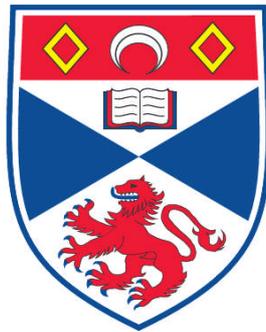


**MODERATE ISLAM - A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS OR A  
POLITICAL FORCE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?**

**John Horrocks**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
University of St. Andrews**



**2007**

**Full metadata for this item is available in  
Research@StAndrews:FullText  
at:**

**<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>**

**Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:**

**<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/149>**

**This item is protected by original copyright**

**This item is licensed under a  
Creative Commons License**

# MODERATE ISLAM - A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS OR A POLITICAL FORCE FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY?

A Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy

Submitted by:

John Horrocks  
Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence  
School of International Relations  
University of St Andrews

Date of Submission:

10 October 2006

## DECLARATIONS

I, John Horrocks, hereby certify that this Thesis, which is approximately 40,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

**Date:** 10 October 2006.                      **Signature of Candidate:**

I was admitted as a research student in September 2004 and as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in September 2004; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2004 and 2006.

**Date:** 10 October 2006.                      **Signature of Candidate:**

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this Thesis in application for that degree.

**Date:** 10 October 2006.                      **Signature of Supervisor:**

In submitting this Thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker.

**Date:** 10 October 2006.                      **Signature of Candidate:**

## ABSTRACT

Arab states are ruled almost exclusively by authoritarian regimes, as typified by Egypt, which enjoys a unique regional centrality in Arab politics, Islamic activism and international relations. Opposition political organisations are closely controlled, rarely functioning in a meaningful capacity. Denied political access, radical Islamist groups embraced violence in an attempt to overthrow regimes perceived as un-Islamic and closely aligned with Western powers. However, Egyptian regimes highlighted the power of entrenched personal-authoritarian rule; they have endured, and have skilfully suppressed Islamic activism of all types, ultimately destroying radical groups by force.

The wider, mainstream Islamic opposition movement is generally described as 'moderate' because the groups within it eschew violence and recognise established political structures. However, while a younger, more democratic trend is emerging within it, it nonetheless contains enduring fundamentalist factions that still share the radical aim of establishing an Islamic state. The moderates proved adept at mobilizing support in restrictive political environments, but have not subsequently gained official political party status. If a resurgence of violent extremism is to be avoided, a new political course is needed. This must be definitively Muslim in character, democratic, just, and of direct popular appeal. It is such a project that the nascent Islamist modernist trend in Egypt seeks to construct. It is enormously ambitious, and currently lacks a unified mainstream following; the concepts of Muslim democracy and an Islamic state are presently mutually competitive.

The struggle between traditional moderate Islamists and the more modernist influence emerging in Egypt is one among several factors that will determine the future viability of moderate Islamism; there are powerful external influences at play that will also shape the evolution of this movement. At present, moderate Islamism is a movement in transition, tending more towards democratic political participation, away from autocratic religious utopianism; its disparate factions do not yet enjoy complete unity of purpose. Looking to the future, it does, however, offer significant potential as a catalyst for democratic transition.

# CONTENTS

## Chapter 1 - Introduction and Structure.

- Research Issue, Aim of Dissertation.
- Significance of Research.
- Summary of Chapters; Research Questions.

## Chapter 2 - Methodology.

- Centrality of Egypt in Arab Politics.
- Importance of Egyptian Islamist Groups in Islamist politics.
- Comparative Case Study Methodology - Explanation and Justification.
- Common Factors and Trends of Wider Applicability in Arab Politics.

## Chapter 3 - Conceptual and Theoretical Grounding.

- Background of Political Islam.
- Summary of Social Movement Theory work on Islamic Activism.

## Chapter 4 - Past and Present - The Evolution of the Moderate Islamist Movement and the Emergence of the Islamist Modernist Trend.

- Part 1: Moderate Islamism and Egyptian Politics Since 1952.
- Part 2: The Characteristics of the Moderate Islamist Movement in Egypt.
- Part 3: Islamism in Transition.

## Chapter 5 - The Future - Democratization, Muslim Democracy and Islamist Modernism.

- Democratization as a Catalyst for Political Reform.
- Modernist Islam as a Potential Democratic Alternative to Authoritarian Rule.
- The Future of Moderate Islamist Politics in the Wider Middle East.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Books**

- Arblaster, Anthony: 'Democracy'. Buckingham, Open University Press, 1994. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- Armstrong, Karen: 'The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam'. London, HarperCollins, 2001.
- Baker, Raymond William: 'Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists'. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Bowen, James and Hobson, Peter R (Eds): 'Theories of Education: Studies of Significant Innovation in Western Educational Thought'. Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons 1987. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- Burke, T. Patrick: 'The Major Religions: An Introduction with Texts'. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996.
- Dekmejan, R. Hrair: 'Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World'. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- Fahmy, Ninette S: 'The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship'. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002.
- Fuller, Graham E: 'The Future of Political Islam'. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Guazzone, Laura (Ed): 'The Islamist Dilemma: The Political Role of Islamist Movements in the Contemporary Arab World'. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1995.
- Halliday, Fred: 'Islam and the Myth of Confrontation'. London: I B Tauris, 2003. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- Hefner, Robert W (Ed): 'Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization'. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond A: 'Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State'. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988.
- Kassem, Maye: 'Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule'. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.
- Kassem, Maye: 'In the Guise of Democracy: Governance in Contemporary Egypt'. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999.
- Kepel, Gilles: 'Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam'. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Kepel, Gilles: 'The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West'. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Kienle, Eberhard: 'A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt'. London: I B Tauris, 2001.
- Kramer, Martin (Ed): The Dayan Centre Papers No 120: 'The Islamism Debate'. Tel Aviv, Moshe Dayan Centre, 1997.

- Kurzman, Charles (Ed): 'Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook'. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Lauren, P G: 'Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory and Policy'. New York: The Free Press, 1979.
- Mannes, Aaron: 'Profiles in Terror: A Guide to Middle East Terrorist Organizations'. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2004.
- Owen, Roger: 'State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East'. London: Routledge, 2000. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).
- della Porta, Donatella: 'Social Movements, Political Violence and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany'. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Richards, Alan and Waterbury, John: 'A Political Economy of the Middle East'. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.
- Roy, Olivier: 'The Failure of Political Islam'. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Sageman, Marc: 'Understanding Terror Networks'. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Saikal, Amin and Schnabel, Albrecht (Eds): 'Democratization in the Middle East: Experiences, Struggles, Challenges'. Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2003.
- Shadid, Anthony: 'Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats, and the New Politics of Islam'. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2002.
- Sidahamed, Abdel Salam, and Ehteshami, Anoushiravan: 'Islamic Fundamentalism'. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996.
- Springborg, Robert: 'Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order'. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1989.
- Wickham, Carrie Rosefsky: 'Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt'. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Wictorowicz, Quintan: 'Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach'. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Zartman, I W et al: 'Political Elites in Arab North Africa'. New York: Longman, 1982.

### Reports

- 'Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations'. New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2002.
- Sharp, Jeremy M: Report for Congress: 'US Democracy Promotion Policy in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma'. Washington DC, Congressional Research Service, June 15 2006.

## Academic Papers and Journals

Abdel-Latif, Omayma: 'Egypt: Brothers Trigger Debate but Cannot Pass Legislation'. *Arab Reform Bulletin*. Vol 4, Issue 3, April 2006.

Abed-Kotob, Sana: 'The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. No 27/1995, pp 321-339.

Abootalebi, Ali R: 'Civil Society, Democracy and the Middle East'. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol 2, No3, Sept 1998. Electronic Journal.  
[[http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria98\\_aboutalebi.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria98_aboutalebi.html)]

Al-Sayyid, M. Kamel: 'The Other Face of the Islamist Movement'. *Carnegie Papers*, No33, Jan 2003.

Baroudi, Sami E: 'The 2002 Arab Human Development Report: Implications for Democracy'. *Middle East Policy*, Vol XI, No1, Spring 2004, pp 132-141.

Brumberg, Daniel: 'Liberalization vs Democracy: Understanding Arab Political Reform'. *Carnegie Papers*, No37, May 2003.

Campagna, Joel: 'From Accommodation to Confrontation: The Muslim Brotherhood in the Mubarak Years'. *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 50, No 1, Summer 1996, pp 278-304.

Carothers, Thomas: 'Is Gradualism Possible? Choosing a Strategy for Promoting Democracy in the Middle East'. *Carnegie Papers*, No39, June 2003.

Denoeux, Guilain: 'The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam'. *Middle East Policy*, Vol IX, No2, June 2002, pp 56-81.

El-Amrani, Issandr: 'Egypt: What Future for Liberals?' *Arab Reform Bulletin*. Vol 4, Issue 2, March 2006.

El-Ghobashi, Mona: 'The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol 37/2005, pp 373-395.

Enhaili, Aziz, and Adda, Oumelkhir: 'State and Islamism in the Mahgreb'. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol 7, No 1, March 2003, pp 66-75.

Fuller, Graham E: 'Islamists in the Arab World: The Dance Around Democracy'. *Carnegie Papers*, No49, Sept 2004.

Gerges, Fawaz A: 'The End of the Islamist Insurgency in Egypt? Costs and Prospects'. *Middle East Journal*. Vol 4, Fall 2000, pp 592-612.

Hamzawy, Amr: 'The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists'. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*, No 40, August 2005.

Hamzawy, Amr: 'The West and Moderate Islam'. Electronic Journal  
[<http://www.bitterlemons-international.org>] Vol 3, Edition 20, June 2, 2005.

Hamzawy, Amr: 'Challenges and Prospects of Political Liberalization in Egypt'. *House Committee on International Relations Hearing 'Redefining Boundaries: Political Liberalization*

*in the Arab World*'. April 21, 2005. (Electronic Paper:  
<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications>]

Hawthorne, Amy: 'Middle East Democracy: Is Civil Society the Answer?' *Carnegie Papers*, No44, Feb 2004.

Hawthorne, Amy: 'Political Reform in the Arab World: A New Ferment?' *Carnegie Papers*, No52, Oct 2004.

International Crisis Group: 'Islam in North Africa I: The Legacies of History'. *ICG Middle East and North Africa Briefings*, 20 April 2004.

International Crisis Group: 'Islam in North Africa II: 'Egypt's Opportunity'. *ICG Middle East and North Africa Briefings*, 20 April 2004.

Israeli, Raphael: 'Western Democracies and Islamic Fundamentalist Violence'. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 12, Nos3 & 4, Autumn/Winter 2000, pp 160-174.

Khan, Muqtedar: 'Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of US Policy'. *Middle East Policy*, Vol X, No3, Fall 2003, pp 79-89.

Khan, Muqtedar: 'The Philosophy of Islamic Resurgence'. *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol 13, No2, July 2001, pp 211-229.

Mahallati, Mohammed: 'The Middle East: In Search of an Equilibrium Between Transcendent Idealism and Practicality'. *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 50, No 1, Summer 1996, pp 119-141.

Noland, Marcus and Pack, Howard: 'Islam, Globalization and Economic Performance in the Middle East'. *International Economics Policy Briefs*, No PB04-4, June 2004.

Ottaway, Marina: 'Democracy and Constituencies in the Arab World'. *Carnegie Papers*, No48, July 2004.

Ottaway, Marina: 'Islamists and Democracy: Keep the Faith'. *The New Republic*. Vol 232, Issue 4716, June 6, 2005.

Richards, Alan: 'Modernity and Economic Development'. *Middle East Policy*, Vol X, No3, Fall 2003, pp 60-76.

Siegle, Joseph T. et al: 'Why Democracies Excel'. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 83, No5, Oct 2004, pp 57-72.

Sivan, Emmanuel: 'Why Radical Muslims Aren't Taking Over Governments'. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol 2, No2, May 1998. Electronic Journal.  
[<http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria598.sivan.html>]

Stacher, Joshua: 'Post-Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party'. *Middle East Journal*, Vol56, No 3, Summer 2002, pp 415-433.

Wictorowicz, Quintan: 'The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad'. *Middle East Policy*, Vol VIII, No4, Dec 2001, pp 18-39.

Zeghal, Malika: 'Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of Al-Azhar, Radical Islam and the State, 1952-1994'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. No 31/1999, pp 371-399.

Zeidan, David: 'Radical Islam in Egypt: A Comparison of Two Groups'. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol 3, No3, Sept 1999. Electronic Journal.  
[<http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria99.zeidan.html>]

### Journalism

Abdel-Latif, Omayma: 'The Hardest Choice is Moderation'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. December 16-22, 1999.

Abdel-Latif, Omayma: 'Islamists Come into the Fold of Civil Society'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. April 20-26, 2000.

Abdel-Latif, Omayma: 'Avoiding Confrontation'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. October 12-18, 2000.

Brown, Nathan and Hamzawy, Amr: 'Take Advantage of the Brotherhood's Gains'. *Daily Star Egypt*. December 9 2005.

Hamzawy, Amr: 'Islamists Re-Awaken Religious Politics'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. December 29 2005 - January 4, 2006.

Hamzawy, Amr: 'Arab Liberals Unite'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. February 2-8, 2006.

Hamzawy, Amr: 'Preaching Democracy'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. May 4-10, 2006.

Negus, Steve: 'Refiq Habib: A Purely Political Islamist'. *Cairo Times*. Vol 2, Issue 8, June 11, 1998.

Rashwan, Daa: 'Islamism in Transition'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. March 11-17, 1999.

Rashwan, Daa: 'Moving away from Violence'? *Al-Ahram Weekly*. April 29 - 8 May, 1999.

Rashwan, Daa: 'Islamists Crash the Party'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. September 16-22, 1999.

Shahine, Gihan: 'The Brotherhood's Latest Challenge'. *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Issue 693.

### Internet Websites

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)  
[www.cairotimes.com](http://www.cairotimes.com)  
[www.carnegieendowment.org](http://www.carnegieendowment.org)  
[www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)  
[www.FT.com](http://www.FT.com)  
[www.ijtihad.org](http://www.ijtihad.org)  
[www.iran-daily.com](http://www.iran-daily.com)  
[www.islam-democracy.org](http://www.islam-democracy.org)  
[www.islamonline.com](http://www.islamonline.com)  
[www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk)  
[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)  
[www.weekly.ahram.org.eg](http://www.weekly.ahram.org.eg)  
[www.washington-report.org](http://www.washington-report.org)

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### Research Issue

The Arab Middle East is dominated politically by authoritarian regimes that seek to retain their own power and inhibit the development of democratic systems of governance. Opposition is repressed or manipulated and there exists a widespread culture of abstention from those electoral processes that are permitted. In this unpromising environment moderate Islamic activist movements operate at the edges of legality in their parent states. Despite their innovative practices in mobilizing grassroots support through alternative political structures, the moderate activists have been unable to unseat repressive state regimes. A historical focus on the religious and moral imperatives for an Islamic polity has exposed serious shortcomings in the moderates' thinking about the political and economic realities of governance. It remains to be seen if these can be overcome in order to attract broader support, sufficient to force entrenched regimes to abandon patronage politics and consider transitions to pluralist systems. It is questionable that Islamists can develop policies that will stimulate economic development and deliver social justice while remaining within an overtly Islamic ideological framework. Indeed, doubts exist about whether their Islamic orientation can accommodate democracy at all. However, the moderate movement has evolved markedly in the last decade, and alternative approaches of a realistic, pragmatic focus are developing. In the short term, it seems likely that these will be opposed by entrenched regimes, as have all moderate Islamist attempts to bring about political liberalization to date. How then, can moderates overcome their failure to transform mobilized support into enduring, institutional, political effect?

**AIM: The aim of this thesis is to assess the potential of the moderate Islamist movements in the Arab world to become a democratic and institutionally viable political force.**

This thesis contends that any viable alternative to authoritarian rule must have an unequivocal Islamic foundation, yet must also be compatible with United States foreign policy imperatives for the region. Moreover, only by contributing to, and being included in, a process of wider democratization, can the evolving Islamist movement expect to realise its full political potential.

### Research Significance

There are two contradictory premises upon which the significance of this study rests, and they also define the dichotomy inherent in United States foreign policy towards the region at

present. Ideologically, Western liberal democratic thinking assumes that 'democracy' is a positive concept that will stimulate beneficial domestic and regional political discourse in the Arab world. Strategically, the Middle East will remain important to Western powers as long as their economies depend on oil to the extent they do at present. Thus, a stable political environment in the region is a goal of all the major Western states, and ideological and strategic aims appear to be complementary. However, because repressive and undemocratic regimes are seen as guardians of that stability, the risk of upheaval associated with political transition makes it an unattractive prospect and democracy remains an aspiration.

The United Nations Arab Human Development Report 2002<sup>1</sup> outlines regional demographic trends, which will exacerbate unemployment, undermine the aspirations of the masses and magnify the failure of regimes to find solutions. If socio-economic decline and political stagnation are not to undermine the stability that the status quo is intended to preserve, realistic alternatives must be found. The establishment of democracy in the Middle East is the stated ideological objective of US foreign policy; if Arab regimes sensitive to US scrutiny of their domestic political environment cannot implement some form of pluralist political system, the US administration may be tempted to bypass them and meddle in Arab domestic affairs - a self-defeating and potentially destabilizing eventuality. Democracy was not established overnight in Europe or the US and it is entirely unreasonable to expect it to be so in the Middle East; an extended process of gradual political liberalization is, realistically, the best that can be hoped for.

The difficulty of such a task should not be underestimated; Arab states have varying experiences of Western political systems and institutions, with one common thread among them - failure. Islam has superseded these ideologies as the primary source of political activism, enjoying a deep-rooted cultural coherence that Arab nationalism, socialism, Marxism and other systems never did. Therefore, any potential successor to the existing repressive regimes must have sound Islamic credentials to stand any chance of attracting significant support. Moderate, gradualist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, or *Ikhwan*, advocate a 'bottom-up' programme of societal change designed to bring about irresistible popular support for the establishment of a truly Islamic society. Others, of revolutionary outlook, see violence as the only means of achieving the same end. It should be noted that 'moderate' in this context does not equate to a Western, liberal democratic interpretation of the term; while Muslim reformist groups do exist, they are very much a minority. In contrast, while pressure

---

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Development Programme, *The UN Arab Human Development Report 2002*. New York, 2002 pp 37-38.

for democratization slowly increases throughout the Middle East, the majority of Islamist groups still seek to establish an Islamic state - they differ only in how that may be achieved. They share a general anti-US outlook and pursue ideologies with a religious foundation that enjoys far more resonance with the populace than Western liberal democracy. Islamists occupy a crucial position in Middle East politics and an understanding of their collective evolution and characteristics is an essential component of any analysis of their future political potential. Fuller summarises neatly: 'Islamist politics could not be more central to modern political and social development; Islamists are struggling like so much...of the developing world, with the genuine dilemmas of modernization: rampant change of daily life and urbanization at all levels, social dislocation and crisis, the destruction of traditional values, the uncertain threats of globalization, the need for representative and competent governance, the need to build just societies, and to cope with formidable political, economic and cultural challenges from the West'.<sup>2</sup> Within Islamist politics, no state enjoys more importance and influence than Egypt. Groups and ideologies originating in Egypt dominate the history and contemporary status of Islamic activism throughout the Middle East; repressive Arab state responses to them are modelled closely upon those developed by the three Egyptian regimes that have held power since 1952. The Egyptian experience of Islamic activism appears to offer much of current relevance in an age when the latter is more prominent than ever. This thesis examines Egyptian moderate Islamic activism during this period in order to evaluate the future potential of the movement throughout the region.

Some Islamic activist groups have shown significant mobilizational flair among particular segments of society, demonstrating the effectiveness of Islamist outreach. Within small communities, networks and professional organizations, they have capitalised upon their advantage of authenticity and legitimacy of message, to earn a reputation for integrity and trustworthiness. However, that reputation is at least partially a chimera; Egyptian Islamists admit they have neither the capacity nor resources to meet the needs of their own supporters alone, and have proved to be no different from other opposition groups, and the regime itself, in their preparedness to use fraudulent methods in pursuit of electoral gain. Until now, Islamist strengths lay in mobilizing support and infiltrating existing non-governmental organisations to gain access to quasi-political opportunities. This constituency-building expertise was not reinforced with policies of contemporary appeal, however; Islamist programmes in most cases have been notable for their lack of real-world policy, and many extended little further than the slogan that 'Islam is the Solution'. The past ability of Islamist groups to mobilize support, and their inability to translate it into institutional effect, suggests

---

<sup>2</sup> Graham E Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004) pxii.

that their ideology and methodology were only partially aligned with the political motivations of Egyptian social classes, and that internal tensions within the movement led to the recognition that a new approach was necessary. Recognition brought change; political Islam has developed extraordinarily quickly and its evolution over the last decade has included consideration of issues which had previously cast doubt on the viability of the movement as a whole - democracy, civil society, parliaments and political parties.<sup>3</sup>

A new 'Muslim Democratic Trend' is beginning to form, recognising the significant difference between a rigidly Islamic state and 'a state for the Muslims'. The advocates of this approach see democracy not as another imported Western concept, but as a vehicle for creating and sustaining just governance with a distinctly Muslim identity. These Muslim thinkers are devoting effort to defining political agendas compatible with the reality of modernity, but they are a tiny minority with no meaningful constituency. The only significant organised movements with a modernising Islamist agenda appear to be Egypt's Wasat (Centre) group, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the younger generation of the Brotherhood itself. In attempting to combine both constituency and ideology into a coherent whole, a moderate traditional and modernist Islamist coalition offers the only combination of realist message and mobilizational power that could conceivably challenge an incumbent authoritarian regime. To attract the widest possible support, and to exploit the increasing popular interest in democracy, it could do so as part of a pluralist, democratic coalition including secular parties, hopefully leading to the re-emergence of civil society and the inauguration of accountable governance. If successful, this process could form a template for wider political reform in the region.

Clearly, any transitional process will depend greatly upon the attitudes of incumbent regimes. In the short to medium term, prospects are far from encouraging. Authoritarian rule still predominates, yet arguably, the future of Arab politics is predicated upon the inclusion of Islamist groups; exclusion attracts too high a degree of risk if a return to violent radical excess is to be avoided. Of course, this offers no guarantee that the Islamists will be successful in governmental roles. They must, however, be given the opportunity to compete within a truly participatory political system before any meaningful assessment of their ability to function within such systems can be made. Western suspicion of Islamist groups must be overcome, and their importance in the development of participatory political systems recognised. The moderate groups are essential components of this process. As Abed-Kotob states:

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid pp xiv-xv.

*It is.... theoretically and practically important that we engage in unbiased discourse on the thinking of the more moderate groups, in an attempt.....to deal with our own fears of the unknown and alien, and ....to determine the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the Islamist movement. Peaceful or violent, democratic or autocratic, political Islam deserves scholarly attention as more than a threat to regional stability; it deserves treatment as a probable contender for future political rule over states with which the West must continue relations.<sup>4</sup>*

### **Methodology**

The basis of this study is the importance of Egypt as a barometer of Islamic activism and authoritarian government attitudes and techniques in the Arab world. In Chapter 2 it is argued that Egypt is the state with the most influence in the Islamic activist movement, moderate and radical, regional and international. Domestically, it enjoys the longest tradition of organised Islamic opposition political activity, and the widest exposure to Western political systems and institutions. It has an established and functioning state bureaucracy, a relatively well-educated population that includes an influential middle-class - the support of which proved to be instrumental in the management of opposition movements by the state. The Egyptian influence in Islamic activism is widespread; groups in Syria, Jordan and Palestine, for example, share a common Egyptian lineage. Internationally, Egypt is the second largest beneficiary of US aid after Israel, and is the key Arab influence in the Israeli/Palestinian peace process. As a result of these domestic, regional and international characteristics, it is arguable that if political pluralism is going to take root anywhere in the Middle East, it should be there. Taking a more pessimistic viewpoint, it is also reasonable to suggest that if it can take root in Egypt, in the face of expert and sustained repression, it can do so anywhere in the region. It thus follows that any lessons drawn from a study of Egypt are likely to have applicability in the wider Arab world, rather than any of limited or partial validity arising from a more disparate study of several, less pivotal states.

If this premise is accepted, then a case study of Islamic moderate activism in Egypt can be attempted. Chapter 2 seeks to establish an appropriate focus of the study, and a means of investigation and analysis suited to producing useful empirical generalizations from a small sample size. A general case study can provide a framework for an empirical investigation, but also presents choices that must be considered carefully. Should a single case study be

---

<sup>4</sup> Sana Abed-Kotob, 'The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol 27 (1995) p322.

selected, providing a relevant but narrow focus, or a broader comparative study, offering potentially greater integrity in its resulting generalisations, but perhaps reduced validity? The comparative case study is usually well suited to this type of inquiry. In this specific undertaking, the challenge is to draw meaningful generalisations from the study of a single country; this can be achieved by studying the three separate political regimes that have held power since 1952 - those of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. This technique not only expands the number of available cases, thus lending enhanced credibility to the generalisations that arise from it, but also allows uncontrolled variables to be kept to a minimum. As opposed to a comparative case study of several different countries, this method allows many variables such as ethnicity, religious orientation, activist groups, and demographic and economic considerations to be kept constant. This means the focus of the study can be directed more consistently at the core issues - the complex dynamic between state and activists. The specific technique used to implement the case study is George's Structured Focused Comparison, which depends upon the formulation of Research Questions to direct work and order study. These are therefore used to define the structure and content of Chapter 4 and 5. They are as follows:

**RQ1:** 'Which factors affected the impact of the moderate Islamist movement upon Egyptian politics since 1952'?

**RQ 2:** 'What relevance have the existing characteristics of the moderate Islamist movement to its potential future political role'?

**RQ 3:** 'What exogenous influences are likely to be most significant to the future of moderate Islamic politics'?

**RQ4:** 'What capacity has the moderate Islamist movement demonstrated to formulate a modern, realistic political project that will contribute to any process of democratization and attract a politically meaningful constituency'?

### **Conceptual And Theoretical Grounding**

Chapter 3 integrates the theoretical influences of this thesis. Islamic activism is a phenomenon that is difficult to define and categorize in a useful manner. It embraces many approaches to activism, from gradualist, legal activism among the community, to violent terror activity, sometimes directed against that community. Islamic activists in Egypt have endured repression, circumvented obstructive electoral legislation and countered the ideological hegemony enjoyed by the regime; nonetheless, they have achieved little institutional political

effect. This is explained in part by the many competing groups, influences and interests within the Islamist movement itself. Also, Wiktorowicz makes the observation that the types of contention used by Islamic activist groups transcend anything specifically Islamic in that they do not differ greatly from those used by non-Islamic groups in other environments.<sup>5</sup> If this is so, then in the context of anti-regime contention in authoritarian Arab states, exogenous factors must be indicated in the Islamists' lack of political impact; the religious justification behind the contention is clearly outweighed by influences that prevent significant political consequences for entrenched regimes. These may be determined in an examination of the state/activist group dynamic, and Social Movement Theory (hereafter abbreviated to SMT) provides a tool for that purpose.

SMT is an evolving discipline, and work to date has concentrated largely upon Western liberal democratic societies.<sup>6</sup> The study of Islamic activism has taken place independently of theoretical and conceptual research on social movements and contentious politics, tending to portray Islamic activism as unique, or not suitable for scientific analysis. As a result Islamic activism has yet to be integrated fully with SMT; the extent and significance of Islamic activism at present means this is an omission of some consequence. SMT brings a new means of analysis to the study of activist movements, but does not yet provide a complete explanation of the Islamic groups among them. Sustaining support following mobilization, in the face of little evident political gain, and attracting true political allegiance rather than the opportunistic acceptance of patronage, is central to the future development of moderate Islamist movements in the Arab Middle East. This is a key facet of Islamic activism examined in this thesis, by selectively employing elements of SMT most relevant to a study of Egypt.

### **Literature Review and Analysis**

The Literature Review and analysis are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 begins with a brief summary of the factors that influenced the development of the moderate Islamist movement since 1952. It then outlines the resulting characteristics of the present movement that may define its future political utility, before concluding with an explanation of the transitional phase in which moderate Islamism now finds itself. Following this, Chapter 5 explores how factors in the wider regional political sphere may influence the moderate movement and be exploited by it. It is suggested that democratization in general, and the pragmatic, realistic approach of the moderate Islamist modernist groups are not only mutually

---

<sup>5</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz (Ed) *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press 2004) p3.

beneficial, but inseparable, if the current political stagnation is to be overcome in a manner that will assuage US concerns and satisfy its foreign policy objectives in the region.

### Conclusions

Finally, conclusions are presented in Chapter 6. The unbroken progression of personal-authoritarian rule in Egypt from 1952 until the present, combined with a political opposition movement characterized by disunity and factionalism, has resulted in a political culture of patronage and widespread apathy. The utopian Islamists failed to overcome internal class-based cleavages and practiced patronage politics in another form; in their capability to address the real underlying causes of mass disaffection (primarily socio-economic decline), the Islamists were found severely wanting. Civil society has alternated between suppression and extinction, and the denial of political access has directed discontent towards radical expression, the violence used in the course of which granted regimes a widely supported pretext for further repression. The strongly negative effects of radically inspired violence, ideology and behaviour among Egyptian society resulted in moderate guilt by association becoming implanted in the public consciousness, as extremist violence became the key determinant of the regime/Islamists dynamic, a destructive confrontation that allowed the moderate Islamists to be contained concurrently. All regimes exploited an ideological hegemony to disrupt Islamist outreach, and the political opportunity structures used to conduct this outreach proved only partially satisfactory for the purposes of mobilization, and rather less so for nurturing enduring political support. The moderate focus on religious and moral purity at the expense of real-world policy has led to widespread disappointment among supporters and the transformation of traditional Islamism. Their limitations induced a resignation to a future of permanent opposition, perhaps at their own choice in recognition of their real-world political shortcomings. After the Mubarak regime crushed the radical Islamist groups in the late 1990s, moderate Islamic activism appeared to be stagnating; from this period emerged three groups of moderate Islamists, the *Wasatiyya* (Centrist) intellectuals, the Wasat Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and the younger generation of the Muslim Brotherhood. For the first time, they have formulated Islamist political programmes that extend beyond slogan and include the tentative conceptual development of a specifically Muslim democracy. Despite an antipathy towards the US that will have to be tempered if US influence is to be used constructively in any democratization process, they offer what appears in the current environment to be the only viable means of bringing Islamic politics into a meaningful future.

---

<sup>6</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004) p5.

The combination of old and new moderate Islamism extends the possibility of bringing a convincing Muslim emphasis to Arab democratic coalition politics, while overcoming the reservations held by many Muslims about a rigidly Islamic state. At present, however, the initiation of democratic transitions will remain within the gift of authoritarian regimes alone and a major revision of US foreign policy will be needed to stimulate any such transitions. Using their concept of Muslim democracy to include moderate political groups of all backgrounds, secular and religious, in a national transitional effort, the Islamist modernists seek enduring change and improvement of the entire political culture in Egypt. For those who fear a hidden agenda within Islamist politics, such democratic coalitions offer the potential to limit the power of any single ideological grouping. Accepting that democratization processes will develop a specific emphasis within each state, and indeed that national interpretations of the democratic concept itself may also differ, the Egyptian experience of Islamic activism since 1952 nonetheless offers lessons of wider applicability throughout the Middle East, allowing an assessment of the future potential of moderate Islamism to be attempted.

It is this future potential, rather than past experiences, that best defines the import and utility of the moderate Islamists. As a catalyst for democratic reform, they harbour the ability to transform the political complexion of the entire Middle East.

## CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines an appropriate focus of the study, and a methodology suited to producing useful empirical generalizations from a small sample size.

### The Centrality of Egypt in Arab Politics and Islamic Activism

While there is no 'typical' Arab state, it can be argued that Egypt, 'the cradle of Islamism', is the state with the most influence in the contemporary Islamic activist movement, the longest tradition of organised Islamic opposition politics and resistance to them, and the widest exposure to Western political systems and institutions. It has an established and functioning state bureaucracy, which has a complex colonial, revolutionary and independent heritage, and has survived the influence of many different political ideologies. The Egyptian population is relatively well educated in modern technical subjects and includes an entrepreneurial, politically influential middle-class; it has had more than a little exposure to Western cultural and consumer trends. The Egyptian external influence in Islamic activism is also significant; groups in Syria, Jordan and Palestine, as well as transnational movements, share an Egyptian parentage. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, states Dekmejian, 'has been the ideological and institutional epicentre of fundamentalism in the Arab and Islamic worlds. It has survived recurrent state repression and internal conflict for over 50 years.....[its influence] is evident throughout the Arab world'.<sup>1</sup> Many of the most significant Islamist ideologues, moderate and radical, are, or were, Egyptian, and the legacies of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb are still very much in evidence. The fragmentation and diversification of the modern Islamist movement began in Egypt, and the bulk of significant activist movements still exist in the Egyptian political and social environment.

Egypt also exemplifies the many profound socio-economic difficulties faced by regimes and populations across the Arab world. Population expansion in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century has caused an influx of young people into an already saturated labour market; regional unemployment could entrap as many as 50 million people by 2009 and for those fortunate enough to be employed, real incomes have declined by 40% since 1982. Relative commercial and economic underperformance suggests a reversal of this trend is extremely unlikely; Egypt enjoyed broad economic parity with Taiwan and South Korea in the 1960s, but despite having a population larger than that of those two states combined, now exports in one year less than they do in two days.<sup>2</sup> The 2002 United Nations Arab Human

---

<sup>1</sup> R Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (New York, Syracuse University Press 1995) p73.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Noland and Howard Pack, 'Islam, Globalization and Economic Performance in the Middle East', *International Economic Policy Briefs* No PB04-4 (June 2004) pp1-3.

Development Report highlights three regional 'deficits' (freedom, knowledge and gender), the resolution of which it states is fundamental to future human development in the Arab world. Richards believes these interrelated deficits collectively spawn a fourth, which he refers to as the 'democratic deficit'.<sup>3</sup> All are evident in Egypt and contribute to the form and longevity of domestic political opposition; the wide variance of Egyptian opposition group views on these problems is reflected in Islamic activist movements throughout the Middle East.

On the international stage, Egypt is the second largest beneficiary of US aid after Israel, and is the key Arab influence in the Israeli/Palestinian peace process. Egypt has weathered the Arab hostility that followed the entry into peace negotiations with Israel in 1976, and support for the US-led coalition in the Gulf War of 1990/91, to become the most diplomatically significant Arab state. Springborg observes: '...Egyptian civilization offers an irresistible lure to those...intent on proving the worth of their cultures and economic and political systems on a global scale. If Egypt can be remade in the image of the conqueror or patron, the rest of Africa and Asia has been put on notice'.<sup>4</sup> The Mubarak regime, despite its democratic shortcomings, is seen as stable and reliable by Western powers, and especially since the cooling of US/Saudi Arabian relations following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, is the most important Western ally in the Arab Middle East. Considered an apostate government by fundamentalist extremists in consequence, and guilty of brutal repression of all opposition groups, Egyptian authoritarian regimes have nonetheless endured; successive regimes have spent 53 years preserving their own power and suppressing valid, meaningful political opposition. That they have been successful reflects the conservative and devout nature of the Egyptian populace; they are not extremists, and value consensus, stability and unity - even if the power of such regimes is preserved as a consequence.

A paradox thus arises; it is arguable from an institutional perspective, that if political pluralism is going to take root anywhere in the Middle East, it should be in Egypt. Conversely, from an operational viewpoint, it could also be suggested that if democracy can gain a foothold in such unpromising circumstances, it should be able to do so anywhere in the region. The obstacles to pluralism that do exist arise from the failings of the regime in power rather than any inherent defect in the apparatus of state or underlying public resistance. It follows that any lessons drawn from a study of Egypt are likely to have applicability in the wider Arab world, moreso than any of limited or partial validity arising from a more disparate study of several, less pivotal states.

---

<sup>3</sup> Alan Richards, 'Modernity and Economic Development', *Middle East Policy* Vol X No3 (Fall 2003) p67.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Springborg, '*Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order*'. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1989) p2.

## The Comparative Case Study Methodology

A study of several states will provide a broader sample from which to collect data than will one of a single state, thus enjoying greater statistical integrity. However, even a multi-state study of moderate Islam will yield only a small number of cases with which to work. Quantitative statistical methods therefore seem unsuitable for this study, and they can stretch the connection with empirical evidence in the pursuit of universality. Also, the lack of empirical work undertaken so far in this field may be better redressed by a qualitative approach, and while a general case-study methodology appears capable of providing a framework for an empirical investigation, a dilemma arises if this is chosen. Should a single case study be selected, providing specific relevance but narrow focus, or a broader comparative study, offering apparently greater integrity in its resulting generalizations, but potentially reduced validity? The comparative case study methodology lends itself well to this study of moderate political Islam and the comparative method is one of the basic techniques used to establish general empirical propositions and discover empirical relationships among variables'.<sup>5</sup> As Stretton posits: 'comparison is strongest as a choosing and provoking, not a proving, device; a system for questioning, not answering'.<sup>6</sup> Generalizations drawn from a comparative case study, even one of few cases, can perhaps assist with further theory development when tested within a wider sample. Lipjhart contends that the principal problems facing the comparative method are 'many variables, small number of cases'.<sup>7</sup> He also opines that 'a single case can constitute neither the basis for a generalization nor the ground for disproving an established generalization',<sup>8</sup> but Stake gives only qualified agreement. He believes comparative case studies are only of value when the specific phenomenon to be studied is present in all cases. If there exists no common thread of intrinsic interest then: 'Generalizations from differences between any two cases are much less to be trusted than generalizations from one' as one cannot make meaningful and objective comparison.<sup>9</sup> This argument is, however, neatly circumvented by the capacity of the longitudinal (cross-historical) expansion technique to reduce or control variables, especially in cases where that common thread of interest is present as a constant. In this study it is provided by the state/activist dynamic that pertained throughout all three regime periods.

If this is used, the study must focus on properly 'comparable' cases. Lipjhart defines this as: 'similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to

---

<sup>5</sup> Arend Lipjhart, 'Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method', *The American Political Science Review* 65/3 (Sep 1971) pp682-683.

<sup>6</sup> H. Stretton, quoted in Arend Lipjhart, 'The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research', *Comparative Political Studies* 8/2 (July 1975) p160.

<sup>7</sup> Lipjhart (Note 5) p685.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p691.

<sup>9</sup> Robert E Stake, 'Case Studies' in Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage 1994) p98.

treat as constants, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one wants to relate to each other. If such comparable cases can be found, they offer particularly good opportunities for the application of the comparative method because they allow the establishment of relationships among a few variables while many other variables are controlled'. He recommends a diachronic longitudinal expansion as the best method of maximising control - i.e. minimising the number of uncontrolled variables - and specifically illustrates the utility of intra-state comparisons in achieving this, as such analysis can take advantage of the many similar national characteristics serving as controls.<sup>10</sup> Thus, careful selection of cases within the setting of a single state increases sample size while reducing concurrently the number of uncontrolled variables.

In distinguishing between *method* and *technique*, the comparative method is a broad, general enterprise, whereas the Structured, Focused Comparison technique is used as the instrument of the method, being much more specific in intent. Drawing on Lipjhart's work, George developed this technique to increase the effectiveness of comparative case studies. He stresses the importance of general, unprescriptive and standardised research questions in each case to ensure that comparable data is collected from the cases concerned;<sup>11</sup> these are presented in the introduction to this thesis and are also used to structure the subsequent analysis in Chapters 4 and 5.

Thus, having established the pivotal importance of Egypt in Arab Islamic politics, and examined the means of maximising the validity of generalizations determined by a relatively limited comparative case study, a methodology for this thesis may be determined. Using the Structured Focused Comparison technique, it takes the form of a comparative case study, set within Egypt, but expanded longitudinally to examine three different political periods. Relationships between state and activist movement will be examined during the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak regimes. While regime ideology, civil and political institutions and treatment of opposition groups may have changed, the religious orientation, ethnic composition and major grassroots political concerns of the Egyptian populace did not; therefore, the pitfall of attempting to compare 'apples, oranges and pears'<sup>12</sup> inherent in an inter-state approach can be avoided. Indeed, the changing nature of political institutions and civil society has itself been a common phenomenon throughout the Middle East since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century and is something influenced as much by external actors as by indigenous or regional ones. This highlights further the difficulties associated with an inter-state analysis, as change is evident to varying degrees in all Arab states. For example, Egypt's international status since 1952 has varied from Soviet client to non-

---

<sup>10</sup> Lipjhart (Note 5) pp687-689.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander L George, 'Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison', in P G Lauren (Ed) *Diplomacy* (New York: The Free Press 1979) p52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p55.

aligned state to Western ally. Furthermore, the 1976 peace negotiations with Israel had significant effects at national, regional and international level. When these concerns are compounded by those applicable to other states in the region, the difficulties associated with an inter-state study become apparent.

### **Common Factors and Trends of Wider Applicability in Arab Politics**

From a SMT- influenced analysis of Islamic activism throughout the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak regimes, several factors can be identified that should have broader applicability throughout the Middle Eastern political environment. This stems not only from the centrality of Egypt in the regional geopolitical and socio-political contexts, but also from similarities in the relationships between authoritarian regimes and opposition activist movements. Despite apparent differences in the type of political elite, be it a constitutional monarchy, a military government or a familial/sectarian regime, the methods employed to control opposition groups are broadly similar. Equally, economic and social pressures in the region, and the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, bring a degree of universality to a political environment that might otherwise be dominated by intra-state ethnic or sectarian contention. These and related factors shape the environment in which the activists operate, and SMT helps to identify common influences and outcomes across the region. This is reinforced by the close relationships and lineage enjoyed by activist groups throughout the region with their Egyptian parent organisations, and the leading role of Egyptian individuals and organisations in the emerging Muslim Democratic Trend. By examining internal and external influences upon the activist groups, it may be possible to identify factors that contributed to their success or failure in their dealings with the state.

It is thus reasonable to suggest that lessons arising from the Egyptian case study will have wider validity, and applying them regionally exploits one of the potential strengths of the comparative methodology, where generalizations determined from intra-state analysis are then applied at inter-state level. In Chapters 4 and 5 the case study outcomes are used to assess the potential of moderate political Islam in the region at large, and, where appropriate, to make policy recommendations. Before that, the theoretical influences within this thesis are outlined in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3 - CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

In this chapter the religious, cultural and political influences that shape modern political Islam are briefly examined. Current work in SMT is also summarized with specific reference to Islamic activism, especially that which explores the practical conduct of that activity.

### Political Islam

#### Constituent Groups and Doctrines

Dekmejian identifies a series of conflicts that originate from the evolutionary relationship between Islamism and its social-economic-political environment. The basic dialectic in all Muslim societies is the struggle between the proponents of a secular state (frequently exemplified by incumbent regimes of little or no legitimacy) and the Islamists, who seek to create an Islamic polity within, or beyond, their own state.<sup>1</sup>

'Political Islam', 'Islamism', and 'Islamic activism' are all terms that are used to describe specifically political activity conducted within an Islamic frame of reference. The former two terms describe the underlying political concept and ideology, while 'Islamic activism' refers to the practical activity undertaken in furtherance of that ideology. Islamism is a constantly evolving doctrine and movement, reflecting the many competing influences within the whole. Terms such as 'moderate' and 'extremist' are also applicable to secular doctrines and are utilized generally to reflect the degree of radicalism associated with the movements concerned. 'Moderate' in the Islamic context should not be interpreted in the sense of a Western,<sup>2</sup> democratic centrist political inclination; in this case it describes a movement that is at once broad and ill defined. For example, old generation Islamic moderates of the Muslim Brotherhood are fundamentalists in the purely religious sense, and they share an ultimate aim with the more extreme groups - the establishment of an Islamic state. They are classed as moderate because they eschew violence and revolution as the path to that objective. However, younger generations of the same movement are noticeably more pragmatic and realistic, following an agenda more politically orientated and less religiously so. While they operate within an Islamic frame of reference, they seek more of a Muslim society than an Islamic state and are far less strident in their approach to the relevance and implementation of *Shari'a*. Islamism itself, argues Fuller,<sup>3</sup> is so varied it

---

<sup>1</sup> R Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (New York: Syracuse University Press 1995) pp19-22.

<sup>2</sup> James Bowen and Peter R Hobson (Eds), *Theories of Education: Studies of Significant Innovation in Western Educational Thought* (Brisbane: John Wiley & Sons 1987) p11. The broad definition of 'Western', including Russia and some former colonial territories, to which this footnote refers, will be used throughout this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Graham E Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p192.

cannot meaningfully be placed on an ideological spectrum, and it is difficult to classify as a distinct programme in its entirety. He describes Islamism as a political movement that uses Islam as the centrepiece of its political culture, improvising meaning to suit local contexts. It is thus not a strict ideology, but a religious/cultural/political framework for highlighting issues that concern politically aware Muslims. This is a useful viewpoint to take, and will be used throughout this thesis.

The dominant underlying doctrinal influence of political Islam is has long been that of fundamentalism, but now more forward-looking stimuli are beginning to develop. While secular liberal, revolutionary socialist, and Islamic fundamentalist ideologies were adopted following the failure of pan-Arabism in the Middle East, the first two are minority interests compared to fundamentalism, which continues to enjoy the mass appeal and familiarity of an overtly Islamic grounding. Indeed, the current wave of Islamic revivalism (which began following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967) is based firmly upon a strong trend of personal religious practice and observance at grassroots level.<sup>4</sup> However, Islamic fundamentalism, like Islamism itself, is not a single, coherent creed, and the many groups that subscribe to it illustrate the diversity and complexity of outlook within it.

The term 'fundamentalism' is thus not ideal to analyse the many and diverse political movements that use Islamic references in politics - indeed, many fundamentalists do not follow any political programme or enter the political arena at all. This is evident in Saudi Arabia and Oman, where the national religious influences are among the more fundamentalist in outlook - Wahabbism and Ibadism respectively. Despite the absolute power these two monarchies enjoy, it is clear that there also exists a significant, apolitical popular loyalty to them that is grounded in fundamentalist religious, rather than political, teaching. Hence the emergence of the term 'political Islam' to refer to the hybrid ideologies that mix concepts borrowed from Islamic tradition with ideas of more modern origin. While true fundamentalists are concerned more with ideas and religious purity, Islamists are action-orientated, believing political action is necessary to change society into a truly Islamic one.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentalists tend to be backward looking, rejecting modernity and seeking a return to an Islamic ideal that in truth never existed. Islamists are very much a product of modern, urban society; they are forward looking, and seek to apply, (or in the case of the Islamic modernists, adapt) Islamic teaching and law to a contemporary society. Generally, fundamentalists follow a 'bottom-up' approach to converting society through emphasis on individual piety and behaviour; once this is achieved they believe an Islamic state will automatically follow. Islamists originally adopted a more 'top-down'

---

<sup>4</sup> Caryle Murphy, *Passion for Islam. Shaping the Modern Middle East: The Egyptian Experience* (New York: Scribner 2002) p7; pp25-41.

<sup>5</sup> Guilain Denoeux, 'The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam', *Middle East Policy* Vol IX No2 (June 2002) p63.

revolutionary tack; establishing a truly Islamic state would generate the conditions in which an Islamic society could develop. Latterly, following the manifest failure of this approach, they have adopted a more gradualist, incremental one; it shares the 'bottom-up' approach of the fundamentalists but is still primarily political in focus, rather than personal.

Two currents exist within the overall Islamist movement - the mainly religious revival among the masses and the primarily political focus of activist groups. Dekmejian sees these currents as competitive; Murphy interprets them as complementary, believing that pious Islam is the soil in which Islamist seed is propagated.<sup>6</sup> Within the political domain of Islam there are two further, opposing, tendencies - the moderate proponents of gradual, evolutionary, political action and those of radical, revolutionary change. Nor are the gradualists a homogenous entity, and the division that exists within their ranks is a generational one. The older generation of the *Ikhwan* pursue the same aim as the revolutionaries, and are to some degree ambiguous in their approach to democracy. Conversely, younger gradualists from the Brotherhood now show some ideological flexibility and an evolving readiness to adapt their programme to the modern world.

The growing impact of globalization highlights the conflicting outlooks of Muslim modernists and conservatives. Modernists seek to adapt Islam to contemporary life, while conservatives adhere to traditional precepts and reject Western and other influences. The modernists place great emphasis upon contemporary interpretation of Islamic sources, stressing the primacy of context over text. There are many forms of modernism, including rationalists and Muslim liberals. The latter are an important voice in the modernist camp, arguing that Islam (if properly understood) is entirely compatible with Western liberalism. They dislike the 'liberal' identification, as it can be associated with permissiveness in Muslim society, preferring to be called modernists or moderates.<sup>7</sup>

In practice, all Islamist groups continually oscillate between political action and societal change, constantly blurring internal boundaries as the movement develops and responds to the challenges of modernity.

#### Neofundamentalism, Post-Islamism and the Muslim Democratic Trend

'Neofundamentalism' is used by Roy to denote what he describes as a degeneration of Islamism, which is related to, but distinct from, fundamentalism.<sup>8</sup> He maintains that the Neofundamentalists are less politically active than the original Islamists, thereby representing a continuing dissipation of political potential. They regard political action as

---

<sup>6</sup> Murphy (Note 4) pp25-41.

<sup>7</sup> Fuller (Note 3) pp50-51.

<sup>8</sup> Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1996) pp75-88; pp194-203.

only one of several means to achieve moral and spiritual reform at societal and personal level. Unlike the original Islamists, their approach to politics places more emphasis on a 'bottom-up', grassroots activism and their doctrine devotes an unbalanced emphasis to the *Shari'a*, at the expense of more practical concerns, according to Denoëux.<sup>9</sup> Kepel chooses to describe this as 'post-Islamism'<sup>10</sup> while Shadid ascribes a more Muslim, democratic emphasis to the phenomenon, rather than anything too rigidly Islamic.<sup>11</sup> This is arguably the more reasonable view, as one of the pivotal characteristics of this developing Muslim democratic tendency is an emphasis upon contextual *ijtihad* to define what form *Shari'a* should take in a contemporary setting - this is an issue of great significance to Muslims and warrants the most extensive debate. Both of these nascent developments could usefully be grouped together under the loose description of the 'New Muslim Democratic Trend'; this is evident throughout the Middle East, and embraces ideas and issues previously considered difficult obstacles to Islamic political development - such as democratic politics, recognition of the state as the only realistic vehicle for the conduct of politics, human rights and diffusion of religious authority. Central to this trend is the definition of 'democracy' that is considered suitable for Muslim society - not another imported Western ideology, but something more aligned with the provision of just and democratic governance in a distinctly Muslim context. Despite the importance of these issues to the evolution of moderate Islamic politics, the New Muslim Democratic Trend is currently largely intellectual in expression and, with the exception of the younger factions of the *Ikhwan*, attracts no significant constituency, hence the considerable reservations expressed by Roy.

#### Moderate Islam versus Radical Islam

Denoëux defines radical Islam as 'a politico-religious movement which, through extreme methods, strives to bring about drastic socio-political changes based on a revolutionary reinterpretation of Islamic doctrine that claims to go back to the fundamental meaning and message of the faith...violence is legitimised as a way of bringing down a social and political order deemed un-Islamic...replacing it with one that will restore Islam's original purity'.<sup>12</sup> The 'radical fringe' is mainly clandestine and certainly tiny, while the moderate movement is large, overt and mainstream. The most obvious difference between them is the advocacy of violence by the radicals, and this is also the most important. Moderate groups seek a gradualist, legalist approach to change that relies heavily on grassroots activism, social and charitable activity and winning mass popular support. They also embrace, at least partially, the concept of democracy, claiming Islamic precedent in concepts such as *shura*

---

<sup>9</sup> Denoëux (Note 5) pp65-66.

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press 2003) pp 366-373.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Shadid, *The Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2002) p71.

<sup>12</sup> Denoëux (Note 5) pp67-68.

(consensus) and *ijma* (consultation). Crucially, they assert that should they gain genuine political power, they will respect democratic rules, abide by the will of the majority as expressed in elections, protect human rights and encourage pluralism in society.

Once again, reality is more complex, and many Islamist groups do not fit into either of these categories; additionally, social movements frequently change their identities with time, responding to the pressures of the political environment in which they operate. Indeed, this is the main reason for the emergence of the neofundamentalist strand of political Islam - the resistance of extant states and regimes has parried the original revolutionary thrust of the Islamist movement.<sup>13</sup> As both moderates and radicals share the goal of establishing either an Islamic state or a Muslim society ruled by *Shari'a*, then the moderates could be said to be closer to the radicals than they are to true democrats; the moderates' public statements about democracy, human rights and pluralism may well be very different from their real positions - the real test of this will be the exercise of power. Another complicating factor is that moderate and radical wings can exist within the same overall movement (as in the Algerian FIS and the Palestinian Hamas); the actions of radicals can undermine disastrously the objectives of the moderates in this case. Conversely, radical groups have demonstrated willingness to participate in, and ability at, democratic politics, as shown by the competence of Hizbollah deputies in the Lebanese parliament since 1992.<sup>14</sup>

#### 'Moderate Islam' - A Working Definition

Islamists are those who use an overt Islamic frame of political reference, and take advantage of the current cycle of popular religious revivalism, 'pious Islam', to pursue specifically political objectives. They are also influenced to varying degrees by secular concerns - nationalism and ethnicity among them - that form part of their overall political complexion. Politics lies at the very core of Islamism, and this is concerned much more with power than it is with religion. Islamism and its moderate sub-division both incorporate diverse groupings and motivations; moderate groups, for the purposes of this study, shall be defined as those that do not use violence in pursuit of political ends in the contemporary political environment. It is recognised that some of them have done so in the past, and that their commitment to non-violent expression may be a temporary tactical move. This definition incorporates significant latitude, but it is sufficiently practical to meet the purposes of this paper. This thesis will focus upon the gradualist, realist movements that are attempting to construct a political project that is rooted in the contemporary world rather than the dawn of Islam. Collectively, this comprises moderates

---

<sup>13</sup> Roy (Note 8) pp194-195.

<sup>14</sup> Denoeux (Note 5) p75.

of old and young generations, modernists, Muslim liberals, reformed radicals and rationalists.

## A SMT Perspective On Islamic Activism

### Background

Islamic Activism is the most widespread political activism in the world yet it is frequently regarded as a unique form that cannot be analyzed using techniques employed in the study of other Social Movements. While the fact that the influence of religious ideology extends to all elements of the Islamic movement, and this distinguishes it from all other social and political movements, proponents of SMT argue that not only is this view untrue, it also explains the lack of empirically based analysis of Islamic activism from this perspective. The study of Islamic activism and the development of SMT have thus far followed parallel courses; this thesis seeks to facilitate an intersection of them in an Egyptian context in the hope that wider regional applicability of outcomes may ensue.

Islamic activism may be undertaken by religious propagation movements, terrorist groups and specific-issue collective action organizations in addition to the mainstream politically orientated groups. Wiktorowicz defines it in suitably broad terms as: ‘the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes’.<sup>15</sup> This is the definition that will be used throughout this thesis. He also observes that the modes of contention used by Islamic activist groups do not differ greatly from those used by non-Islamic groups in other environments, many of them rooted in Western democratic society or Third World post-colonial struggle. As a result, the underlying dynamic, processes and organization of the contention itself transcend anything specifically Islamic.<sup>16</sup>

### The Application of SMT to Islamic Activism

Previous SMT work has concentrated largely upon Western liberal democratic societies, and the study of Islamic activism has taken place largely independently of theoretical and conceptual research on social movements and contentious politics. Wickham outlines in detail the importance and influence of Egypt in the overall arena of Islamic activism and suggests that understanding the rise of Islamic Activism in Egypt (and by extension, elsewhere) can be assisted by SMT research.<sup>17</sup> It may, according to Wiktorowicz and others,

---

<sup>15</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz (Ed), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press 2004) p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p.3.

<sup>17</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004) pp4-5.

‘provide an efficient shared language for comparative analysis and theory building’,<sup>18</sup> and it will be used for the former purpose in this thesis. First generation SMT sought to establish a link between causal factors such as societal strains (economic and industrial decline, encroaching modernity) and personal grievance, which led individuals to activism. Precipitating factors were identified, and those of relevance to Egyptian Islamic activism can be grouped as follows:

Reinforcement of Inferiority: The military strength and economic power of Western states and Israel, in sharp contrast to the clear lack of such attributes in Arab states, were highlighted starkly by the 1967 Arab/Israeli War, the collapse of Arab nationalism, the failure of many secular modernization projects, the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian dispute, the 1991 Gulf War and the most recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. All these events reinforced in the Arab psyche pre-existing views of their own backwardness and shortcomings.

Cultural Imperialism: The growing and pervasive influence of Western culture, supported by industrial, economic and military might, generates the perception that a deliberate and orchestrated campaign to undermine Islam is in train. Anti-regime activism in the Arab Middle East incorporates in many cases an anti-Western dimension, especially in states perceived by activists as ‘clients’ of the US. Anti-Western sentiment is a powerful motivator used extensively by activists to exploit the resentment many Muslims feel at what they see as the cultural imperialism and aggressive penetration of their societies practiced by the Western political commercial complex, and permitted by illegitimate, un-Islamic regimes.

Socioeconomic Causes: The emergence of an educated lower-middle class, coupled with economic stagnation, declining employment prospects and eroded real incomes, has produced a significant, disaffected sector of society in Egypt that is a specific recruiting target of Islamic activist movements.

Political Strains: Authoritarian rule, lack of access to political systems and institutions and violent repression have allowed an attitude of political abstention and cynicism to prevail, compounding political activists’ problems in attempting to mobilize supporters and build constituencies.

The first two of these factors form what is generally known as the Cultural Identity model; in this, the resurgence of Islamic identity is a response to decades of Western cultural domination. The latter two groups form the Political Economy model, and Islamic activism

---

<sup>18</sup> Wiktorowicz (Note 15) pp3-5.

from that perspective could be interpreted as a 'no' vote - that is, a rejection of the status quo rather than a positive embrace of an Islamic alternative.<sup>19</sup> In both contexts however, Islamic activism became a natural vehicle for the expression of political discontent and now represents the most realistic option for confronting political exclusion in Middle East states.

However, social movements cannot simply exploit discontent, but must also provide motivations, resources and opportunities for such action. In the Egyptian context, the rise of Islamic activism stemmed from a considered mobilization process, initiated and sustained by Islamic counter-elites.<sup>20</sup>

Islamism has emerged as the only ideology that enjoys sufficient coherence with the populace to enable it to generate mass mobilization. The relevance of this to more enduring forms of political change could possibly be determined by examining the actual dynamics of contention, including political opportunities and constraints, and the mechanisms of collective action - mobilizing structures and resources, and ideological framing. This should allow comparison of Islamist movements with other opposition groups, and illustrate why mobilizational power never brought true political access.

### The Dynamics of Contention

The dynamics of contention include the relationship between political activists and the regime, the nature of anti-regime activity and repressive state measures. These continually vary in response to prevailing circumstances in the political environment. Dekmejian argues that the precise form of Islamic activism is determined by the intensity of the crisis situation the activists believe themselves to be in, which in turn is contingent upon primarily local precipitants - illegitimate regimes, political opportunities and constraints, repression, and state violence.<sup>21</sup>

### Political Opportunity and Constraint Structures

Social movements are deeply influenced by exogenous factors of economic, social, political and cultural origin. These affect movement viability itself, strategy and tactics, mobilization capacity and other instrumental aspects of movement development and sustainability. They generate what are known as structures of opportunity and constraint, the greatest of which is access to political space. This encompasses the level of formal access to political institutions, regime receptivity towards political challengers, the presence and power of political opponents, the stability of the ruling elite, levels and

---

<sup>19</sup> Wickham (Note 17) pp6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p8.

<sup>21</sup> Dekmejian (Note 1) p6.

nature of repression and the institutional capacity of the state. These structures may present or prevent opportunities for activism, but movement responses are entirely dependent upon their own recognition and interpretation of opportunities and threats.

In Arab states, institutions of civil society, such as student associations and professional syndicates, often serve as apparent surrogate political fora in view of the lack of formal participation permitted by the ruling elite. Egyptian Islamic activists have been notably effective in infiltrating these institutions to propagate their own religious and political message and compete for control of executive positions and material resources. In Jordan, Morocco, Turkey and Yemen, where the political systems are arguably more open, moderate activists have skillfully exploited whatever opportunities have arisen from the ability to form formal political parties. Even radicals-cum-reformists, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organization and the Islamic Group, have attempted to create political 'parties' (Islam Party and Shari'a Party respectively) despite state refusal to grant them formal status as such.<sup>22</sup> The political gain derived from these 'opportunity' structures was minimal. In Chapters 4 and 5, the limitations of these approaches will be highlighted and explained; the dividing line between opportunity and constraint is very fine indeed.

#### Repression and State Violence

Repression and institutionalized state violence also shape the political environment in which the moderates compete for support; they are not immune to state retaliation or public outcry in response to violent acts, as all activist groups can be associated with perpetrators of violence. As Burgat notes: 'the attitudes and propaganda of violent armed Islamic groups are used to discredit all Islamic opposition by entrenched governments. This approach is used to justify the repressive power of the regime and strengthen the position of the secularist Arab elites which support them'.<sup>23</sup> Violence is not the sole means of political expression, but in states where other means are restricted or absent, it becomes much more likely to occur. Two factors in particular are indicated as significant in the emergence, or not, of political violence, and they exert an unavoidable influence on moderate politics within the same environment. They are: access to institutionalized politics and the nature of state repression.

- Exclusion from participatory politics can frequently bring advantage to the extremists, supporting their contention that violence is the only way to achieve political change. Strongly exclusionary regimes tend to encourage more extreme

---

<sup>22</sup> Wiktorowicz (Note 15) p13.

<sup>23</sup> Francois Burgat, 'Ballot Boxes, Militaries and Islamic Movements', in Martin Kramer (Ed), *The Dayan Centre Papers No 120: The Islamist Debate* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle East and African Studies 1997) p40.

collective action as the radicals can be seen as potentially more effective than the moderates. Thus, extreme groups often originate from moderate Islamic movements operating within closed or semi-open political systems.

- In Egypt, the Islamic Group reacted violently to severe state repression and the exclusion from institutional politics of all Islamic activist groups. This indicated that the nature of repression itself is directly linked to the type and severity of political violence employed by terror groups; selective, pre-emptive repression, which may be coercive but non-violent, attracts a far lower-key reaction than does violent, indiscriminate, reactive repression. Similarly, severe repression directed against moderate groups can also produce an extreme backlash. Policies of co-optation are employed by repressive regimes in an attempt to control moderate groups without attracting such a reaction.<sup>24</sup>

### Mechanisms of Collective Action

#### Mobilization: Structures and Resources

A subdivision of SMT, known as Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), was developed to indicate the crucial role of established social networks and organizations (in the Islamic context, most particularly the mosque) in the mobilization process.<sup>25</sup> Social Movement Organizations, as these are known, combine both resources and organizational capacity to marshal what would otherwise remain as individual grievance; they can be viewed as the catalyst that organizes contention, structures it through mechanisms of mobilization and provides strategic resources to facilitate sustained collective action. They include Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs), medical clinics, charities, and cultural centres which collectively provide many basic goods and services that the state cannot or does not.

RMT distinguishes between Social Movement Organizations and Social Movement Communities; the latter are very informal and flexible networks of activists that operate without the need for the structure of a formal organization. This is an important difference in the context of Islamic activism, where such communities include extended family groups, mosque congregations, neighbourhood groups and local business networks. Use of these communities has been a key element of the Islamist mobilization strategy, and a conduit for their message and patronage. They assume particular importance in societies where

---

<sup>24</sup> Mohammed M Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement', in Quintan Wiktorowicz (Ed), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington Indiana: Indian University Press 2004) pp68-70.

<sup>25</sup> Wiktorowicz (Note 15) pp 10-12.

repression is severe and the more formal Social Movement Organizations, such as NGOs and professional syndicates, are easier to monitor and control.

### Networks and Alliances

Middle Eastern society is, effectively, a 'network of networks'. Even the more established and formal political organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, comprise dynamic and evolving networks of their own that extend beyond the boundaries of the core political movement itself. Alliances of convenience are also a feature of political activism in the Middle East; such pragmatism may take the form of temporary accommodations forged between rival activist groups to face a common threat. SMT highlights the fact that these mobilization structures are notably less effective in authoritarian settings as vehicles for converting mass support into tangible political gain. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt used its 'quasi-party' structure to exploit support mobilized through informal networks on the periphery of the political space. But, in the 'semi-open' environments that existed at times during the Sadat and Mubarak years, such exploitation at the political level alarmed the regimes sufficiently to cause the re-instigation of repression. Progress towards participatory politics was therefore entirely a function of regime tolerance, and the question of how genuinely productive were the 'quasi-party' structures in securing political gain from mobilized support will be examined later.

### Culture and Ideological Framing Processes

The ways in which meaning is produced, articulated and disseminated by movements is referred to as 'Framing'. 'Frames' are the conceptual and descriptive tools used by groups in the production and dissemination of the collective interpretation of local events. Framing thus describes the process of constructing meaning to facilitate the mobilization of participants and support.<sup>26</sup> Islamic movements rely heavily on the careful and selective construction of meaning and framing processes. It achieves three core tasks for social movements:

- The diagnosis of a problem in need of redress, including the apportionment of blame and responsibility.
- The provision of a solution to the problem in the form of specific strategies and tactics to ameliorate injustice.
- The provision of a rationale to motivate and support collective action.

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid pp15-18.

The Islamists must compete with regime framing which is employed widely against them. Political elites frequently manipulate elements of the Islamic movement to combat challenge, and state control of official mosque sermons allows regimes to amplify their own frames while stifling those of others. The success of activist framing processes is acutely dependent upon the reputation and credibility of those who articulate the group message within the community, and the use of familiar language and cultural symbols designed to maximize the coherence of the specific ideology. 'Official' Islam (i.e. that practiced by the state-endorsed *ulema*) is largely discredited throughout the region and people turn to a vernacular 'popular' Islam and respected community leaders, including Islamic activists, to fill the resulting void. The activists have skillfully exploited this, but also realize that some potential recruits are deterred by the overtly Islamic nature of their message; they therefore astutely blend the religious and the secular in their framing processes and social programmes to avoid alienating this sector of the populace. In repressive political environments, Islamists are careful not to present too robust a challenge to the regime and thus also produce a clandestine message that is circulated through informal, safe, Social Movement Communities that escape state surveillance. While this may be considered to be an effective tactic, the need to resort to it highlights the enduring power of the state to control outreach and ideological propagation by activist movements.

Framing processes are, thus, interpretive devices that help to convert personal grievance and political opportunity into motivation and collective action. Islamic activism is deeply rooted in the culture of Islamic society, utilizing a shared language, theological underpinning and common history. It has identified and utilized the disillusionment of the populace arising from institutionalized corruption, economic stagnation and political exclusion. Because it takes place almost entirely in an atmosphere of repression, the framing processes employed are different from those used by activist groups operating in Western liberal democracies. This is evident in outreach programmes and recruiting activity where the Islamist message is transmitted by a process known as *da'wa* ('the call to God') and activism is framed as a moral obligation; in Egypt, this was the catalyst that converted supporters motivated by purely rational interests into activists willing to undertake high-risk activity that would seem to contradict that very rationality.

The theoretical and conceptual influences outlined in this chapter provide a specific perspective from which to view the material discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Despite the importance of the dynamics of contention between regime and activist movements, and the reliance the latter placed upon particular mechanisms of collective action, other influences were also at play that proved to be at least as instrumental in determining the political impact of moderate Islamist movements.

## CHAPTER 4 - PAST AND PRESENT - THE EVOLUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODERATE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE ISLAMIST MODERNIST TREND

This Chapter is sub-divided into three parts: Part 1 deals with the major influences acting upon moderate Islamist opposition politics in Egypt throughout the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak eras. In Part 2, Moderate Islamism in Egypt is considered from the perspective of extant characteristics of the moderate movement, and their likely influence upon its ongoing development. Part 3 examines the continuing transition from 'Old Islamism' to 'New Islamism' that began towards the end of the 1990s.

### PART 1- MODERATE ISLAMISM AND EGYPTIAN POLITICS SINCE 1952

#### THE TENURES OF INDIVIDUAL REGIMES

##### The Nasser Regime

Gamal Abdul Nasser assumed power following the coup of the 'Free Officers' in 1952, and rejected a power-sharing approach to government, believing it would threaten his anticipated reform programme. He and his Free Officer colleagues established an authoritarian regime based upon a foundation of military rule under charismatic leadership. Democracy was to them a much lower priority than establishing the national discipline and political will to carry out the projects they envisioned. They immediately strengthened and enlarged the domestic security apparatus and implemented a programme of expansion of the state bureaucracies, thereby fortifying what were to become two bastions of state power.<sup>1</sup>

The regime maintained throughout its rule an impressive stability based upon an effective combination of Nasser's charisma, underlying nationalism, expanded opportunity and equality. Apart from the opposition groups of the extreme left and the Islamists, which only really became viable during the later years of Nasser's office, the regime built an enduring 'populist coalition' that included the great majority of Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> Nasser pressed home this advantage, allowing him to achieve the almost complete elimination of opposition political groups throughout his tenure as President, replacing them with national rallies to channel popular 'representation' in directions approved by the regime itself. Nasser refused to allow them to be termed 'parties' because 'parties meant partisanship,

---

<sup>1</sup> Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge 2000) pp288-290.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond A Hinnebusch Jr, *Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers 1988) pp15-29.

and partisanship meant dividing the body politic, and that would not be tolerated'.<sup>3</sup> As mechanisms for genuine political participation, the rallies were largely pointless, but provided the corporatist means by which the regime could control Egyptian society. Nasser deepened and continued a crisis of participation that began in the late 1940s by creating an authoritarian, nationalist, populist state, wherein power was concentrated in the office of President and political organizations were dedicated to boosting his personal popularity and reinforcing his power to impose a nationalist revolution. A central pillar of this popular appeal was the implementation of measures such as expanded free educational opportunities and the promise of state-sector employment for all university graduates. This effectively created a 'social contract' between Nasser and the masses, allowing him to pursue the complementary aims of modernizing the economy through the use of a large public sector while mobilizing the masses against the landed and private business elites.<sup>4</sup> The masses had in turn to honour their side of the bargain, the price of which was complete political acquiescence.

Civil society in its most basic form was both incorporated and extinguished under the populist policies of Nasser. Civil associations found themselves incorporated into the formal state structure, dissolved or rendered obsolete. The trade unions remained weak and factionalised throughout Nasser's rule, and the professional associations, with their additional political dimension, were subjected to especially close control and publicly portrayed as organizations that pursued 'their own selfish class interests'.<sup>5</sup> As the state was by far the largest employer of professionals, their dependence upon it for employment and patronage, combined with constrictive laws, allowed Nasser to divide the political bases of the syndicates and control them. Nasser's corporatist political system, in which such interest groups were organized along functional lines and placed within a single representative body, destroyed their function as alternative sites of political opportunity or access. Rendered compliant, the public institutions thus offered utility to the regime as channels for the propaganda that was a central component of a resocialization programme based on a loose combination of themes - Islam, Arab nationalism and socialism. From 1954 until 1967 therefore, the educated element of Egyptian society ceased to function as anything other than a loyal, uncritical tool of the regime.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the Nasser era, the professional associations were essentially directed by the state and were even used at times to mobilize support for the regime. While this secured their long-term survival, it rendered them politically impotent during his tenure, and ensured what Owen describes as

---

<sup>3</sup> Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1998) p279.

<sup>4</sup> Maye Kassem, *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers 2004) p13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* pp 88-97.

<sup>6</sup> Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press 2004) pp30-32.

‘controlled collaboration’ was available to the regime to the exclusion of much else.<sup>7</sup> As an alternative means of political access for the Islamists, the utility of the professional associations was thus much reduced during the Nasser era compared with that of the Sadat and Mubarak regimes. Moderate Islamists achieved little during the remainder of Nasser’s tenure, only resurfacing under the relative liberalization of the early Sadat years. However, several factors from the Nasser era were of significance in the moderate Islamist campaigns of the Sadat and Mubarak periods.

Nasser’s suppression of the Brotherhood, and the imprisonment of many of its most influential figures, was to have unforeseen consequences for Egyptian politics, because it stimulated a much more radical, reactionary Islamic ideology that was to lead to the emergence of more extreme Islamist groups towards the end of his tenure as President. Originally, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only political group left in existence by the regime, which tried to co-opt it by offering the leaders three ministerial posts; the Brotherhood refused, being unwilling to appear to support the regime over issues where it took an opposing stance. As a result, the regime dissolved the group - by then the largest organized popular force in Egypt - in January 1954. Brotherhood activity assumed thereafter a decidedly radical hue, leading to an attempt to assassinate Nasser in Alexandria in the following October. Nasser thus had to deal with the Islamist movement at large. He did so in an uncompromisingly brutal manner, concurrently crippling the moderate mainstream of the Islamist movement, preventing it from either ‘holding the alliance or nourishing the religious commitment of a new generation of fundamentalists’.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the Nasser period, the moderate Islamist movement therefore existed in a state of political and organizational limbo. The extreme approach of the radical Islamists, coupled with the widespread public support for the social contract at that time, allowed the regime to execute an indiscriminate, reactive policy against the entire Islamist movement, moderate and radical alike. Despite the fact that Islamic activism was much less significant as a political force during the Nasser era than it became later, this lesson seems to have been well-noted and would be re-applied during the Sadat and Mubarak periods.

From a SMT perspective Nasser was successful in pre-empting or suppressing opposition politics because his regime acted against all the agents, sites and targets of mobilization activity simultaneously. A key pillar of the Nasser strategy was to control the educational and legal systems, the religious establishment and the press and media. This illustrated that the regime clearly understood the opportunities and methodologies exploited by opposition groups in the repressive environment of the time, and was quick to exercise the capabilities of an expanded internal security apparatus. This served two complementary

---

<sup>7</sup> Owen (Note 1) p32.

<sup>8</sup> Kassem (Note 4) pp137-140

aims; firstly, to control the political space afforded by the school, university, court and mosque to opposition activism, and secondly, to appropriate opposition ideas and actions to enhance the legitimacy of the regime.

Nasser was politically astute from the outset, and the regime exploited the strong emphasis in Egyptian society on education as the prime means of advancement.<sup>9</sup> The importance of this approach should not be underestimated, as it had direct, strong emotional appeal among a significant sector of the populace and allowed the regime to deny alternative channels of political access to the opposition. Education was seen by the middle classes as the key to a better future and was valued accordingly - almost regardless of the cost to them under the social contract. This was set against a background of urgent need for national economic growth, and thus betrayed a policy conflict - the demands of economic growth compete directly with those of economic redistribution. This was to prove the Achilles Heel of Nasserist policy, steadily undermining the social contract upon which the political acquiescence of the population was based. Among those segments of society considered 'strategic' by the regime, especially educated youth, genuine support existed as they had been granted a symbolic and material stake in the revolutionary order.<sup>10</sup> This extra entitlement came at a political cost of course, and it was intended to neutralize their potential to threaten the regime then and in the future. However, it was made on a largely *ad-hoc* basis, and as a result of the conflicting economic pressures inherent in the reform/redistribute policy nexus, it became concurrently unaffordable and difficult to withdraw. After the 1967 war with Israel, the worsening economic pressures that developed originally in 1965/66 produced an environment in which anti-regime contention began to re-emerge.

Initially, frustration among university students and bureaucrats initiated sporadic public protest - in contrast to the political abstinence of the population at large. A number of Marxist and Islamic underground cells also began to form, but they were tiny in number and size. Nasser was forced, in 1968, to grant more political freedom to the student movements - these improved political opportunities allowed them to become the only organised opposition to the government at that time. With an interesting irony, those most indoctrinated by the regime became the most disaffected when the regime failed to maintain the patronage bargain on which their support was based. This wave of protest towards the end of Nasser's rule was not significantly Islamically - motivated and thus differed markedly from political contention during the Sadat and Mubarak eras. This contention actually emerged in an environment of political upheaval - the military defeat in 1967, the death of Nasser in 1971, and economic recession - and brought into question for

---

<sup>9</sup> Wickham (Note 6) p26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid pp21-23.

the first time it's underlying legitimacy.<sup>11</sup> During the decline of the Nasser regime, the lack of an organized party structure, weak institutions and corruption encouraged patrimonialism and clientelism, and greater factionalism within the regime itself. Nasser originally overcame these problems with the power of his personal charisma and reputation, but the disastrous showing of Egypt in the 1967 war with Israel signalled the end of mass political quietism.

Thus, Nasser quickly secured absolute power for his regime through a process of institutional control, ideological dominance and an undeniable populism based on post-independence optimism and personal charisma. However, his regime made a little terror go a long way towards enforcing order; together with the police, military and security forces, they crushed any opposition to Nasser's rule and 'crippled the people's ability to think and act'.<sup>12</sup> It was, therefore, a *de-facto* police state that Nasser had established; despite setbacks and concessions following the war of 1967, he managed to maintain it as such until his death. During the convulsive end to the Nasser regime, Anwar Sadat was no doubt aware of the twin dangers posed to him by the legacy redistribution policy and the surviving Nasserist influence. He was also clearly alive to the importance of the student protest movement in countering the latter, and the significance of patronage in securing its support.

### The Sadat Regime

When Anwar Sadat became President he attempted to reconcile the Egyptian state with the dominant forces in its environment and adapt its institutions to the post-revolutionary era.<sup>13</sup> His overall approach to political reform was ambiguous in that the situation at the end of his rule was not significantly different to that at the beginning - personal authoritarian rule had been preserved, and any liberal measures that had been introduced were almost always accompanied by limitations that prevented them achieving any real impact.<sup>14</sup>

Sadat launched his 'corrective revolution', promising improved living standards and greater democracy. This was a courageous undertaking, as establishing stronger links with the West, and his as yet undisclosed intention to pursue peace with Israel, both essential pillars of the revolution, were bound to stoke up resentment among the Islamist opposition. Sadat was no doubt aware of this, and his co-optation of the Islamists against the Nasserites

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid pp33-34.

<sup>12</sup> Ninette S Fahmy, *The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship* (London: RoutledgeCurzon 2002) p60.

<sup>13</sup> Hinnebusch (Note 2) p1.

<sup>14</sup> Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London: I B Tauris 2001) p20.

suggests that he was perhaps also keen to stress the Islamic credentials of his regime in order to temper that resentment. Like Nasser before him, his immediate preoccupation was to cement his own power and influence within the regime; nonetheless, Sadat did allow a more liberal political life to return to Egypt, implementing a programme of limited electoral reform that resulted in the formation of 'independent' political parties. However, Sadat actually transformed the Arab Socialist Union into a tame political party by stimulating the development of several competing, pre-existing political tendencies within it, ultimately allowing three of them - his own National Socialist Rally, the Liberal Socialists and the National Progressive Unionists - to contest the 1976 election as separate political organizations. By manipulating electoral law and procedures Sadat ensured that all three parties came to represent broadly similar and unthreatening ideologies rather than independent economic, social or cultural interests. Large segments of the population, especially the lower classes, were thus disenfranchised, as they had no organization of their own to represent them. This tentative 'liberalization' eventually foundered in the face of growing popular opposition, especially to cuts in food subsidies in 1977 and Sadat's entry into peace negotiations with Israel. Law 40/1977 banned the two largest opposition groups - the Nasserites and the Muslim Brotherhood - from participation as formal parties. This strengthened further the power of the President at the expense of parliament in what was to become a continuing trend in Egyptian politics. In reality, Sadat introduced political diversity rather than genuine pluralism, and Fahmy speculates that this could have initiated a transitional phase ahead of a truly pluralistic system, enquiring also why this did not occur.<sup>15</sup> The answer is provided by Sadat's focus upon foreign policy and economic issues - the need to be free of the Israeli threat and to attract substantial foreign investment, especially from the US, as part of his *infitah* ('open door') economic policy. This provided the impetus for a political liberalization that was in reality anything but, and replaced a weak single-party system with an equally weak multi-party one.

Sadat had identified two potential threats to the survival of the regime - the emergence of an independent civil society and a resurgent Islamist movement. In dealing with civil society, Sadat took an opportunistic approach, maintaining the tactics of his predecessor to control and contain opposition to the regime. The institutions of civil society remained incapable of mounting any degree of organised protest and offered only limited utility to the Islamists as alternative political opportunity structures. While his approach to trade unions remained broadly similar to that of Nasser, the professional associations were more directly affected by his economic policies than the unions were. The ability of the associations to establish independent financial resources undermined the relative importance of government-connected leaders who until then had brought access to state resources; a degree of political independence was therefore possible, and on occasion

---

<sup>15</sup> Fahmy (Note 12) p62.

exercised - the associations maintained a degree of unity in opposition to unpopular policies such as the peace agreement with Israel. Towards the end of Sadat's tenure, the professional syndicates began to free themselves of state control, becoming the primary opportunity structures within which opposition political activity could take place. However, there was no doubt where the real power lay, and Sadat did not hesitate to dissolve syndicate councils as a demonstration of what little real autonomy from state control they enjoyed.<sup>16</sup> Kienle also identifies the imposition of illiberal pressures on civil society as a direct consequence of reduced regime influence stemming from increased economic freedom as a result of the *infitah* policy. The redistribution of resources that occurred had the unforeseen side-effect of reducing the regime's capacity for patronage, and this was countered by new restrictions on liberties to preserve governmental control.<sup>17</sup> Once Sadat had secured his position, he thus built a new legal and constitutional framework to underpin a system of personal authoritarian rule not so very different from that enjoyed by Nasser.<sup>18</sup> While the policies he implemented may have provided justification or motivation for Islamic opposition activity, it was this fundamental dynamic of governance that determined the rules of the game of regime/activist interaction.

Because of the political danger inherent in a retreat from the Nasserite social contract, Sadat not only retained the educational and state employment provisions it offered, but extended them. As university output grew, the state sector became increasingly bloated and inefficient as it struggled to absorb it. This produced a social strata known as the 'lumpen intelligentsia' - a large pool of unemployed, undervalued and disenfranchised young university graduates. In an attempt to align university output with employment capacity, the regime introduced in the mid-1970s a period of delay between graduation and employment by the state. What had previously been a distinct social class - the professional, university-educated middle class - thus began to accommodate graduates without means, as graduate earnings declined by about 20% over the remaining years of Sadat's tenure.<sup>19</sup> In so doing it became a less distinct social entity, containing within it an aggrieved constituency available for mobilization. Sadat had overextended the Egyptian patron-state by retaining the social contract in order to buy political support and the effects for the state were crippling in the long term. This was perhaps the beginning of the developmental crisis that Ayubi believes to be the primary cause of the upsurge in Islamist political activity which continues to the present, and in which 'many new social forces were unleashed without their energies being politically absorbed and without their economic and social expectations being satisfied'.<sup>20</sup> Sadat soon faced economic strains and unrest on a

---

<sup>16</sup> Kassem (Note 4) pp99-104.

<sup>17</sup> Kienle (Note 14) p5.

<sup>18</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p23.

<sup>19</sup> Wickham (Note 6) p38-41.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Fawaz E Gerges, 'The End of the Islamist Insurgency in Egypt: Costs and Prospects'. *Middle East Journal* Vol 4 Fall 2000 p611.

politically significant scale, the latter for the first time concurrently from the excluded lower class and the undervalued middle class.

Part of Sadat's strategy to defeat the Leftist challenge and the remaining Nasserites within the regime was to allow the moderate Muslim Brotherhood to re-establish its organization to counter their influence. Sadat did not grant legal recognition to the Islamist groups, but did allow them to function within the Egyptian state, even extending financial and organizational support to them until his power was secured. In the vacuum created by Nasser's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, many smaller, secretive Islamist groups had come into existence, functioning through the extensive local and familial networks that characterise Middle Eastern society. These covert groups were bolstered, as was the re-emerging Brotherhood, by the release of Islamic activists imprisoned during the Nasser era, and the Islamist movement was becoming increasingly widespread and powerful. At this point, and throughout most of the 1970s, the moderate Muslim Brotherhood was still severely depleted and proved less attractive than many of the more extreme groups to the new generation of fundamentalist Islamic activists. In this environment were formed groups such as Islamic Jihad and the alliance of Islamic student groups, the Islamic Group, and Sadat at first supported them as their ideology and methodology utilized what he perceived as politically neutral *da'wa*. This accommodating approach also allowed the Muslim Brothers to stage a strong re-emergence during the 1980s, strengthened by a new generation of younger, more politically aware activists who grasped the importance of playing by the political rules. Responding to Sadat's apparent liberalization, they challenged the government in parliament or by using the political opportunities offered by the institutions of civil society, such as the professional syndicates. Actually, two mutually reinforcing and distinctly illiberal forces strictly limited their prospects - the self-interest of an authoritarian regime, and the almost prohibitive regulation of opposition political activity. The Islamists were excluded from the formal political system, so directed their efforts at institutional outlets beyond direct regime control. It can be seen that this partial reform helped to undermine the legitimacy of Egypt's political institutions and elites. This was not lost on the educated youth, who became further alienated, nor on the Islamists who began to exploit this alienation. As a result, a political system 'with a hollow core and a dynamic periphery'<sup>21</sup> evolved.

However, as Sadat's policies became more unpopular, the radicals began to draw support away from the Islamic student groups and a re-grouping Muslim Brotherhood. To counter this unpopularity, Sadat cultivated the image of himself as the 'believer President' as part of a wider framing effort to bestow Islamic credibility on the regime, which included measures to infuse the state education system with more Islamic content. State schooling

---

<sup>21</sup> Wickham (Note 6) p64.

was predicated upon learning by rote, so pupils had little opportunity to develop critical or analytical thinking;<sup>22</sup> they were subsequently very receptive to Islamist teaching, transmitted in a familiar discourse. This unintentional surrender of regime ideological hegemony was to provide a ready resource for the radical Islamists in the future.

As the Sadat regime became increasingly illiberal, and more aligned with Western powers, the true nature of reform became more widely understood and there developed in Egyptian society what Wickham describes as a 'Parallel Islamic Sector' - a broad and varied network of networks of different functions and objectives. It was independent of, and increasingly in competition with, the Egyptian state; its efforts at coalescence and constituency building were aided by Sadat's attempts to boost the Islamic credentials of his regime and by the availability of external funding generated by the regional oil boom of the mid-70s. Not only had the resurgent Islamist movement become a political threat, but it had also accumulated significant financial resources under the *infitah* policy - perhaps as much as 40% of economic ventures were controlled by Brotherhood - related interests alone.<sup>23</sup> The gains made by individual brethren explain why the Muslim Brotherhood collectively did not oppose *infitah*, why the radicals gained support from the poorer classes, setting the scene for an enduring split in the Islamist ranks, and why ideology within moderate movements came to be consistently overshadowed by interests.

The peace negotiations with Israel cemented the regime's unpopularity, even turning previously co-operative moderates against it and leaving Egypt isolated among the states of the Arab world. A popular religious revival was gathering momentum, and the Islamists began to eclipse the Left as the leading opposition force. The state strategy of co-opting the Islamic clerical establishment, intellectuals and moderates in order to contain the radicals was failing, and Sadat decided to confront all Islamic activist movements, moderates included. Under the legal and financial pressures applied by the regime, the Islamic Group became more radical, more overtly political in intent and expanded its support base well beyond the university campuses where it had originated. While the Brotherhood remained a moderate organization, Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group embraced ever more extreme and radical splinter groups, one of which (Tanzim al-Jihad) was responsible for the assassination of Sadat. A historical progression is evident here, whereby the ruthless crackdown of the Nasser regime gave birth to radical Islamism in the late 1960s, and the subsequent removal of support for the broader Islamist movement by the Sadat regime further reinforced the radical and militant tendencies within it throughout the 1970s. They were bolstered by the more fundamentalist Arab states that remained bitterly opposed to the existence of the state of Israel. Sadat was aware of this

---

<sup>22</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, 'Why Radical Muslims Aren't Taking Over Governments', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* Vol 2 No 2 (May 1998). [[http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria598\\_sivan.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria598_sivan.html)] pp3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Wickham (Note 6) p95.

exogenous influence upon domestic extremist groups and did not underestimate the seriousness of it; it was an important factor in his decision to adopt a more confrontational approach towards them.

Despite the unpopularity of the regime, the Islamists were unable to present a united front and there remained a clear division between the moderates, rooted in the middle class, and the radicals, who enjoyed support from younger, poorer segments of society. The conflict quickly became polarized as one between the violent radicals and the regime. When Islamic Jihad assassinated the President, hoping this audacious act would trigger a popular uprising in Egypt, it illustrated quite how far removed from mainstream opinion and aspiration the radicals were. Egyptian culture is deeply conservative, largely devout, and not well disposed to internal revolt; at that time, ordinary Egyptians craved nothing more than a simple means of improving their everyday existence. Because the radical groups had deliberately cut themselves off from the middle classes and the *ulema*, they had no realistic chance of ever instigating such an uprising; this disunity of the Islamist opposition movement meant they could not even secure political access when Sadat was so desperately unpopular. Also highlighted was the failure of the regime's policy of co-optation, a fact noted by the successor regime of Hosni Mubarak.

### The Mubarak Regime

Upon assuming the presidency in 1981, Mubarak pursued a flexible policy of supporting moderate groups to a degree, including releasing many Muslim Brotherhood supporters imprisoned by Sadat, and employing restrained repressive measures while the political situation was favourable. The regime controlled Islamic activism within the legislative and syndicate arenas with a combination of relatively low-key containment using restrictive participatory laws, and a selection of co-optive methods. It is possible that Mubarak believed the mass arrests of Islamists following the assassination of Sadat rendered them unthreatening, and he concentrated upon establishing his personal rule within the political apparatus of the state. This discreet and considered application of selective repression was very effective and had partially inhibited the Islamists' capacity to act as the major catalyst for political change.<sup>24</sup> Mubarak faced no immediate power struggle within the regime, but did inherit a combination of socio-economic problems that posed potentially serious challenges to the continuance of personal authoritarian rule. Sadat's peace treaty with Israel left Egypt isolated within the Arab world and had triggered widespread resentment in domestic politics, the Nasserite Arab socialist experiment had produced enormous national debts which had not been reduced by Sadat's *infitah* policy, and the multi-party political system perhaps hinted at a challenge to established rule. Not initially

---

<sup>24</sup> Kassem (Note 4) pp148-151.

concerned by the latter, Mubarak did allow a degree of political liberalization to take place, primarily by allowing a small number of political parties to function, but only as a means to legitimise his position and consolidate power.<sup>25</sup> Continuity with the Sadat regime is the defining, but not exclusive, characteristic of the Mubarak era. The class and special-interest structure of the NDP remains much the same as it was during Sadat's tenure, and it continues to lack a clear ideology today.<sup>26</sup> It still encompasses a collection of individuals whose only common political aspiration is to cultivate and exploit patronage.

The Islamist moderates at this stage continued to pursue the introduction of symbolically important elements of the *Shari'a*, whilst concurrently attempting to build the institutions of an alternative Islamic economic and social structure (such as Islamic banks and investment companies) in anticipation of securing real political power. They had by the mid-1980s established themselves in the People's Assembly and the professional syndicates as the foremost opposition movement. In the People's Assembly they did so by using alliances of convenience with other parties and fielding independent candidates, as evident in the 1984 and 1987 elections. However, while the moderates thus circumvented restrictive electoral legislation, designed specifically to limit Islamist influence in the formal political arena, voters still only enjoyed the means to select which party would come second. Owen advances the view that even if the legislative elections had been truly open and fair, the NDP may well have retained a commanding position. This is explained by the close relationship between the regime and the NDP, the power of patronage politics and the desire of the middle class in particular, after decades of protecting vested interests shared with members of the bureaucracy, to preserve the status quo. Using superior organizational and mobilizational skills, the moderates also made impressive gains within the civil society institutions. The regime needed the professional classes to fulfil vital functions within the state and society, and to preserve patronage relationships; it thus allowed them a more generous degree of political manoeuvre compared with classes regarded as unimportant. It was, nonetheless, very effective at controlling political activity within the syndicates and, at best, Islamist activity in the professional associations only facilitated the circulation of 'zephyrs of change' in Egyptian political life. There existed no mass support for an Islamic state or the fundamentalists who aspired to it. Radical actions, and the ambiguous attitudes of the moderate groups towards them, repelled the more secular-minded members of the population, which made the achievement of true political representation by the Islamists significantly more difficult than it already was.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p27.

<sup>26</sup> Fahmy (Note 12) p65.

<sup>27</sup> Owen (Note1) pp153-169.

The Islamists recognised that the government would always attempt to use a 'divide and rule' policy against such a large and disparate political alliance. As they all shared a common aspiration to an Islamic polity, they initially refused to indulge in factionalism to thwart any regime attempts to split their support. This was effective while political activity seemed to bring collective benefit, as typified by electoral successes between 1984-87.<sup>28</sup> It was not to last; the domestic effects of the deepening regional economic crisis caused by falling oil prices strengthened the radical tendency of the Islamist movement, as the regime further eroded the unwritten covenant forged with the people in the Nasser era, and devalued by Sadat. This created mass dissatisfaction, as the sectors of the populace hit hardest by these measures were already the most vulnerable. During this period of state economic retreat from society, a powerful effect of the moderate Islamists social programmes became apparent. The widespread failure of the state to provide such services and goods was contrasted actively by the Islamists with their ability to provide them at local level and their capacity to discharge the roles and responsibilities vacated by the state in specific localities. This was a simple, yet highly effective ideological message - the state has failed because of its moral turpitude and secular nature, whereas 'Islam is the Solution'. In response to this, Mubarak attempted to wrest the initiative from the Islamists by distancing the regime from secular politics and culture and allowing Islamization of the socio-political space. The Islamists interpreted this as a victory; the regime employed this tactic as nothing more than a political expedient.<sup>29</sup>

Government tolerance of the Islamist gains was approaching its limit in 1986 when a new and highly corrupt Minister of the Interior - Zaki Badr - took office and began to target the means of Islamist ideological propagation. He understood how Social Movement Organizations and Social Movement Communities were exploited by the Islamists for this purpose, and initiated measures to control local mosques, or to close them down, to prevent their use by Islamist ideologues and recruiters. He authorised large-scale arrests of Islamists, followed by serious politically orientated charges, showing that the regime was prepared to use the widest definition of 'Islamic activist' in its new repressive campaign.<sup>30</sup> This was to have destructive implications; the Egyptian public were generally supportive of regime actions against violent groups, but when state repression assumed this indiscriminate and excessive nature, that support was significantly reduced, prolonging the anti-extremist campaign that followed. Groups such as Islamic Jihad attracted more support than they normally could have expected to, and it was only radical violence against the domestic population and enforced 'Islamization' initiatives that began to erode that support in the future. Kienle highlights the more subtle repressive effect of mass arrests and military trials on the electorate - they would also signal to voters that the presence of

---

<sup>28</sup> Kassem (Note 4) pp148-151.

<sup>29</sup> Gerges (Note 20) p603.

<sup>30</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p151.

the Muslim Brotherhood would not be tolerated in the Peoples' Assembly and therefore a vote for them would be wasted.<sup>31</sup> This was a convincing example of indirect regime framing, demonstrated by the collapse in support for the Islamists and their allies. Following the 1987 elections the state resorted to an even more careless and indiscriminate policy of repression, typified by further mass arrests, torture and extra-judicial killings. This initiated in turn the period of most extreme Islamist violence, and also infuriated a large segment of the population, which though politically moderate, became embroiled in the confrontations as a result of the government's 'catch-all' definition of Islamic activists.

Thus, Mubarak faced an Islamist movement that was becoming more radical and extreme than at any time previously. The number of domestic casualties of political violence began to increase almost exponentially, illustrating the deteriorating relationship between the regime and the Islamists, which was responsible for this and the resultant increase in the number of political detainees. Mass military-run trials of civilians became routine, and the radical Islamist movement firmly embraced terrorism. Mubarak was deeply suspicious of all Islamist movements as the radical extremists were becoming increasingly active, and domestic groups were attracting international support and sympathy. This could not be controlled in the domestic environment by any other means than the resort to force which was by now very evident. This was a factor of significant influence on the moderate movement, because throughout the Mubarak era until the late 1990s, the relationship between the moderates and the regime was actually largely defined by that between the radicals and the regime. As long as the radicals presented a more immediate threat, this determined regime responses and the moderates would frequently be portrayed as 'the 'acceptable' face of terror' in opportunistic repressive actions by the government. Guilty by association, the moderate groups were repressed harshly by the regime, which was supported by the secular opposition and the public, who believed that the violent actions of the radical Islamists justified such a reaction. This became a self-perpetuating cycle of atrocity and repression, the increasingly coercive and brutal nature of state responses compounding the radicalisation of the Islamist movement, and leaving the moderates politically marginalized in both formal and alternative political spheres. The regime-generated moderate/radical link proved unbreakable in the public eye, a testimony to the effectiveness and dominance of regime framing. The anti-democracy, anti-civil society measures introduced by the regime were justified as 'protecting Egypt's nascent democracy from the Islamists', and government framing exaggerated violent radical excess while ignoring or understating the positive contributions of the moderates to national order (including supporting government action against Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group).<sup>32</sup> SMT work on the power of activist framing does not fully explain this particular weakness of

---

<sup>31</sup> Kienle (Note 14) p57.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond William Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2003) p193.

the 'power of ideas', where the ideological message, no matter what familiarity and authenticity it enjoyed with its target groups, did not overcome everyday concerns.

By 1992, the radical groups were operating openly in Upper Egypt and had established an 'Islamic Liberated Zone' in the Cairo suburb of Embaba. In addition, the government also faced the increasing success of the moderates in raising support among the middle classes. The regime responded with electoral manipulation, which limited the political impact of the moderate gains, but did not prevent them from gaining influence through the professional associations. The Islamist movement in Egypt then was broad and diverse; there were moderate Islamist presences in the mainstream secular political parties, there was the Umma party itself, the extra-legal Muslim Brotherhood and the violent radicals in many small, secretive groups and cells. These groups were incapable of political unity against the regime, reflecting the conflict of interests between internal factions, and this vulnerability to divisions among component activist groups and social classes within society at large was not lost on the government. When it adopted a policy of 'total war' against the radicals in 1992, it also made clear that any further accommodation of moderate opposition movements would be suspended until the radical threat had been eradicated. The regime deployed 14000 troops and within 6 weeks had extracted the Islamists from Embaba by force; this failed to trigger any wider revolt because violence used by the radicals in controlling and 'Islamizing' the liberated zone had significantly weakened any support they may have had.<sup>33</sup> The radicals responded vigorously, but, by attacking a group of foreign tourists at Luxor in 1997, killing 58 plus 4 Egyptians, they stimulated a popular backlash against themselves more effectively than the government could ever have hoped to do.<sup>34</sup> A wave of moral revulsion, coupled with later economic hardship as the tourist industry all but collapsed, destroyed radical support. The government, having maintained a strategy of severe repression against them, crushed the radical movements, which began to negotiate ceasefires and renounce violence within months, initiating what was to become a new phase of Islamic activism in Egypt. Thus the years of worst violence from 1992-97 did not trigger civil war or revolution; the principal reasons were the split between radical and moderate Islamists, and the destruction of public support through the widespread use of violence by the radical armed groups.

This opened the way in Egypt for government co-option of an Islamic activist movement for which popular support was seriously eroded. Both Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group recognised that the path to power lay in politics and formed political 'parties' in an attempt to dissociate them from past violence, and to counter the view that their ceasefire

---

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2002) pp276-298.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Shadid, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2002) pp98-109.

was merely a tactical move. Confronted with irreversible defeat, they realised that to secure any political success, they would have to forge a new alliance with the middle class; they abandoned their radical ideology, rejected violence and began to embrace democratic concepts and human rights. This was an astonishing *volte-face*, and many observers still believe that it is intended to obscure the true Islamist agenda. The moderate influence was greatly checked now the government was in a position of strength, and the Muslim Brotherhood contained divisions of its own, between the traditional, elderly leadership and a younger, more forward-looking generation that believed a new approach to opposition was needed. Public support for the Brotherhood had been damaged by the ambivalent attitude of some moderates towards the use of violence by the radicals, and the discrete support extended by some members of its weakened leadership to radical groups. Widespread aversion to radical violence had united the majority of opposition political forces, and a sizeable proportion of public opinion, behind the government. While the mainstream Muslim Brotherhood remained co-operative with the regime, and still attracted a degree of support for their campaign to secure formal political status, the relationship had become extremely one-sided and all Islamists had been greatly discredited.<sup>35</sup>

Another important advantage enjoyed by the regime was total control of the electoral process; through what Kienle amusingly describes as ‘a discretionary approach to the application of law’,<sup>36</sup> it employed large-scale fraud, interference and irregularity to manipulate electoral results favourably. It also controlled syndicate elections, by implementing Law 100/1993 that was ostensibly aimed at preventing Islamist electoral success in circumstances of low turnout. In fact, it deprived the Islamists of their last legal platform in Egyptian politics. Islamist opposition to this simply strengthened regime determination to deny them as much political opportunity as possible; several syndicates dominated by Islamists were placed under direct judicial control and supervision. Despite apparent signs of more pluralist politics in the 80s, when opposition parties secured slightly wider representation in the Peoples Assembly, the subsequent elections of 1990, 1995 and 2000 betrayed a widespread ‘erosion of political participation and liberties’ resulting in reduced opposition minorities in the Peoples Assembly.<sup>37</sup> The underlying dynamic remained unchanged after the transition from Sadat to Mubarak, just as it had done when Sadat replaced Nasser. Similarly, the power of the executive branch was enhanced at the expense of the legislature and the judiciary, and the President expanded the use of military courts to hear cases involving civilians in ‘acts of violence or terrorism’. The expanded use of the ‘coercive apparatus’ of the military, security forces and police has been a major feature of the Mubarak years, reflecting not only his protracted campaign against radical Islamism, but his determination to deal with the Islamist opposition as a

---

<sup>35</sup> Owen (Note 1) p185.

<sup>36</sup> Kienle (Note 14) p60.

<sup>37</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p30.

whole. Politically motivated arrests rose from 3600 in 1992 to 17000 in 1993, police and Islamic activist deaths increased dramatically, and ‘mass Brotherhood trials became an election-year tradition in Egypt’.<sup>38</sup> This was the uncompromising backdrop against which moderate Islamist politics was played, one made even more threatening by periods of extreme Islamist radical violence between 1992 and 1997, which signalled the beginning of the decline of the established Islamist movement in Egypt and the emergence of ‘New Islamism’ as a potential political force in national politics. The end of the 1990s brought an important change in the Islamist challenge facing the regime. Until then, the most immediate and dangerous political threat to all three regimes had manifested itself in the form of radical extremist groups with a hard-line, fundamentalist, undemocratic agenda. They based their legitimacy on the Muslim duty to overthrow an apostate regime, and their drive to achieve power did not include any serious consideration of what to do with it if they were successful. Now the Mubarak government has defeated these groups, the new threat to the regime, while at present much less significant, could nonetheless prove to be more enduring and effective. A general, loosely defined democratic trend forming in Egypt includes a changing moderate Islamist movement, the more forward-looking members of which espouse a political programme more coherent than that of the regime itself and profess objectives compatible in many respects with the wider regional aims of Egypt’s superpower sponsor. This is examined in Part 3 of this Chapter and in Chapter 5.

It can be seen that a number of discrete factors have shaped the evolution of the moderate Islamist movement within the Egyptian political environment, and thus determined the impact of the movement on that environment, since 1952.

**RQ 1: ‘Which factors affected the impact of the moderate Islamist movement upon Egyptian politics since 1952?’**

### **The Nature of the Egyptian State and Civil Society**

#### **Civil Society and Access to Institutionalised Politics**

Opposition access to formal political systems, which throughout all three regimes were either closed or semi-open, has been severely limited; civil society, as a host for alternative political opportunity structures for opposition groups, was similarly restricted. The political environment in which the Islamist movement functioned may have been subjected to different emphases by the individual regimes, but has remained resolutely inhospitable to opposition movements. This has generated responses from the Islamists ranging from the violence of the radicals to the acquiescence of those moderates who

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p38.

reasoned that all provocation of the state was counterproductive. It is the reason why alternative political opportunity structures assumed significant and lasting importance to the Islamists, even in view of the limited and conditional successes they generated. It is certainly a major stimulus behind the emergence of the modernist trend among the Islamists, discussed later in this chapter, all of whom believe that open, democratic political systems must somehow come to change this self-perpetuating obstacle to political progress and social and economic development in Egypt.

In the absence of true political access, the institutions of civil society have assumed an importance in Egypt that reflects their *de-facto* status as an alternative political structure. Civil society is broadly defined as a ‘melange of associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, unions, parties and groups that come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen’.<sup>39</sup> It represents the pragmatic, class-based interests of specific sectors of society via trade unions and professional associations, for example. The apparent popularity of Islamist movements during the mid-1980s brought some optimism about the emergence of civil society in the region at large, although this was tempered by concerns about the continuing activities of extremist minority groups which employed violence. Commentators today use the example of Islamist social movements to underpin the contention that genuinely autonomous groups exist in Middle Eastern society. This is somewhat misleading; while moderate Islamist groups are to some extent organizationally autonomous, operationally they are limited by ties of patronage, class and interest to the state itself, and by the degree to which the state will permit access to alternative political opportunity structures. In theory, the state apparatus is the neutral arena in which civil society functions. But, in Egypt, the regime maintains tight control over civil society because it is perceived to be a threat to its survival; regime members therefore wish to preside over one that is fragmentary and lacking cohesion. While civil society has increased in size in Egypt, this is not entirely the beneficial development it seems to be because the gain in extent actually assists the regime to keep civil society fragmented. In their attempts to provide an effective alternative opposition movement, the moderate Islamist movements demonstrated an ability to mobilize support on a considerable scale. In so doing, they relied almost exclusively on the institutions of civil society rather than those of the formal political system. In common with secular parties in electoral authoritarian environments, the *Ikhwan* have adapted, fending off state repression and retaining an organizational existence. Driven by the motive of self-preservation, this adaptation has seen the Brotherhood jockeying for domestic influence and seeking to influence important international actors from a base in what passes for civil society in Egypt, rather than a platform in institutional politics. This flexible, adaptive approach has been successful from that perspective, so it is interesting to speculate what the Muslim Brotherhood and other

---

<sup>39</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p87.

moderate Islamist groups may achieve if subjected to the demands of open electoral politics,<sup>40</sup> freeing them from reliance upon alternative political opportunity structures alone. The Islamists correctly identified the importance of a functional civil society, but have so far been forced to use it as an alternative political opportunity structure because of a lack of any alternatives. They are thus well positioned to exploit it in any future process of democratic opening, but must remain cognisant of the fact that it is not a substitute for openness in an institutional political system.

Egypt has a number of Laws that are designed explicitly to govern the formation of political parties and to regulate their representation in Parliament. They provide various means by which government control of the political space is guaranteed; politics in Egypt is a game that is played on government terms alone. The government party, the National Democratic Party (NDP), is faced by 4 major 'opposition' parties: the Liberal Party, the Nationalist Unionist Progressive Party, the Socialist Labour Party and the New Wafd Party, plus the largest extra-legal opposition movement, the Muslim Brotherhood. None of the official opposition parties provide credible opposition; in many respects they provide tacit, and sometimes overt, support for government policy. Their very political viability is also questionable, as they share with each other, the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime itself, a number of serious shortcomings discussed in detail later in this chapter. This lack of effectiveness of opposition parties in Egypt is as enduring as the state itself; it highlights a political space that is dominated by the regime and typified by apathy and cynicism on the part of the electorate, a significant factor partially overcome by the Islamists' use of *da'wa* to instil a sense of duty and responsibility in their followers. This perhaps explains an ongoing reluctance by some moderate movements to abandon religious identity, even though a significant degree of their support could also have originated from patronage relationships.

#### Political and Institutional Failings

The compound legacy of all three regimes has resulted in major defects in the Egyptian political culture, the political parties and the development of political opportunity structures. A contradictory constitution, extensive Presidential political rights, a profound imbalance of power between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, and proscriptive party and electoral laws all conspire to weaken the opposition political parties and groups in Egypt. The large ratio of independent to official candidates (4:1 in 1990 and 1995) illustrates the weakness of the political parties and their enduring failure to establish roots among the masses. This also indicates weak party affiliation and loyalty, while the electoral success of many of the independents reflects the

---

<sup>40</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, 'The Metamorphosis of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No 37 (2005) pp391.

failure to institutionalise the party system among the masses and within the political culture as a whole. All of Egyptian politics is typified by a historical lack of any coherent ideology, and is more a 'politics of persons' - parties function around the prominent personalities of their leaders rather than a definitive ideology or programme. Of particular relevance to the Islamists is the fact that the success of independent candidates who possessed no electoral programmes shows that the criteria for support were clientelism, kinship and religious sentiment. Even official party candidates succeeded on the basis of personal reputation and charisma, or straightforward tribalism, or by distributing resources in exchange for votes.<sup>41</sup>

Many of the Egyptian political parties exhibit inherent weaknesses; these are surprisingly common and the Islamists are generally no better than their secular counterparts in this respect:

Leadership shortcomings are prevalent - while actively criticising the government over the length of time a President may hold office, many opposition leaders have held their positions since 1976, and party regulations do not address the issue of leadership terms at all. There is also a commonality in the dictatorial style adopted by leaders of both government and opposition parties - even senior members of the leadership groups are routinely excluded from the decision making process,<sup>42</sup> and opposing tendencies or factions within the regime and opposition movements are stifled by their respective leaders. This failing in the Muslim Brotherhood led directly to the younger generation of activists within it forming a distinct faction from the mid-1990s. This, and the Wasat Group which assumed a distinct identity of its own from 1996, now comprise the core of the more democratic, modernist trend discussed later in this chapter.

Lacks of unity, internal divisions and factionalism have been the plague of Egyptian opposition politics; such infighting has done nothing to allow a supportive constituency to develop. The government has keenly exploited this major weakness - to the extent that it will deliberately encourage such factionalism in a classic 'divide and rule' approach. Such a move was evident following the 1984 election when the Umma Party was allowed to form by Mubarak with the intention of splitting the middle-class Islamist vote. The Islamists' own internal disunity reflected the irreconcilable diversity of views and interests present within their movement. All of this destroys the credibility of the parties concerned among their supporters, and precludes any collective effort by opposition parties to present a united front against the regime.

---

<sup>41</sup> Fahmy (Note 12) pp89-92.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p95.

Despite cultivating a reputation for integrity among host communities and in municipal politics, the Islamists have also shown themselves to be capable of all the fraud and duplicity of the NDP and the secular opposition parties in parliamentary elections. The Egyptian National Committee for overseeing the 1995 elections reported widespread use of forgery and fraud by government and opposition candidates alike.<sup>43</sup> While this is not unusual in Egyptian politics, and it may thus be naive to expect opposition movements to compete honestly in such a manifestly corrupt game, when malpractice is identified with a political group that claims to be 'cleaner' than all its competitors it assumes a significance it may otherwise escape. Corruption undermines the potency and effect of moderate ideological framing, alienates their supporters, contributing to apathy and cynicism within parliamentary and syndicate electorates.

### The State / Islamic Activist Movement Relationship

#### The Importance of the Islamic Activist Movement as an 'Opposition in Being'

The performance of the Islamist movement in Egypt was shaped greatly by the relationship the various activist groups enjoyed with the state at the time. As Kienle explains<sup>44</sup>, the illiberal measures taken by the Egyptian regimes since 1952 may be explained largely by the conflict between the regimes and the Islamist movement. These measures were applied to groups that were considered to reject liberal values and to be hostile to the state. For example, during the Mubarak era repressive action by state forces increased in response to the escalating use of violence by the Islamist militants. This approach was always, and remains, an important element of regime framing, used concurrently to portray the regime as seeking transition to democracy, while laying the blame for the lack of progress towards it at the door of the Islamists. This is a transparent tactic, and overlooks the illiberal trends that emerge in any case as entrenched personal-authoritarian regimes seek to preserve their own power.

It does however illustrate the delicate balancing act played out by both Sadat and Mubarak regimes, and to a lesser extent the Nasser regime following the 1967 war, which adopted a more flexible approach to the Islamist opposition than the outright suppression of the early Nasser period, perhaps in view of the increasing power and importance of the Islamist groups. They had to keep the Islamists playing by the rules of the political game, which they did by granting them just sufficient access and influence, whilst ensuring the Islamists still functioned as an 'opposition in being' so they could be publicly portrayed as a threat to national order.<sup>45</sup> This latter tactic allowed the government to be seen as a lesser evil in

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p97.

<sup>44</sup> Kienle (Note 14) pp 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity' *Middle East and North Africa Briefing* 20 April 2004 p18.

the public eye, a useful bonus to their framing campaign. Their efforts to resolve these apparently contradictory aims were greatly aided by the gift of radical Islamist violence, which allowed them to establish the important moderate/radical link - clearly advertising the threatening nature of Islamic activism, yet allowing a variable approach to be taken to the moderates whereby the regime could repress or accommodate them. The effect of radical violence, even on a very small scale, should not be dismissed; all three leaders ultimately became suspicious of all Islamists as a direct result of extremist activities. Both Nasser and Mubarak faced assassination attempts from, and Sadat was murdered by, Islamist extremists; it is unsurprising that their views of the Islamist opposition were coloured in such a way.

### Activist Violence and State Repression

Even when considering moderate Islamic politics, a consideration of the use of political violence should not be omitted, on several counts:

Reformed radical movements have now aligned themselves closely with mainstream moderate movements, but many see this as a tactical, temporary move; the radical outrages directed against Muslims, and moderate association with these groups - including some refusals to condemn outright their use of violence - damages the moderate cause.

The use of violence by the radical groups provided the regime with a political opportunity of significant value - the means to co-opt the moderates in order to contain the radicals, and the justification to repress the moderate groups more forcefully than would otherwise have been the case.

Moderate groups have used violence in the past and suspicion persists that they still possess the capability to use it again, despite public rejection of such methods.

The state employs political violence as a selective tool of variable intensity in repressive enterprises. It has apparent justification to do so: from the regime perspective violence has a record of success extending over 50 years in Egypt.

State repression is frequently cited as the reason behind the lack of true political access achieved by the Islamists. Fahmy outlines how government coercion and harassment prior to and during elections may produce the desired result in the election concerned, but contributes noticeably to the radicalisation of political society in the long run, especially

when directed against ostensibly moderate forces.<sup>46</sup> This gives the radicals a justification for violence that in turn damages the moderate cause and allows further repression - both of which limit political access even more. Wiktorowicz and Hafez state that in Egypt opposition political violence began in response to a broad governmental anti-Islamist crackdown and was therefore a direct result of state repression.<sup>47</sup> However, the ideological foundation of both Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group, the two most violent factions, evolved not only during periods of severe repression under Nasserite rule, but also in the relatively liberal environment of the early Sadat era; it is therefore questionable that Islamist political violence in Egypt was always the direct result of repressive measures alone. It is perhaps more accurate to suggest that repression often compounded existing radicalism rather than always initiated it. Their suggestion that radical violence originated from frustration among the younger elements of moderate movements at the lack of political gain achieved by those organizations is probably supportable, but this was the result of several influences, the main one being that the moderates themselves failed to generate a sustainable constituency despite manifest skills and successes in mobilization. The Muslim Brotherhood did attract a level of support large enough to concern the regime. Thus, if an atrocity carried out by an extremist group presented an opportunity to discredit the Brotherhood publicly, it was seized upon. Conversely, when the Brotherhood offered utility to the regime in helping to contain the armed groups, they were treated more leniently for as long as they remained useful. The conflict between the regime and the radicals was therefore very different to that between the regime and the moderates, as Kienle observes;<sup>48</sup> but what is important is that the moderates could not extract any political gain from this. The radicals triggered repressive responses and the moderates also took the consequences; the utility of the moderates to the government served government purposes alone. However, the moderate Islamists did indirectly benefit from government crackdowns; the precarious security situation allowed them to exert pressure on the regime for further liberalization and Islamization of the political system. The regime may have been content to allow the latter to some degree, using the process of Islamization as a framing device in order to protect its Islamic credentials. Furthermore, external pressure on the regime for increased Islamization did not come from Islamic activist groups alone; the Mubarak government needed the support of the *ulema* of Al-Azhar to bestow legitimacy upon its campaign against the radical Islamists, and the clerics made clear that greater Islamization would be the price of that support.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Fahmy (Note 12) p92.

<sup>47</sup> Mohammed M Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement' in Quintan Wiktorowicz (Ed) *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press 2004) p62.

<sup>48</sup> Kienle (Note 14) p132.

<sup>49</sup> Malika Zeghal, 'Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam and The State 1952-94'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No 31 (1999) p385.

Most significantly, the radical Islamists' use of extreme violence in the 1990s sounded the death knell for wider Islamic consensus and public support. This illustrates the profound difficulty faced by activist movements that incorporate armed groups; the use of political violence will always be the act that gains public attention, attracts the harshest regime responses and exerts the most vivid ideological framing effect. It can become the sole determinant by which the overall state relationship with moderates and radicals alike is defined, a 'worst-case' response that bestows a legitimacy and freedom of action upon the regime that will be exploited in the widest and fullest sense. Once any moderate group becomes associated with violent cells or splinter groups, it becomes an easy target for persistent and effective state repression. Furthermore, radical groups, through violent outrage, achieve an impact out of all proportion to their size, lending further urgency to state efforts to control or defeat them, and limiting moderate impact in the public consciousness. The whole Islamist movement in Egypt rapidly came to be associated with the actions of terror groups. Even after the defeat of Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group in the late 1990s, the influence of global Islamic groups ensured that the Mubarak regime, and indeed others in the Middle East, remained extremely wary of accommodating moderate, reformist Islamist trends. This persists; tentative reform initiatives by the regime itself towards moderate groups may well be destroyed or delayed by events like those in the Red Sea tourist resorts in recent months.

### Ideological Dominance

All three regimes achieved and maintained almost complete ideological dominance; Nasser exploited the power of radio and television to forge his popularity with the masses and discredit his opponents, and, like his successors, closed off opposition access to all means of mass communication such as professional syndicate newspapers. While moderate Islamists attempted to spread their message through Social Movement Communities using pamphlets and audio cassettes, the government controlled all the state media (by far the most popular among the masses) and opposition views and interests were denied exposure via these channels. The Muslim Brotherhood tried to overcome this by using the publicity mechanisms of the secular parties with which it formed political alliances; it is arguable that this was a partially self-defeating action, for despite the Islamization of politics they helped to achieve, Islamic activists ran the risk of diluting their popular *da'wa* by association with secular parties advocating Western political ideologies.<sup>50</sup> Regime dominance also extended to the educational and legal spheres, activity in the former arena indicating awareness of the need not only to block channels for Brotherhood framing efforts, but also to exploit popular receptivity to learning as a conduit for the propagation of regime frames. The importance of government control in legal circles is illustrated by

---

<sup>50</sup> Sana Abed-Kotob, 'The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt'. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No 27 (1995) pp 329-331.

the frequent and effective efforts to control civil society groups and to manipulate electoral law to its own advantage. It is difficult to gauge the precise effect of this factor on the Islamists, as they limited their political activism to carefully selected communities in order to preserve safety and to avoid areas where extant support for secular parties reduced their chances of nurturing any themselves. This did not mean that Islamist efforts to initiate and sustain a counter-hegemonic discourse were unsuccessful, however. Despite regime interference, the Muslim Brotherhood message was disseminated directly, by participation in parliamentary politics, which was regarded as a means in itself to offset regime ideological dominance. Election campaigns allowed framing to be spread more openly when *Ikhwan* candidates were entered as independents or in alliance with secular parties, and gaining access to the People's Assembly allowed transmission of the message without fear of legal restriction. Moreover, it allowed the government to be held accountable against a specifically Islamic yardstick, strengthening public perceptions of the Islamists as a positive force for good, battling against an un-Islamic corrupt regime. Of course, the lack of legal interference did not stop the regime from employing the many extra-legal instruments at its disposal, but Islamists nonetheless saw political participation as a crucial framing mechanism to promote wider societal awareness of their cause.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to consider how this tactic to circumvent regime dominance helped also to reinforce Islamist commitment to participatory politics, perhaps offering an example of how involvement in institutional politics tends to normalize groups of more narrow ideological foundation.

### **Personal - Authoritarian Rule and Patronage Politics**

#### **The Resilience of Personal - Authoritarian Rule**

The contradictory Egyptian Constitution highlights the significant gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities. The principle of division of power between the legislative, executive and judicial branches is subjugated therein to the principle of overriding power bestowed upon the President. As Kassem states: '...since Nasser ascended to the executive branch in June 1956, the Presidency has developed and continues to be the most dominant force in contemporary Egyptian politics'.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, Egypt's political system has become one of the most resilient personal-authoritarian systems in the world.

All three Egyptian regimes since 1952 have been markedly authoritarian in nature, lacking the bureaucratic institutions by which to control society effectively. This brought them the requirement to mobilize support, which was satisfied by coercive or encouraging means - ideally, by destroying opposition elements resistant to control, and imposing conformity

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p331.

<sup>52</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p11.

upon those that were more amenable to it.<sup>53</sup> The relative ‘liberalization’ of the Sadat and Mubarak years has been largely illusory; even the conduct of multi-party elections, as Hinnebusch states, concealed an ulterior motive: ‘the multi-party system is more than a mere façade because notables and activists play the game, but.....because it advances their co-optation, it has.....reinforced rather than undermined authoritarian rule’.<sup>54</sup> As a result, any political gain by the moderate Islamist movement was only ever what the incumbent regime would allow at the time. Islamist parties have never succeeded in generating enduring mass political support; through a process of ideological compromise and alliances of convenience, they became the means by which the secular opposition parties they sided with secured the largest share of the opposition vote.

It was explained earlier that the Nasser regime ‘targeted agents, sites and targets of mobilization activity simultaneously’ and this illustrates an interesting dissimilarity with the two successor regimes. It could do so as a function of the newly increased capacity of its coercive apparatus and the adoption of economic policy options not available to Nasser’s successors as they proved to be entirely unsustainable in the long term. The social contract had served as a tool of both patronage and coercion, (coercive as it demanded the unspoken surrender of rights for resources) but became a costly and damaging legacy to his successors. This not only restricted the magnitude of government largesse under Sadat and Mubarak, but perhaps also dictated a compromise between spending on patronage and the coercive apparatus.<sup>55</sup> Sadat attempted to circumvent this with his *infitah* policy and Mubarak by courting US sponsorship, but the differing methodologies supported the same aim of preserving regime power. Because of this preoccupation with the continuity of their rule, the regime attitude to opposition groups was shaped in a very definite and predictable form. The regime responded to threats, and threats alone. The nature of response was determined by the perceived severity of the threat, and the form of that threat - in terms of ideology, political orientation, or legal status of the organizations concerned - was largely immaterial. Islamists became the target for the most severe repression when they constituted the most severe threat, and the fact that they were Islamists was practically irrelevant. This is not to suggest that the government did not tailor its repressive responses to deal with such threats - the Islamists were subjected to quite specific ideological attack, and the regime was sometimes skilled at co-opting Islamist ideological framing to provide themselves with bogus Islamic credibility.

Kassem sees mass arrests, the implementation of restrictive laws to limit Islamist gains, the use of military courts and related repressive measures as evidence of the ‘fragility’ of

---

<sup>53</sup> Owen (Note 1) p32.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Maye Kassem, *In the Guise of Democracy: Governance in Contemporary Egypt* (Reading, Ithaca Press 1999) pxi.

<sup>55</sup> Wickham (Note 6) p106.

personal authoritarian rule.<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, the willing resort to such extreme measures is one of the techniques by which such rule is preserved - the Mubarak regime has been in power for 25 years, and employed repression as one of several means to end effective Islamist opposition. In doing so it merely continued the practices of the Nasser and Sadat regimes, and this ongoing preservation of personal-authoritarian rule has been the dominant obstacle to effective political opposition of all types.

#### Authoritarian Politics as a Catalyst for Change in Moderate Islamist Movements

The *Ikhwan* were not invulnerable to the political influences acting upon them and Egyptian society at large, and have also been shaped by the institutional political environment. As was the case with European political parties following World War II, Islamist movements are collectively becoming less utopian, less oppressive and more flexible as they move closer to the political centre in search of wider support. Reinforcing the SMT contention that Islamic activist movements are not unique social movements, ideological imperatives have been abandoned as Islamist groups seek credibility and inclusion in mainstream politics; if the national political space becomes more democratic in Egypt, this transformation of the Islamist groups can be expected to accelerate. Parties in authoritarian political structures play dual 'games' - an electoral game to secure votes and a regime game. When played by the Muslim Brotherhood, the latter originally tended to have a delegitimation focus, but has been superseded by an emphasis on steady participation which seeks to achieve transition to democracy. In authoritarian systems, movements play both games simultaneously, and many of the internal struggles within the Brotherhood revolve around balancing electoral and regime games. Social movements thus become dynamic organizations in ongoing transformation, and Islamist groups are no exception.<sup>57</sup>

#### Patronage Politics

Both the Sadat and Mubarak regimes have skilfully and selectively employed patronage, co-optation, legislative control and physical coercion to implement 'contained pluralism' - a technique that allows the regime to adopt a camouflage of liberalization without having to make any real concessions to such a concept. The dominant means of gaining support is the practice of patronage politics; in the absence of democratic institutions, a credible ideology and governmental accountability, clientelism prevails, and regimes distribute resources and exercise influence in exchange for political support. This is illustrated by Kassem in an observation of relevance to both Sadat and Mubarak eras: '...an authoritarian regime's monopoly of .....patronage can provide it with the flexibility to utilize even a potentially threatening process such as multi-party elections very much to its own

---

<sup>56</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p152.

<sup>57</sup> El-Ghobashy (Note 40) pp374-376.

advantage.....the fact that it can preserve the political status quo while .....holding multi-party elections with minimal use of..... the coercive apparatus, highlights the power of patronage as a mechanism of clientelist co-option and control'.<sup>58</sup> Authoritarian states use the coercive apparatus much more readily than do democratic ones, and this in itself requires the use of extensive patronage to ensure reliable support for the regime.

This is something normally associated with regimes alone, but Islamic activists proved equally adept at using similar methods to raise support. Social programmes and local support networks were instrumental in propagating the Islamist message and distributing resources to the needy. This powerful means of Islamist mobilization, wherein framing spread by *da'wa* was reinforced by the stark contrast between widespread state retraction of economic support and localized Islamist provision of it, was implemented through alternative political opportunity structures offered by professional associations and informal Social Movement Communities. So from the outset, this was a programme that was limited in scope and local in focus - activities within the professional syndicates, for example, were essentially directed at special-interest groups. The Islamists could not hope to provide social support on the scale it was needed, and admitted that only the state could attempt to tackle such extensive problems.<sup>59</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood, in reality, was practising the patronage politics of the state, without the resources of the state. The people they supported were grateful for assistance from wherever it came - their acceptance of it did not in any way signify an ideological alignment with, or political allegiance to, the Islamist movements. Indeed, it is questionable whether such support bought any enduring loyalty at all, as observations of a coercive aspect to Islamist mobilization, including framing practices strongly reminiscent of those of the regime, are not rare.<sup>60</sup> In short, the long-term erosion of personal wealth and state services in Egypt, bestowed a primacy upon need over any ideology. This is something the Islamists, especially the moderates who were bigger social providers, seemed to have underestimated consistently. Politics is both personal and local; while citizens may be prepared to vote for Islamist candidates in local municipal or professional association elections, experience throughout the Middle East and the wider Islamic world, especially Turkey, shows this is not repeated in national elections where more purely political concerns predominate. In Egypt, the principal reason not to vote for the Islamists arises from the widespread economic and material disadvantages suffered by the electorate. They realise that the domination of the government party, the NDP, brings about two considerations of direct relevance to them in everyday life. First, regime legislative and electoral manipulation will ensure that a vote for the Islamists is a wasted one; using independent candidates alone or in alliance with

---

<sup>58</sup> Maye Kassem, *In the Guise of Democracy: Governance in Contemporary Egypt* (Reading, Ithaca Press 1999) pp182-183.

<sup>59</sup> Wickham (Note 6) pp192-193.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid pp154-155.

other parties, the Islamists have never secured a majority in the People's Assembly, and have never challenged the NDP stranglehold; they remain an extra-legal political organization. Secondly, despite the characteristic apathy of the public towards politics, they see the NDP as the only means by which to gain access to government resources.

Owen outlines typical characteristics of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East; of particular relevance to Egypt is the desire to systematically inhibit the development of class-consciousness, preserving the middle class tendency to adopt an individualistic focus determined by interests. Middle class individuals need to protect interests arising from patronage relationships and authoritarian states need to exploit this dependency to retain control. The state must therefore ensure that a degree of collective class independence does not develop to threaten this control mechanism. Thus, public policy favoured the accumulation of private wealth, ensuring that a mutual understanding between the middle class and regime made the former supporters of the status quo.<sup>61</sup> The government exercise of patronage was not without effect in the moderate Islamist camp either, as the middle class was far more dependent upon government resources and influence than the lower class, which was regarded by the regime as politically unimportant. This was a phenomenon mirrored in the professional associations, where established, middle-class members failed to assist unemployed young professionals. It undermined the cohesion of the Islamist movement within the syndicates, which it used extensively as alternative political opportunity structures. This led to a comfortable acceptance by many moderates that the regime was a better bedfellow than the radicals, and they settled into the malleable practice of the 'politics of permanent opposition'. This stimulated the rise of the younger generation of moderate Islamist modernists who believed a new approach was needed to overcome this political stagnation in their movement. A further consequence of patronage politics is economic underperformance by the state. Inconsistent economic reforms, dictated or diluted by the demands of patronage, bring injustice and disadvantage to many segments of the populace, and can exacerbate rather than eradicate the root causes of political extremism. All three regimes faced economic crises at various times, and none of them demonstrated truly competent management of the economy. In authoritarian contexts, this matters less than it does in democratic ones, and only the most severe economic hardship constituted a threat to the incumbent regime; a general economic ineptitude has become an apparently permanent feature of Egyptian governance as policy is driven by the more immediate priorities of patronage politics.

---

<sup>61</sup> Owen (Note 1) pp35-39.

## Regional and International Influences

The state/activist movement dynamic throughout all three regime periods illustrates that exogenous factors affected both the state and the opposing tendencies within it, and that these factors may thus be considered constants.

To varying degrees, all three leaders attracted hostility from others in the Muslim world as a consequence of Egypt's political individuality. In forming relationships with world powers (either the USA or the USSR - both seen as secular, Western and antithetical to Islam), they were accused of betrayal by those who believed the nature of Egyptian society should be Islamic. Nasser was less Western-aligned than his successors, but was nonetheless a very secular-minded leader and this aroused significant antagonism in regional Islamic states. His forays into Pan-Arab Nationalism and Arab Socialism were interpreted by many in the region as the pursuit of Western ideological aims. Sadat and Mubarak faced much greater antipathy, domestically and regionally, for their support of a peace agreement with Israel and their pursuit of Western investment in Egypt. This led directly to the assassination of Sadat, and an attempt on Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa in 1995 by Islamic *jihadis*. A persistent thread of Islamist framing has highlighted this Western alignment unto the present, and Mubarak's regime is one of the most important targets for global *jihadi* groups seeking to rid the Arab world of what they consider to be apostate regimes. This in turn ensures the threat of radical extremist groups continues to serve as justification for the continuance of authoritarian government and the suppression of moderate Islamist activity.

Regional economic underperformance, especially in those states without significant rentier income from oil and gas exports, also generated conditions of concern to both the regime and Islamist movements. Economic crises directly resulted in the emergence of social elements of young, unemployed university graduates ripe for political mobilization, demanded unpopular austerity measures of the state and severely restricted external funding available to Islamist opposition groups. They strengthened the stranglehold of patronage on Egyptian political life, and a continuing lack of improvement remains without doubt a stimulus for radical opposition activity.

The Israeli/Palestinian dispute is widely reflected in Islamist framing throughout all three political eras, with the US/Israeli 'conspiracy' a favourite target of vitriol that highlights the complicity of the Egyptian regime within it. This is effective primarily because it exploits the pre-existing sense of inferiority in the Arab mindset explained in Chapter 3. It also exploits a wider anti-US sentiment among the masses that has been used by both regimes and activists alike when it suited their purposes, and has grown into an entrenched facet of Arab public opinion - even among some modernist Islamist reformers, although the more pragmatic among them do hold a more nuanced viewpoint. An anti-US stance is

evident even in the pro-democracy, more secularly inclined organizations, and the significance of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict was a major factor in the transformation of the major radical Islamic groups. After years of struggle against the Egyptian state, militant Islamists concluded that the 'external enemy' was the most dangerous one and only by political integration within Egypt could they hope to influence efforts to combat the US/Israeli axis.<sup>62</sup> An anti-US stance is thus present across the entire range of Islamist politics in Egypt; given the pivotal importance of US foreign and economic policies for the Middle East, Islamists aspiring to power in Egypt must dwell on their policy towards the US.

## **PART 2 - THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODERATE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT IN EGYPT**

Following the development of the moderate Islamist movement since 1952, the defining characteristics of the movement at present may hint at the strengths and weaknesses of the movement in a future political environment.

**RQ 2: 'What relevance have the existing characteristics of the moderate Islamist movement to it's potential future political role'?**

### **Interests vs Ideology: Islamist Political Motivation**

The Islamists greatly underestimated the degree to which conservative Egyptians would follow class-determined interests, with the moderates attracting support in the middle class and the radicals becoming entrenched in the poorer classes and areas. Consequently, there was always a conflict between ideology and interest; fundamentalism proved to be transient and abstract to many followers, and there always existed suspicion of, and sometimes open opposition to, an Islamic state governed by *Shari'a* - moderate recognition of which was illustrated by their notable reluctance to advertise the importance they attached to it in electoral campaigns. This was clear in the middle class who remained tied to the governing NDP through business interest and patronage networks, and also at times among the lower class, as evidenced by the collapse of support for the radicals in the Islamic Liberated Zone of Embaba, where the violent enforcement of Islamic practice soon alienated the established family, clan, business and criminal groups. More evidence is provided by the fact that the Islamists targeted their social support at very carefully selected areas of urban conurbations where poor provision of state services and the absence of secular self-help organizations and political parties left an institutional void. In areas where these groups existed, resistance to Islamist activism was clearly evident.<sup>63</sup> The primacy of class-based interests over ideological commitment among Islamists became an enduring weakness that would be exploited by the government. The moderates were

---

<sup>62</sup> Diaan Rashwan, 'Islamists Crash the Party'. *Al-Ahram Weekly* Issue No 447 16-22 September 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Wickham (Note 6) p123.

frequently co-opted by the regime in order to contain the radicals; their conservative, middle-class base led them to accept this imposition as the preservation of the status quo was far less threatening to established interests than revolutionary upheaval. So while their gradual transformation of society was designed to lead to the removal of the regime in the long term, it would also ensure continuity and the protection of interests.

The moderate approach to achieving their objective of an Islamic polity was gradualist, long-term, generally non-violent and based within the existing political structures. Many of the leading moderates rejected an overtly political approach, aspiring instead to transform a corrupt society into an Islamically pure one; once this was achieved, a truly Islamic state would be the natural consequence. This unworldly objective meant that their project concentrated upon the trivial and politically irrelevant and largely avoided the social, economic and political realities of 20th Century Egypt and the wider world. This was another factor leading to the practice of the 'politics of permanent opposition' - a tacit recognition by the moderates, perhaps, that the essential compromises demanded by real politics would entail at least a partial retreat from their moral high ground - thereby introducing public doubt about their real commitment to either democratic politics or fundamentalist Islamic purity. Wickham observes that the Muslim Brotherhood 'was the only opposition movement capable of mobilizing substantial popular support for an ideological programme distinct from that of the Mubarak regime' and that it was 'the only opposition party with a programmatic alternative to the incumbent regime'.<sup>64</sup> The moderates 'ideological' programme was certainly different from that of the regime, with *da'wa* introducing the idea of personal and civic duty, but neither the Islamists nor the government possessed an ideology worth the name. The Islamist message was usually secondary to competing class-based interests within the movement, an occurrence that is to some degree at variance with SMT work on the 'power of ideas' within activist movements. Ideas are powerful, but only when complete and well defined to those likely to analyse them in detail. This includes those with interests and patronage relationships to preserve, not only potential political activists. Common concerns arise commonly; effective solutions to them are thus more likely to earn political capital for those who provide them than any abstract ideology, no matter how vividly it is conveyed.

This primacy of interest over ideology is something that any new Islamist political entity will have to be fully aware of and plan for; decades of patronage, and persistent need, have bred a mentality that will be most resilient in the face of change. This highlights the importance of tackling modern socio-economic problems with modern policies derived from a realistic and consistent ideology; only then can the root causes of radicalism and the stranglehold of patronage be destroyed.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid p92.

## Attitudes to *Shari'a*

The moderate political programme never matured into anything remotely realistic or capable of tackling the foundations of extremism; the concept of both an Islamic state and *Shari'a* law has remained unelaborated throughout the three regime periods to date, and the Brotherhood continue to use ambiguous terms such as 'Islamic Democracy' and 'Islamic frame of reference' in their theocratically-toned discourse. The arguments associated with an Islamic state and the place of *Shari'a* within it are well beyond the scope of this paper and both concepts enjoy as much variation as does the Islamist movement itself; interpretations of *Shari'a* range from a primitive list of punishments for transgressions, to a sophisticated framework for the formulation of a contemporary legal code. For the purposes of this study, the issue is what degree of import and relevance to the moderate programmes do these concepts enjoy? Essentially, they are becoming increasingly symbolic, and while it is unrealistic to expect acceptance of the complete severance of religion and politics, even the older generation of the *Ikhwan* were consistently careful to avoid pressing for implementation of anything other than the more symbolic elements of *Shari'a*. Kurzman usefully identifies three 'modes' of liberal Islam by their relationship to *Shari'a*. He uses the categories of 'Liberal *Shari'a*', 'Silent *Shari'a*' and 'Interpreted *Shari'a*' to illustrate the approach of different groups to this important issue, but, arguably, the one theme common to all of them is that of human interpretation. Indeed, the modernist Islamists espouse views that are spread among all three modes and to some extent overlap. However, they share several basic principles within the framework of *Shari'a* and Islamic state concepts - they reject theocracy, champion democracy, hold a modern view of women's rights, take an inclusive stance over the rights of non-Muslims, advocate freedom of thought and do not fear modernity.<sup>65</sup> While their views on these subjects may not closely conform to Western liberal democratic norms, it is important that they do not, certainly in the near term. Muslim democracy must be definitively Muslim, and the retention of religious and cultural identity is an essential ingredient of that; in turn, implementation of *Shari'a* is a symbolic manifestation of that identity. Intelligently applied, it can also be much more and Islamic modernists stress the utility of *Shari'a* in providing a modern and relevant rule of law for Muslim democratic societies. The key to integration of the Islamic state and *Shari'a* concepts within a modern political system is thus informed contextual interpretation; this has the potential to allow a degree of religious identity to be retained and exploited without inducing conflict with the unavoidable realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

---

<sup>65</sup> Charles Kurzman (Ed), '*Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*' (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1998) pp13-26.

### Reliance on Patronage Politics

There are two significant disadvantages of patronage politics that affected the entire Islamist opposition. First, a dependency upon patronage dictates a contrary, short-term determination of priorities and formulation of policy that can help to bring about the downfall of the patrons as a result of the unpredictable and fluctuating demands of the patronage process. This is a facet of more relevance to a regime, which at least ostensibly, is pursuing a formal policy under the public gaze. The Islamist opposition, lacking any real policies, was less threatened by, but not immune to, such inconsistency. It will, however, be forced to confront such issues if it ever assumes even shared political power. Secondly, patronage is clearly dependent upon the provision of resources, and is thus a means of generating support that is far more useful to an established regime than a repressed opposition movement. The Muslim Brotherhood, whenever it was allowed to do so, practised patronage politics only to find it could not meet the demands of its own, relatively small, special-interest communities. When external influences such as the collapse in oil prices during the 1980s restricted funding from sources like Saudi Arabia, the opposition practice of patronage became much more vulnerable than that of the state. Such use of patronage rendered the moderates' underlying mobilizational power difficult to quantify, despite its singular importance to their effort. The multi-party system established by Sadat never permitted representation of the masses precisely because it was never intended to; Islamic politics therefore offered the only alternative to the regime and support for them must be viewed in that context - it is unwise to interpret such support as unqualified endorsement of an Islamist agenda. Moderate social support programmes thus represented in many cases the only alternative to paltry or non-existent state provision. They were ad-hoc, localised and short-term; they were intended to mobilize support and were not part of any political strategy to be implemented in the event of assuming power. As a consequence, the methods of mobilization the Islamists developed as a counter to repressive politics proved to be unsuitable for converting mobilizational power into sustainable political support. Thus, movements aspiring to political power would be unwise to rely extensively upon patronage at the expense of realistic, relevant policies of direct, everyday emotional appeal to a significant section of the populace.

### Mobilization Structures and Resources

SMT illustrates that grievance alone cannot explain the participation of individuals in activist organizations. For a movement to have political viability and impact, the aggrieved must be able to act collectively and to do so they must have access to political opportunity structures, to the resources needed to gain and retain support and to channels of ideological propagation.

The confrontational relationship between the state and the Islamists during all three regimes forced the Islamists to adopt techniques common to non-Islamic social movements, which were designed to meet the needs of mobilization, not participatory politics. In their choice of alternative political opportunity structures they unintentionally limited their own impact. The primary alternative structure they chose was that provided by the foremost Social Movement Organization of Egypt's restricted civil society - the professional syndicates. This parasitic approach, by which the Islamists penetrated the syndicates extensively, allowed them to capitalise upon a long tradition of politicisation among the syndicates themselves.<sup>66</sup> Many commentators suggest that Muslim Brotherhood activity within the professional syndicates was a unidimensional initiative, a measure of last resort in the face of effective government denial of mainstream opportunities to the opposition groups. Fahmy believes this was, in fact, part of a wider, co-ordinated campaign by the moderates to increase overall political support across all segments of society.<sup>67</sup> She believes the Islamists pursued the support of the population at large through alliances of convenience with other political parties, that of the poor masses through voluntary and social work undertaken by Islamic NGOs, and the influential middle class vote through activity in the professional syndicates. Certainly, Brotherhood activity within the most politically influential syndicates began to bring ascendancy from about 1984 onwards; they went on to achieve their maximum representation in the People's Assembly during the 1987 alliance with the Labour Party, strongly suggesting the complementary approach that Fahmy outlines.

The Brotherhood demonstrated in this campaign an organizational ability that overshadowed that of its competitors, utilising both Social Movement Organizations and Social Movement Communities within and beyond the boundaries of the syndicates themselves to mobilize support and propagate its ideological message. However, it is questionable whether such activity brought the moderate Islamists any lasting political benefit, for two main reasons.

First, Fahmy outlines convincingly the political failures of the syndicate organizations and these are closely comparable with those of the political parties discussed earlier - rigid, undemocratic leadership, divergent objectives, corruption and financial mismanagement, factionalism, intolerance, and extensive disunity among the syndicates collectively.<sup>68</sup> In reality, the Islamists' behaviour in the syndicate electoral processes was far from the example of integrity, honesty and transparency promoted by their apologists. The Muslim Brotherhood proved adept at fraudulent practice, and an examination of financial activity undertaken by the organization in pursuit of religious and political objectives entirely

---

<sup>66</sup> Kassem (Note 4) p112.

<sup>67</sup> Fahmy (Note 12) p143.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid pp 144-146.

unsanctioned by syndicate membership, shows irregularity on a huge scale.<sup>69</sup> These internal shortcomings facilitated external interference and control from the regime, reducing the effectiveness of what could have become an active and significant political counter-structure. This seemed to be a possibility when the professional associations became increasingly important to the moderates during the Mubarak era; however, the growing number of disenfranchised young graduates within the associations exacerbated class-based differences, illustrating the dominance of such interests over ideological motivation or the lure of *da'wa*. It is doubtful that the associations ever represented true political opportunity structures at all; in view of the readiness of government responses to Islamist gains, they seemed to offer, probably via middle-class patronage networks, a means by which the government could monitor any emerging Islamist threat. The less formal, more loosely structured Social Movement Communities were much harder for the state to penetrate and tended to be more closely associated with the lower class. While they proved effective channels for ideological dissemination, the means by which this was delivered - social support programmes - was popular because of extensive need among the target populace, not necessarily because of any inherent receptivity to the Islamists' message. While the Islamists could mobilize support on the political periphery therefore, the professional associations did not constitute a political opportunity structure in the centre by which such support could be converted into political effect.

Secondly, the moderates' gains were not as dramatic or significant as many observers claim. They must be seen in the context of extensive political apathy, and a small core of well-organised and able Islamists exploited a very specific, and ultimately short-lived, opportunity to gain control of syndicate councils. Typical turnouts in the council elections (expressed as a percentage of the total syndicate members) were frequently below 15%, and even when this increased in the early 1990s to over 20%, this was partially as a result of pro-regime membership efforts to counter the influence of the Islamists.

While professional syndicates were *de-facto* political bodies, syndicate elections remained precisely that and their results did not reflect the development of a core of support for the Islamists that would be significant nationally. The political opportunity structures exploited by the Islamists were therefore of limited use in the closed or semi-open environments of Egypt between 1952 and the present. As a means of political access utilised as a response to repression, they are of no relevance to legal political organizations operating within a truly democratic system. This strongly emphasises the importance of a genuinely independent civil society as a foundation of any pluralist political system.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid pp141-147.

### Guilty by Association with Radical Islamist Violence

This has been one of the most persistent and effective elements of regime framing directed against the moderate Islamists, and must be overcome if future productive development of Islamist politics is not to be compromised. If the causes of political violence are not related to state repression alone, then when repression is abandoned during any democratic transition, the problem of political violence may be ameliorated but is not automatically solved. Indeed any such transition may be a trigger for violence in itself. For the entire Islamist moderate trend in Egypt (i.e. the 'Old Islamist' moderates, typified by the older generation of the Muslim Brotherhood, the reformed radicals and the Islamist modernists), this poses the question of what relationship the Old Islamist moderates and the Islamist modernists should have with the reformed radical movements in any future pluralist political environment? The answer should be based on a purely rational balance of political advantage. Essentially, despite the abstinence from violence they have maintained since 1997, the reformed radicals are simply too great a political liability to Islamist politics in a pluralist or transitional democratic setting. Their previous violence is not forgotten and their reformation is still treated with widespread suspicion, because it is thought to be insincere, or enforced under state-applied duress. The radicals could thus be damaging to the moderate cause in the future as they have been in the past. As they always represented a tiny hard-line fundamentalist minority, and destroyed most of what little support they had, the support they are likely to attract is outweighed by that they may repel. The moderates, therefore, should unequivocally reject any idea of a coalition with the reformed radicals.

### Cultural and Ideological Framing Processes

Islamist movements in Egypt share a common historical and cultural context within which they all compete for power in national political arenas defined by particular state borders. Roy highlights that some of them have challenged the legitimacy of the state concept itself and pursue the formation of a Muslim community that transcends it, but the great majority of Islamic activist movements pursue political aims within one given system. This has two apparently contradictory implications:

First, competing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the Islamists share vocabularies, ideas and organizational structures with their secular opponents within these political arenas. Democracy, civil society, human rights, just and accountable governance are all concepts that feature in their discourse. They share a generally nationalist view and a concern with the 'national project', even though they may declare they observe a different type of patriotism/nationalism.

Secondly, despite a stated desire to do so, religiously motivated actors have failed to translate their theological principles into programmes for creating institutional structures that are significantly different from those of the secular nation state - no Islamic movement has ever produced a convincing alternative.<sup>70</sup> This lack of definition of what an Islamic polity might really be, and of precisely what form *Shari'a* might assume in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is an enduring feature of Islamist politics and largely explains the reservations held by many towards those who advocate an Islamic state. The challenge for the Islamist modernists is to pursue truly democratic ideals and realistic priorities within a demonstrably Muslim framework, while tempering these reservations and making their own aspirations a more coherent and important objective for the populace at large.

### **PART 3 - ISLAMISM IN TRANSITION**

Since the defeat of the radical terror groups towards the end of the 90s, the failure of Islamist groups to overcome the power of a repressive, authoritarian state in Egypt, the dilution of purely Islamic ideology in pursuit of a more pluralist and inclusive one, and the renunciation of violence by the two most powerful radical groups indicates that Islamism is in a state of flux and transformation.

By the end of the 1990s, the mainstream moderates had little to show in terms of forcing change upon the autocratic Egyptian regime, and it is initially tempting to suggest they had failed in their political mission as a consequence. The support they attracted because of the apparent (and sometimes illusory) distance they maintained from 'dirty politics' gave them a moral free hand, exploited during years of repression, but not carried into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Radical intolerance, religious policing, public beatings and stoning, and violence against civilians, intellectuals and foreign tourists have persistently devalued any achievements made in the social and community spheres by the moderates. Islamic activists are aware that despite manifest successes in mobilization, they never attracted sufficient mainstream support to bring them an electoral majority. The authoritarian nature of moderate leadership has limited their organizational flexibility, undermining their political impact. The Old Islamist moderates and radicals thus presided over the failures of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the moderates had contributed to the Islamization of the political environment within Egypt, and, more importantly, had evolved after years of failed opposition to regime repression. While the Muslim Brotherhood remains excluded from the political sphere and is still repressed by the regime, and other moderate Islamist initiatives are obstructed by the regime at every turn, democratic Islamists have maintained their commitment to political reform. This underpins the latest

---

<sup>70</sup> Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1996) pp11-16.

evolution of Islamic political thinking, which Shadid suggests is based on 4 precepts:<sup>71</sup> it recognises and seeks to exploit the ongoing religious revival, it focuses upon the state system as the unit of activity, it is democratic in intent and aims to achieve a diffusion of religious authority. This latter point identifies a desire to break the patronage relationship between the regime and the *ulema*, rather than the total separation of church and state. The moderate Islamist alignment responsible for this new thinking is part of a wider nascent political trend including less significant Arab pro-democracy groups such as *Al-Ghad* and *Kifaya*, which could perhaps be considered ‘no’ vote organisations; they are all, however, concerned with a political system of genuine benefit to Muslims in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, rather than one that is rigidly Islamic. For simplicity, this Islamist alignment within the wider democratic trend will be referred to as the ‘Islamist modernists’. While many moderates continue to call for the establishment of an Islamic state, this is increasingly symbolic language alone; in real politics, these ideals are subordinated to the priorities of liberal democratic reform. Islamic rhetoric maintains the distinctiveness of religion-based politics and sustains the appeal of the *Ikhwan* among its followers; while the moderate Islamists are embracing pluralist politics, they do not all surrender their religious legacy. In reality, promoting democratic reform and developing pragmatism are becoming additional components of a comprehensive Islamist modernist agenda.<sup>72</sup> It would be unrealistic to measure the ‘success’ of the movement against a yardstick of political impact on the regime and institutional politics in authoritarian Egypt; no opposition group was ever likely to be afforded the political opportunity to threaten the regime in any way. To do so in the future will require commitment to participatory politics, well-reasoned policies of popular appeal and engagement with international actors such as the USA in order to bring about regime concurrence for democratisation. That the moderates have emerged from over half a century of repression to demonstrate such commitment is arguably far more significant than past pursuance of a delegitimation campaign against the regime and a utopian religion-based ideology.

The Muslim Brotherhood began a process of ideological transformation in 1994; their statement on party pluralism and women’s rights illustrated the developing generational cleavage in the movement. This was followed in 1995 by a ‘Statement on Democracy’ which outlined new thinking on the issue of the status of non-Muslims, the relationship between religion and politics, political violence and human rights. Significantly the statement asserts that ‘there is no ineluctable contradiction between...popular sovereignty and a *Shari’a* based system’. The impact of the new thinking was subsequently attenuated by frequent uncompromising statements from the ruling generation of the Brotherhood, especially the General Guide, Mustafa Mashour, which raised enduring doubts about these

---

<sup>71</sup> Shadid (Note 34) p71.

<sup>72</sup> Amr Hamzawy, ‘The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists’. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief* No 40 August 2005 pp2-3.

ideological revisions,<sup>73</sup> leading a group of moderate Islamists to conclude that a new Muslim political initiative was needed in Egypt. Originating in the centrist Islamic mainstream - the *Wasatiyya* - a group of intellectuals known as the New Islamist Trend (hereinafter referred to as the 'New Islamists') outlined a detailed political ideology that could propel the more democratic and inclusive Islamist political groups to popularity. These are the younger, more politically dynamic generation of the Brotherhood, plus the Wasat Group, an even more moderate and inclusive organisation that sprang from this younger generation in a widely reported 'split' in 1996. The Wasat group was immediately noteworthy for its stance of religious toleration and rejection of privileged interpretation of religion by the *ulema*, and its stated objective to 'go beyond the slogan 'Islam is the solution''.<sup>74</sup> There is a clear distinction between the two; the New Islamists are intellectuals, not political activists, whereas the younger *Ikhwan* faction and the Wasat Group comprise moderate activists with very definite political ambitions. A further distinction needs to be highlighted here: the Wasat Group recognise the similarities between themselves and the younger, more progressive generation of the Brotherhood, but highlight their own desire to separate *da'wa* and political activity, in contrast to the continuing combination of the two in the Muslim Brotherhood. Whereas the Wasat Group thus portrays itself as a civil party, it believes the *Ikhwan's* religio-political character is threatening to both state and Brotherhood alike, and perpetuates the ambiguous vision of an Islamic state held by the latter. The Wasat group published two versions of their political programme - the first by Rafiq Habib (a leading Protestant intellectual) in 1996, updated by 'Abd al-Karim, a professor of aeronautical engineering, in 1998. This is unusual in itself, and both versions elucidate a clear project based on a modernist interpretation of Islamic law, to be implemented in a way that 'does not hinder progress'. The entire thrust of the programme stresses the importance of tolerance, diversity and pluralism. Religion is seen as a fundamental component of pluralism, but religious practice and political orientation can vary within it. *Shari'a* is seen as a valuable collection of principles, but the application of them requires the production of laws by human beings. However, while secular reformers such as al-Naggar consider the Wasat programme to be a significant initiative, other secularists voice concern that *Shari'a* remains a pillar of the group's ideology<sup>75</sup>.

Rashwan suggests that the ideological orientation of the Islamist groups will be the ultimate determinant of the development of them; the moderates may differ in the way their political and social enterprise relates to the tenets of Islam, they may also differ in their interpretation of some of those tenets themselves. They are united, however, in their

---

<sup>73</sup> El-Ghobashi (Note 40) pp382-386.

<sup>74</sup> Augustus Richard Norton, 'Thwarted Politics: The Case of Egypt's Hizb Al-Wasat' in Robert W Hefner (Ed) '*Remaking Muslim Politics*' (Princeton, Princeton University Press 2005) pp133-134.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid pp143-144.

conviction that their respective projects are 'Islamic'.<sup>76</sup> The Old Islamists tend towards a religious interpretation of this, while the Wasat/New Islamist grouping hold a firmly civilizational view; the young generation of the Brotherhood fall between the two, their viewpoint being less refined than that of the latter, but showing more flexibility and capacity for contemporary contextual interpretation of the Islamic state and *Shari'a* concepts than the former. They, in common with the New Islamists and the Wasat group, show a willingness to adapt ideas from other cultures and show a continuing commitment to align the Brotherhood with the profound changes taking place in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Collectively, the Islamist modernists recognise many of the limitations of Islamist thinking and activity outlined previously in this chapter and seek to broaden the impact of Islamist modernist politics beyond the mere continuance of patronage and the 'politics of permanent opposition'. Their outlook is rooted in the concept of social justice rather than individual liberty; the Wasat Group, especially, advocates a rigorous, modern and contextual interpretation of the Islamic sources in an attempt to define a political creed that will stand the test of the global age, in strong contrast to that of the old generation of the Muslim Brotherhood. It recognises the importance of Christian and other minorities within the national community, and argues that a distinctly 'Muslim' democracy is an essential foundation of any contemporary Egyptian society. Muslim democracy is not a mature concept, and will be explored further in Chapter 5.

The New Islamists aspire to develop a 'system of government [that has] respect for all freedoms, collective and individual, [and] pluralist elections within the rule of law'<sup>77</sup> and seek to engage the widest political cooperation and participation in pursuit of this aim. The response of the Muslim Brotherhood suggests it was aware of the support this viewpoint had the potential to attract. Publishing a reform plan with a strong emphasis on democratisation in 2004, the Brotherhood placed itself within the emerging Egyptian reform consensus and among liberal opposition movements in order to bridge the religious-secular divide as a prerequisite to forming genuinely democratic alliances. In turn Arab liberals also recognise the potential of the New Islamist initiative, and the reality that excluding Islamist moderates from the political arena will only diminish the prospects for democratic transformation. Secular-religious national alliances are considered by Hamzawy to be instrumental in contesting state power and articulating popular consensus over the need for political change.<sup>78</sup> The New Islamist programme is ideally suited to serve as a foundation for such an alliance of Muslim Brotherhood, Wasat Group and Arab liberal democrat secular groups.

---

<sup>76</sup> Dīaa Rashwan, 'Islamism in Transition'. *Al-Ahram Weekly* Issue No 420 11-17 March 1999.

<sup>77</sup> Joshua A Stacher, 'Post Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party', *Middle East Journal* Vol 56 No 3 (Summer 2002) p417.

<sup>78</sup> Hamzawy (Note 73) p5.

Stacher postulates that the emergence of the Wasat group is driven not only by the ideas of the *Wasatiyya* intellectuals, but is also a response to three possible stimuli: the politicising influence of the professional associations, the exclusive, autocratic internal nature of the Muslim Brotherhood, and government repression. During the 1990s, when Muslim Brotherhood influence in the professional syndicates was prevalent, a generation of younger moderate activists was exposed to political activity in that environment; they gained valuable experience and a desire to participate in politics that distinguished them from their colleagues in the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>79</sup> Despite considerable acrimony between the new Wasat group and the established Brotherhood, the Mubarak regime, swift to stifle any potentially threatening development, withheld formal recognition as a political party from the Wasat group on the basis that they ‘failed to add anything new to the existing political parties’, eventually granting the group the status of a NGO. At the same time, the regime also attempted to fragment the Brotherhood by mass arrests of members, including carefully targeted young moderate ‘rising stars’, prior to the 1995 and 2000 elections, recognising that the modernist influence was not something confined to the Wasat Group alone. Stacher argues that a desire to form a more distinctly independent and moderate grouping, to avoid the wrath of the state, could have developed in consequence.

Determined to avoid the ‘guilt by association’ suffered by their moderate predecessors, the New Islamists have been publicly critical of those who exercise political violence; also, they have been consistent critics of the Mubarak government’s indiscriminate repression and suppression of even moderate political activity. Their political ideas show a definite real-world grounding and can be summarised as: ‘an inclusive project based upon cultural commonality rather than religious difference, seeking extensive educational reform as an essential first step, before building a national community which includes a functioning civil society and is subject to modern and effective socio-economic policies’.<sup>80</sup> Their acute awareness of the dangers of the extremist views of the Old Islamist radicals, which traditionally find a receptive audience among the disenfranchised, underprivileged young Egyptians, explains the importance they assign to educational reform. They believe that a balanced and broad education can allow people to see propaganda and corrupt ideology for what it is. This stress on education as a fundamental of the civilizational project is politically highly astute; state education at present is woefully under-resourced and this particular breach of the social contract has been an enduring cause of resentment and discontent throughout the Mubarak era. It is also inimical to developing independent critical thought in pupils, and contains an undue religious emphasis stemming from the Sadat era. There is clear political potential in an approach that has strong and direct popular appeal by offering the masses not only what they want in terms of a basic state education, but if implemented correctly, extends the hope of developing a new generation

---

<sup>79</sup> Stacher (Note 78) pp415-416.

<sup>80</sup> Baker (Note 32) pp39-40.

of young Egyptians with the ability to evaluate for themselves any political ideology, secular or religious. The New Islamists 'educational solution' thus compares very favourably with the regime's 'security solution', - the latter given new impetus by the Global War on Terror and US support for Mubarak's government.

The New Islamists, even moreso than the Wasat NGO, seek to distance themselves from the Old Islamist moderates; they highlight the unrealistic programme of the latter, which is not based on any coherent political platform. The New Islamists seek to provide intellectual and ideological guidance to moderate social forces from all trends in Egyptian society, allowing a consensus on national identity and political direction to serve as a baseline for cooperative coalition politics, free of the sterile 'secular vs. Islamic' debate.<sup>81</sup> They contrast this with the political stalemate between the government and radical Islamists in the mid-1990s, which in their view destroyed the hopes of the masses by also preventing the development of any viable moderate alternatives. However, they give insufficient credit to the fact that established movements such as the *Ikhwan* are well-rooted in Egyptian society and must therefore possess significant potential for constructing broad alliances for political change. Most importantly, with the selection of Mohammed Akef as General Guide in 2004, the *Ikhwan* for the first time publicly adopted ideas developed by the younger generation of the movement. This was a move aimed at several audiences, not least the Egyptian government and the Bush administration and its 'Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East'. This strengthens the case of the *Ikhwan* for inclusion as an important element of any democratic alliance in the future.<sup>82</sup>

The Islamist modernists' collective approach to contemporary socio-economic issues is increasingly realistic. They believe that only scientifically sound policies have utility in this respect, and acknowledge that Western expertise can be used to achieve economic development. However, they add the proviso that this must be done 'in ways consistent with the values and purposes of Islam',<sup>83</sup> illustrating that Muslim democracy may evolve with a moral dimension, and an appreciation of collective responsibility, that is arguably lacking in Western liberal capitalism. This ethical emphasis does not dictate a repeat of previous experiments in Islamic economics and banking; the modernists believe commercial and economic activity can take Western or Islamic forms provided it does so within a framework of social justice. They do not restrict this pragmatic outlook to domestic economic policy alone, recognising and advocating the need to participate in the global economic system. However, they stress the need to break the dependency of Egypt upon a superpower sponsor, and to set economic objectives based on national priorities wherever possible. They admit their thinking on this subject requires further elaboration, but the

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid pp41-46.

<sup>82</sup> El-Ghobashy (Note 40) p390.

<sup>83</sup> Baker (Note 32) p131.

fact they have started from a scientific and pragmatic baseline is a development in the Islamic sphere that is particularly noteworthy.

So, regardless of whether political Islam can be considered to have failed or not, it is evident that a process of profound change is underway. The suggestion that the Islamists collectively are solely responsible for an Islamization of the national political environment is not completely supportable; it is more accurate to suggest that they responded to, and exploited, a process of Islamic resurgence that was already in train among the populace. The Egyptian regime, during both Sadat and Mubarak eras, was aware and suspicious of this, but ultimately contributed to the Islamization process as a political expedient in order to gain support from the *ulema* in combating the Islamic radicals and to give the impression of beating the Islamists at the religious game. This is not to suggest that the moderates did not achieve anything noteworthy since 1952. Even acknowledging that changes evident since 1996 are as much a product of the realities of political participation and the restrictions of authoritarianism as of any process of considered change among moderate Islamist groups, the more modernist, democratic and pragmatic trend that has emerged from within the Muslim Brotherhood is testament to some kind of enduring commitment to non-violent, participatory, inclusive politics. This is commendable, and the consequential wider acceptance afforded to the modernists by secular Arab liberal groups offers hope for the future.

This must, however, be interpreted in context. The modernists represent the only significant strand of Islamist thinking grounded in contemporary political and economic reality to emerge from the tenure of these three consecutive regimes. Persistent undemocratic personal-authoritarian rule, supported by near complete ideological dominance interlocked with domestic class interests, and perpetuated by superpower regional policies, provides a difficult obstacle to be overcome.

## CHAPTER 5 - THE FUTURE - DEMOCRATIZATION, MUSLIM DEMOCRACY AND ISLAMIST MODERNISM

In Chapter 4 the historical evolution of the Islamist movement, and the factors that shaped it, were considered in conjunction with an analysis of which characteristics of the movement may prove significant in any future political environment. It is now necessary to examine how factors in the wider political sphere in Egypt and the Middle East may influence the development of the modernist movement, and indeed be exploited by it.

### **RQ 3: 'What exogenous influences are likely to be most significant to the future of moderate Islamic politics'?**

Many of the factors that shaped the evolution of moderate Islam to date are indicated in its future development. Despite the fact that the nascent Muslim democratic trend is small and lacks an organised constituency, the regime appears no more likely to allow it political space than it did the moderate Old Islamists, and actively associates the Islamist modernists with their traditional forebears in its framing activity. Muslim democracy is a concept which is gaining some support throughout the Middle East and is potentially a promising development; the Mubarak regime sees it as simply another threat to the continuance of established rule and strives to stimulate popular fear of an Islamic state in attempting to stifle it. This direct connection with a rigid Islamic state is thus a political liability of which the Islamist modernists must divest themselves; their future is inextricably linked with the growth of a tolerant, inclusive, Muslim democracy. Their civilizational project includes many ideas - especially the power of balanced education and modern economic policies - that could prove instrumental in eradicating the causes of extremism. To implement them, they must attract a constituency and bring about a process by which democratic governance can take hold. Coalition politics, within and beyond the Islamist movement, appears to offer the only realistic course by which to pursue this aim. Despite the restrictive political environment within Egypt, pressures for democratic reform are growing as never before throughout the Middle East, US Foreign policy is evolving in response to harsh lessons from the War on Terrorism and military adventuring in Iraq, and radical Islamist groups remain an ongoing concern for the Egyptian government and public alike. The development of the Islamist modernist movement cannot occur in isolation from these influences, and democratization in Egypt represents an essential component of it; the commonality of these issues across the region strengthens the contention that eventualities in Egypt may enjoy significantly wider relevance.

### **Democratization as a Catalyst for Political Reform**

A positive future for moderate Islamic politics is entirely dependent upon the emergence of democracy and in Egypt this will be subject to two competing influences - the interests of

the entrenched regime and the aspirations of the opposition political movements. The process of democratization in itself is the catalyst by which moderate Islamism could achieve broader political acceptance, and by which the enduring commitment to democracy of its adherents could be demonstrated and tested. Similarly, the interest democratization is attracting nationally, regionally and internationally cannot be ignored indefinitely by the Mubarak regime. Balancing these influences in any transitional process will be challenging, but recent developments in US foreign policy may offer potential to assist with providing that balance. The importance of developing political constituencies within an independent civil society as an element of such a process cannot be overstated, and US regional policy may also evolve to be a more significant factor in this respect.

### Regime Interests - The Durability of the Egyptian State and the Influence of US Foreign Policy

In many respects the emergence of democracy throughout the entire Middle East is hindered by entrenched regimes more than by radical Islamist movements. Indeed, Abootalebi concludes that the disproportionate power of the state over society leaves the latter at the mercy of the former, and that the major obstacles to the emergence of genuine democracy are rooted in the endurance of authoritarian states, especially ones wherein there are no truly effective civil society groups to counterbalance state power.<sup>1</sup> For those who contend that the Islamist social support networks constituted a significant part of Egyptian civil society, this ignores the fact that these networks were to a substantial degree based upon dependency and patronage, and were acutely political vehicles for the propagation of the Islamist agenda and the delegitimation of the regime. As such, they were subjected to sustained scrutiny and repression by the regime and could not function in the way Abootalebi describes as 'truly effective'. They cannot therefore be considered an entirely satisfactory model for an emerging civil society despite the fact that they indisputably brought benefit to some of the most vulnerable groups in Egyptian society. Ideally, states and regimes should play a full and constructive part in developing the concept of Muslim democracy, including human rights and political and economic modernity, while recognising the important religious and cultural influences that differentiate such a concept from a Western secular one. However, this is unlikely, and when the tenure of these regimes is perpetuated by US foreign policy, especially so since the outbreak of the War on Terrorism, how can they be encouraged to undertake meaningful reform? In order to exert leverage on the Egyptian regime in a non-threatening way, the modernists need to attract the political support of the US; in turn, the US must revisit its foreign policy towards the region and develop a more detailed understanding of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ali R Abootalebi: 'Civil Society, Democracy and the Middle East'. *Middle East Review of International Affairs* Vol 2 No3 Sept 1998.  
[[http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria98\\_abootalebi.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/meria/meria98_abootalebi.html)] p2.

the ongoing transformation of Islamist movements. In distinguishing between Islamist rhetoric for domestic consumption, and the real-world foundations of pragmatic Islamist modernist policies, the US may come to lose its fear of the Islamist movement in its entirety and recognise the enormous diversity that exists within it.

US foreign policy has long been a contentious factor in Middle Eastern politics and remains so; it is concurrently a major stimulus for democratic change and a significant obstacle to it. The US administration does recognise that the persistence of undemocratic states and personal-authoritarian rule are major contributors to the growth of Islamic extremism, but also has superpower interests to protect. Khan is alive to the degenerating credibility of the US administration in the Middle East but believes it possible to recast US policy; he stresses the importance of overcoming Muslim antipathy as a precursor to, and part of, that aim. Thus, he links the realization of a Palestinian state, and the urgent need to dispel the notion that the War on Terrorism is actually a war on Islam, to any initiative to implement real democracy in the region. Khan proposes a future US policy based upon a principle of 'compliance for security' whereby states in which democratic governments are less prepared to comply with US interests, actually contribute to stability and security in the Middle East by removing the major stimuli of radical extremist groups. Thus, the promotion of democracy in the region no longer remains inimical to US national security interests.<sup>2</sup> If this premise is accepted, it overcomes the two main inconsistencies inherent in the US approach to establishing democracy in the region:

The 'inconvenience of democracy' was an argument advanced originally during the Cold War as the US sought to balance power between itself and the Soviet Union. Democracy was too unpredictable a force to allow it to threaten this aim. That imperative has been replaced by the need to court undemocratic allies in the War on Terrorism whilst at the same time imposing 'democracy' on Iraq and forcefully advocating change elsewhere in the region. While the US drive for democracy is ideologically genuine, the protection of superpower interests does place a premium upon political stability rather than change. This pragmatic outcome, if not the reasons for it, is not lost on Arab populations; if they wish to restore their regional credibility, the US authorities must pursue democratic change at the expense of stability and recognise the importance of nurturing a form of democracy rather different to that enjoyed by US citizens - specifically, a definitively Muslim democracy. Ideally, any revised policy must avoid direct association with those groups or political alliances most likely to pursue this objective, and accept that they may not achieve power alone, or even at all, in the near term. Muslim democracy is not only compatible with Khan's 'compliance for security' proposal, it should be a pillar of it.

---

<sup>2</sup> Muqtedar M Khan, 'Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of US Policy', *Middle East Policy* Vol X No3 Fall 2003 p85.

Islam and democracy are considered to be incompatible by many US advisers. This is not the case. There is nothing in Islamic sources to support the incompatibility argument; it is based instead on narrow, exclusive and out-of-context interpretations that are widely discredited in the Muslim world, especially so by Muslim modernists. The key to democracy gaining credence is precisely what form it takes. It is presently popularly considered to be a 'Western' concept, with all that implies; however, it need not remain so and a more obviously Muslim form of democracy, with a focus on societal justice rather than individual liberty, offers a realistic proposition as elaborated by the Islamist modernists. Such a focus is exemplified by the Refah party project in Turkey, which is also much more loosely tied to *Shari'a* and has earned widespread electoral support.<sup>3</sup> Whilst a dislocation from *Shari'a* is a step too far in Arab countries at present, this outlook does indicate the appeal of fair and pragmatic political programmes; thus, Muslim democracy must come in concert with sustainable political and economic policies or it will fail to address the underlying problems affecting Egypt and the wider region that were never resolved by Nasserism, Arab Socialism or nationalism.

In turn, the US must resist the urge to transplant 'Western' democracy into Muslim societies, and should recognise that the concept of democracy is contextual. With reference to Egypt specifically, but also as a template for wider reform, US aspirations may be partially satisfied by a further development of the New Islamist project - one which recognises the real-world focus of the latter, while acknowledging also the need to incorporate Old Islamist support. Indeed, many commentators suggest that the only realistic option for future US foreign policy towards the region is to accept that cooperation with moderate Islamist movements is indispensable if progress is to be made. In fact, excluding the Islamists from the political sphere probably undermines the possibility of democratization taking place more than anything else. The perceived challenge that Islamist organizations pose to democracy cannot be met by befriending moderate but marginally important groups, and the US must not make the mistake of using Arab Liberal groups as a counter to religious movements on the false assumption that the latter are all anti-democratic. It can only be met by dealing with mainstream, powerful organizations that will ultimately determine the future of Middle East politics, the most significant of which is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>4</sup> The US could therefore discreetly promote the concept of an Islamic coalition within a national democratic, multi-party, cultural and civilizational political project, taking care to preserve regime options for the future while still allowing political openings to materialise. Signs that such a course of action may be

---

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Shadid, *Legacy of the Prophet: Despots, Democrats and the New Politics of Islam* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2002) pp146-148.

<sup>4</sup> Marina Ottaway, *Islamists and Democracy: Keep the Faith* The New Republic Vol 232 Issues 4716 and 4717 June 2005.

under consideration come from the new Strategy Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) apparently being developed by the US State Department, which together with the Moderate Muslim Outreach programme forms components within the overall Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East. In this strategy, announced by President Bush in November 2003,<sup>5</sup> which appears to incorporate thinking closely aligned with that of Khan, the immediate military emphasis of the Global War on Terror will be replaced by a more considered, cultural and educational approach which includes a strong emphasis on 'moderate Muslim outreach' to discredit extremist ideology.<sup>6</sup> In a striking ideological opportunity, the Islamist modernists' proposed educational reforms could be used as a foundation of this 'battle of ideas' against the hateful precepts of radical Islamic terror groups, and as such could actually form an integral element of the SAVE initiative. Importantly, domestic Initiatives are much closer to the roots of radicalism and are likely to be better received than any perceived as imposed solely by the US; this suggestion may also allow direct US association with the Islamist modernists to be avoided, which is an important consideration for the future. This is recognised among the Islamist modernist community; Abu Ela Madi, a founder of the Wasat Group, holds a balanced and nuanced appreciation of the West, in common with many of his modernist contemporaries. Acknowledging that 'America is not the West, the US public is not the US government' and that Egypt's present relationship with the US discourages reform, he reasons that serious efforts by the US to broker reform would be well received.<sup>7</sup>

If this is so, the proposed US SAVE initiative and the Egyptian Islamist modernists' educational emphasis, may together offer a unique confluence of thought that could be combined effectively within the 'compliance for security' proposal advocated by Khan. However, how can these strands of thought be integrated and transformed into workable policy proposals without alienating the Mubarak regime? The US must overturn the overly secular focus of current policy that may exclude the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat Group from future developments and instead of regarding with fear 'parties with an Islamic character', recognise that they may invoke creative political ideas and pragmatic principles.<sup>8</sup> A possible solution is a graduated approach with intermediate priorities, in which a long-term objective is pursued in realistic stages. At first, the US could appropriate the educational ideas of the New Islamists and attempt to persuade Mubarak to implement educational reform designed specifically to counter radical Islamist ideology.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy M Sharp, 'CRS Report for Congress: *US Democracy Promotion Policy in the Middle East: The Islamist Dilemma*' Washington DC, Congressional Research Service June 15 2006 p5.

<sup>6</sup> Guy Dinmore, 'US Shifts Anti-Terror Policy', *Financial Times* 31 July 2005.

[[http://FT.com/terror/London\\_blasts-business\\_impact-US\\_shifts\\_anti-terror\\_policy](http://FT.com/terror/London_blasts-business_impact-US_shifts_anti-terror_policy)] p1. Date accessed 01 Aug 05.

<sup>7</sup> Augustus Richard Norton: 'Thwarted Politics: The Case of Egpt's Hizb al-Wasat' in Robert W Hefner (Ed) *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 2005) p149.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* p157.

Realistically, effective reform will require substantial investment, and a re-evaluation of US aid priorities may be required. This can only be attempted with the complete concurrence of the regime, and will not ameliorate widespread public perception that the latter is too closely aligned with the US. Therefore, as the next stage in the process, that perception must be tempered by bringing material improvement to the lives of ordinary Egyptians while exerting pressure for real democratic change upon the regime. Given the national respect for education in Egypt, careful educational reform could serve both purposes. Through increased provision of quality state education, the consequences of a retreat from Nasser's social contract may be reversed, democratic ideals may gain a degree of governmental and popular support, and the cultural and anti-radical thrust of the New Islamists' project may gain credence, providing continuity with a future social-democratic coalition. Ideally, the long-term US aim must be to overcome Arab hostility, and SAVE can thus be only one part of a wider overhaul of US foreign policy in the Middle East. Indicating that such an overhaul may be underway within the Greater Middle East Initiative, Secretary of State Rice has served notice upon the Mubarak regime that it must deliver genuine democratic reform in Egypt,<sup>9</sup> signalling the primacy of change over stability in emerging policy aims. But, in the short term, the key to any educational and cultural solution is the ability of the Islamist modernists to generate a domestic constituency and encourage support for Muslim democracy; part of the US effort should thus include a much more critical evaluation of the development of civil society permitted by the regime in order to facilitate this, and the re-prioritization of US aid to Egypt offers a potentially very effective mechanism by which this may be achieved. Ultimately, a future coalition government less aligned with US aims than the current regime is not a disastrous prospect, and a focus on defeating violent radicalism in itself serves US security interests. While the US administration may be reluctant to see the Mubarak regime replaced, it also recognises the potential consequences of preserving authoritarian rule against the popular will. Furthermore, there is no reason why the NDP could not compete in transitional elections.

Overall, this strengthening current of change could help to transform US policy into a positive external influence, with the power to overcome negative internal influences, in the Middle East democratization process.

#### Opposition Aspirations - The Democratic Concept and Constituencies

One of the difficulties faced by the pro-democracy community in the Middle East is illustrated by the situation in Egypt, where the strongest advocates of democracy form a tiny intellectual elite that enjoys little political affinity with the masses - far from an organised constituency with the power to achieve change. As Ottaway contends, unless such broad-based constituencies as political parties, trade unions and social movements are

---

<sup>9</sup> 'Does He Know Where it's Leading'? *The Economist* 30 July 2005, p24.

allowed to develop freely, they will never provide an effective balance to authoritarian government; from the Islamist perspective, the future of the modernist trend is entirely dependent upon the provision of legal political space for opposition movements. As pro-democracy movements exist in the form of regime-approved NGOs in Egypt, they exert little impact upon the domestic audience; Islamist preachers still hold the ideological advantage over the liberal/centrist democrats. Organizations with broad support do exist, the Muslim Brotherhood being an obvious example, but the older, controlling generation hold ambivalent and sometimes unclear views on democracy; they also prefer obedience in their supporters to free political thought. In this discouraging environment there are nonetheless possibilities worthy of further exploration. The growth of democracy, suggests Ottaway, depends on the development of domestic constituencies dedicated to it (ideally) or at least prepared to pursue it as a road to power (realistically). She recognises here the main worry of democrats concerning an Islamist ascendancy to power - the possibility that they will abandon democracy once in control of the political process. However, there are procedural and constitutional safeguards that can be utilised to prevent this and the recent pragmatic shifts among the Islamist modernists are likely to continue, mirroring comparative experiences in activist movements outwith the Islamist sphere where the tensions inherent in moving from religious ideology to pragmatic policies usually result in a more real-worldly orientation of the movement concerned. Moderation and pragmatism in the Islamist movement will emerge from an extended and uneven process. A key step in facilitating this is the inclusion of Islamist modernist movements in the political sphere, confronting them with the challenges of managing contemporary societies. This is far more conducive to democratic opening than the authoritarian-sustained illusion of entirely religion-free Arab politics.<sup>10</sup> The key question, in Ottaway's view, is how to develop political constituencies that are capable of implementing and sustaining political reform.<sup>11</sup>

In a study of Capitalist Development and Democracy, Rueschmeyer, Stephens and Stephens conclude that the real source of persistent democratic drive is an effective combination of working-class mobilization and middle-class activism.<sup>12</sup> However, they identify in Egypt two significant obstacles to this process: first, the state control of resources and independence of the ruling elite from other social classes helps to preserve personal-authoritarian rule; secondly, the dependent position of Egypt in the global geostrategic and economic environment generates circumstances that impair the genesis of democracy. The Islamist experience supports this view, as both working class mobilization and middle-class

---

<sup>10</sup> Amr Hamzawy, 'The Key to Arab Reform: Moderate Islamists' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace PolicyBrief* No 40 August 2005 p3.

<sup>11</sup> Marina Ottaway, 'Democracy and Constituencies in the Arab World' *Carnegie Papers* No 48 July 2004 pp5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens and John D Stephens, quoted in Abootalebi (Note 1) p3.

activism were present in the movement, but were never sufficiently co-ordinated to threaten the elite or overcome the imperative to protect it's international sponsorship.

Pro-democratic constituencies will only develop if the popular perception is that all other alternatives to an unacceptable status quo have been exhausted, or if democracy can be associated with other ideologies of immediate impact. The notion that all other realistic alternatives have been tried is held mainly by the small, liberal, intellectual community; they do not share the more prevalent view that a virtuous Islamic state is a viable alternative to the corruption of existing regimes. Furthermore, the status quo is not regarded as unacceptable by all segments of society, especially those with interests to protect. Therefore, can any popular ideology in the Arab world offer the potential to partner democracy, remove it's Western liberal association and transform it into an idea of mass appeal? In the post-independence era, nationalism can be ruled out. Pan-Arab nationalism may persist on the sidelines as long as the Palestinian dispute remains unresolved, but there is a profound difference between rhetoric and action in Arab attitudes to this issue; it is not an idea around which a mass political movement will coalesce in any Arab state. In view of the blight of economic stagnation and inequality, high unemployment and social injustice - common to most Arab states - socialism offers, apparently, an appealing populist solution. Ottaway suggests that a competent leadership 'could build this aspiration for a better material life into a demand for democratic political participation, giving rise to ..... movements that might advance both the cause of democracy and that of socio-economic justice...'.<sup>13</sup> However, such a suggestion must acknowledge the typical weakness of socialist movements across the Middle East, and the fact that socio-economic precipitants can lead to very different outcomes than democracy alone. Thus, while socio-economic factors could foment exploitable discontent, an organised, co-ordinated effort is required to facilitate change, and the only political movement with the support and capacity to assume a leading role in this process is the moderate Islamist grouping. The popular support of the Muslim Brotherhood, enhanced by the wider appeal generated by the Islamist modernists, could underpin the core of a multi-party democratic coalition with the power and credibility to achieve change. Secondly, this needs a permissive environment in which to occur - a civil society, notable at present for its absence in Egypt.

### Civil Society

Before the onset of genuine political liberalization, the establishment of civil society is considered essential to constrain state power and improve prospects for democratization. The ability of the state to control those prospects is perhaps underestimated, illustrated by

---

<sup>13</sup> Ottaway (Note 11) p13.

the fact that some observers interpret the emergence of 'contained pluralism' in Egypt as a move from one-party rule to genuine pluralism. What is really evident in Egypt is that it is possible for the societal preconditions for democracy to exist and personal-authoritarian rule to persist. The development of civil society institutions has been controlled closely by the regime, which has encouraged the growth of civil society groups for its own purposes - there are now 14,000 of them in existence. However, the underlying aim has been to ensure that a large number of small, diverse groups exist in circumstances that are unlikely to allow them to coalesce into an effective opposition or reformist voice. External support and influence channelled through domestic NGOs is thus difficult to co-ordinate and utilise, allowing the regime to take a stance that is not overtly obstructive, knowing that such investment is unlikely to bring political cohesion among the opposition. As a result, US aid to Egyptian NGOs is of limited effect in stimulating the growth of a genuine civil society. A reconsideration of aid priorities could be carried out as part of the educational initiative suggested above, allowing US leverage for reform to be exerted on the Mubarak regime, and more effect to be realised from the aid programme.

A meaningful and sustainable civil society will only develop in Egypt when properly institutionalised, well-organised groups gain sufficient power to pressure the regime to open the political system in a genuine way. In view of the persistence of the state, and the awareness of the regime of the dangers for them inherent in such a development, this is an unlikely proposition in the short to medium term. Intellectual effort, extra-legal fundamentalist groups and compliant, restrained NGOs alone will never develop the political constituencies needed to challenge authoritarian rule and support democratic evolution. Regardless of this, the New Islamists see a role for themselves and their national project in the development of such a society, and the way in which it may be used to bring realistic and sustainable change. This is reasonable if they are prepared to develop an appeal that is more emotional and less intellectual, and to undertake grassroots organizational and mobilizational activity; the internal divide between fundamentalists and modernists must also be bridged if contemporary Islamist groups are to attract enough support to exert political pressure on the regime. In the progression towards democracy the development of a healthy civil society is important in its own right; in view of the lack of formal political access in Egypt, it becomes an essential conduit for the development of modern Islamist politics.

**RQ4: 'What capacity has the moderate Islamist movement demonstrated to formulate a modern, realistic political project that will contribute to any process of democratization and attract a politically meaningful constituency'?**

If entrenched regimes can be persuaded to enter into a process of transition, the nature of the transitional process, and the eventual political system, must be considered. The

particular role of the moderate Islamists within both process and polity will determine to a significant degree their future political utility. The movement contains disparate elements, which, if organised into a cohesive whole, could form a central pillar of a future democratic government with real potential to reform and endure.

#### Modernist Islam as a Potential Democratic Alternative to Authoritarian Rule

Democratic transformation is generally a process of conflict and upheaval. This is why many commentators advance the concept of a multi-party, social-democratic coalition as the best means of achieving it. Wide representation allays the majority of political fears and facilitates the expression of the widest range of views. No single interest group or ideology is allowed to dominate, and the democratic process is protected and strengthened. A carefully orchestrated process of 'interest bargaining' is required to reassure the existing regime that transition will not lead to total loss of vested interests, or worse, while tempering the more unrealistic aspirations of those who seek power.

Those who do not subscribe to Roy's view that political Islam has failed, see in the Egyptian Islamist modernists not only a further stage of the evolution of Islamic activism but also a potential first step towards social-democratic politics. Their moderate, inclusive and realistic outlook offers great potential to contribute to a democratic coalition government. The Old Islamist fundamentalists of the Muslim Brotherhood also have a role to play, however, as they command significant popular support and harbour mobilizational expertise; any attempt at coalition building without them would be a risky undertaking. Despite their previous ambivalence towards democracy, they should now be able to make a more constructive contribution to such a process if they can be convinced that it does not threaten the essential tenets of Islam and avoid association with the reformed radical movements in any coalition setting. Hawthorne challenges the notion that any coalition between secular and religious groups is possible at all, as ongoing polarization between liberals and fundamentalists is simply too great.<sup>14</sup> The opposing aims of the Old Islamists and the Islamist modernists concerning the primacy of a Muslim democracy or an Islamic state do indeed represent a significant ideological cleavage. This, essentially, revisits the compatibility of Islam and democracy argument; the *ijtihad* (intellectual effort in the interpretation of Islamic sources) of the New Islamists, especially in its innovative work to use *Shari'a* as a means by which secular and religious demands may be reconciled, and their reflective development of Muslim democracy, coupled with the emergence of secular-religious political modernist alliances, could help to overcome this. Moreover, successful initiatives for democracy generally take place in societies where no single group, including the regime, has a monopoly of power; importantly, this structural explanation is

---

<sup>14</sup> Amy Hawthorne 'Political Reform in the Arab World: A New Ferment'? *Carnegie Papers* No 52 Oct 2004 p15.

independent of cultural considerations, allowing suggestions that Islam itself is an obstacle to the development of democracy to be rejected. Herein lies a strength of the Islamist modernist approach; as an unthreatening part of a democratic coalition, they demonstrate not only to their detractors, but also to reluctant potential allies such as the Old Islamist moderates, that the idea of incompatibility is ill founded.

### The Role of the Islamists

It is only in a social-democratic coalition that the Islamist modernists collectively have any political future in Egypt; even if in the long term they achieve an independent and sustainable following, coalition membership is an unavoidable hurdle on the route to that status, and the pursuit of political changes that will help to realise that aspiration is where their focus must be directed.

When considering their potential to assist a transition to democratic politics, the Wasat NGO should not be seen simply as the activist wing of the New Islamist intellectual circle. The sophisticated thinking of the latter is not fully apparent in the Wasat platform, and less so in the younger generation of the Muslim Brotherhood from which the Wasat Group evolved. However, Stacher emphasises what this author believes to be one of the most important differences between the Wasat NGO and the young generation of the Brotherhood and their various moderate predecessors: the fact that they have written political programmes in which their conceptualisation of democracy is explained. Neither is without shortcomings; the treatment of Christian and other non-Muslim minorities, and the status of women, provide two examples. The difference between them and their Old Islamist predecessors however, is that the former are making open efforts to tackle these problems from a civilizational, not religious, approach. Indeed, the fact that they have openly aired such issues in public does suggest a more inclusive and liberal attitude towards them.<sup>15</sup> A continuing and increasingly close dialogue between the Wasat group, the young modernists of the Brotherhood and the New Islamists can only improve and consolidate the moderate position, but neither of these elements can bring sufficient organizational expertise or mobilizational capacity to develop a viable constituency. The moderate Old Islamist mainstream is the source from where this must come. While retaining the emotive 'Islam is the Solution' slogan, even the ruling generation of the Brotherhood sense the inevitability of change, and their programme now assumes a focus tending towards liberal reform. Mohammed Habib, the Brotherhood vice-chairman, identifies the movement's priorities as, *inter alia*, the abolition of restrictions imposed upon the establishment of political parties, repeal of Emergency Law, and increased powers for Parliament and the

---

<sup>15</sup> Joshua A Stacher, 'Post Islamist Rumblings in Egypt: The Emergence of the Wasat Party', *Middle East Journal* Vol 56 No 3 (Summer 2002) p425.

Judiciary at the expense of the executive.<sup>16</sup> This is reinforced by the statement of Saad Al-Kattatni, the head of the *Ikhwan* parliamentary bloc, that the organization is keen to cooperate in Parliament with secular parties.<sup>17</sup>

None of the individual Islamist elements has the influence (or in the case of the New Islamists, the desire) to succeed in the political arena; it is certainly also arguable that they may not acquire it collectively or be able to dispel the misgivings that many Egyptians harbour about an Islamic state. The New Islamists' rational, pragmatic aim to establish a centrist coalition of mixed political persuasions recognises and addresses both these limitations. The concept of an 'Islamic coalition within a centrist democratic coalition' seems to offer Islamic activism a future, and the chance to contribute to a genuinely democratic politics. While any Islamist coalition probably does not have the ability to become a dominant element of a democratic transformation, and indeed the possibility of it achieving dominance is in many respects an electoral disadvantage, it does have the potential to be a catalyst for change as part of a wider centrist political grouping.

A consistent theme of Egyptian regime framing as it seeks to limit the potential of the Wasat NGO has been to identify it as a splinter group of the Muslim Brotherhood, and therefore no different to it, or even its radical offshoots. This is not a valid viewpoint; the Wasat group, and their ideological mentors, offer something very different to the other moderate groups, and have a contemporary relevance that their competitors do not. As a government-approved and monitored NGO, they have little real influence or mobilizational capacity and it is difficult to imagine change in the near future, but this may not be the disadvantage it appears to be. The current low level of political support of the Wasat group paradoxically renders it an ideal component of any social-democratic coalition because it is unlikely to be destabilizing, even in alliance with the modernist elements of the Muslim Brotherhood. The grassroots support and mobilizational abilities of the Old Islamists are useful in constituency building, which could be complemented yet balanced politically by the moderating ideological collective outlook of the modernists. Thus, the overall Islamist element of any such coalition need not be threatening if it is balanced as such internally, and externally by secular parties of moderate, realist orientation.

### Muslim Democracy

Variations in the definition of Muslim Democracy among the modernist camp alone are significant. In this paper it is a term used primarily to differentiate between an essentially

---

<sup>16</sup> Nathan Brown and Amr Hamzawy, 'Take Advantage of Brotherhood Gains', *Daily Star Egypt*, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005. [Electronic copy at: [www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm) ]

<sup>17</sup> Omaya Abdel-Latif, 'Egypt: Brothers Trigger Debate but Cannot Pass Legislation', *Arab Reform Bulletin* Vol 4 Issue 3 April 2006.

religion based concept of an Islamic state or polity, used by the Old Islamists, and a civilizational, community-based concept of an inclusive, democratic system based on Muslim social justice in a contemporary setting. The idea of Muslim democracy recognizes the popular appeal of a distinctively Muslim society and political system, the dangers of a total separation of church and state, and the importance of factors central to Muslim identity such as *Shari'a*. It embraces aspects of Western liberal democracy that can be allied with Islamic notions of social justice, but seeks to avoid an uncritical adoption of Western political systems perceived as having already failed in Egypt. An essential foundation of Muslim democracy is the concept of 'Islam - rightly understood'. Its New Islamist proponents condemn the corrupt and inexperienced interpretations of Islamic sources that have led to the backward and defensive outlook of many in the Muslim world, and to the violent expression of radical political Islam. They believe that a political system that is both modern and Muslim in character is achievable and deny absolutely that *Shari'a* precludes any compatibility with democracy. Instead of rejecting modernity, they embrace it, aiming to combine the integrity of the pious with the political abilities of the liberal modernists. Most tellingly, they recognize the need for legal, democratic participation within existing state structures, and the development of a viable, independent civil society as a precursor to democratisation on any scale. This reflects the wider shift in mainstream, non-violent Islamist movements towards increasing pragmatism, and acceptance that democratic reform is the only viable approach to challenge persistent authoritarianism.

The conceptual basis to this new pragmatic thinking is anything but new itself, being based upon elements of Islamic jurisprudence that are centuries old. Ghannouchi argues that on the basis of these long-established principles of Islam, every Muslim has a duty to help to establish an Islamic government; however, if this is not possible, Muslims must accomplish whatever they can in pursuit of that ideal. If this involves power sharing in either Muslim or non-Muslim environments, in order to establish a social order, it is incumbent upon Muslims to partake of it; more importantly, it does not have to be based upon *Shari'a* and no temporal stipulation is made for the ultimate achievement of an Islamic state. Participation must instead be based upon a form of *shura*, which is the authority of the community of believers. This is not the exclusivist provision it initially appears to be; in a modern interpretation, this means 'the authority of the people expressed by democratic means' and by definition includes all who comprise the body politic, illustrating the potential contemporary utility of *shura* in formulating a distinctive Muslim democracy if it is interpreted and applied in an entirely contextual way. Specifically, it is the duty of all Muslims to pursue and contribute to the development of secular, democratic systems if it is in the interest of the community at large to do so. A just government, in the most contemporary sense, is considered to be very close to an Islamic one as social justice is the most important principle of Islamic government. In Egypt, the Islamic majority of the population is ruled by an authoritarian regime and is not able to bring about Islamic

government or democracy. In this case, *Shari'a* does not preclude cooperation with secular groups to establish a secular democracy that would guarantee human rights and liberties.<sup>18</sup> This can be seen as an end in itself, or as an interim step on the route to an Islamic state - a fear voiced by critics of the Islamists. The choice in Egypt's case, and one not in any way inimical to the precepts of *Shari'a*, is between authoritarianism and democracy. The eventual transformation to an Islamic state need not occur at all if secular democracy satisfies the Muslim requirement for social justice, and exposure to democratic governance tempers demands for it as part of the normalization process such exposure often triggers.

The modernists' concept of Muslim democracy avoids historical limitations, as it does not consider *shura* alone as a suitable democratic process for the modern world. Instead, they acknowledge the achievements of Western democracy, encouraging the selective adoption of what they see as its strengths, while rejecting features that conflict with their concept of a Muslim democratic political system. In particular, they have identified the following characteristics of Western liberal democratic systems as suitable for utilisation within such a framework: the separation of powers, multiple political parties, competitive elections, constitutionally protected rights of free speech and association, an independent judiciary and limited terms for the highest political offices. However, their aspiration to 'a democracy of just outcomes'<sup>19</sup> precludes an adoption of the liberal/capitalist model on several grounds, most notably the materialist, consumerist mentality with which it has become closely associated, and the injustices they believe result in consequence. What further sets the New Islamists apart is their insistence that what is important about political power is the use to which it is put, not the simple acquisition of it - often the only stated aim of Old Islamist groups. Nor is their conception of Muslim democracy without shortcomings; even one of the most lucid and intellectually gifted Islamist modernists, Essam el-Erian of the younger generation of the *Ikhwan*, has difficulty in conveying the specifics of this vision. It is clear however, that the effective fusion of Islam and democracy is seen as the main reference point of it, and Muslim democracy may be considered to be the hallmark of modern Political Islam.<sup>20</sup>

Any truly democratic state incorporates the rule of law as an essential building block; in the conceptual development of an Islamic state the conflict between *Shari'a* and secular law has proved to be profound and enduring. The precise place of *Shari'a* in the Muslim democratic state envisioned by the Islamist modernists, and its relationship to secular law, prove to be as difficult to determine for them as for any moderate Islamist group. In an

---

<sup>18</sup> Rachid Ghannouchi 'Participation in Non-Islamic Government' in Charles Kurzman '*Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*'. Oxford, Oxford University Press 1998 pp 92-95.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond William Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 2003) pp171-172.

<sup>20</sup> Caryle Murphy, '*Passion for Islam: The Egyptian Experience*' (New York: Scribner 2002) pp129-131.

attempt to solve this, the New Islamists advocate a process of genuine *ijtihad* to set any application of *Shari'a* in a modern and relevant context. *Shari'a* has never been a detailed exposition of law, personal or political. It comprises guiding principles alone, and therefore skilful interpretation is indispensable if a truly viable system of law is to be formulated. This has been noticeably lacking from moderate Islamic political thought to date, but it is an area of crucial importance and latent benefit. It will be especially significant in reconciling the competing secular and religious demands of any social-democratic coalition, and compliance with the precepts of *Shari'a* will be a strong motivator for those who still believe it to be a foundation of just governance in an Islamic state - regardless of the basis of that belief, intellectual or dogmatic. Applying *Shari'a* is seen as strengthening Egypt's Islamic identity and is a cultural as well as political issue. The question, therefore, is what exactly what form and purpose does *Shari'a* assume in the modernist conception, not whether or not it should be abandoned entirely.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the advantage that a rational, modern definition of *Shari'a* would bestow upon a Muslim democracy - that of unequivocal separation from its Western-liberal sibling - should not be overlooked. If the Islamist modernist movement is able to achieve this admittedly challenging undertaking, it will confer a political utility upon their movement that was never enjoyed by any Islamist predecessor, setting a firm foundation for an enduring political platform.

### Islamist Economics

One of the most frequent, and just, criticisms of Islamic activist movements is their lack of real-world, detailed political programmes, especially in the economic dimension. This is something acknowledged by both the younger generation of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wasat group, and they advance broad proposals to arrest Egypt's economic decline and aid the poorest elements of society within a framework of social justice. The Brotherhood place a more noticeable emphasis on the fact that they believe a society based on Islamic precepts would promote social security for all citizens and narrow economic differences between classes. Their economic programme makes individual and state alike active participants in the pursuit of social justice, making Muslims mutually responsible for one another. While accepting the principle of private ownership, the *Ikhwan* policy assigns a role to the state of owning and managing enterprises that should necessarily remain within the public domain. Themes that recur in their pronouncements concerning economic development are:

- Reduce government bureaucracy and the size of the public sector.
- Official attainment of high levels of productivity.
- An economy based primarily upon the private sector.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid pp182-184.

- A non-interest-bearing banking system.
- *Zakat* (almsgiving).
- Independence from foreign economic intervention.

In this latter objective, the Brotherhood seeks to achieve Egyptian economic integration with other Muslim economies as an alternative to the present reliance upon ‘foreigners from the West’.<sup>22</sup>

However, Richards and Waterbury believe that as Islamist politics is ‘primarily the politics of culture,’ then economics attracts lower priority than matters of collective and individual behaviour, social mores and religious piety.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that should an Islamist organization secure a pivotal role in the Egyptian government, economic consistency may well be sacrificed for expediency. While this may bestow flexibility in reconciling disparate economic interests in a coalition scenario, it is unlikely to satisfy the individual economic interests of diverse groups. Economic development is thus likely to be hindered by the religious and moral focus of many Islamist groups; efforts of professional economists are likely to be scrutinised more for religious compliance than scientific validity or political viability. Richards and Waterbury see the ‘Utopian assumptions about human behaviour’ made by Old Islamists as the core theoretical problem with previous Islamic approaches to economic issues, and they conclude that the Islamist mainstream has thus far failed to offer any coherent and consistent theory of economics. They believe that ‘the configuration of specific interests that undergirds any Islamist government, combined with institutional structures and the political exigencies of the moment, will be far more important than ideology in determining that government’s economic policy’.<sup>24</sup> Another key determinant of any future Islamist economic policy is likely to be the demands of coalition formation and maintenance. These demands will take precedence over economic logic whenever the implementation of economic policy brings significant hardship to many people - not a rare occurrence in Egypt to date, and a likely outcome of any future economic reform. The drivers of economic policymaking for Islamist regimes or coalitions in Egypt are thus similar to those faced by extant regimes, and Islamists can consequently be expected to match the dismal economic performance of those regimes.

A common theme among Islamist groups has been the tension between the moderate, conservative, merchant middle class and the young urban poor. As discussed earlier, these interest groups will oppose each other within the Islamist movement; it is precisely because economic politics is secondary to cultural politics that such movements remain viable.

---

<sup>22</sup> Sana Abed-Kotob, ‘The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No 27 (1995) pp326-327.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1998) p351.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* pp354-356.

Internal conflicts invariably hinder economic reforms; a regime that pursues a cultural ideology will oscillate between market and state control. This is not unusual in Middle Eastern countries; what makes it potentially less consistent under Islamic rule is the fact that bureaucrats will be subjected to more ideological pressure than under a secular regime, perpetuating contradictory, ineffective economic policy.<sup>25</sup> The key issues in this critique are 'a cultural ideology' and 'Islamic rule'. While the Islamist modernists' programme is founded upon a cultural base it differs from that discussed by Richards and Waterbury in that it includes all elements of Egyptian cultural influence, including secularists and Christians and is therefore not intended to support an exclusively Islamic politics. This is no guarantee of sound economics, but does indicate that a freer hand may be extended to professional economists; the key determinant in the development of Islamist modernist economic policies is thus not the demands of religious ideology, but the pragmatic considerations of coalition building.

Against the prevailing political background in Egypt and the region, the predicted economic mismanagement under Islamic activist influence may not be that significant politically in the short term. Such mismanagement is widespread, and has been for decades, under the existing regimes. Under personal-authoritarian rule, buying support is more important to regime survival than economic efficiency or growth. While an Islamist government, or a coalition with a significant Islamist element, may be less repressive than the existing regimes, it will almost certainly continue to practice in government the patronage politics it learnt to use in opposition. In view of the current and projected regional pressures highlighted in the UN Arab Human Development Report for 2002,<sup>26</sup> it is conceivable that Islamist economic practice will do nothing to slow the progressive economic decline of the Middle East. This is a well-known precipitant of radical sympathy, and even if any future centrist coalition extends more professional freedom to economists than authoritarian regimes have done, an overnight transformation will not occur. A challenge facing the moderates in Egypt is thus the construction of policies that address the economic woes of their country in a manner designed to preserve internal stability. Their resistance to an economic alignment with their national superpower sponsor may be the first casualty of the test of reality imposed by political power.

### **THE FUTURE OF MODERATE ISLAMIST POLITICS IN THE WIDER MIDDLE EAST**

Having established that the future of the moderate Islamist movement in Egypt hinges on membership of a broader coalition pursuing democratic ideals, the question arises of whether such a course of action is applicable in the wider region. Hamzawy argues that the

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 357.

<sup>26</sup> UN AHDR 2002 (Note13) pp4-5; 143-163; among them population growth, rising inflation and unemployment, scarcity of water and increasing consumption of other natural resources.

new pragmatism of modernist Islamists creates an atmosphere of relative openness to US and European policies in the Arab world and an initial willingness to engage Western countries less ideologically. He suggests the possibility of Islamists becoming key players in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Yemen amid processes of substantial political transformation cannot be ruled out. This apparent willingness of Islamic modernists to develop ties with the US and Europe should not be misconstrued as trust however; doubts about Western objectives in the Arab world remain deep across the entire Islamist spectrum.<sup>27</sup> Despite calming statements from the Brotherhood General Guide, Mohammed Akef, in which he indicated the movement would respect extant treaties signed by the Egyptian government, including the peace agreement with Israel, the Brotherhood still assumes political positions and uses rhetoric hostile to the US and Israel.<sup>28</sup>

It is apparent from the study of Egypt that the problems the Islamic activists made for themselves were compounded by the institutional shortcomings of the state, the iron grip of personal-authoritarian rule, and wider regional and international influences. A study of the wider Middle East reveals a political picture that is depressingly similar, thus suggesting that potential solutions to the Egyptian situation may also apply elsewhere if adapted to local circumstances. Generally, while some apparent structural concessions to democracy have been made, none of them generate political openings that threaten the power of the incumbent regime. It has been suggested that the passage of time or the assumption of power by younger generations of Arab leaders may bring about more democratic systems of governance; this is not evident so far. Bashir Assad's Syria offers an example of a leader constrained by vested interests within an autocratic regime in order to protect his own power. While tentative economic reform has taken place, this is not matched with political pluralism. Two of the brightest hopes for democratization, King Mohammed VI of Morocco and King Abdullah II of Jordan, have proved reluctant to surrender the historical reliance on Islamic legitimacy that has always preserved the power of the Monarchy. In Morocco, Islamist opposition parties at odds with royal policy are excluded from the institutional political process;<sup>29</sup> Jordan's emerging plurality is possibly the most advanced in the region, but does not in any way reduce or limit the power of the King.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Algeria remains locked in a stalemate between a military regime and an Islamic opposition of the kind that raises all the worst fears of an Islamic state, and while Lebanon enjoys a functioning parliamentary system, true democracy is still a long way off. Such structural shortcomings raise the question of how any transitional process can be initiated without

---

<sup>27</sup> Hamzawy (Note 10) pp 3-7.

<sup>28</sup> Brown and Hamzawy (Note 16).

<sup>29</sup> Sharp (Note 5) pp10-12.

<sup>30</sup> Kamel S Abu Jaber, 'The Democratic Process in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan' and Tom Pierre Najem, 'State Power and Democratisation in North Africa: Developments in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya' in Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel (Eds), *Democratization in the Middle East: Experiences, Struggles, Challenges* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press 2003) pp 133-134, 136-139 and pp187-190.

threatening stability. (In this context 'stability' means the avoidance of violent disruption during transition, as opposed to the concept of stability enshrined in former US foreign policy towards the region, wherein it came to mean 'no change'). Should any reform be a product of a top-down process instigated and directed by the existing regime, or a bottom-up evolution driven by opposition movements?

What is missing at present is an institutional framework in both the state and civil society by which such processes can function. Schnabel highlights the existence of an independent civil society, and a civic political culture that is receptive to change, as important steadying influences in transitional processes.<sup>31</sup> The lack of these throughout the region means that any transition will be protracted, especially as each nation possesses characteristics that will dictate the emergence of a singular form of pluralist or democratic governance to meet its own specific needs. As Tehranian argues, 'the vehicle, speed and route taken.....on the journey toward democratization are as individual as are the end results'.<sup>32</sup> Top-down democratization has yet to produce truly democratic political institutions; Schnabel illustrates the discontinuity between political democratization and social and economic democratization responsible for this.<sup>33</sup> Despite these problems, there is broad agreement that a gradual, controlled process of democratization is required, and that one implemented from the top down is therefore necessary. The advantage of top-down approaches to democratization is that they can, if managed correctly, prevent reversion to violence and disruption. This necessarily limits public participation, and may require recourse to undemocratic measures in order to contain those who seek to undermine the transitional process, but may also lead to a more enduring democratic system. Top-down approaches have been tried - Egypt is a prime example - but what has been provided through them is nothing more than sham democracy with no redistribution of power. Egypt has also illustrated that top-down attempts can be jeopardised by a political culture that is not fully developed in society at large - reform championed by the regime alone is greeted with popular suspicion in a political atmosphere typified by cynicism and exclusivity. However, even such mechanisms may serve a purpose; Schnabel suggests that a period of top-down rule as part of the democratization process may balance and stabilize the effects of political, economic and cultural reforms.<sup>34</sup> Gradual, top-down processes do risk reversal as a result of their very gradualism; however, the influence of anti-democratic radical movements can be effectively countered by processes of economic development, run in parallel with those of democratization - if material living standards are improving, support for extreme movements usually suffers as a consequence. The Algerian experience

---

<sup>31</sup> Albrecht Schnabel, 'A Rough Journey: Nascent Democratization in the Middle East', in Amin Saikal and Albrecht Schnabel (Eds), *Democratization in the Middle East: Experiences, Struggles, Challenges* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press 2003) p2.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in *Ibid* p2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* p12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* p14.

shows that the stability of the state must take priority during any democratic transition and that rapid political democratization alone can be disastrous. Priority should be given to permitting other political forces to develop a meaningful and independent social presence so that a credible number of options become available to society.

The more optimistic commentators do believe that democratization is possible in the region, and, provided such optimism is tempered with a realistic assessment of the time and effort such a process will consume, this is not an unreasonable viewpoint. There are, however, a series of obstacles to be overcome. Piecemeal attempts at democratization through political liberalization, without any surrender of power or the development of civil society, will hinder the process rather than encourage it, and will stimulate the use of violence in the repertoires of contention of both sides of the regime/opposition divide. Islamic fundamentalism must be sidelined from political debate if the clash between Western and regional values and norms is to be resolved satisfactorily; this will not be straightforward while Old Islamist support remains an indispensable component of any transitional coalition. Additionally, great power interference must be replaced by policies that consider regional interests in a long-term perspective alongside those of the US. The two need not be mutually exclusive, and if American efforts at promoting democracy are to be taken seriously, such a remoulding of policy is essential.

What does the Egyptian experience have to offer that may be of utility in the regional development of democracy? Primarily, the Islamist modernist movement typifies more realistic, pragmatic political thinking defined by 21<sup>st</sup> Century realities. It's inclusive, civilizational project offers a means to encourage the cultural aspects of democratization, and it recognises that any split between the Islamic foundations of society, and the majority of the members of it, is an entirely counterproductive proposition. However, the New Islamist emphasis on thorough and expert interpretation of Islam in a modern context offers the potential to assuage traditional discomfort with the concept of democracy. This is not to suggest that Islamist modernist politics is the cure for all ills. Their economic thinking in particular needs to be elaborated into real policies; however, their recognition of modern influences suggests that they will seek the guidance of professional economists in formulating, and directing, such policy. This is of signal importance, as economic development must be pursued in parallel with political democratization in an attempt to generate the most fertile medium possible in which to nurture progress. The willingness of the Islamist modernists to acknowledge Western expertise in this area, and lack of reservation about using such expertise within an Islamic framework of social justice, does, however, offer more hope than outdated communist practice, Islamic fundamentalist utopianism or the existing conflict between the demands of patronage and economic development. The importance of a sound economy as a prop of the democratization process may expose a weakness of the modernists programme - their insistence on the

severance of economic links with the US. In Egypt, US financial aid is of too great a magnitude to be ignored. Moreover, given the need for a reassessment of US regional policy, there exists perhaps more room for international interest bargaining than was the case previously. As part of a 'compliance for security' arrangement, it is conceivable that the US would perceive benefit in providing the economic cement for the structural stability needed in the political environment to facilitate lasting change.

All the same, at a time when Arab democratization is attracting more emphasis than at any time before, Western policy must still be extremely carefully framed. It should not endorse current inaction, but the US in particular should not attempt to dictate the pace and content of any reform to, or worse still seek to by-pass, the Egyptian government. Such a course of action would aggravate the regime 'legitimacy deficit', subvert any ability to implement bold reform measures, and associate genuine reformers with foreign intervention.<sup>35</sup> The legacy of current US policy, evidenced by the overt anti-American posture of Arab pro-democracy movements such as *Kifaya* and *Al-Ghad*, and the prominence of anti-American framing in the recent perceptible hardening of traditional Islamist attitudes in general, indicates that change is long overdue. The Islamist modernists, therefore, would be better served by casting their policy towards the US in the light of US policy towards them; there is no doubt, at the level of individual bilateral transactions, who has the most to gain. This is not suggested as a permanent arrangement, but as an integral part of the transitional process that should not be discarded in favour of cultivating domestic popular support. A successful accommodation of this kind in Egypt may well pave the way for wider acceptance of realistic international politics, and recognition of the continuing importance of US interests in the Middle East.

In the face of so many challenges, where should any coalition attempt to focus its efforts? Surprisingly, Nasser's social contract may offer an idea. According to Hinnebusch, Nasser's 'populist coalition', based on the social contract and his charismatic leadership, 'included the majority of the populace'<sup>36</sup> and the ability to do so now would be of inestimable advantage to the modernist movement. Despite its deficiencies, the social contract nonetheless offers an instructive insight to the Egyptian political psyche that may be of relevance if the turbulence of any transition to democracy is to be negotiated successfully. If a moderate, democratic, inclusive Muslim politics is to gain support and acceptance, the presence of a respected, well-known charismatic leader to advocate such a programme would be a huge advantage. Despite its intellectual status, the New Islamist movement has included influential people of both religious and secular professional backgrounds who

---

<sup>35</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity' *Middle East and North Africa Briefing* 20 April 2004 p3.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond A Hinnebusch Jr, *Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers 1988) p29.

have attracted wide national attention as part of their efforts to disseminate their ideas, and can command impressive attendances at public meetings. Also, many original members of the Wasat group were considered to be rising stars of the new generation of Muslim Brotherhood activists before they became part of the Wasat initiative; they too cannot be without ability in this respect. A starting point for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century social contract with political relevance and strong popular appeal would be the educational programme of the New Islamists. This would serve many mutually reinforcing purposes, leading to a long-term and constructive re-alignment of political and social thinking. It should prove far more attractive than the fundamentalist concept of an Islamic state governed by *Shari'a*, and is not likely to prove objectionable to secular opposition groups. The religious sensitivities of the fundamentalists could be soothed by the implementation of an agreed curriculum including Islamic teaching. Indeed, if the crisis of theology apparent in Islam at present (where literalist, ultra orthodox Islam is gaining the upper hand) is to be overcome, then the obstacles to intellectual and theological advancement posed by authoritarian government and the self-interest of the *ulema* must be circumvented.<sup>37</sup> A balanced educational programme can only contribute positively to any initiative to do so. This element of the New Islamist project perhaps offers a real opportunity to reconcile US and Arab differences over US regional policy, through its potential within the SAVE initiative.

However, proponents of a modern social contract should note above all else the dangers associated with any retreat from it; it must therefore be funded adequately for a realistic period of time to allow stability following transition - and for that reason alone, the New Islamist relationship with the US, and the importance of the economic aid it delivers, must be reconsidered. If the intent of their programme is the stated outcome of enduring societal change, then the realities of international relations could be included as part of it. This is not to suggest such an international alignment will be admired, but it may at least be understood. In the longer term, only sound economic and social policies will enhance the future of democratic politics and marginalize radical discourse, and these are essential precursors to any reduced dependency on foreign aid. Perhaps a source of partial funding may arise from a reduction in government spending on the coercive security apparatus; this would also send a powerful message to the electorate that democracy is associated with institutional changes of measurable benefit to them.

In their choice of routes towards democracy, if they decide to take one at all, the states of the Middle East have no example to follow from among their own. Egypt could fill that role if the incumbent regime can be persuaded to initiate such a process. This is perhaps not as unlikely as it may initially seem. Despite wishing to be seen as an ally of the US against terrorism, which breeds anti-democratic initiatives, Egypt also needs to project a

---

<sup>37</sup> Murphy (Note 20) pp 276-279.

favourable image abroad, must respond to US and European pressures for real democratization as opposed to piecemeal liberalization, and must resolve pre-existing socio-economic pressures from before September 2001.<sup>38</sup> This suggests some change may have to occur, despite government rejection of 'outside interference'. If such an eventuality does arise, then the Islamist coalition within a democratic centrist coalition proposed in this thesis offers a model of wide regional utility. It harbours the potential to accommodate and balance ethnic, religious, class and political differences within a framework of Islamic cultural commonality that is present in no other alternative - indeed, after half a century of repressive regional politics it is questionable that viable alternatives exist at all. It embraces modernity, and envisions an educational foundation of pivotal importance to long-term socio-political evolution that has been absent from any programme before it. In short, it offers the only genuinely conceivable route to sustainable democratization; it is far from free of hazards or obstacles, and it will be long and tortuous, but if this road is taken it should start from Egypt, and should be navigated using the vehicle of the Islamic/centrist coalition. This inclusive, reconciliatory solution is seen as idealistic by some and it is possible that less complete solutions may materialise; Schnabel offers the example of the Jordanian monarchy allowing a controlled expression of the Islamist voice, leading to its deflation and internal disintegration.<sup>39</sup> He also suggests co-operation between secular groups may reduce the influence of the Islamists and thereby induce them to interest bargaining. This is unlikely, given the fragmentation and weakness of opposition groups, which tend to lead them into short-lived alliances of convenience with different partners. So while the solution offered by the Islamic/centrist coalition may well be idealistic, it is no less realistic than other possibilities.

Ultimately, this is where the future of Moderate Islam lies. If the movement is to be judged on the basis of its past ability to shape Egyptian government policy, to secure institutional representation and to force political opening, it cannot justifiably be considered a political force for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, if the enduring democratic commitment, realistic policies and inclusive, cooperative stance of the contemporary movement are considered in the context of the democratic groundswell slowly gathering momentum in the region, it has real potential to act as the foundation of a genuinely participatory political system in Egypt.

---

<sup>38</sup> Hawthorne (Note 14) pp7-8.

<sup>39</sup> Schnabel (Note 31) p38.

## CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

### Violent Confrontation, Political Stalemate, Economic Decline

The Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak regimes have consecutively reinforced a largely unchanging system of undemocratic, personal-authoritarian rule since 1952. Egypt is ruled by an unaccountable elite that subscribes only to the ideology of patronage, and practices social and economic policies determined by the need to preserve that rule. Despite variations in strategies adopted by individual Presidents, the regime/Islamic activist dynamic has been one of effective and frequently brutal regime repression, underpinned by ideological hegemony and lasting class and patronage relationships, countered by Islamist violence, anti-regime and anti-US framing, and semi-covert mobilization activity. Opposition movements, including the Islamists, have had no more a coherent ideology than the regimes, and all the individual, group and institutional failings of the state and its servants have been replicated among them. Political access via formal or informal political opportunity structures remains denied to anyone except the ruling NDP. Religious fundamentalism has proven abstract and unappealing to large segments of the Egyptian populace and has become closely associated with violent extremist excess; a corrupt thread ran through mainstream Islamist politics, and combined with patronage, internal disunity and inflexible leadership, raised questions about the real ability of the Islamists to bring beneficial change. Secular political parties are similarly weak and divided, serving no demonstrable purpose in opposition. Gathering demographic and economic pressures lend increasing urgency to the need for reform, and support for democratic transition strengthens despite the lack of political representation and a genuinely independent civil society. However, this pressure for change may be interpreted as no more than a 'no' vote in many cases, given the lack of realistic projects on offer from many opposition groups. Crucially, democratisation requires organized constituencies of activists from lower and middle classes to bring pressure for change, and the few that exist at present in Egypt are harassed and obstructed at every turn.

Egyptian politics has emerged from destructive conflict into entrenched stalemate, with reversion to the former state an enduring possibility. The unpredictable and fluctuating demands of patronage have exerted a disruptive influence upon the Egyptian economy - regimes have steered it from crisis to crisis, and have survived purely because undemocratic elites are less susceptible to the political consequences of economic mismanagement than are democratic governments. Even US support has not halted a steady economic decline that has been one of the principal causes of mass disaffection. This domestic situation serves as a template, in some respects, for the Arab Middle East as a whole; any postulated solution to it may therefore be relevant elsewhere in the region.

## The Failure of the Security Solution

The future of moderate Islamic politics is inextricably linked to the emergence of democracy, or at the very least pluralist transitional politics. Problematically, democracy exists only as a concept before it becomes a reality, and in the Middle East at large it is a concept that, at best, is simply obscure to large numbers of people, and at worst is considered 'Western' and consequently greeted with open hostility. If democracy does not take hold, then personal-authoritarian rule will most likely persist until a crisis forces a transfer of power in entirely unsatisfactory circumstances. The state attitude to the Islamists is encapsulated in a policy based upon security rather than dialogue. The Islamists remain closely monitored and contained; despite exploiting the popular revival of personal Islamic practice to achieve an Islamization of the sociopolitical space, the modernists show little ability to marshal a politically meaningful constituency behind their modern and relevant political project, while the Old Islamist moderates are unable to overcome internal division and increasing indifference towards their utopian vision of an Islamic state. This leaves the radicals, their groups fragmented by the regime and forced to adopt an overt political path that meets with even more suspicion than that of their moderate counterparts. The military defeat of the radicals gave the Egyptian government a great opportunity to steer Egyptian politics in a positive direction and also offered the Islamists the chance to embrace modern political reality. The at least partial failure to do both is fuelling a hardening of Islamist dogma and anti-Western attitudes, leading discontents into international *jihadi* activity, and may also be facilitating a local reversion to extremism. Increasing regional interest in democratisation is also reflected in Egypt, but the political elite remains to be persuaded of the benefits democracy may bring them.

Egypt's superpower sponsor may have a significant role to play in any process to do so, and the process itself may prove to be an important stimulus for any reform of US foreign policy towards the region at large, the fundamental precepts of which must incorporate a more complete understanding of the contextual nature of democracy itself. Failure to recognise that Muslim Arab interpretations of democracy are very different to that of the US State Department will rapidly negate the genuinely democratic aims from which the policy is derived. The prospect of a return to radical Islamist outrage is viewed as too damaging to contemplate by most political actors, but this does not indicate a unanimous acceptance of an ideological, political and economic programme to prevent it. The regime may conceivably interpret past victories against the radicals as an indicator of future potential, and thus be tempted to enter into a conflict similar to that of the mid-1990s. However, demographic and economic trends in combination may work against them to a greater degree than they did then, and the burden of such an extensive security and coercive apparatus could prove unsustainable if US financial aid comes to be distributed on a more conditional basis as part of a revised foreign policy agenda. It is also possible that the

Mubarak regime is playing a straightforward waiting game, recognising that Islamist politics presently exploits a popular religious revival. Islamist legitimacy stems from mass adherence to Islam, and if the revival wanes, the regime perhaps assumes that support for the Islamists will decline accordingly. Thus, in the absence of any democratic initiative, the more convulsive transfer of power alluded to above would be a likely outcome. Ultimately, the security solution is not a solution at all; what then, are the realistic alternatives?

### **The Potential of the Cultural and Educational Solution**

The US State Department's proposed SAVE project, and the educational element of Egyptian Islamist modernists' political programme, extend in combination the opportunity to facilitate democratic transition, encourage the development of civil society and, at least partially, to meet US foreign policy aims. By pursuing a long-term objective in realistic, achievable stages, the US could undermine radical Islamist ideology through educational reform in Egypt, a process of benefit to regime and populace alike. If implemented ostensibly by the regime, such reform would not directly associate the Islamist modernists with the US, avoiding damaging political consequences for them in Egyptian politics. This educational project will necessitate substantial investment, which could also be used to bring progress towards democratisation as it will involve a careful re-assessment of US aid priorities, a bonus of which may be more effective use of that aid to develop civil society within Egypt. The inclusion of some elements of New Islamist thought in a projected wider reform of US foreign policy that may bring beneficial change to Egyptian politics, may also attract more mainstream political support for the New Islamists and hence provide continuity with a future social-democratic coalition. A transitional coalition government in Egypt, even one less prepared to accommodate US wishes than the Mubarak regime, is considered by the US administration to be a risk worth taking in order to defeat violent radicalism by addressing the underlying causes of it.

### **Muslim Democracy and Democratic Coalition Politics**

Any democratic political movement in Egypt will probably have to exist in alliance with a locally acceptable political entity, secular or religious, in order to overcome Western association and attract broad support. Socialism may have some potential to resolve the many inequities of Egyptian life, but it too suffers from being identified with Western political systems and the record of ingrained weakness of the socialist parties does not suggest this is a realistic outcome. The Islamists are the only grouping that enjoys wide cultural coherence with the majority of the populace, but they have yet to resolve the ideological dichotomy surrounding the relative importance of a modernist Muslim democracy or a fundamentalist Islamic state. This is the most immediate challenge to a

truly viable Muslim democratic movement, and the nature and role of *Shari'a* in a modern polity require long overdue definition in order to defeat it. The definition of a distinctively Muslim democracy will have to be formulated around a framework of *Shari'a* if it is to be authentic enough to satisfy the moderate Old Islamist camp and large segments of the population; at the same time, it must be practical enough to function politically amid the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Despite increasingly symbolic pursuit of *Shari'a* implementation by the moderates, it remains a powerful manifestation of Muslim identity; it will not be abandoned, so it will have to be made to function in a modern democratic context. As there is nothing in Islamic scripture that is antithetical to democracy, even secular democracy, and *Shari'a* is a human, not divine, construct, then definitively Islamic underpinnings of Muslim democracy could come from an embrace of social justice that many Muslims believe to be largely absent from Western liberal, capitalist, democratic practice. Bridging this ideological chasm will be an enormous undertaking. It is one that cannot be avoided if moderate Islamic politics is to play any influential role in the future of Egypt and the Middle East; radical Islam and personal-authoritarian rule have in combination produced a mutually-destructive politics of violence and repression. If a coalition of Old Islamist moderates and Islamist modernists is ultimately possible, this does not address the broad concerns that many have about a state that is anything other than secular in nature. Even the dilution of traditional Islamic fixations with piety by New Islamist economic and democratic thinking is unlikely to convince entirely; something more is needed.

A wider democratic coalition, including secular parties, could assuage fears about an overly Islamic influence in any transitional government, and bring stability to the interest-bargaining process that would be a part of the transition itself. It would provide important lessons to the Islamists about the necessity of compromise in democratic politics, and would lessen the likelihood of any single group dominating the transitional process. This represents the most pragmatic and workable manifestation of Islamist political thinking to date; it comes, however, without mainstream support. This is why clarification of the content and role of *Shari'a* in Muslim democracy is so important if the mobilizational draw of the Old Islamist moderates is to be integrated with the avant-garde political thinking of the Islamist modernists.

Government policies towards the Muslim Brotherhood have progressively established the practice of channelling social discontent towards a movement that cannot bring political change. Even to the Mubarak regime, the perils of limiting Islamist representation to the banned Muslim Brotherhood, and thus by default also to violent *jihadi* groups, must be apparent. Denial of political party status to the Wasat NGO has deprived the most liberal and forward-looking expression of Egyptian Islamic activism of a political outlet, prolonging this impasse. If political progress is to be achieved, and the recourse to radicalism

stemmed, then Islamist modernists must be exposed to the realities of democratic politics in a coalition environment. They will sink or swim, giving the truest indication of competence on their part and receptivity to their policies on the part of the masses. This in turn will influence directly the possibility, or lack of, of spreading democratic transition in the Islamic societies of the Middle East while seeking to protect and include the many and diverse minority groups that exist within them.

Moderate Islam failed, politically, to provide 'the solution' in that it was unable to exert sufficient pressure on the regime to force significant change of policy or to gain access to the formal political system, and the persistent lack of any clear ideology, political project or realistic policies made this failure all the more likely. In trying to balance political pragmatism with Islamic purity they achieved neither, strengthening public doubt about their commitment to both democratic politics and an Islamic state. It would be unreasonable to suggest that this means the moderate Islamists achieved nothing since 1952, however. They helped to bring about a process of Islamization of the sociopolitical space, even allowing for the fact that this process was to some extent politically expedient to the regime. Of greater and more enduring significance is the fact that the moderate Islamist movement ultimately proved receptive and adaptable, recognising its own limitations within the authoritarian environment, and initiated change through the emergence of the modernist elements. They seek, to varying degrees to avoid the dichotomy between religious purity and political pragmatism by taking a civilizational approach to the construction of a distinctive Muslim democracy that will emphasise the commitment to democratization and pluralist participation they have maintained throughout years of repression and exclusion.

### **Regional Prospects**

Egypt can be seen as the test case in the evolution of Muslim democracy; despite promising developments in countries like Jordan, the main regional Islamic opposition groups are derivatives of the Old Islamist movement and have yet to develop programmes as modern and liberal in outlook as that of the Egyptian Islamist modernists. Moreover, the Mubarak regime is as entrenched as any in the region, and any process by which it is brought to a negotiated transition must offer great utility elsewhere in the Middle East. This does not ignore the fact that national factors will play a significant part in the evolution of democracy throughout the region, but illustrates the primacy of Islam over nationalism as a belief system, and the commonality of Arab Islamic historical and cultural influences. Democracy will no doubt attract different interpretations in different states, but this is an outcome no different to that seen in Europe throughout the last century, for instance.

### **The Future Utility of Moderate Islam**

Moderate Islam therefore cannot yet be described as an independent mainstream political force, but offers potential to act as a catalyst for democratic change and development as part of a wider, balanced and inclusive political movement. That potential could be enhanced by a revised US regional policy, which acknowledges the primacy that inertia has enjoyed over democracy in that policy in the past. The US Secretary of State has very recently established a team to develop a strategy for US outreach to moderate Muslim groups as part of the evolving SAVE initiative. This proposal could provide the economic means and political opportunity to implement in Egypt an interim educational programme championed by the New Islamists. If implemented, this suggested arrangement could engage the Islamist modernists in a graduated progression to political reform of benefit to Egypt, the US and the Middle East region and elevate the domestic political profile of the modernists to the mainstream. This would also provide continuity in their political development while preserving a definitive Muslim character in their activities, at the same time serving US security interests in Egypt. However, the internal divisions and ideological stalemate evident at present in the Islamist movement must be overcome, and the pursuit of an inclusive Muslim democracy, as opposed to an exclusive Islamic state, must be an agreed objective. If agreement is not reached, radicalism still lurks just below the surface of regional politics; economic stagnation, population growth and social injustice could easily propel it into view again, signalling for certain the loss of the most significant opportunity for Muslim democratic politics in the last half century.