliged to take a clearer stance against their regimes as the pressure grew. However, both organizations managed to underline national over religious identity, without rejecting the salience of the latter. They ascribed, though, to the need to engage with issues of political nature rather than with social Islamization, a field in which, as a result of state repression, they were very active [McCarthy 2018: 367]. These preoccupations rapidly changed since there was a qualitative transition from the "Arab street" towards the political arena [Brown 2103: 5].

Furthermore, many transformations in political Islam's character were witnessed. The creation of a political platform, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Egypt, hastily changed the political landscape but also brought into the fore organizational contradictions. A harsh tug-of-war for leadership was initiated, which was mainly related to the party's and organization's political identity and desiderata. Many members, such as the erstwhile leader Aboul Fotouh, opposed the establishment of a new political party since this move would disengage the organization from its social base. Furrher objections were articulated by other members (Essam al-Aryan & Saad Katatni), something that ushered younger members to express scepticism with regards to the trajectory of the organization. MB's political readiness appeared with deftness when, during the protests in February 2011, the organization managed to gain serious political benefits both from the arena of social movements but also from Mubarak's political openings [Leigh Wilmot 2014: 21-22]. This comes as no surprise; political readiness emanates from direct response to political challenges with the presentation and activation of the Renaissance Project by Khairet al-Shater, who put ahead an ideologically loaded Islamic governance which, nevertheless, would be based on the tenets of constitutional democracy [Ikhan Web 2011]. The ambiguity continued since, from being a traditionally oppositional power, the MB found itself in a power struggle. This became clear in an overt disagreement over the issue of Khairet al-Shater's candidacy for presidency in 2012, which was finally disapproved [al-Anani 2015: 537]. The FJP finally elected Mohamed Morsi for the candidacy, making him the first democratically elected president in the history of Egypt.

Even when Morsi managed to claim victory in the elections, practicing genuine politics was not an easy task, mainly because of domestic power struggles. This was channelled through antagonisms with the "ancien regime" but also from the diffused enmity towards the MB. For instance, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) constituted the MB as a political organization which, to succeed,

must compromise its positions along the political establishment [Wickham 2013: 170]. Being aware of their power and impact, the MB attempted to exploit SCAF and turn public opinion against it, as, for example, during the protests outside Maspero in Cairo in 2011, when twenty-seven protesters were killed by the Egyptian army (Meijer 2014: 131) and during the November-December 2011 protests in central Cairo. Undermining SCAF proved an insurmountable issue. In the MB's hierarchy of values, what was finally prioritized during the turbulent 2011 period was not social change but a consensus to gain and maintain power [Leigh Wilmot 2014: 29]. Besides, for the MB, change was not to occur in the streets but rather through electoral politics, a major strategic transformation for political Islam; this was reflected in the national assembly elections when they claimed a 43 per cent.

In retrospect, what research highlights is that the MB largely undermined consensual perspectives. For the first time in their history, the MB had the chance to contribute to a drafting committee for a new constitutional text. As MB expectations imposed an Islamic frame over the new constitution, doubts over the real role and expectations on behalf of the MB arose from members of other ideological origins of the committee. Liberals, democrats and secularists felt aversion towards the MB's intentions to ideologically and politically dominate the country and the constitution [Meijer 2014: 133]. During the 2012 Constituent Assembly, Egyptian Islamists managed to control its 2/3 majority, despite their prior declarations of ideological heterogeneity. The justification was that parliamentary reality was reflected in this manner. Another sense of distrust came when while the MB had promised that they would not seek a parliamentary majority allowing political polyphony; in reality, they announced more candidates than they had earlier declared, generating an environment of distrust. In addition, while modifications and enhancements over the constitutional draft were proposed, such as the al-Selim document which aimed at protecting individual and collective rights against religious threats, most of them were unjustifiably rejected [Leigh Wilmot 2014: 31].

While in leadership, in November 2012, Mohammed Morsi, in a surprising manoeuvre, that was characterized as a constitutional coup by many, declared himself in control of the Egyptian constitutional court. In the promulgation, article 2 stated that any law passed after his election as a president would simply be above legislative scrutiny and that the president had the right to pass laws that "safeguard the revolution" [Mabrouk 2013]. In addition, in contrast with Tunisia, the MB

expeditiously drafted a constitution that was not unanimously accepted, finally highlighting shari'a's salience as its founding principle [Meijer 2014: 135]. These developments precipitated the growth of opposition platforms against the MB, such as Tamarod [Ben Lazreg 2021: 11], orchestrating a vast anti-Islamist campaign across major Egyptian cities. Another reflection of general hostility against the MB was the formation of the National Salvation Front in 2012, demanding the ousting of the MB from power. For many analysts, the MB had only reached "behavioural" and not a genuine "ideological" moderation [Schwedler 2013]. As observed, the MB neither had the political culture nor the willpower to build a strong cross-ideological and pluralistic structure to lead Egypt to a smooth post-revolutionary transition.

On the other hand, Ennahda had as its leader one of the most influential and inspiring intellectuals of contemporary political Islam. Racheed al-Ghannouchi has been one of the figures that promoted the culture of a democratic and pluralistic political Islam in both theory and praxis. Having lived long in exile (Britain), he was knowledgeable in subjects such as Islam and its governance, individual and collective rights and shari'a. His magnum opus *Public Freedoms in the Islamic State* (al-Huriyyat al-'ammah fi'l Dawla al-Islamiyyah) not only engages with the issue of political Islam managing state power, but also closely relates social transformation with altering social possibilities. He deems Islam largely compatible with (post)modernity and its challenges, without, though, ignoring the latter's suppressing mechanisms [Ghannouchi 2022]. For al-Ghannouchi, a secular/democratic state (al-dawla al-madaniyya) is "less evil" in comparison to a despotic/Islamic one [Abu Rabi' 2004: 210]. Ennahda is presented as an inclusive party that is open to dialogue. Al-Ghannouchi characterized it as equivalent to the German Christian-Democrats, that is a conservative but democratic party that favours a liberal economy and the rule of constitutional law [Ben Lazreg 2021: 7].

Similar to Egypt, the uprising in Tunisia and the ousting of Ben Ali in the beginning of 2011 marked the strengthening of Ennahda's Islamists. Ennahda's remarkable electoral victory (89 of 217 seats), activated a lasting ideological and organizational transformation. The need to consolidate political stability expedited these evolutions. As Ben Lazreg proposes [2021: 8], Ennahda deftly retreated over critical social and political issues that even eroded its ideological façade and identity. Unlike the MB, Ennahda did not include shari'a as the main legislative source while it withdrew its demand for criminalizing blasphemy. Al-Ghannouchi

ideologically framed these concessions; he claimed that the supremacy of Islam lies exactly on its capability to adjust depending on social needs and the promotion of democratic reforms. However, the gunning down of two of his political adversaries (Chokri Belaid και Mohamed Brahmi) in 2013 – for which the Islamist deep-state was blamed – generated a critical juncture. The crisis was even scaled-up by delays on passing a constitutional draft, further delays on serious socio-economic reforms and over the failure to tackle high unemployment, a malaise that led to the 2010 uprising. Eventually, the government resigned in 2014, highlighting Tunisia's Islamists eagerness not to damage the political landscape and revolutionary gains. During the next elections, Ennahda fell to sixty-nine seats, triggering additional transformations in the movement.

Unlikely Morsi's position, who failed to drive Egypt to wide political consensuses and was coined as power-hungry, al-Ghannouchi managed to lead the party towards striking wide transitional coalitions (i.e. with Nidaa Tounes), cultivating a democratic spirit and delivering power vis-à-vis a political crisis [Lynch 2016: 9; Ben Lazreg 2021: 8]. Since the 2011 elections, al-Ghannouchi had declared his intentions for an inclusive transition government. The first post-2010 government was coined as a "troika", since it consisted of Ennahda, Etakatol and the Democratic Congress (CPR). What's more, despite the nebulous relations between al-Ghannouchi and Nidaa Tunes leader, Beji Caid Essebsi, both parties temporarily collaborated on programmatic terms, fitting M. Abdelrahman's theoretical frame on cross-ideological alliances. In the same spirit, after the 2019 elections, Ennahda chose to join the new-formed Qalb Tunes, despite declaring otherwise prior to the elections (Ben Lazreg [2021: 10]. In contrast, the MB in Egypt, despite forming in 2011 the Democratic Alliance with al-Ghad, al-Karama and other parties [Jadaliyya 2011], did not seek wider alliances in their pursuit of the *fuloul* (remnants of the old regime), quickly losing much of their legitimacy. The making of wider socio-political consensus in Tunisia proves that it boosted stability and political credibility.

Ennahda suffered from deep internal disputes related to identity transitions. Similar to Egypt, confrontation and discredit derived from its radical members. Disputes ended in the formation of a Salafist party, the Dignity Coalition (Itilaf al-Karama), which managed to gain six percent of the votes in the 2019 elections [Ben Lazreg 2021: 9]. A Salafist party, al-Nour, also challenged the MB in Egypt during its short reign and in the aftermath of this. Despite successful political manoeuvres, Ennahda gradually started losing credibility in the political sphere

from 2020. A critical variable was Ennahda's leader's attempt to collaborate with Ben Ali's people, such as Mohammed al-Yeriany, aiming at overcoming his political opponents. This move raised ethical concerns over the real intentions of Tunisia's Islamists.

Comparatively, both organizations did not react with the same eagerness in issues of equality and minority rights. Ennahda dedicated efforts to incorporate in its priorities issues of gender equality. Whether including more women in its cadres or trying to legislatively protect sex-workers or legally frame gender-based violence, Ennahda – despite harsh internal reactions – endeavoured to reinvigorate, always in an Islamic mindset, its political discourse. Conversely, the MB did not follow the same trajectory, reflecting a more patriarchal model. In line with the views of the "old guard", Egyptian Islamists opposed gender-based reforms towards equal rights. On FJP's political platform, women's rights are solely defined along the lines of the Islamic law [Ben Lazreg 2021: 14]. Respectively, MB's performance on minority rights was equally poor. For example, while Ennahda chose to include a Jewish candidate for the 2018 municipal elections, the MB chose a discourse that, mainly, demonized Copts and that ultimately led to violent clashes [Ben Lazreg 2021].

Political choices and transition within both parties cannot be approached without reference to the regional environment. Qatar's and Turkey's support for political Islam was crucial. Material, especially, and communicational support of the former and logistical of the latter became a cornerstone for their success, as well as a haven after the MB's delegitimization and ousting from Egypt. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and the UAE also got involved in mobilizing anti-Islamist propaganda [Lynch 2016: 15]. Additionally, as is often observed, a sequence of local (i.e. the coup d'etat in Egypt) and regional (the Syrian and Libyan civil wars) developments have internationalized political Islam's agenda, in contrast to the process previously witnessed, that is the focus of political Islam in domestic affairs. Concomitantly, internationalization consolidated the exchange of "good practices" as imperative for moderate political Islam's survival and further as a strategic necessity to promote religious political moderation as a nonpareil, vis-à-vis the spread of ISIS's form of religious radicalization. Besides, the Islamic State regarded the MB as "apostates" from Islam [Durham University 2018]. However, as some scholars suggest (Awad & Hashem 2015), regional factors and notions, manpower and material spillover can always pose a threat to domestic security across borderline areas, such as in Egypt's Sinai.

V. The quest for Post-Islamism: From outlaws to legals and back to outlawry

Whereas the Egyptian MB historically constitutes the ideological compass for political Islam at an international level, their recent experience does not bode well for political Islam's governance. A year in office is not a total evaluation. Current scholars [Ben Lazreg 2021; Schwedler 2013] have evaluated Ennahda's performance, in post-Islamist terms, as more successful. Political formations, eagerness for cooperation as well as readiness for political openings justify this approach. On the contrary, according to Khalil al-Anani [2015: 529], the MB has failed to socially cement itself for three reasons: the lack of revolutionary spirit the momentum required, the errors of the organizational chain and political mismanagement. In both cases, notwithstanding, Islamists did not manage to dominate the state apparatus. A series of established institutions, such as the judiciary, the army and security forces, were almost under the previous regimes' total control, resulting in an overwhelming hindering of the democratic transition. Al-Anani [2015: 539] observes for the MB that "the more they tried to put these institutions under their control, the further resistance they met".

Perhaps, the most intriguing example is al-Azhar in Egypt. The dependence of the most powerful and influential Sunni institution from the Egyptian state showcased the lack of autonomy in political and doctrinal issues after the 2011 revolution [Brown 2013].

Frustration and the creation of social and political alliances against Morsi's governance brought rapid and dramatic changes in Egypt after a year of MB in office. On July 3rd, after several days of massive protests and a 48-hour ultimatum by the Egyptian army, power was seized by General and then Defence Minister Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. For the MB, the 2013 coup d'etat, the subsequent Raba'a al-Adawiyya massacre (August 14th, 2013, with approximately 1,000 casualties) and the MB's re-designation as a terrorist organization, all became a landmark for post-2011 political Islam. A national and regional network, that was formed before 2011, disintegrated after 2013, marking the MB's return to proscribed status, seeking refuge in allied countries. Particularly, after the MB ban in 2013, their members' incarceration, the issue of several death penalties against their leaders, and the organization's assets that were frozen (Kingsley 2013), the MB has dissipated. The MB failed to develop solid crisis management. Previous close ties with al-Sisi did not prevent the latter from moving against them. At the same time, popular dissatisfaction was not timely diagnosed, resulting in political miscalculations.

After the coup, the MB chose a religious (mihna)[1] and not a strategic framing to avoid collapse.

Nevertheless, the social and political imprint of both organizations is overwhelming. For example, the MB's "demise" is not enough to remove them from the Egyptian social and political fabric. Conscious denial of the organization's detachment from the social movements, in contrast with what occurred in Tunisia, has, perhaps, saved the organization from elimination. The Egyptian state has developed two strategies against the MB. On the one hand, it attempted to "decapitate" the MB's leadership to cause its deactivation. On the other hand, it tried, mostly unsuccessfully, to demonize the MB, connecting them with violence, radical Islamism and political violence [Zollner 2019]. The first approach is, undoubtedly, short-sighted; the MB, despite its strict hierarchy, is not confined to a strategic cadre but, as mentioned, has social roots. The second approach provocatively ignores multiplicity and heterogeneity across the spectrum of political Islam and its various manifestations.

Yet, strategy in relation to ideology still occurs. This is reflected, one more time, in cross-generational gaps and political violence. The new generation, particularly in Egypt, is trying to radicalize the movement, even if the creation of a new formation would be needed. At the same time, older members are still dedicated to struggle through political means [Zollner 2019]. The new generation casts doubt on the decisions of the old one, who are either in jail or in exile. Reality has driven to a public division since different opinions and positions are being expressed in many media outlets. Meanwhile, the MB's disorganization is reflected in the separation between the social and the political movement since, again, contradictory postulates on the subject have been occasionally articulated [Amr Darrag 2016]. Ambiguity may reflect different and contradictory positions on these matters between different generations and different schools of thought within the MB. In the aftermath of the Raba'a massacre, most analysts highlighted the democratic disguise that the MB has been serving the people in their attempt to hang on power. Besides, as many proposed, the mystical veil that covers the *tanzim*, the party's internal apparatus, still provokes concern for its dynamics and real intentions [Meijer 2014: 131].

Still, the MB seem to evade complete disintegration. Its survival mechanism is interesting. Although its two overarching institutions remain in place (Guidance

[1] It refers to the ousting of pious Muslims from religious deviants during the 9th century from the Caliph al-Ma'mun.

Office, Shura), the crackdown led to a degree of de-centralization and de-hierarchization, which, in turn, made the organization more resilient to suppression. Thus, channels of communication between the rank-and-file members are not cut. The first factor for resilience is its pyramidal structure. As many Guidance Office members are jailed in Egypt, those who managed to avoid incarceration and escape abroad are still able to continue the MB's work. In April 2015, the MB promulgated the formation of an exile Guidance Office, which probably exists between (mainly) Turkey, Qatar and London (Middle East Eye 2015). The Guidance's primacy offers a real alternative and a pathway to continuation [Trager 2011], establishing an "army" of apparatchik. Despite the pyramidal structure, the MB facilitates horizontal communication channels, steering clear already known paths. As Zollner [2019] underlines, these procedures are a past consignment from the decades of crackdown on the organization, a consignment enriched with modern technology tools. The MB's size and dispersion are yet another factor that contributes to its survival. Al-Sisi's regime, despite its vast network of counterespionage has not managed yet to eliminate the MB. Lastly, the degree of independence and the laxity of surveillance from the MB's leadership that some members enjoy in spreading Islamist notions is of fundamental importance [Zollner 2019]. Unquestionably, MB's ideology can thus be altered and be spread across the Egyptian society without being destroyed.

Corresponding organizational and identity issues have occurred for Tunisia's Islamists; mostly, the dual identity of the party, the political and the socio-religious one. As McCarthy [2018: 376-380] thoughtfully observes, Ennahda's members were puzzled over issues related to its ideological trajectory and framing as well as its strategy. In other words, issues that were closely connected to the place and salience of Islam and its reflection on the party's politics and discourse. Another issue was the party's strategy over Tunisia's societal and political malfunctions and the ties between the party and the social movements. Since the party's conference in 2012, a gradual disconnection was put forward. With the formation of the Dawa wa Islah (Preach and Reform) platform, the way was paved for an overall de-radicalization of more militant members [Merone 2019]. Thus, al-Ghannouchi's move in 2016, after a period of serious turmoil, to formally disengage the party from the religious movement was pioneering,[2] though it was not surprising. The Tunisian politician and intellectual coined the Islamist political community as

[2] The first Islamist party to formally move to such a disengagement was the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco.

"Muslim Democrats", while he suggested that the party was entering the era of democratic Islam [Ben Lazreg 2021: 11]. According to al-Ghannouchi, this transformation reflected the trajectory of Tunisia as a whole. This democratic ordeal makes a religious party, according to Ennahda's leader, unnecessary [Ghannouchi 2016]. Subsequently, past ideological questions related to secularism and state religiosity are, according to the Tunisian politician, obsolete in present day Tunisia, while focus should be put in democratic reforms. However, under the lens of this separation, Ennahda, partly due to a relatively more stable transition and partly due to its wider influence on the Arab and European world, posed solid foundations for post-2011 *post-Islamism* as a notion, applying Islamist politics to a wider audience and constituency. Besides, traditional enmity against Ennahda's Islamism in Tunisia almost has obliged the party to change its wider political identity to survive [McCarthy 2018: 368].

This "specialization" in politics, as it has been termed, had multiple repercussions. First, Ennahda aimed at a wider constituency in Tunisia while it sought a much longed for legitimization from European audiences. Furthermore, this process marked an ideological transformation of an important part of moderate political Islam that focused on its commitment to a liberal state [Ben Lazreg 2021: 12]. As a result, moving away from its established hierarchy of values, post-2011 political Islam introduced a reinvigorated intellectual and political model. Undoubtedly, nonetheless, more conservative factions reacted against this "liberalization". For example, many protests were organized and orchestrated by a former Ennahda MP, Noureddin Hademi, in 2019, reacting to a law promoting equal gender inheritance rights. These reactions and pressures cast doubt on whether the separation between the party and the social movement actually took place. According to researcher F. Merone [2019], "despite the 2016 assurances, politics and preaching were not eternally abandoned by Ennahda, but function additionally one with the other".

Respective transformations are profound in both cases. No doubt, the transition from a regime of conspiracy to a process of open socio-political integration contributed to this process. Cross-ideological association, particularly after 1990s, is just one aspect of this phenomenon. Al-Ghannouchi, in 2016, explained that its party acted mainly based on political openings rather than its ideology. As already mentioned, in the MB, the broader political milieu and internal ideological struggles consolidated political pragmatism in MB even if criticism derived from more conservative parties, such as al-Nour [Lynch 2016: 4]. Yet, Ennahda did not manage to secure its legal status. Amidst an authoritative political setting, the

Tunisian president, since 2019, Kais Saied, managed to secure himself wide and uncontrolled powers. Saied demonized Ennahda, accusing it of the country's destabilization. In a surprising move, alongside allegations of terrorism, al-Ghannouchi was arrested and Ennahda banned. This development led to a general marginalization of the parliament for emergency reasons, also including the National Salvation Front [Middle East Eye 2023]. Tepid reactions to this general assault on political freedoms urged many to attribute this development to the failure of political Islam in state management [Freer 2023].

VI. Conclusions

As Kurzman and Türkoglu [2015] have shown, political openings in semi-authoritarian regimes benefit well-organized and popular radical movements in, at least, the first elections. In the Middle East, political Islam had acquired these characteristics. However, as shown above after recurrent elections, constituencies distanced themselves from Islamist politics. Having these cases in mind, a bifurcation of political Islam may be observed, depending on spatial and temporal contexts. Organizations of political Islam seem to re-model their political agendas without, however, navigating to uncharted waters. This was reinforced by first outlawing the MB, since Cairo has always been the "historical centre" of all its branches and, second, by ultimately outlawing a widely successful political Islamic party such as Ennahda.

Moderation and radicalization coexist in Islamist movements. As pre-defined trajectories in periods of political turmoil do not exist, diverse scales of moderation and outcomes appear for the organizations of political Islam. Further, many expressed concerns over whether Islamists would use democratic means to achieve undemocratic aims, even utilizing historical examples (i.e. Nazis). Yet, as research highlights, Islamist parties have accomplished, to a lesser or to a greater extent, ideological transformations, related to their intellectual background and their local, regional and international position.

Both examples show that despite being connected to violence, security and general destabilization, moderate political Islam has mainly worked differently. Even incitement to radical politics from younger members of the MB or Ennahda is not linearly translated into the use of arms [Zollner 2019]. By and large, both parties have moved away from their radical past. Nevertheless, political Islam still serves as one of the most conservative political powers in the Middle East, with religion at its core socio-political agenda, coupled with intense ideological contradictions.

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