

The growth of Political Islam in Egypt (The Islamic Brotherhood Movement – IBM as a model)

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Abstract

As a result of weakening of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt was weakened in both economic and political aspect, beginning from year 1801, when the English expelled the French from the country, Egypt was continuously a prey of imperialist objectives. As a result of deepening dependency from abroad, the Egyptian economy was in the hands of foreign companies, the army and few local cooperatives. The decreasing number of the middle class made most of the population to fall into extreme poverty. The imperialist invasion and unsuccessful result of the modernist and secular thought of the constitution in 1921 was a reason for the growth and development of political Islam. Jamaluddin Afghani and Mohammed Abduh are two thinkers who influenced for the birth of political Islam in Egypt and its' positioning in an ideological frame.

Political Islam, since the second half of the 19th century has begun to grow, as a result of the application of the European model of a nation-state and as a result of the depravity of the politics of the dynasty that used to rule the country (Zubaida, 2011:73). The despair that was felt by the population as a result of the fail of political and economic experiments, as well as the gap created in the governance, prepared the ground for development of Islamic movements, and one of them was the IBM. This situation is the first critical point that influenced the growth of political Islam in Egypt.

The concept of secular, authoritarian but socialist and nationalist governing of Jamal Abdul Nasser was initially warmly accepted by the population. However, the defeat of Egypt in the conflict against Israel in 1967 has strongly shaken the optimistic atmosphere that Nasser previously managed to create within the population. The young Egyptian Arabs who suffered disappointment after the death of Nasser, began to position themselves towards the Islamic line (Eanber, 1978: 96). This situation was the second turning point that influenced the revival of political Islam in Egypt.

Keywords: Political Islam, Egypt, IBM, Hassan Al-Banna, IBM structural composition.

1. The Rise of Political Islam in Egypt

As a result of the contraction of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt weakened both economically and politically, and since 1801 when the English expelled the French from the country, Egypt has consistently been subject to imperialist aims. As a result of deepening dependence on the outside, the Egyptian economy has been in the hands of foreign businesses, the military, and some local associates. The mass decline of the middle class made most of the population fall into extreme poverty. The imperialist invasion and the unsuccessful result of the modernist and secular thought of the 1921 constitution, gave rise to the growth and development of political Islam. Jamaluddin Afgani and Muhammad Abdu are two thinkers who have influenced the birth of political Islam in Egypt and embedded it within an ideological framework. (Zubaida, 2011: 26; Marsot, 1985: 71; Nafi, 2008: 43).

Political Islam, since the second half of the 19th century, had grown increasingly as a result of the application of the European model of nation-state and as a result of the unbundling of dynasty politics that ruled the country. (Zubaida, 2011: 73) The despair experienced by the people as a result of the failure of political and economic experiments and the gap created in governance has prepared the ground for the development of Islamic movements such as the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement. This situation is the first critical point that influenced the rise of political Islam in Egypt.

The secular, authoritarian but socialist and nationalist governing concept of Jamal Abdunnasir was initially welcomed by the people. But Egypt's defeat in the 1967 conflict with Israel dealt a blow to the optimistic atmosphere Nasser had managed to create among the people. Young Egyptian Arabs who suffered disappointment after Nasser's death began to position themselves on the Islamic line. (Eanber, 1978: 96). This situation has been the second turning point that influenced the revival of political Islam in Egypt. The "Green Belt Project" which was an American project of the 1970s caused Muslim radicals to grow. This situation even created clashes within the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement which was known for its non-violence character. The clash that began inside the Movement both in the Middle East and Egypt, points to two different concepts of Islam. The first are movements like the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement, which are modern and with their discourses and practices refer to the state (Zubaida, 2011: 113), while the second opinion consists of a concept of radical Islam. Both opinions clash with each other as they conflict with the secular and liberal parts. These two thoughts extended their lifespan to the end of the 20th century, especially the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement managed to keep the dose of collision with the West and its references low.

2. Muslim Brotherhood Movement (MBM)

The "Muslim Brotherhood Movement" (MBM) is a long-standing Muslim movement in the Arab world and is known as the most fundamentalist movement within Sunni Islam. (Zubaida, 2011: 4). It is also accepted as an opposition political organization which has widespread support in many Arab states. Its foundations were laid in Egypt in 1928 by a Muslim scholar and teacher Hasan al-Benna, while ideologically it rested on the opinions of Abdu, Afghan, and Rida. (Zubaida, 2011: 72).

The establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt coincided with the harshest years of British rule. The First World War had ended, and the Egyptians were already waiting for independence from England. Taking steps towards their expectations, they sent a delegation led by Zaglul Pasha to the Paris Peace Conference to demand the independence of the country. But the British retaliated by arresting Zaglul Pasha, an act that led Egyptian patriots to revolt. Thus, the British arrest of this delegation in order not to demand independence further increased the demonstrations and strikes in Egypt. (Mitchell, 1969: 299; Graziano, 2014: 77).

The Arab peoples, who experienced the modernization experience, at the same time with the invasion showed a patriotic reflex in the face of these recent events in Egypt. Thus, Arab nationalism that began in Egypt turned into a wave of widespread thought that spread to other Muslim countries. The capture of the Egyptian oil by the British and the seizure of their income made the poor Egyptian patriots organize among themselves. The Arab nationalist youth no longer honoured the co-operation of the ruling castes with the invaders and thus threw themselves into revolts. (Yusif, 1994: 15) This period was also the time when Arab nationalism peaked and the leader of the "Vefd" party Zaglul Pasha became the symbol of the time.

After the liberal constitution of 1922 came to power, the Vefd party with Zaglul Pasha came to power, but his strained relations with the English, led King Farouk to dissolve parliament and Zaglul Pasha no longer became prime minister. (Marsot, 2007: 80) In parallel with the gaining of independence and then with the assassination of Zaglul Pasha (1927) the economy was further weakened in Egypt; a period of mourning was experienced where about 70% of society (especially the felahs, farmers) were affected by this. The Egyptian people were frustrated with King Fuad because of the poor economic situation but also because he was subject to English colonization. This nervousness was clearly demonstrated by the popular uprisings and demonstrations organized mainly by the Vefd party. 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement founder Hassan el-Benna (1906-1949) has participated in these protests since he was thirteen years old. (Marsot, 2007: 103) These data primarily show that the Movement was a product of the economic crisis stemming from external and internal elements.

In May 1928 Hasan al-Benna and his companions founded the Muslim Brotherhood which was guided by the principles: "Our goal is Allah, our law is the Qur'an, our leader is the Prophet, our path is Jihad, and death in the path of Allah is our ardent desire." The founders of this group came from the people, including lumpers, but also artists or traders. (Bayoumi, 1992: 35).

Modernization and opposition to the West may be cited as the reasons for the establishment of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement, namely: invasion of Arab geography by Western powers and economic and cultural imperialism, cooperation of Muslim leaders with Western powers, abolition of the caliphate, the non-application of Sharia law, the spread of secularist education, and the Western streams that were thought to have contributed

to the debasement and disruption of traditional and Islamic culture and thought.

Hasan al-Benna was born on October 14, 1906, in the Mahmudiyyah town of the Buhayra vilayet. At the age of eight he had attended the school of Religious Knowledge of Reshad and after learning there until the age of 12, enrolled in the Mahmudiya Elementary School. From the time he was in school, he and his friends first established the "Moral and Ethics Group" and then the "Sin Prevention Group." After changing the education system where elementary schools returned to the primary school system, al-Benna continued education at the Daru'l-Ulum Teacher School in Damanhur. (Al-Shalabi, 1978: 47; Tilmisani, 1989: 23; Aljundi, 2008: 19; Jeken 2001: 38).

In 1927, Hasan al-Benna was appointed primary school teacher in the city of Ismailiyah. The conditions of that city influenced the development of the idea of the Muslim Brotherhood. The English invasion, the negligence of the rulers and the dismal condition of the people greatly shocked Hasan al-Benna. His anti-imperialist state of mind is a solid reason to build an attitude against the West. He has also emphasized this in his writings or speeches. Al-Benna thus expresses his feelings and observations:

"At that time, Ismailiyah was in a state touching your heart. On the west side was the English garrison, while on the east side was the Christian school built for the children of the Suez Canal leaders. The Egyptian child could not attend this school. As if we were captives in our country. The English had seized all the proceeds of the land. As if the whole state mechanisms were a puppet of English colonizers. They lived in the most beautiful buildings; they ate the best food. English was spoken in every place. As if it was a western country. The name of one of the city's broadest streets was "Mosque Stree" but writing at the top of the street seemed like a bullet to my head. "Rue de la Mosquée". What does this mean? What did Richard's children have in the land of the East's greatest commander, Salahaddin Ayoub? It was as if poking a cross on the moon's forehead." (Benna, 1969: 8)

In his youth Hassan al-Benna was influenced by Sufi and patriotic emotions and after a while he and his companions founded the Relief Society 'Hasaffiye.' The purpose of this organization was to protect Islamic education and to fight against the missionaries coming to the city. In his writings and speeches, al-Benna stated that he worked with deep devotion to

Allah and his Messenger, laboured as a simple slave, and aimed no post or wealth. His attitudes aroused popular sympathy for him. He had often emphasized that this situation could not go this way, and together with his comrades developed an opinion in an organized way to counter foreign oppression. Also, to prevent religious debauchery in society, they emphasized that the Islamic tradition of the Prophet Muhammad time was to be taught. According to Benna, Islamic thought is represented by first-generation Muslims. At that time, there was great devotion to the principles of the Qur'an and the real "nation" was Islam. (Aljundi, 2000: 24).

Since Hasan al-Benna came from a family affiliated with the "Hanbali Madhhab," the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement is considered a movement based on the Hanbali Madhhab. The founder of the Hanbali madhhab, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, tried to solve all the problems of fiqh according to the Qur'an and hadith; but on special occasions he also gave permission to personal opinion (re'j). According to Lias, the behavior of other madhhabs by followers of the Hanbali madhhab, and in some cases even the use of violence by them has caused many Muslims to be nervous about them. There is a clear anti-Western attitude in the Hanbali. (2007: 34).

During the years 1931-1932, Hasan al-Benna was committed to be the leader of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement. From this effort he emerged as a strong leader in the second half of the 1930s, when the Movement was the largest Islamic movement in Egypt. In the first half of the 1950s the number of activists of the organization was more than one million and had more than 1500 branches. Over time, the Movement crossed Egypt's borders, finding widespread support in the Middle East and North Africa, and even was organized in Europe and Asia. The Movement also played a role in the birth of many Islamic groups that would be organized under other names, some of which (like the "Hajr" group in Syria) would also establish relations with the Movement itself. After 1934 the centre of the movement was the city of Cairo (Lia, 2007: 211).

Concerned that the British would not leave Egypt and fearing they might carry out an attack on them as they had done in Palestine in 1936-1937, the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement established its armed wing. This wing, among other things, was also aimed at fighting alongside the Palestinians, supporting them. (Aljundi, 2000: 230) Beginning in 1939 until a three-year period, the 'Muslim Brotherhood' has developed a very fierce opposition to the government. In 1941, the Movement presented its candidates for MPs, thus making the Movement a part of the political arena. During that year, the

movement organized large-scale demonstrations, demanding that British leave the country as soon as possible. (Aleuwais, 1990:56).

As a result of Bennas's harsh criticism of Egypt's English rule and Movement's activities, in 1941 after his speech in Damanhur, Benna was arrested by Hussein Sirriu's government. Nahas Pasha, who succeeded Sirriu, warned Benna not to run in the election, and the Movement withdrew afterwards. In 1945, when Prime Minister Dr. Ahmed Mahir declared Egypt's entry into war with the aim of joining the United Nations, he was killed by a young man who was allegedly a member of the Movement. Even if the court did not find the culprit, Prime Minister Nukreshi Pasha banned the Muslim Brotherhood and seized their assets (Ali, 2011: 33). It was even speculated at that time about an armed 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement group called "Jevval" who had attacked several state offices. The English, who saw Benna as the cause of riots that had taken place, demanded that he be expelled from Cairo (Bayomi, 1991: 208). Also, in October the same year, Benna and his other Movement friends were imprisoned, and the organization's protests ceased. Because the government in those years was focused on World War II, they did not want to lose power internally and therefore released the Movement leaders. In 1948, when the prime minister decided to ban the Movement, he had in fact prepared the ground for his death. (Marsot, 1985: 103).

Likewise, the 1946 agreement between Prime Minister Sidki Pasha with the English to grant Egypt limited independence and the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948 increased the number of supporters of violence within the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement. Although Benna was known as a man against violence¹, it was impossible to stop young people. Finding weapons in the Movement offices paved the way for the state to ban the organization. (Aljundi, 2000: 212) After all these events, in the radical wing of the Movement have begun acts of violence including assassination of Prime Minister Nukreshi (Alshabky, 2005: 237). As a result, the pressure on the Movement increased even more. On 12 February 1949, Hasan al-Benna had fallen prey to an assassination attempt, and the Muslim Brotherhood was again put 'underneath the ground'. Not only Movement members but

¹ The 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement also has unarmed militias. Politicizing military participation will drive them into a dynamic of potential violence. They took part in the war against Israel in 1948, staged attacks on nightclubs, luxury hotels and clashed with security forces several times. (Qaradawhi, 2007: 212).

also many leftist and patriotic men were arrested in this period. (Marsot, 1985: 145).

The Movement was increasingly politicized in the post-World War II period and was increasingly followed with concern by both, authoritarian leadership in Egypt and Western countries. The Movement, which was constantly at war with the Egyptian government, was once banned (the Nasser and Sisi period) and withdrew underground, and other times played an equilibrium role within other forces (Sadat's time). The Movement's struggle against Egyptian leadership has in some cases even contained violence. As they have staged assassinations against Egyptian prime ministers and presidents, the government has also violently opposed them. For example, the assassination of Prime Minister Dr. Ahmet Mahir in 1945, of Movement founder Hasan al-Benna in 1949, and State President Anwar Sadat in 1981 are just a few of these cases. (Alshabky, 2005: 248).

In 1952 an interesting event happened. Many young Egyptians who had not been arrested fought English military troops. While the English held Egyptian police accountable and besieging the commissariats called on them to surrender, but the police did not surrender. During the clash, many policemen were killed, and many British-owned businesses burned. A huge fire swept across the sky of Cairo. (Marsot, 2007: 112) There were rumours later that this fire was brought out by English agents.

In place of Hasan al-Banna as the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood came Hasan Ismail al-Hudayb who was a person who enjoyed widespread sympathy both inside and outside the Movement (Ali, 2007: 7). Hudaybah was against violence as his predecessor Benna but could not break the Brotherhood's armed wing because the organization was planning a coup along with the 'Organization of Free Officers.' The 'Free Officers' who carried out the coup had entered the army under the 1936 Egyptian-English Agreement, and most of them were ready to sacrifice everything for Egypt's independence.

Many young Arabs had joined various groups just as Anwar Sadat and Jamal Abdunnasir had become part of the Movement. (Marsot, 2007: 107) As a result of this agreement many children of ordinary people had joined the army thereby breaking the English influence in the army. (Imam, 1997: 45).

In fact, this coup was not a Movement's method. But being under pressure and being under the rule of others made this cooperation necessary. As a result of this plan in 1952, the "Free Officers' Organization"

seized power in the country through a bloodless coup. A short period after the coup in Egypt, a new era has begun under the leadership of Jamal Abdunnasir. Although planning a secular Egypt, Nasser did not think of a direction for the country based on the Qur'an as the Movement expected. This situation led to a clash between the Movement and Nasser who avoided an assassination attempt on which he blamed the Muslim Brotherhood. During his rule, Nasser had dealt with the elimination of his political opponents. He applied many different methods such as exile, torture, arrests and executions. Conspiracy theories were often used to eliminate opponents. The Muslim Brotherhood, which influenced Nasser's coming to power in 1954, was accused of organizing an assassination attempt against him and thus was deported. (Marsot, 2007: 108) Prominent names such as Sayyid Qutub who emerged from the Movement, were either imprisoned or withdrawn from the political and social scene.

Faced with Nasser's tough stance, the Muslim Brotherhood shrank during this period. Even if the younger generation demanded the same level of response, the older generation was thought to maintain their position before the coup. (Imam, 1997: 87) In this case, the weakening of the Movement resulted also because of the support that Nasser had at home and abroad. Despite the attacks it suffered, and aimed at not wakening further, the 'Muslim Brotherhood' Movement chose to remain on the conservative side. Despite all of this, there were not many detachments from the Movement.

The Nasser period can be treated as a turning point for the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser's thought of establishing an Arab Republic, his rapprochement with the Soviet Union because of the nationalist-socialist thinking he nurtured, caused a rift in his relationship with the Movement and this led the organization to focus more on spreading outside the Middle East, namely in Europe and the USA. Thus, the Movement managed to spread to the other five continents. (Ganim, 2012: 495) On the other hand, a good part of the Muslim Brotherhood that escaped violence and pressure of Nasser went to Saudi Arabia. In this way, connecting with the Saudis provided them with material and spiritual support. In a very short time, individuals and organizations affiliated with the Movement became active in financial and business areas. (Zubaida, 2011: 102-105; Saraf, 2017: 65).

The Muslim Brotherhood, which was banned since 1954 with the death of Nasser and the arrival of Anwar Sadat in his place, was legalized again in

1970. During this period a warm policy was pursued against the persecuted persons and organizations under Nasser's rule. This was due to the erasure of Nasser's charismatic image but also to the removal of people close to him from power. (Hinnebusch, 1985: 33) Sadat had tried to free many Movement members and form a coalition with them, but he was out of control in this case. The emergence of covered women in the streets and the increasing number of Islamic activities in daily life indicated that Sadat was unable to control Muslim forces. Not only the Movement but also the Jamaat al-Islamiyah and other Muslim groups experienced rise during this period. (Marsot, 1985: 130) It could be argued that these actions of Sadat were to gain popular support but also to stand against Israel. For this reason, he had prayed together with people and had openly shown that he had once been part of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Movement too had learned a lesson from the Nasser period and under Sedat's rule had made reforms while maintaining a more lenient attitude towards the government. But within the organization there were objections to this new attitude, and many detachments became part of other organizations such as the Muslim Salvation Organization, 'Takfir wa'il Hijra' (religious excommunication and displacement) and 'Jihad'. (Hopwood, 1993: 58,118).

Contrary to Nasser, who was part of the non-aligned countries, Sadat turned his head to the US and Western countries. Neo-liberal policies in the country deepened poverty even further and the middle class had begun to merge. The signing of the "Camp David Agreement" with Israel further increased discontent and angered the opposition. As Islamist groups became stronger, opposition to the "Camp David Agreement" intensified. To suppress the opposition, the Sadat government tried to use authoritarianism like its predecessor, Nasser. Despite all these events, the Muslim Brotherhood organization was increasingly empowered in Egypt. Later, at a ceremony marking the anniversary of the Arab-Israeli war, Anwar Sadat was killed by a man who was allegedly a member of the Movement. (Hopwood, 1993: 13.23).

Mubarak, who succeeded Sadat, on the one hand tried to exterminate Islamic armed groups, and on the other hand, tried to promote peaceful Islam in the country thereby attempting to isolate the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite direct actions but also those in the background, Mubarak's leadership failed to wipe out the entire Brotherhood Movement. The main cause of this failure could be explained by the fact that with the extremely liberal policies that the state tried to apply, it lost all means to gain the

support of the lower and middle classes. By this time, the students, intellectuals and the poor who followed Nasser during the 1960s had already gone through masses in support of Islamist opposition, and the process of hiring poor classes in the administration that had begun in the Nasser and Sedat era, has come to an end in 1986. As the only solution, these people had only hoped of being employed in the private sector.

As we reach into the 1980s, one could see that many Islamic organizations have been allowed to operate, including the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. Given the fact that Mubarak was empowered, the Movement pursued three major policies to be effective again. Initially, *it formed coalitions with small groups to ensure its presence in the Egyptian parliament.* Secondly, *during the election process, it tried to take over the student and professional organizations.* And finally, *it had formed an extensive network of social assistance and of the villages.* This attempt to fill the space created by the state without challenging the state itself gave the Movement great popularity. Mubarak said he was willing to cooperate with non-radical Muslim groups. Although a successful policy, Mubarak did not follow with precision and most Muslim groups became part of the state. (Ragheb & Tawfiq, 2008: 32).

The 1990s and beyond can be described as the years of Movement's political ideology. Although a banned movement, the Muslim Brotherhood ran in the 2005 elections, achieving a 20% success rate. Through some of Mubarak's manoeuvres and the obstacles he put forth, the Movement managed to get 88 MPs to the 454-seat parliament. (Hopwood, 1993: 112).

The Muslim Brotherhood has always been a movement that looked at developments in the world and constantly carried out reforms to accommodate new conjunctures. Even the classic slogan "Islam is the choice" was changed in the 2000s with the proclamation of the new slogan "Democratic Change."

The main leader of the Movement, Mehdi Akif Jalal al-Azm, had visited Turkey in 2008, noting that the Arab rightist had radically changed its approach to Turkey. For example, the Arab right under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood earlier disliked the Turkish model because of the abolition of the caliphate, the establishment of Kemalism and secularism, and its relations with the West and Israel. Later, the reform program put forth by the Movement was inspired by the AK Party model which introduced a soft system between secularism and democracy. Instead of previous slogans such as "Our leader is the Qur'an," "Sharia Law must be

applied immediately”, “Islam is the only choice”, the Brotherhood began using the terms social reform, democracy and human rights. (Alshabky, 2004: 157).

It can be said that after the death of Hasan al-Benna, the Muslim Brotherhood shifted from a radical Islamic movement based on Sayyid Qutub’s thinking to a more elastic one. Partnering with parties of different ideologies and establishing contacts with the US can be used as arguments in this regard. However, within the Movement there were people who opposed such developments and formed other Islamic movements.

Conclusions

Finally, based on the above-mentioned issues we must conclude the following:

- Jamaluddin Afghani and Muhammad Abdu are two thinkers who have influenced the birth of political Islam in Egypt
- The despair of the Egyptian population as a result of the failure of political and economic experiments and the gap created in governance has prepared the ground for the development of Islamic movements such as the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ Movement. This situation is the first critical point that influenced the growth of political Islam in Egypt.
- The Muslim Brotherhood Movement is a long-standing Muslim movement in the Arab world and is known as an opposition political organization that has widespread support in many Arab states.
- Its foundations were laid in Egypt in 1928 by a Muslim scholar and teacher Hasan al-Benna, while ideologically it rested on the opinions of Abdu, Afghan, and Rida.
- The principles of the Movement were: “Our goal is Allah, our law is the Quran, our leader is the prophet, our path is jihad, and death in the path of Allah is our most ardent desire.” The founders of this group came from the people including lumpers, but also artists or traders.
- The social model that Muslim Brotherhood Movement stood for: Political Islam, the creation of unity among Arabs, the establishment of Islamic hegemony in the world.
- Following Benna’s death, there was no charismatic leader with the authority to keep the Movement united.

- After the 1980s, the Movement had been passive in its radical moves by moving towards a post-Islamist process.
- After the 1990s, the Movement rejected the teachings of a religious state it initially stood for and started developing a democratic conformist approach.
- As a global outreach Movement, it is impossible to predict possible movements of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement due to its complicated relationship with the US.
- The Movement is still undergoing a change that is not completed yet.
- The army which is the major weight of power in Egypt is the main obstacle to the completion of the Revolution.
- Instead of resolving the problems of the people on the streets, Morsi's government preferred to fix its cadres in the state, thereby disturbing the opposition and the military, as well as the US as military's guarantor power.
- The Muslim Brotherhood Movement is not destroyed, but still hopes of coming to power.

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