Feature Paper:

The Exploitation of the Misperceived Westernized Views of French-African Colonial Troops during the First World War

Karim Iskander

Book Review

The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon, Paris, Francois Maspero, 1961
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Regime Types and Civil Wars in the aftermath of the Arab Spring

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Message from the Editor

It is our great pleasure to have served as the co-editors of Khamasin, the Journal of the Department of Political Science at the American University in Cairo. This edition of the Journal builds on our previous publications and speaks to our students’ interests in international politics and state-society relations. Having lived through a decade filled with dichotomies ranging from uprisings to civil wars in the region, a re-evaluation of Western colonial legacies in the South and a rise of new international networks promoting gender equality and women empowerment worldwide, our students and in particular the authors of this issue, have engaged in these international debates with interesting insights either through articles, book reviews or film reviews. During the process of this issue’s publication, the Israeli government has once again used force against peaceful worshipers in al-Aqsa mosque while simultaneously displacing Palestinians from their homes. In solidarity with Palestinian People and their struggle against colonialism, we have decided to adopt a picture manifesting the Palestinian struggle.

The authors for this issue, like the previous issue have completed their submissions under difficult circumstances of lockdown, online teaching and an increasing tide of the Covid-19 pandemic with its associated grief and loss, which touched each and every one of our community. To their commitment and hard work during the writing and peer-review process we are sincerely grateful. We are also thankful to all our colleagues who accepted to review these papers and for their insightful comments, which helped bring these papers to light. We are also grateful to our Chair whose commitment to Khamasin is the reason behind the continued publication of the journal, and to the Department of Political Science for their administrative support in publishing this edition of Khamasin.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nadine Sika and Dr. Maye Kassim
Co-Editors, May 2021
The Exploitation of the Misperceived Westernized Views of French-African Colonial Troops during the First World War

By: Karim Iskander

Many relations between global hegemons and their respective colonial regions have been relations that entailed a wide array of abusive forms of exploitation, whether to the economic and natural resources of the country or the populations. Trotsky, followed by Lawson and Buzan, named such relations “uneven and combined development” where both the global hegemons and their subordinate regions develop. However, the development of both is incomparable and the resources and necessities required for the further development of the global powers are constantly supplied by the subordinate regions ¹. Such exploitation is especially highlighted in events where the resources of the subordinate regions are integral for the development and modernization of the global hegemons. Of these events, the First World War is one of the most prominent.

The success and victory of the European countries fighting in the First World War rested largely on the economic and military resources supplied by their colonies throughout the war. However, one of the most important forms of exploitation that is often largely overlooked is the manner in which race was exploited as a lens for viewing colonial populations as a lower form of human. This paper argues that the French Empire exploited and abused French-African populations and used the concept of race as a justification for using colonized African bodies on the front line of the war.

In attempting to grasp this concept of the exploitation, it is first pivotal to understand the reasons that led to it in the first place. Africans were seen as a lower form of life and an unevolved human species that was inferior to the white European male. The idea that the Africans were seen as an inferior species, one of lower intelligence, civilization and even going as far as being physically inferior, not only allowed for the colonization and the abuse of the African population, but also engendered a sense of expendability of the African life. Hence, due to the perceived lower status and importance of African life, the use of French-African soldiers and the abuse of the French African populations were seen as normal and, in some cases, integral for the preservation of the more valuable European life.

The concept of the exploitation of the French-African troops based on their lower racial status resulted in a paradoxical conflict amongst the leaders of the French army. While the lower status of the race of the French-Africans was the reason said race was exploited and abused against the French-African populations, such a status was also the very same reason the French military authorities were hesitant when contemplating the integration of French-African troops into the French army during the First World War. The lower racial status of the French-Africans signified their expendability and dispensability as troops; nevertheless, it also symbolized their savagery and underdevelopment as a population and a race. French military authorities displayed concerns over the French-African’s capability of learning the French lexicon and communicating with other French troops within the army as well as their potential to attain the military and combat skills that would enable them to serve the French army. All such concerns over the colonial troops’ abilities were attributed to their race and their lower racial status. Such concerns could be ascribed to social Darwinism where it was commonly accepted that colonial populations, such as the Africans, were intellectually underdeveloped and were lacking in matters of reason and understanding. In overcoming such a dilemma, the French military authorities came to the solution that they would recruit specific races of the French African colonies that they considered as “the most advanced among

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the ‘primitive’ races.”

Nevertheless, concerns about the integration of French African soldiers into the army were set aside when faced with the dire need for soldiers rendered their race insignificant; the French authorities were left with little alternatives but the recruitment and the deployment of French colonial troops due to the increased casualties of French and metropolitan troops. The recruitment of French-African troops for the purpose of minimizing the French casualties highlights the reduced value that the French accredited to the African race. The French authorities were unfazed by the prospect of the French African casualties or the death of the French-African troops. This not only signified the worthlessness of the African race in the eyes of the French authorities but places the value of the African race in comparison with the more important European race where the damage inflicted onto the French battalions of the army was an area of concern for the French authorities while the death of the French-African troops was barely considered a necessary sacrifice that was integral for victory in war.

The expendability of French-African soldiers in comparison with the value placed on the metropolitan French soldiers during the First World War is best emphasized by the position to which the colonial troops were assigned in the French army. Since critical damage was inflicted to the metropolitan French battalions and with the increasing levels of casualties from the French troops, the French military authorities were pressured to recruit and use the French-African populations as human shields that would protect the French troops on the front lines. This is especially emphasized in the words of the French colonel Petitdemange when in one of his letters to the French military authorities he said that “African soldiers, in order to save white lives, should be used more intensely.” The significance of such a quotation lies in the racist exploitation of the African life and again focuses on the notion that the white life mattered most in comparison with the African. One of the common terms used in the literature regarding the use of colonial troops in the First World War is “Cannon Fodders.” The term defines a dispensable group of soldiers that act as a primary sacrificial defense line in the face of enemy fire. The French African soldiers acted as cannon fodder so that metropolitan troops are given the opportunity to gain territorial advantage without risking their lives. Simply put, the perceived lower racial status of the French-African colonial troops placed them in a position where they were used as sacrificial lambs in order to provide protection and a line of defense to the racially superior French metropolitan troops.

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
troops.

Finally, the racial abuse of the French-African populations within the French army is signified by the inequality of opportunity for survival and living conditions during the world war. Most of the newly arrived as well as veteran French African soldiers suffered under the harsh condition of the camps to which they were assigned to and had to endure precarious conditions such as inhumane environments and poor levels of sanitation. The French military authorities deployed the French African troops in colder and more inhumane conditions with full knowledge of the Africans’ susceptibility to diseases, especially in the cold European weather. Many of the French African troops not only were lost to the battles of the French army but were casualties of the cold weather, to which the colonial troops had not acclimatized, and the foreign diseases that accompanied it. The French authorities placed the French African colonial troops at a disadvantage in comparison with the French metropolitan soldiers when it came to the supplies and weaponry that were often malfunctioning, such as those of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais in the Neville offensive. The testimony of one of the French African soldiers highlights this point by stating that the troops had been “demoralized” due to the lack of fundamental supplies. While the soldier had not further explained what he meant by the demoralization of the colonial troops, considering the history of inhumane and brutal treatment of the colonial population, a vague image of the animalistic treatment that the colonial troops endured could be drawn. Of such supplies crises, one of the most notable was the food crisis that France experienced between 1917 and 1918 that inflicted more damage upon the colonial troops, who were cut off by the French military authorities in order to conserve enough supplies for their European counterparts. The food crisis did not only affect the colonial troops but had influenced the colonial subjects in the French African colonies where, in order to preserve its state and empire, France depleted all food storages in its North African colonies causing famines such as those in Algeria and Tunisia in 1917 and 1918 respectively.

The exploitation of the Africans by the French army is not only limited to the devaluation of the worth of the African life in comparison to that of the European and the expendability of the African soldier in order to save the French. Exploitation assumed another form during the First World War in which certain characteristics and attributes of the African race were seen as an integral part of the war and were valued in the French-African soldiers by the French authorities.

During the time of the First World

14 Dean, William T. “The French Colonial Army.”
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 485.
War, the concept of the bestiality and the quasi-animalistic nature of the African races was given the prominence and validity of scientific truths. The African population was thought to be the missing link that tied man to his previous undeveloped primal form as an ape.19 This link of man to nature and his intellectual underdevelopment has also been correlated with a man’s tendency and propensity towards violence and brutality. It is important to note that Africans where specifically likened to certain animals, apes. Such a correlation between man and primate is often used to symbolize violent and savage behavior. 20 The prevailing belief that the African population was naturally endowed with a violent temperament built a racial preconception in the minds of the French military authorities that the French African colonial troops were better fitted for battle than the French metropolitan troops; and thus were an integral part of the French military. 21

However, the violence of Africans was not only attributed to their bestial and animalistic nature. The classification of the civilizations of the world often placed great emphasis on the religion of the race. Pagan and non-Christian religions were often correlated with the uncivilized races of humans.22 Hence, the notion of religion was racialized where non-Christian races were thought of as uncivilized and undeveloped races. This is especially important when the Islamic religion is taken into consideration. The French worldview of Islamic nations and races was one of fanaticism, uncivility and violence.23 For the French military authorities, this was considered a military advantage since it places many of the Islamic French colonial populations, such as Algeria and Morocco, under the preconception of violent, savage soldiers giving France an upper hand in its battles during the First World War. It also follows closely to other theories about the violence of French-African troops; the coupling of the bestiality of the African population with the fanaticism and violence of Islamic African populations rendered the French-African soldier a pivotal aspect of the French colonial army. 24

Along with the mistaken perception of the innate violence of the African troops, other misconceptions of the African race were their resilience to harsh weather conditions seeing as that the environment in which they live present a greater challenge for survival. These misconceptions also included the underdevelopment of their nervous system which made them immaculate as cold-blooded killers that would not hesitate in the face of violence and brutality; it was believed that the cumulative effect of the harsh weather environment and the

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constant struggle for survival has transformed Africa into a permanent battlefield to which the Africans had adapted by becoming natural soldiers. 25

With such perverted misconceptions in mind, the French-African troops represented the perfect soldiers for the French military authorities. One of the most notable consequences of these racial misconceptions is the role that the French-African troops occupied during the war. The French commanders placed the French-African troops as the leading soldiers on the front lines. They excused their actions claiming that the Africans were a “race of warriors”26 possessing the qualities of battle and combat that allowed them to survive battles and emerge victorious. A fundamentally important term that is ubiquitous in the literature describing the role of the colonial troops is “shock troops.” The term is defined as troops that are used as spearheads for perilous military operations.27 The perceived violence and brutality of the French African soldiers rendered them as the perfect example of shock troops. 28 Seeing them as the perfect assault battalions, the French commanders were encouraged to deploy the French African troops in dangerous assault missions that the ordinary French troops would not be able to succeed in. 29 Hence the French African battalions were deployed before large French units acting as spearheads in both the battle of St. Mihiel in 1918 and the battle against Villers-Cotteret in 1914.30 One of the severe repercussions of having the prevailing reputation of being violent “shock troops” is that deployment in offensive mission that were considered dangerous positioned the French-African troops in jeopardizing positions that often increased their casualties at disproportionate rates. 31

However, the use of the racial misconception of the savage nature of the French-African troops was not only limited to deployment of colonial soldiers as shock troops but was also utilized as an abstract weapon that struck down enemy morale, especially that of the German troops.32 The violent reputation of the French-African troop was integrated with wartime propaganda to induce a sense of fear amongst the German soldiers; stories that circulated among the German enemy lines about the Senegalese soldiers that returned victoriously with “pocketful of white men’s ears”33 created an image of a brutal, savage African soldier that gave rise to terror to the point that the German soldiers had developed an irrational fear of the French-African troops. 34 Thus, the French military authorities did not hesitate to manipulate such a violent reputation of the French African troops and even further exploited the racial view of the colonial troops in German wartime propaganda to ensure

28 Dean, William T. “The French Colonial Army and the Great War.”
29 Ginio, Ruth. “French Officers,” 64.
31 Ginio, Ruth. “French Officers,” 64.
that said fear was spread between the German military ranks.  

Nevertheless, the racial exploitation of such violent reputation of the French-African troops is flawed with more than a single paradox that highlight its inadequacy. Of these, it is important to emphasize that war is a violent activity that entails the savagery and brutality of soldiers.  

Thus, it seems contradictory to the concepts of warfare and combat to label a soldier as violent since a peaceful soldier would seem to be out of place in a setting of war. It is also important to give significance to the claim made by French authorities that the integration of African colonial troops into the French military was considered the pinnacle of the success of their civilizing mission in Africa while, on the other hand, the savagery and barbarism of the African populations from which the colonial troops had been recruited was seen as an important military advantage for the French army.  

This is what the paradox is about; while the French civilizing mission claimed to have aided the riddance of savagery and barbarism in its African colonies creating a new civilized territory, savagery and barbarism were an essential characteristic of their prized French-African soldiers and was one of the main reasons that they were employed into the French army. Finally, despite displaying great success in its results, the plan to use the violent imagery of the French African soldiers in order to spread fear and terror among the enemy ranks had had an adverse effect and influenced the morale of the French population itself, spreading fear and panic among the citizens. Such fear is represented by the French novelist Henri Barbusse in his war diary, Le Feu, which was based on his experience as a French soldier on the western front. He states that the Moroccan soldiers “were imposing and frighten a bit” which shows that the fear due to the savage image of the Africans was did not only reach the French populations but had had its influence on the metropolitan soldiers of the French army as well.  

Other than vouching for the French-African soldiers’ capabilities as shock troops as well as instigate a sentiment of fear and panic amongst enemy lines, the violent image of the French-African troops was exploited in a different manner within the psychological warfare between France and Germany during the First World War. The French African soldiers were used as a scapegoat unto which the horrors of war were blamed; considering the recognized violent nature of African population, blaming the French African soldiers for the uncivilized actions of war seemed as the perfect solution for the French military authorities.  

French African soldiers were held responsible for alleged atrocities committed against German soldiers such as the mutilation of corpses as well as the execution of prisoners.  

It is of extreme importance to understand why a global power, such as
France, needed a population and a race to which it can attribute its war actions and decisions and lay blame upon. During the First World War, the French military authorities were accused of crossing the boundaries of European civilization in their use of violent African populations as colonial troops. This resulted in a global criticism of the French modes of combat and warfare, most important of which were the British and American allies who had demanded explanations for the allegations and war crimes that the Germans had accused them with. Under the pressures from its military allies as well as the international community of civilized nations, the French military authorities were left with no alternative but to blame its colonial troops for their war crimes in attempt to maintain its reputation as a civilized state in contrast with the savage and brutal territories of uncivilized populations.

However, the misperceived violent image of French African soldiers was not only exploited by their French colonizers but was also abused by the opposing Germans that aimed at propagating a violent image of the French-colonial soldiers in order to weaken the publicized image of the French. The most notable instance of abusing the reputation of the French-African soldiers had been during the French occupation of Rhineland in 1918. The German officers had fabricated allegations against the French African soldiers occupying Rhineland, most notably of which is their tendency to rape white German women the image of a rapist French African soldier had become a remarkable image of German propaganda. Fear of the sexual brutality of the French African soldiers spread, not only among the German populations but among other European nations as well, resulting in a chain reaction of fear from the French African soldiers. Once again, the French had to face the pressures of the international community of nations and speak against the allegations which the Germans had fabricated. Hence giving the Germans an upper hand and an advantage over the French based upon false propaganda.

Just as the use of the French-African soldiers as shock troops based on their violent nature was flawed, so has been their use as scapegoats for the violence of the French. Paradoxicality arises when, in refuting the criticism that had been directed at it for its use of violent colonial troops, France claimed that the colonial troops did not differ in behavior from the French soldiers. This is contradictory to their initial attribution of their war crimes to the violent nature of African troops. Conflict also arises on the side of the Germans in their condemnation of the violence and “uncivilized” manner of warfare by which the French African troops battle considering the violent and inhumane weapons that the German army innovated during the First World War, such as the use of gas attacks
Finally, it is worth noting that the allegations against the savage sexuality of the French African soldiers was refuted not only by French military authorities, who had convicted only 28 cases of sexual assaults among the colonial troops, but also by the German women themselves who had asserted that the sexual relations had been consensual and often initiated by the white women themselves. General Mangin, the French commander responsible for the African colonial troops, had received a letter from a German woman of prominent status who claimed that she had been voluntarily engaged to a French-African adjutant. This shows that, once again, the reputation of French-soldiers had been unjustly abused and their race exploited for the benefits and the advantages of their European colonizers.

The exploitation of the African race, however, was not limited to the period of the First World War only, it extended further beyond it. It was a common characteristic of the European worldview to depict races of colonial territories as a child or an exotic woman. Both images incur a sense of helplessness on the part of the African races. Such an image not only persisted throughout the First World War but was even fortified. Lieutenants serving with French African battalions, such as Leon Gaillet, had described the African soldiers as "Great children" as well as "grown children." The French-African colonial troops endured many of forms of exploitive and abusive behavior by their French colonizers during the First World War, whether in physical forms or in mental and abstract forms. However, the many forms of exploitive behavior are all linked to their same root of origin, the exploitation of the concept of race. It is also evident that said exploitive behavior of race had survived the end of the war and persisted, haunting the populations of the French-African colonies through institutions, such as the League of Nations, that should have been their salvation from the burden of their colonizers under which they had slaved for centuries. Race had become a weapon in the hands of the French colonizers with which they had exploited their African colonies.

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The French-African colonial troops endured many forms of exploitive and abusive behavior by their French colonizers during the First World War, whether in physical forms or in mental and abstract forms. However, the many forms of exploitive behavior are all linked to their same root of origin, the exploitation of the concept of race. It is also evident that said exploitive behavior of race had survived the end of the war and persisted, haunting the populations of the French-African colonies through institutions, such as the League of Nations, that should have been their salvation from the burden of their colonizers under which they had slaved for centuries. Race had become a weapon in the hands of the French colonizers with which they had exploited their African colonies.

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49 Ibid., 66; Dean, William T. "The French Colonial Army," 490.
50 Ibid., 507.
52 Ibid.
Bibliography


The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon, Paris, Francois Maspero, 1961

By: Farah Otozbeer

The Wretched of the Earth by Frantz Fanon was first published in French in 1961 and later translated to English in 1963. Frantz Fanon got a job as a psychiatrist at the Blida-Joinville Hospital, which was the only institution known to treat long term mental illnesses in Algeria.¹ His exposure to the cases at the hospital, and the mounting mental disorders suffered by the Algerian people, provided inspiration for his book; The Wretched of the Earth. One of the central concepts explored in the book is the notion of violence: the settler against the native, the native against the settler, the violence of colonization and decolonization. However, Fanon also explores concepts such as national culture and identity, before ending with a personal account of the mental disorders he got to witness and treat at the Blida-Joinville Hospital.

By highlighting the horrific link

between the violence of colonialism and mental disorders, Fanon has not only provided inspiration for anti-colonial movements but has also shown the true colors of the settler’s violence against, and oppression of, the native. One could argue that the strength of this book lies not only in its applicability to all anti-colonial movements around the world, but also in its specific focus on violence; a concept that has often been overlooked in the discourse on decolonization movements prior to Fanon.

The book starts with a revolutionary preface by Jean-Paul Sartre; a French philosopher who supported Fanon’s idea that violence must be used by the native to get rid of the settler. In his preface, Sartre criticizes a French nation which is very much invested in values such as “equality, fraternity, love, honor...,” but is still racist toward “subordinate” cultures. He argues that the “European has only been able to become a man by creating slaves and monsters,” referring to the countless European colonial missions in Africa and Asia. One of the most intriguing arguments presented by Sartre is his reference to the violence of third world natives. He argues that the “children of violence” (i.e., those who have witnessed the violence of the settler since their early childhood) draw their humanity from committing acts of violence because it is the only language they comprehend. This is a concept that is explored by Fanon in detail in his first chapter, “Concerning Violence”, which is perhaps the most intriguing and compelling one.

This chapter changes the discourse around colonialism and decolonization to a very large extent, because it clearly highlights that decolonization and independence cannot be achieved through peaceful means. Fanon argues that “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon,” because the whole colonial system must be destroyed from the bottom up. He also introduces one of the most radical ideas to the discourse around violence and colonialism; through arguing that the Algerian native (and any other colonized native) is violent because he has learnt violence from the settler. Ever since the settler has plunged into his town, he has been using violence at every occasion, and hence the native dreams to seek revenge and to take the place of the settler one day.

This argument is vital and essential in explaining many of the trajectories happening around the world today. The violence and conflicting identities of the

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3 Ibid.
4 P.21
5 Ibid. p.20.
6 Ibid., p. 21
7 Ibid., p.27.
8 Ibid., p.30.
native Algerian is precisely explained by Fanon. He argues that:

when the native hears a speech about Western culture, he pulls out his knife... The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him.\textsuperscript{9}

In Chapter Four, Fanon moves on to discuss “national culture.” He describes how the collective Algerian national identity and culture have come to be reshaped by the colonial system. Furthermore, he explains that

colonialism is not satisfied with holding a people in its grip... it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.\textsuperscript{10}

One could maintain that this idea explains the conflicted mindset of the Algerian diaspora in France, who are torn between two identities. This conflict comes as a result of the settler’s persistence in wiping out any trace of pre-colonial history. The native is taught to believe that if any history exists, it is barbaric and shameful, and that colonialism came to “lighten their darkness.”\textsuperscript{11} Hence, the native has turned away from his own national culture to seek the culture of his French colonizer. Fanon explains this phenomenon eloquently when he says that “the result [of colonialism] will be individuals without an anchor, a horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless.”\textsuperscript{12}

One could state that the uniqueness of this book, and its capacity to bring forth new ideas to colonial discourse, lies in Chapter Five: “Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders.” The effect of colonialism and settler’s violence on the psychological wellbeing of Algerian natives has often been overlooked by scholars in their study of the post-colonial history of Algeria. The remnants of colonial rule still linger in Algeria today, manifested in conflicting identities and a lack of belonging. Fanon gives a personal account of some of the cases he witnessed at Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria. For example, he presents cases of individuals with severe homicidal impulses and depression following the murder or rape of their wives, thirteen-year-olds who have killed their European classmate while playing, suicidal tendencies amongst twenty-two-year-olds, and behavioral disturbances in refugee children under the age of ten.\textsuperscript{13} This chapter is the hardest to read, because it describes

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p.33.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p.169.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p.175.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 220.
the exact cases and the situations that led these people to reach this state of mental deterioration. Fanon explains that “the war of national liberation by the Algerian people... has become a favorable breeding-ground for mental disorders.”

*The Wretched of the Earth* is a personal favorite. One finds that its value lies not only in its rich detail with regards to the case of French colonialism in Algeria, but also in the fact that it is written by a Frenchman. Given the fact that it was first published a year before Algerian independence, it is not common that a Frenchman would condemn and expose the atrocities and brutality of the French authorities against the Algerians. One could further argue that the book has been, and continues to be, a significant piece of work that provides inspiration and reference to anti-imperial and anti-colonial movements around the world. Moreover, the strength of this book lies in its credibility. Fanon approaches many of his analyses of Algerian identity as a psychiatrist - first and foremost - who has witnessed and conversed with natives that were deliriously lost in their struggle to gain national liberation. Thus, he has drawn on both personal experiences and colonial history to elucidate the horrific effects of colonialism on the Algerian people.

This book has discussed and highlighted a plethora of ideas, but the main arguments were concentrated around violence, national culture and mental disorders. I recommend this book to anyone interested in French colonialism in Algeria, and to readers interested in wider subjects such as Pan-Africanism, anti-colonial movements, and decolonization. Fanon has successfully provided a timeless piece that has served and will continue to serve as a sacred manuscript for anti-colonial movements around the world. His book has not only helped educate young minds on the vital aspects of colonial war, but has most importantly influenced the discourse in France around the war in Algeria. One could even go further to argue that this book has inspired the decision of the French National Assembly to change its reference to the Algerian war of independence from *les événements d’Algerie* (the events of Algeria) to the “War of Algeria” in 1999.

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14 Ibid., p.201.

Regime Types and Civil Wars in the aftermath of the Arab Spring

By: Ingi Rashed

Introduction

Tunisia's mass mobilization in 2011 triggered a regional process of demonstrations against long standing authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. Since then, the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) witnessed massive political transitions, reformulation of state society-relations, societal transformation and civil wars; yet the region never democratized with the limited exception of Tunisia.

Since the so-called Arab Spring, regimes underwent two major processes: authoritarian remaking and civil wars. Political elites used the existing coercive apparatuses against citizens in a process of regime rebuilding in some countries. While other regimes failed to perform functions of statehood while the
militarization and excessive use of violence led to civil wars.

This article is concerned with analyzing the phenomenon of civil wars occurring in politically different MENA regimes. It analyzes the factors that have dragged different political regimes into civil wars. Following the lead of Theda Skocpol, using historical analysis, the cases of Syria and Libya are analyzed.

Literature review

The world witnessed the height of civil wars during the period from 1945-1999. During this period, there were roughly 128 civil wars occurring throughout the globe.¹ A total estimate of 16.2 million deaths occurred as a result of these conflicts, which amounts to five times as much as deaths in interstate conflicts.² These civil wars occurred in 73 states with an average duration of six years.³ A quarter of the 128 civil wars that broke out since 1945 lasted two years or less, and a quarter of all civil wars have lasted at least 12 years.⁴ Accordingly, variations between cases inspired scholars to understand and explain factors shaping elites’ behavior and choices during times of political distress.⁵

What are civil wars?

In accordance with Clausewitz, the term ‘war’ is usually used for a “form of organized violence with political intentions.”⁶ Here Vasquez emphasized three main characteristics of a war which are: “an organized activity with rules and customs...; it is not random violence, but focused and directed; and it is organized in the sense that it is collective and social, not individual.”⁷ According to Feliu and Grasa civil wars are fundamentally different from interstate wars. Not only because different factions continue to exist within the same borders after the war ends, but more importantly, defeat might lead to the end of one or more of those factions.⁸ According to Paul Collier and Ankh Hoeffler, civil wars are distinguished from other types of conflict by four main factors. First, they are “Internal conflict with at least 1,000 combat-related deaths per year”. One of the most contentious dimensions here is “the threshold of violence” i.e. the numerical threshold of casualties. The largely

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⁴ Fearon, James D. “Why do some Civil Wars last so Much Longer than others?” Journal of Peace Research 41, no. 3 (2004): 275-301
accepted scholarly threshold, determined by the Correlates of War Project, is a minimum of 1000 deaths in the conflict’s first year and continuous violence “in all following years at an average of 1000 deaths per year until the conflict’s end.”

Second, in order to further differentiate civil wars from massacres in terms of casualties both “government forces” and an “identifiable rebel organization must suffer at least 5% of these fatalities.”

Third, rebels must be politically mobilized seeking legitimate authority and recognition by state elites. As such, rebels in civil wars are distinctive from terrorists, insurgents, and other more “delocalized” conflicts. Finally, the insurgent groups must possess the means to finance themselves to counter the power of the government and its security servants. In addition, Small and Singer define civil wars as “armed conflict that involves (a) internal military action, (b) violent participation of the national government of the state, and (c) effective resistance by both sides, armed groups and resistance.”

According to Sambanis, state violence by the regime-whose motive is to control resources, political power, authority, legitimate use of force, - should be persistent and countered. For Collier and Hoeffler, the “opposition forces must also be delineated.” Yet, this feature is very controversial: as in many cases, various rebel forces may be loosely organized than others, having numerous agendas, ethnic or tribal compositions, and wider territorial alliances and allegiances. Sambanis defines civil war as “a violent armed conflict that takes place within the territory of an internationally recognized state, with parties to the conflict that are politically and militarily organized, with publicly stated political objectives.”

According to Sambanis, disagreement between scholars on the operational definition of civil wars revolves around three questions which are: “What threshold of violence distinguishes civil war from other forms of internal armed conflict?” How do we identify the beginning and the end of a civil war? and “how can we distinguish between intrastate, interstate, and extrastate wars.”

Theories explaining the triggers of civil wars

According to Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, civil wars are generally triggered by motivation: grievance versus greed. They explain that wars are usually provoked by social grievances and opportunities

10 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 815
available for groups. Social grievances are grouped into four main categories which are: ethnic/tribal or religious hatred, political repression, political marginalization, and economic inequality. First, ethnic, tribal, and religious hostilities are believed to be a direct cause for civil conflict that occurs due to societal polarization and radicalization. Second, political repression, excessive state violence, and the absence of associational rights and freedoms are considered among the causes that incite masses to rebel against regimes since early 2000s. Authoritarian regimes have been using people’s money excessively to establish large security apparatuses to protect their realm and suppress any attempt for change. Third, minority groups fear permanent exclusion and marginalization by the regime. A potentially crucial case is when political allegiance is based on ethnic division when a minority group rules the majority that are intentionally excluded from political participation and access to public office, and resources. Amartya Sen argues that poor classes rebel to induce redistribution of wealth and resources. Quantitatively, income inequality is usually measured by the Gini coefficient.

Yet, there is another nontangible measure of income inequality that occurs whenever wealth does not trickle down over society and remains in the hands of small elite.

Opportunities also initiate civil wars for example factions financing, low war costs, and the lack of state control over its terrain. According to Michael, there are three widespread sources financing civil wars which are: extraction of natural resources, donations from diasporas including militant groups abroad, and subventions from other governments supporting either the government or the rebels. For Sachs and Warner, conflict risk generally increases upon rebels’ reactions to poor governance. Furthermore, diaspora is considered a second source of financing source. By sending their money in, diaspora communities help arming rebel groups without being easily traced or controlled. A third significant source of finance is coming from other states governments supporting either rebel groups or the government side. This is the model that took place in several conflicts in the MENA region whether in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq. Here regimes are heavily involved in the battles through arming and financing the conflicting parties.

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to foster their interests in the destabilized the state.

Weak government control over territorially is another dimension of opportunity. This dimension is exacerbated if the terrain is favoring rebels: the existence of “forests and mountains provide rebels with a safe haven” and a chance to maneuver against government control. According to Herbst, geographic dispersion of the population hinders the government capacity to control its lands. Finally, social cohesion is considered an opportunity for rebellion against the state. Ethnic and religious cohesion within rebel groups increase the ability of unity against the government whenever the government turns to be the main enemy of the rebel group. This was not the general case in the Middle East as societies are mostly heterogenous and divided through ethnic, religious, and tribal lines which weakens the opposition vis a vis the state. In Syria and Libya for example, the opposition is widely divided and each group has its own interests, priorities, sources of financing and supporting parties whether from inside or outside the state.

Recently, attention is turned toward state capacity to function before the eruption of civil wars which is tightly linked to its capacity to respond and engage in the war. Scholars such as Reynal, Mason, Weingarten and Fett examine the link not only between the state institutional capacity and its response to violent events but more importantly to the eruption of civil war. They examine the relation between state institutional inefficiency and the rebels’ decision to continue fighting against the regime. Here they argue that a state’s structural deficiency provides rebels with the opportunity to maintain the fight against the state with a lower cost. This is among the factors that lead to protracted civil wars in the region. As the war cost is generally calculated by both conflicting sides, whenever the cost is low for rebels to continue fighting, they are no longer deterred or intimidated to seek any peaceful compromise or agreement. The fight goes on and opportunities for settlement vanish. Fearon and Laitin explain that “financially, organizationally, and politically weak central governments render insurgency more feasible and attractive due to weak local policing or inept and corrupt counterinsurgency practices.” Sometimes, rebels also benefit from resource extraction due to state inability to maintain security which helps them

financing their violence.\textsuperscript{27} Accordingly, some scholars focus on the agency of the state behind the whole process and its impact on the war duration and magnitude.\textsuperscript{28}

Collier & Hoeffler, Goodwin & Skocpol, Elbadawi and Sambanis assert that the type of political regime (democracy, autocracy or hybrid) also has an impact on the eruption and the duration of civil wars. The assumption here is that the more autocratic the regime is, the more likely it is to develop a large security apparatus, to use against society rather than implementing efficient ruling systems. While simultaneously eroding horizontal and vertical accountability.\textsuperscript{29}

Furthermore, history plays a double-edged sword in shaping peoples’ minds about civil war. When a recent historical memory of a civil war exists, it might discourage citizens from potentially rising against a certain regime. The most obvious example is the bloody civil war that took place in Algeria referred to as ‘the dirty war’ and lasted for almost eleven years between the government and several rebel groups. According to Zaraouilia, the memory is "producing the legitimacy of the political system and framing the citizens’ perceptions of the postwar regime."\textsuperscript{30}

On the other hand, sometimes the history of previous similar events of rebellion makes the country more prone to witness similar events as the experience is already there and the grievances already persist. This is the case of Syria if we consider the events of Hama 1980-1982 and the recent events of 2011 with respect to some contextual differences. Finally, scholars stress that “the risk of conflict is proportional to a country’s population” as both opportunities and grievances rise with population increase.\textsuperscript{31} This is one factor that generally makes wars in the MENA region in specific and Africa as bloody and long as they are.

The duration of civil wars

The average time for civil war is that it lasts six times longer than the average international war as it is characterized by its persistence and longevity. \textsuperscript{32} Scholars find that the duration of conflict is systematically related to the structural conditions prevailing prior to conflict (triggers of civil wars) and to circumstances during conflict (its events). The key structural characteristics that lengthen conflicts are low per capita income, high


\textsuperscript{32} Fearon, James D. "Why do some Civil Wars last so Much Longer than Others?" Journal of Peace Research 41, no. 3 (2004): 275-301
inequality and a moderate degree of ethnic division (all present in states that witnessed those conflicts such as Syria and Libya). Collier stresses that the key variable that shortens conflict is the decline in the prices of primary commodities that the country exports. Additionally, he explains that external military intervention through troops, naval forces, equipment or aid, intelligence or advisers, air support and military sanctions may shorten wars.  

**The outcomes of civil wars**

In general, civil wars have different outcomes: government or rebel victory, truce, or negotiated settlements. The events of September 11 decisively changed the global national interest of powerful states led by USA from focusing on the promotion of democracy to focusing on the establishment and maintenance of “stability,” which serves their purposes and feeds their interests. The shift in US policy, impacted the outcome of civil wars as well. During the cold war era, civil wars resulted in the direct victory of one side over the other while after September 11, settlements between warring factions has become the norm. Scholarly debates on the outcome of civil wars are still ongoing. For instance, Doyle and Sambanis stress that signing treaties leads to more successful peacebuilding processes that are more likely to be maintained and stable as each party can get something of his interests and aims at more to be achieved.  

While Licklider asserts that negotiated settlements are less stable than military victories because military victories are decisive as they mean the eradication of one side. Scholars found out that state capacity is involved in the outcome and the duration of civil wars in two ways. Moreover, the interactions between insurgents and their government ultimately determine the ongoing events of a civil war and accordingly its outcome.

The early months of 2011 witnessed “the outbreak of revolution in six Arab countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria.” Among the various conflict trajectories of the Arab Spring, was civil wars, of which Syria and Libya are worthy of analysis.

**Syria versus Libya**

After the 2011 mass demonstrations, Syria and Libya had similar outcome of violent and protracted civil wars. There are some common factors shared between the two states that led them to the same fate after mass uprising in 2011.

**History:** Before the uprising, President Bashar El Asad announced that Syria was

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stable, and that the country lacked the overt structural problems that dogged Tunisia and Egypt. Yet, he ignored that Syria was, however, "no stranger to uprising" with various unrests that rocked the country before in 1964, 1973 and 1980–1982, with the latter culminating in the notorious Hama massacre during which 20,000 people were killed in three weeks by government forces. The historical memory of upheavals in Syria facilitated the eruption of violence especially that the 1980-82 grievances were not addressed, nor efficient reforms were implemented which cumulated until the explosion of the Arab Spring. On the other hand, Libya did not witness mass violent events, while coercion under the Qadhafi regime was high. Hence the society was ready to explode without fear.

Heterogeneous society: Although the Syrian regime was not explicitly highlighting ethnic polarization prior to the uprising, its policies were deeply fragmenting society, playing on the different sectarian backgrounds of the population, which consists of 74% Sunni, and the remaining 36% are divided among significant minorities such as Christians, Alawites, and non-Sunni Muslims which make up about 10% each. The smaller minorities are the Druze living in the mountains and the Kurds mainly in the northeast. The Druze are loyal to the regime governing their lands. While, the Kurds have always suffered from discrimination. They have been denied basic human rights. Historically, Alawite minority seized power from the Sunni through a military coup in the late 1966. Given the tension between sects in Syria due to widespread inequality, discrimination and poverty, opposition armament led to the outbreak of violence.

Libyans had a weak sense of national identity. The collapse of Gaddafi allowed for disunity that could not be stopped by a transitional government without a monopoly over the use of violence. Historically, Libya was divided into three provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan which had different ethnic/tribal structures. Since 2012, disunity manifested itself as provinces including Cyrenaica demanded more autonomy and a bigger share in state's resources and powers. First, in June 2013, Cyrenaica claimed self-government by tribal representatives and the establishment of the Cyrenaican defense forces. Second, a deeper ethnic problem emerged with the Berbers in Western Libya in the Jabal Nafusa and the Tabu ethnic group from Southern Libya claiming more rights and freedoms. The Berbers (the majority is Ibadis and not Sunnis similar to the majority of Libyans) asked for the recognition of their language as an official language and


claimed constitutional protection or they will arm themselves against any coming authority. Moreover, radical Islamist groups found opportunities to grow in Libya as a failed state that lacked control over its terrain and borders.\footnote{Hove, Mediel. “Post-Gaddafi Libya and the African Union: Challenges and the Road to Sustainable Peace.” \textit{Journal of Asian and African Studies} 52, no. 3 (2017): 271-286.} Throughout the years Islamists were able to grow and recruit members not only from different Libyan groups but from neighboring failed states too which increased their presence and control in Libya.

**Grievances:** In both cases, socioeconomic grievances eroded the political legitimacy of governments. Syria’s succession after Hafez El Assad highlighted the dense relationship between decentralized “executive authority and politicized state organizations.”\footnote{Stacher, Joshua. \textit{Adaptable Autocrats: Regime Power in Egypt and Syria}. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012.} When Bashar al-Asad came to power in the year 2000, he asserted that his plan was to “modernize authoritarianism” in Syria to gain legitimacy.\footnote{Volker Perthes, \textit{Syria under Bashar al-Asad: modernisation and the limits of change}. Adelphi Papers (London: Oxford University Press for International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004).} One of his main policies was to pursue economic liberalization and privatization which led to shifting public assets to crony capitalist networks. The applied limited political liberalization and manipulated elections allowed for authoritarian persistence for a while.\footnote{Bradley Louis Glasser, \textit{Economic development and political reform: the impact of external capital on the Middle East} (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2001).} These policies led to widespread inequalities and impoverished different sects in Syria.

Since 1968-69, Qadhafi ascendance to power, continuous and excessive extraction of the country’s oil revenues to benefit himself and his close tribal entourage became the regime pattern. Grievances in Libya were in the form of favoritism, and clientelism towards certain tribes who were closer to Gaddafi which resulted in the exclusion of other groups.\footnote{Lewis, William. “Libya: Dream Versus Reality.” \textit{Mediterranean Quarterly} 22, no. 3 (2011): 42-52.} Such exclusion led to systematic state marginalization of those groups which automatically meant lack of access to resources, public offices, and power.

**State institutional capacity:** as state institutional capacity is a major determinant of its operation, there are two different institutional trends between Libya and Syria.

Bashar inherited the state with strong politicized but fully functioning institutions. Yet, due to his policies, he established a coalition of “crony capitalists -the rent- seeking alliance of political brokers” controlled by his mother’s family and the bourgeoisie. It was the new bourgeoisie, not the Ba’ath Party that financed his 2007 re-election campaign.\footnote{Hinnebusch, Raymond. “Syria: From ‘Authoritarian Upgrading’ to Revolution?” \textit{International Affairs} (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 88, no. 1 (2012): 95-113.} Bashar perceived the Ba’ath party, civil...
society and the workers and peasants’ unions as obstacles to reform. He declared that the state needs first to achieve economic stability then the regime could later allow for political freedoms. He decided to cut all funds to civil society groups. Additionally, he infiltrated the party with elements of conflicting orientations to weaken it. Hence, the party was no longer an organization for recruiting people to high offices. In 2010 on the eve of the revolt, he dissolved the second-rank branch and sub-branch leaderships. This hampered the regime’s organized channels to its constituency and led to the infiltration of neighborhoods and villages. The gap was generally filled by the security service officers which were highly corrupt. 45

Additionally, to secure himself, he decided to replace the older generation with his loyalists in the security forces and technocrats into government “in a tug-of-war” with the party leadership over appointments. 46 He created clientelist networks to coopt key segments of society into the regime. At the same time, he became increasingly dependent on El Asad-Makhlouf clan, which resulted in “overconcentration of patronage, opportunities and corruption in his hands at the expense of other regime clients.” 47

Libya on the other hand was known to be a state with no institutional structure. Qadhafi was not interested in establishing functioning institutions to the extent that when his regime collapsed, Qadhafi took the state with him. Qaddafi’s long rule was characterized by continuous suppression of Libyan tribes and the creation of “patronage networks that rewarded supplicants and punished transgressors. But Qadhafi did not establish formal governance structures that were able to survive his overthrow and murder.” 48 The collapse of Qadhafi put the state itself at risk and left a vacuum in which authority became contested. As Fahim reports, “In the absence of a strong government, a monstrous shadow state was emerging, centered on the power of militias made up of men who fought Colonel Gaddafi and never put down their arms.” 49 Always threatened by coup attempts in Libya, Gaddafi frequently “shook up the ranks, changed officers’ ranks while moving them, and granted out posts by patronage requirements rather than merit.” 50 The fall of the regime signaled the collapse of a repressive system that led systematic and

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
perpetual violence against diverse groups in Libya.\textsuperscript{1} Almost the whole army defected. According to Lacher, “To build a functional state, Libya needs to prevail over the four decade old Gaddafi-led authoritarian legacy which prevented the development of authentic national institutions.”\textsuperscript{2}

Economic factors and natural disaster: many scholars explain violence erupting in Syria as a response to the government’s failure to solve the humanitarian crisis prompted by the 2006–2010 droughts leading to economic crisis that was exacerbated by the unintended consequences of El Asad inefficient reforms.\textsuperscript{3} This means that in some cases natural disasters and environmental problems followed by inefficient response to resulting economic consequences cause severe social and economic grievances that pave the way for rebellion.

Foreign intervention: foreign intervention in both Syria and Libya exacerbates civil war and led to the spread of violence. Early on in Syria, international backing of the opposition by the West and of the regime by Russia and China hindered rising initiatives towards compromise or settlements. Later, with foreign intervention through financing both sides, training them, and providing them with weapons, the chance was lost when both sides felt that they were waging a life-or-death struggle in a zero-sum game.\textsuperscript{4} After years of conflict, the battle in Syria turned to be a proxy war with regional intervention of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, which denied all prospect possibilities for settlements and Syria remains in full destruction. Yet, with the rise of other disturbing events in the region, the change of the American administration, the everlasting problem of Iran nuclear capabilities, and the recent clash between Iran and Israel, the focus is no longer on Syria as it is no longer a priority on the global agenda.

The 2011 international intervention in Libya was “mandated by UNSC 1973 to protect civilians from the Qaddafi regime’s violent response to ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, especially in the East of the country.”\textsuperscript{5} Yet according to Anderson, “international interventions have mostly served to exacerbate divisions between Libya’s many tribal, regional and institutional actors rather than support peaceful relations

\textsuperscript{4} Hinnebusch, Raymond. “Syria: From ‘Authoritarian Upgrading’ to Revolution?” International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 88, no. 1 (2012): 95-113
among them.” Immediately after the revolution, shifting alliances have battled for control, producing anarchy and a power-vacuum filled by local militias, organized criminals, and foreign spoilers. The protection of civilians was extremely undermined when the vast stockpiles of small arms, anti-aircraft missiles and rocket-propelled grenades left over from the 2011 civil war were controlled by militias, and jihadists from all Libya which damaged the security situation in Libya and in its neighborhood.” Thus, Libya deteriorated into civil war in very short time with lack of regime, institutions, and security forces. Although the rebels had taken up arms before the NATO led involvement, the intervention extended the duration of the war as it arguably helped balance the situation in favor of the rebels and against the regime remaining militias. The African Union’s road map for Libya required power-sharing between the old regime and the opposition, however, this was overshadowed by the excessive violence in Libya.

Conclusion

A decade after the Arab Spring, many Arab Spring countries such as Syria, and Libya have been degenerated into bloody civil wars with dwindling hope of peace and stability. Both Libya and Syria did not settle down. On the contrary, every day is witnessing rising violence and rapid backsliding toward radicalism. The existence of common variables throughout the Middle East and mainly the two states forced them to be exposed to harsh civil wars triggered by grievances that exploded after the Arab Spring. For long time, authoritarian regimes “relied on economic and political institutions to preserve the status quo, creating unsustainable tradeoffs between economic and political freedoms, especially for young people.”

Authoritarian rulers justified their assumption of power to curb corruption, which undermined economic growth and redistribution, “but in the end, they become corrupt and, rather than initiating a process of change, introduces piecemeal reforms while presiding over a corrupt system. As decades of slow, piecemeal reforms failed, the Arab social contract unraveled leading to the revolutions.” Finally, the international intervention element that took place in both states in different ways is crucial to the persistence of violence, chaos, and hostility. The uprisings in Libya, and Syria were entangled in a “web of conflicting and

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complex regional and international politics and interventions.”¹ In both cases, countries such as USA, Russia, France, Britain, Iran, Saudi Arabia and others have specific interests, and accordingly many of them intervened to foster their interests through different ways such as sending troops, arming local militias, and financing conflicting parties to ensure the conflict has a certain result favoring their interests which further complicates the situation and aggravates the consequences ending in producing protracting wars.²

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¹ Ibid.
² Ibid. P7


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Anne Frank-Parallel Stories Documentary Review

By: Mariam Zanaty

Everyone has a story to tell, be they on the victim's side or the oppressor's; everyone has a chance to tell their version of the narrative. In my opinion, we do not know the past as it happened; we witness history through the lens of those who survived, or those who were brave enough to narrate the events as they occurred. That is to say, most, if not all, historical movies and series are biased towards the side of their producers, aiming to describe their version of the narrative, because they are directly affected by their producer's backgrounds. The Anne Frank-Parallel Stories directed by Sabina Fedeli and Anna Migotto, and produced by Veronica Bottanelli, Franco di Sarro and Didi Gnocchi, is a documentary rather than a movie, which allows it to serve as a more accurate representation of the historical period it portrays, namely the Holocaust (1933-1945), since it includes interviews of the real survivors themselves.
While growing up, the Holocaust incident captured my attention, not only because it was one of the deliberate and systematic mass genocides in the world, but also due to Adolf Hitler’s strong manipulative ability that led 13.6 million soldiers to follow his orders. During the Holocaust, the German army and primarily the protection squads (1) commanded by Adolf Hitler, were able to execute six million Jews and Gypsies in the 44,000 concentration camps the Germans built between 1933 and 1945. The protection squads wanted to purge humanity of the Gypsies and the Jews in an attempt to create a pure “Aryan race.” (2) Adolf Hitler, however, is not the star of this documentary. Instead, the star is a fifteen-year-old German girl, Anne Frank and five female survivors, who were lucky enough to survive Germany’s worst sin. These five brave survivors are Arianna Szörenyi, Sarah Lichtsztejn-Montard, Helga Weiss, and the sisters Andra and Tatiana Bucci.

In the Anne Frank- parallel stories documentary, the only two actors are an old woman (Helen Mirren) and Katrina Kat (Martina Gatti). Throughout the documentary, the old woman reads from Anne Frank’s diary while Katrina, a privileged white Western girl, takes a tour around Europe while documenting her travels via the online platform “Instagram”. Katrina visits Bergen-Belsen in Germany, Terezin in Czechoslovakia, Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, Drancy in France, Risiera di San Sabba in Italy and finally Anne Frank’s hiding home in the Netherlands. All this gives the reader an overview of some of the most vicious Holocaust concentration camps. As Katrina visits these venues, we are introduced to the five brave female survivors—the main focus of this documentary—who share their stories and feelings about being prisoners in said concentration camps. Needless to say, the documentary covers the Holocaust’s time frame, from 1941, when Helga Weiss was deported from Prague to Terezin ghetto, until 1945 when Stutthof— the last concentration camp — was liberated by the Red Army. (3) Throughout this documentary, one empathizes with the victims and feels utter bitterness for the torture they had to endure, solely because of their religious background.

I believe that the main aim of this documentary was to tell the story from the victims’ standpoint using their own words, feelings, and memories with no filter. This conveys the message that seventy-nine years later, survivors are still aching at the memories of what both they and their families had to go through, and that Hitler and the German military forces are not forgiven for their atrocities. Most importantly, it teaches the audience that, just as Anne Frank remained full of courage, one should never lose hope, no matter how harsh reality becomes. Through these messages, both the directors and producers
try to ensure that these ladies’ sufferings do not go in vain, and that they are still remembered for their courage. The documentary also reminds people that everyone is (or should be) held accountable for their actions, sooner rather than later. The mere presence of these survivors in this documentary film sends the message that it is not a ‘survival of the fittest’ world after all, but one where power is limited, no matter how exclusive it might seem to its possessor.

The documentary clearly displays the torture that these young ladies had to tolerate, both emotionally and physically. All five survivors experienced constant fear throughout their prolonged stay in the camps. They had to withstand psychological torture in the form of emotional distress because they were separated from their family members in the concentration camps. Some of them even watched their own families walk into the gas chambers, such as Andra and Tatiana Bucci who were just children when they witnessed their own mother, grandmother, cousin and aunt walk into these chambers and never make it out alive. The two sisters were mistaken for twins by Dr. Josef Mengele since they looked very much alike, and hence they were spared for medical experiments. The oldest survivor, Helga Weiss and her mother, managed to survive by lying about their age, mainly by stating that Weiss was older, and her mother was younger than they actually were at the time. It was a miracle that they made it out of the selection lines of the gas chambers, together and alive. As for the physical torture, it ranged from gas chambers, starvation, being forced to walk with bare feet on snow, and facing the risk of being shot if the detainees fell behind or stopped walking. In the words of Auschwitz survivor Sarah Lichtsztejn-Montard, “they would hit us with batons, we were told you enter through the door and exit through the chimney” (0:08:02). Those who tried to escape the marches, or were too tired to continue walking, were immediately shot. Others, like Helga Weiss and her mother, had to make a sixteen-day ‘death march’ from Freiberg to Mauthausen camp in Austria, where Weiss remained until the liberation of the camp by the US Army in 1945.

The survivors’ families, including their children and grandchildren, played a huge role in helping them heal. Some of those families would listen to the ladies as they painfully recalled their memories of the camps. Some resorted to music to soothe their pain after hearing these stories, and others expressed their empathy towards their grandmothers’ experiences by getting matching tattoos of the ‘numbers’ that their grandmothers had on their forearms as an identification in the camps. Needless to say, all these families carry intense hatred of the Holocaust for the trauma it caused to their mothers and grandmothers. Some
of them even stated that the Nazis’ actions would never be forgiven, no matter how much time passes. For the most part, the survivors cannot themselves forgive the Nazis; as Lichtsztejn-Montard put it, “I shall never forgive them for what they have done to the children who were sent to the gas chambers” (0:15:27).

Since the documentary was based on the victims’ testimonies against Hitler’s regime and solely focused on recounting the survivors’ stories, one could claim that it disregarded the stories of the Christian Germans who either did not take part in this genocide altogether, or merely lived at the time of its occurrence. It also disregarded the Polish citizens who had concentration camps forcefully built on the part of their territory that was occupied by Nazi Germany at the time. That is the documentary, like many others, is a one-sided narrative presented from the survivor’s standpoint, which makes it unfair to the afore-mentioned innocent Christian Germans and Polish citizens. While this might be hard to believe, it should be known that not all Germans living during the Nazi era were Nazis, or even approved of their strategies. In fact, many of the soldiers who took part in the Holocaust, or merely lived at its time, were forced to remain silent because they were either too afraid for their lives or fell victims to Hitler’s uncanny psychological manipulation. In other words, there has to be a distinction when judging both types of soldiers; those who were forced to kill and those who firmly believed in the purge. Disregarding the German’s side of the narrative and their passive resistance makes the argument more in favor of the Jews and fails to take account of the many Germans who had to live with inherited guilt for their ancestors’ actions.

It is also worth mentioning that the documentary did not depict any black actors, survivors or experts, which does not eliminate the fact that it is a Eurocentric, white-dominated project that solely focuses on Ashkenazi Jews (4). Mirren, the old British lady, and Gatti, the teenage girl, were very sympathetic towards Anne Frank’s story. These two ladies, who are of different ages, and who possess distinct outlooks on life, shared the same sympathetic sentiments towards the female survivors and Anne Frank’s stories. These characters were overwhelmed with feelings of disbelief, especially Gatti—perhaps due to her young age—concerning the degree to which people can become inhumane, and the extent to which they can treat each other unfairly. These two European actors, who had nothing to do with the Holocaust altogether, possessed mixed feelings of guilt, responsibility, shame and, most of all, pity for those who made it and those who didn’t; for their lost dreams, their lost potential and the opportunities that they could have had, if
they were only born into a more accepting and a less discriminating world.

To conclude, *Anne Frank-Parallel stories* is one of the documentaries that could not be easily forgotten. The way the events were portrayed, and the way the survivor’s stories were presented, along with the optimism that the survivors projected throughout the scenes, were just some of the few aspects that I loved about it. Although Frank was one of the most prominent young voices during the Holocaust, it was wholesome to display the other victim’s narratives too, so that the audience would not fall into the trap of ignoring other survivors’ sufferings as well. In my opinion, the German Army, and especially the Protection squads who were under the command of Adolf Hitler did not only do wrong by the Jews, but they also wounded humanity as a whole. The mere thought of the amount of violence and brutality that normal human beings are capable of foreshadows a lot about our present. That is because it’s a “violence in, violence out” cycle; a solid proof of this statement is the hatred and vengeance that Jews have carried over the years till this day. Seventy-nine years later, Jews are implementing the same techniques Hitler used; dragging Palestinians out of their homes like the Nazis abducted the Jews and taking over Palestinian territory like the Nazis did to them, to name a few. Unfortunately, Jews still and will always have Nazi Germany in them, with Palestinians falling victims to their torture and Palestine becoming a huge concentration camp, where the Palestinians lack sovereignty, their freedom is limited, and their ideology is disrespected. Needless to say, the motives behind the Holocaust —creating the Aryan race—and the occupation of Palestine— finding a land to settle in after Nazi Germany— are different, but the consequence is the same: humanity is bleeding. Alas, it is safe to say that history is repeating itself, except that the Palestinian survivor’s stories have not received the same attention that the Holocaust incident has captured over the years.
khamasin

Glossary

1) **Protection Squads**: Schutzstaffel (SS); Adolf Hitler's personal bodyguard unit.

2) **Aryan Race**: The German pure race; non-Jews.

3) **Red Army**: Soviet Union forces.

4) **Ashkenazi Jews**: Eastern European Jews.

References

Could Descriptive Representation Pave the Way for Substantive Representation of Women?

By: Mennatallah Soliman

Representation has been a major concern for women. As a group that has been historically marginalized and underrepresented, women want to ensure that their voices are being heard and their issues are given the attention they deserve. Therefore political representation of women has been one of the topics that generate heated debates. One of the issues problematizing the debate is that we have not yet reached a solid conclusion on what type of representation is best suited to represent women’s interests. The two most prominent, current and conflicting approaches today are descriptive representation versus symbolic representation.

There are three key terms in the context of women’s representation, which are descriptive, symbolic and substantive representation. Descriptive representation
refers to the type of representation where women represent their own group. In this type of representation, the gender of the representatives is crucial to consider women politically represented. On the other hand, we have symbolic representation; unlike descriptive representation this type of representation puts more weight on the agendas and ideologies of the representatives rather than any physical aspects like gender. Finally, we have substantive representation that focuses on the main goal of political representation, which is how women’s issues and concerns are being tackled. This article aims to explore the different types of representation. In addition, it investigates the link between descriptive representation and substantive representation by highlighting the direct effects of the physical presence of female politicians on the representation of women’s interests.

When studying women’s political representation, we seek an answer to one particular question: which type of representation (i.e. descriptive representation versus symbolic representation) leads to substantive representation of women. Symbolic representation and substantive representation are often discussed as two sides of the same coin; whereas descriptive representation and substantive representation are viewed by many as conflicting due to the fact that descriptive representation prioritizes the gender of the representatives. However, despite all the arguments against descriptive representation, the fact that it ensures that women are physically present in positions of power to represent their group’s concerns makes it more likely to lead to substantive representation.

One of the main benefits that descriptive representation guarantees is the role-model effect. Research has shown that the lack of visible female role-models has an influence over women’s career choices.\footnote{Rayne, “I see you”, 5.} Politics has been viewed as a field that is exclusive to men. As mentioned previously, it was not until recently that women have stood for elections for high level political positions in large numbers. For instance, there were no female members of the US Senate until 1986. However, because progress in the political representation of women has been encountered in different parts of the world in the past few decades, women started to show more interest in politics. The field is slowly becoming more open to for women’s participation.

A large part of this progress could be linked to the role-model effect. The presence of women in positions of power is one of the most important factors that encourages other women especially young girls to become aware of politics or to even pursue a career in the field. In the US in
1992, which was referred to as “the year of the woman” due to the increase in the number of women running for both the House of Representatives and the Senate, research has shown that girls have shown an unusual interest to be involved in politics. A good example of the role-model effect would be Madeleine Albright, the first female secretary of State; she highlights that for her seven year old granddaughter seeing a female Secretary of the States has been the rule not the exception to the extent that she did not realize what was extraordinary about her grandmother being the first female Secretary of State. Certainly, this could only be accomplished through descriptive representation.

Symbolic representation, despite being concerned with women’s issues being addressed, does not contribute to breaking gender stereotypes around areas like politics. As mentioned above, our ultimate goal when discussing women’s political representation is substantive representation. However, descriptive representation being focused on the gender of the representatives might bring us one step closer to reaching substantive representation of women’s interests not the opposite. For symbolic representation, the representatives’ ideology is what matters regardless of their gender. This disregards a crucial aspect of representation which is the experiential knowledge of the representatives. A representative who has been through similar experiences to the ones their group has been through is far more likely to genuinely represent the interests of that group. In policymaking, for example, policies that concern women need to be made and in order to have a realistic picture of how those policies can affect women’s lives, women ought to be present during the process and speak for their group.

However, some would argue that assuming that “any woman can stand for all women and any Black can stand for all Blacks” is fallacious. They claim that women have different interests that are decided by other aspects of their identity, and that all the varying interests ought to be represented and therefore symbolic representation is crucial. Yet standing for the presence of women as representatives for their gender does not necessarily mean that all women representatives should agree on the same solutions to either issues that concern women or other issues. Descriptive representation, in fact, prioritizes gender to compensate for the lack of female representatives. However, it does not impose any restrictions on the ideologies or agendas of the representatives. A study of the Norwegian parliament demonstrates that even though

\[\text{Campbell, “See Jane Run: Women Politicians as Role Models for Adolescents”, 236.}\]

\[\text{Rosenberger, “The power of example: Voices from the field”, 4.}\]

women tend to give more attention than men to the issue of combining family life and work life, women from right-wing parties are supporters of private solutions whereas women from left-wing parties perceive government intervention as the answer. The previous example demonstrates how descriptive representation does not deny women of different ideologies their right to be represented.

Some would argue that symbolic representation of women’s interests encourages men to stand for and be concerned with women’s issues regardless of their gender. In fact, in an ideal world this approach would align perfectly with the substantive representation of women’s interests. Nonetheless, given the historical context of women’s political representation and the world we live in today, this approach would be problematic for numerous reasons. To begin with, research has shown that there are areas where gender differences play a direct role in shaping the policy attitudes of the representatives. A study of 27 EU countries has demonstrated that gender-based differences in attitudes towards certain issues such as, same-sex marriage, abortion, women in the workplace and the welfare state are significant. Gender-based differences are also visible on attitudes towards social policy, pornography and gender quotas. In a study that analyzed Romanian MEPs activity in the 2009-2014 legislature, Emanuela Simona Garboni highlights that the 36% of female MEPs were not only more active with regard to women’s interests than their male counterparts, but they were also generally more active in respect of the total number of speeches in plenary.

However, supporters of symbolic representation would claim that a representative would stand for the interests of the group they represent even if they conflict with the interests of their own group. Yet this perception of representation fully disregards psychological factors like the unconscious bias of the representatives. The effect of factors like unconscious bias on the substantive representation of women is proportional to the lack of female representatives, since the presence of female representatives is likely to increase males’ awareness of females’ preferences. Data obtained from the 2009 European Parliament elections demonstrated that the attitudes of males and females on policies were rather similar in countries where there was a higher number of female MEPs. This proves that the mere presence of women in positions of power could impact their male colleagues’ policy
attitudes.

Some would view descriptive representation of women’s interests as a way of restricting female politicians to a narrow area in politics that is only concerned with either women’s issues or issues that are considered feminine, such as welfare and healthcare issues. It is true that female politicians tend to prioritize women’s issues. However, research has shown that women in positions of power focus on issues that are prioritized by female voters.\(^{10}\) This demonstrates that the issues that female politicians give most attention to are, in fact, a reflection of women’s concerns; which is the essence of substantive representation. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women are trapped into particular areas of politics like issues that has to do with their group’s concerns or “feminine” issues. In “The Power of Example” Laura Rosenberger, a diplomat, and her few female colleagues in foreign policy were seen as evidence that women can serve in such positions; they were representing their gender even though their job was not directly focused on women’s interests.\(^{11}\)

Thus descriptive representation of women does not only ensure that women’s issues are being addressed, but it also allows them to engage in other areas of politics that satisfy their own interests. On the other hand, symbolic representation, neglecting the gender of the representatives, could lead to lack of female politicians in both areas concerned with women’s issues and other areas of politics as well. To achieve descriptive representation of women, many countries have pursued positive discrimination strategies such as gender quotas. Opponents of descriptive representation argue that such measures portray women as incapable of reaching positions of power on their own. They also claim that gender quotas and any form of positive discrimination would contradict the equality that women have been fighting for.

As a matter of fact, women might not be able to get to elective offices on their own. However, that is not because they are incapable of holding elective offices, but rather because the barriers that are placed against them are difficult to be removed without the implementation of strategies like gender quotas. For instance, gender bias and cultural norms about leadership might hinder the political progress of qualified female politicians. Those biases might be popular among voters as well as political gatekeepers. Consequently, it becomes nearly impossible to disregard the gender of the representatives, as symbolic representation states, when it is in fact one of the factors that both voters and leaders treat as important or decisive.

\(^{10}\) Wangnerud, “Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation”, 62.
\(^{11}\) Rosenberger, “The power of example: Voices from the field”, 3.
Research has shown that a significantly higher number of women get elected in parties that adopted gender quotas. This is because gender quotas reserve candidacy places for female politicians who would not be their party’s first candidacy choice otherwise. Gender quotas do not only give women the opportunity to challenge gender-biased cultural norms but also help them by removing the barriers that are keeping them from reaching positions of power. All in all, the underrepresentation that women have faced historically determines our need for measures that are more empowering than symbolic representation in order to reach the substantive representation of women’s interests. Women’s physical presence in powerful political positions guarantees numerous benefits that would not be attained otherwise. These benefits include motivating women to take part in politics, whether as a general subject or a professional career, through the role-model effect.

Unlike symbolic representation, descriptive representation takes into account the experiential knowledge of the representatives which plays a great role especially when it comes to making decisions that are directly related to women’s lives. Moreover, the fact that women focus on women’s issues and the so-called “feminine” issues when in positions of power should not be used to disqualify them from engaging in other political areas. In fact, female politicians giving extra attention to women’s issues is a mere reflection of women’s concerns, which is the core of the substantive representation of women’s interests. Finally, positive discrimination measures, such as gender quotas are crucial to give women the opportunity they deserve to become politically active. This is because the factors that hinder women’s political progress still exist and are not expected to disappear overnight. Therefore, descriptive representation is more likely to lead to the substantive representation of women’s interests; since we have not yet reached the point where descriptive aspects of one’s identity, such as gender, are completely irrelevant.

Work Cited:

Rosenberger, Laura. 2017. The power of example: Voices from the field. America


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Introduction

The Middle East has witnessed the creation and collapse of several empires throughout its history, including ones that were ethnically and religiously heterogenous. The Ottoman Empire was one of the longest lasting empires in the region and its policies have helped shape societies in the region. Moreover, European colonialism, the successor of the Ottoman rule, followed suit and has created oppressive policies that have instrumented cleavages and deepened divisions. One of the aspects of Ottoman rule and European colonialism is sectarianism. The region has long witnessed the inclusion of a mosaic of religions and ethnicities, that have existed in peace and conflict through the years, never escalating to the level of conflict and rift, such as the conflict that is partaking place within the essence of the Syrian civil war. Justin Glenger states that “if sectarianism is to be defined as the
politization of ethnic or religious identity, then this politicization is best understood not as a cause of this or that political malady …..but rather as an effect of their particular institutional characteristics.”¹ I propose a similar argument within the study of the Syrian civil war. In this paper, I argue that sectarianism has long existed in the region; however, it is the policies of manipulation by state leaders that have led to the escalation of sectarian conflicts, including the Syrian case. In order to analyze such a statement, I am going to examine three major variables exacerbating ethnic and sectarian conflicts: 1) the sectarian history of the Middle East, 2) the recent developments that helped widen that rift, and 3) the Assad regime’s history of sectarian politics in relation to the Syrian civil war.

Defining Sectarianism

Sectarianism is a highly contested concept amongst scholars. According to Makdisi, sectarianism is “a process- not an object, not an event, and certainly not primordial trait, but rather a process through which a kind of religious identity is politicized, even secularized, as a part of an obvious struggle for power.”² Fanar Haddad explains that there is no set or precise definition for sectarianism; however, the word is used to refer to “contemporary subnational mass-group identities.”³ Through this, we can understand that sectarianism is a broad topic that encompasses the marginalization of groups based on their ethnicity, tribe, and religion. And if we take that as our basis, we can understand that sectarianism is not a phenomenon that is restricted only to the Middle East, but can be applied elsewhere also. In this paper, and for argument’s sake, I shall use Makdisi’s definition of sectarianism.

Theoretical framework

To better understand sectarianism and its implications, we must first understand the theoretical framework behind such a concept. Three of the important theories that examine the relationship between ethnicity and conflict are “social identity theory”, “symbolic politics theory” and Mazur’s “Doubly Included/Doubly Excluded” theory. In this section, I am going to explain and analyze these theories and then in the upcoming section on the Syrian case study, I shall use these theories to try to understand the role that sectarianism plays in the Syrian crisis.

Social Identity Theory

“Social Identity” theory is a social psychology theory that explains the causes that lead to the rise of ethnic-based conflicts. Pioneers of the theory include identity theories scholars such as Donald Horowitz, Micheal Billings, and Henri Tajfel. The theory denotes that people tend to seek a “positive social identity,” which entails the sense of belonging

¹ Justin J. Gengler, Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf, Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf (Oxford University Press, 2014), 34.
³ Lawrence G. Potter, Sectarianism in the Middle East, Great Decisions, 2015, 30. http://www.jstor.org/sta-
to a group. And by that, the individual’s loyalty to the group is tested through compromises between his/her group and others, favoring of course the group. With such loyalty to one’s group, in accordance to the theory, comes a desire for the prevailing of one’s group over the others. As mentioned, since there is competition among different groups, marginalized groups tend to call for better social and economic status. Though, since the world system today is marked by notions of equality and representation, the repression of different social groups is considered illegal. Yet, in oppressive regimes, such means could be installed as part of the regimes strategy to manipulate the state’s resources, including the political, social, and economic aspects, and thus oppressing certain groups along sectarian lines and through the security apparatus. And in such cases, if there is political instability, marginalized groups might try to gain better social and economic status through opposing the existing status quo in the form of uprisings or even revolutions.

Symbolic Politics Theory

On the other hand, the “Symbolic Politics” theory, as explained by Kaufman, explains that “ethnicity is based on a “myth symbol complex” and that when hostility towards another ethnic group is an important part of this complex, the likelihood of intergroup conflict increases.”

Moreover, this means that there are two other prerequisites of ethnic conflict, and that includes when the marginalized group feels that there is a threat to their survival and when there is a chance to mobilize. First, the theory entails that the threat to a group’s survival creates emotional response in return, and such response is usually filled with symbols that further bond the group together. While another emotion as fear may justify the escalation of ethnic tensions into violent conflicts. Second, all such emotions, whether of threat or fear, are turned into action when the repressive state apparatus breaks down, leaving a room for the group to mobilize, demanding more rights.

Mazur’s “Doubly Included/ Doubly Excluded” Theory

On the other hand, Kevin Mazur (2018) proposes a theoretical framework for analyzing sectarian and ethnic conflicts. This theory explains the relationship between ethnicity and patronage networks, proposing that there are four possible relationships, which are “doubly included, ethnically excluded” clients, ethnically included clients, and doubly included.” Moreover, it is argued that the doubly included and doubly excluded affect and shape the rise of sectarian-based conflict in ethnically or sectarian-divided countries. The doubly included are those who share the ethnicity or

5 Ibid, 2-3.
8 Ibid, 6.
9 Ibid, 7.
sect of the regime and involved in its patronage networks and the doubly excluded are those who do not share the ethnicity or sect of the regime and are not part of its patronage network. Moreover, in the case of ethnic or sectarian-based uprisings or contestation, the doubly included are the least likely to participate, while the doubly excluded are the most likely to participate. And depending on this, the level of the conflict can be measured.11

History of sectarianism in the Middle East

When looking at the history of the Middle East, we can see that sectarian divisions date back to centuries ago, and that they are not particular to the Middle East, but rather ethnic or religious divisions that also exist everywhere in the world. So, what makes the issue so problematic in the Middle East? The history of the Middle East is filled with times of harmony and with times of division along sectarian lines. So, why the sudden escalation of events? As Makdisi puts it; “sectarianism is a modern story, and, for those intimately involved in its unfolding, it is the modern story – a story that has and continues to define and dominate their lives.”12 But before we answer that, let’s first briefly examine the recent history of the Middle East that has paved the way for the rise of sectarian-based conflicts.

To begin with, we can assume that there are three main “historical legacies” that created “cleavages”, which in return affected the response of sectarian and minority groups towards their oppressive governments.13 And that denoted their choice to support or oppose the oppressive regimes their countries. Such legacies include the Ottoman millet system, the integration of the economies into world markets, and the regimes’ policies of religion and secularism.14

First, the Ottoman Empire was home for many different ethnicities, religions, and languages. The millet system entailed that the main identifier is religion, making it the distinguishing identity among the Ottoman subjects. Moreover, this system guaranteed the protection of certain religious groups (recognized by the Ottoman rule) to be autonomous enough to practice their own religion and are governed by a religious leader of their own that is approved by the Sultan.15 This system was very successful in the sense that the Ottomans were able to rule over a huge mosaic of differences, thus entailing their longevity and, most importantly, internal peace. However, this entailed that only the approved religious communities could be part of that system and others that were not approved by the Ottomans or were not recognized as religious groups were marginalized.

In addition, although the millet policies were very influential in creating and maintaining

11. Ibid, 4-5.
15. Ibid, 283.
the sectarian-based lines, they were not the only sectarian-based policies introduced. The Ottomans were under pressure from the Europeans to introduce the concept of modern citizenship, thus shifting from religious to territorial-based identity.16 Furthermore, the Mandate system that followed the collapse of the Ottoman rule introduced identities based on new sectarian lines that continued to take shape during the Mandate system and during the creation of the new states after and out of the mandate system. Moreover, such identities were constantly affected and reshaped as a consequence of the mandate policies and as a response to those policies by the locals who were also competing for influence along with the Mandate governments.17 Second, it can be argued that the sectarian and ethnic lines that were created by the Ottomans and their successors (the Western colonizers) created differences along those lines. Such differences entailed that post-independence, when the Middle Eastern states began to join the world’s economies and the world market, the groups that were marginalized by the Ottomans and their successors along ethnic and sectarian lines suffered more due to their historical marginalization, thus they did not have access to good education or to business and trading networks like the other preferred groups.18 Last, the common feature among Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes is that of adopting a state religion and at the same time creating secular-based policies that deem the participation or the inclusion of religiously-affiliated groups, thus shaping the political life by allowing the participation of some but not all groups of societies in the political life.19

Recent developments

Recent developments in the region have reinforced sectarian-based narrative in politics and among the people. Despite how important is the effect of the Ottoman millet system in creating and paving the way for the sectoral-based narrative, we must understand that it is the recent developments in the region that further fostered those sectarian lines and even created new ones. Because it is important to understand that despite the existence of historical forms of sectarianism in the region, we cannot solely claim that they are the sole cause. It is rather that a lot of the blame falls on the modern political context.20 It can be noted that the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a rise of political Islam and a general revival of religious narrative in the region, after a time that was filled with notions of nation-based solidarity and regional solidarity post-independence. Moreover, Iran’s Islamic revolution, along with the shift of the Iraqi regime from a majority Sunni to majority Shi’i regime created fear among the region’s leaders that there is a rising

17 Ibid, 775-776.
competition between Sunni and Shi'i discourse and along the sectarian lines.\textsuperscript{21} Also, the rise of ISIS and their religious based narrative of extremism caused even more alarm and tension in the region.\textsuperscript{22}

With such ongoing events in the region and since that the Gulf monarchies are rentier states, they do not need coordination along political institutions or economic classes, and thus coordinate based on sectarian lines.\textsuperscript{23} Still, such sectarian based conflicts (such as the rise of the Iranian hegemony as a Shiite power after the revolution) do not validate the fact that a sectarian-based conflict is on its way to happen. To the contrary, the problem does not lie in the sectarian-based divisions which have existed for so long, but with the policies of leaders and their governments, as they deny people their freedom and manipulate them along sectarian lines in order to consolidate their rule.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, further reiterating the fact that we when considering sectarianism, modernly, we can separate the historical religious aspect of sectarianism from the modern politically religious aspect of sectarianism.\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{Brief overview of Syria’s sectarian history}

As explained above and since Syria was a part of the Ottoman empire, it’s safe to say that the millet system was installed within today’s Syria and that the sectarian lines were drawn upon during the Ottoman rule through the millet system and were reshaped after the Ottomans shifted to the modern identification of citizenship after being pressured by the Europeans.\textsuperscript{26} Syria was established in 1920 (and gained independence in 1946) along those sectarian lines, as many of the Middle Eastern states whose creation was artificial, disregarded harmony, and included mostly sectarian and ethnic mosaics. Figure 1 below depicts the ethnic and sectarian divisions that exist within Syria. As mentioned above, early during the French Mandate system, those groups competed together for control within the Mandate system and they were also played against each other by the Mandate system, which favored certain groups over the others.\textsuperscript{27} Some of those favored groups include the Alawites (a different religious sect), which the Assads belong to.\textsuperscript{28}

The French Mandate system was looking for a sphere of influence in Syria and so played on sectarian lines that have existed since Ottoman times. The French, looking to weaken the Sunni authority at the time, chose to support

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Justin J. Gengler, \textit{Understanding Sectarianism in the Persian Gulf}, Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf (Oxford University Press, 2014), 34-35.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ussama Makdisi, \textit{Pensée 4: Moving Beyond Orientalist Fantasy, Sectarian Polemic, and Nationalist Denial}. International Journal of Middle East Studies, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 559. doi:10.1017/S0020743808081488.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Michael Gasper, \textit{Sectarianism, Minorities, and the Secular State in the Middle East}, International Journal of Middle East Studies vol. 48, 2016, 772.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 775-776.
  \item \textsuperscript{28} E. J. Townshend, \textit{Unravelling Syria’s Ethno-Sectarian Politics} (Thesis, Master of Arts (MA)). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, 2013, 32.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the Alawites and this gave the Alawites access to governmental positions and the Syrian political life. However, with the rise of the pan-Arabism narrative in the region, the French sought again to play on sectarian lines, but this time was not to refute the power of one group, but rather to create internal conflict to prevent the sects from uniting against the French. In both cases, we can see how elements of the “social identity” and “symbolic politics” theories play out. First off, the regrouping, based on the feeling of belonging and identity to fall in a certain group, can be explained through the case of how the Alawites regrouped together despite being the minority in the Sunni-dominated Syria. While, on the other hand, the regrouping of the different sects that happened as a consequence of the French playing off the sects against one another can be explained through the “symbolic politics” theory as each group began to regroup even more when they felt that their security is threatened by other groups.

Fig.1: Syrian Ethno-Sectarian Groups ((Holliday, 2011, 10).30

The Assad Regime and Sectarian Politics:

In order to be able to understand the sectarian element of the Syrian crises, we must first examine the policies of Hafez and Bashar el Assad, both of whom ruled for a total of around forty years combined before the 2011 uprisings. After a series of coups, Hafez al Assad, who was then the Minster of Defense, claimed power and became the first non-Sunni President in Syria in 1971.31 An attributor of Ba’athism, Hafez al Assad used sect, clan, and family ties and relations in order to consolidate his power. As El-Hindy puts it “Assad’s long rule reflected his ability to play religious and ethnic groups against one another”. Moreover, Hafez el Assad was able to play on the rift and society and instilled in religious minorities the idea that he was their protector against the Sunni majority.32 So, Hafez began consolidating his power through the positing of affiliated Alawites in important and high positions, including the security apparatus and thus keeping any other group from competing with him for power (even other Alawites). Bearing in mind such change from Sunni to Alawites sect in the ruling echelon, Hafez al Assad was careful to continue supporting the Ba’ath ideology.33 On the other hand, members of other sects were sure to create good relations with the President. However, they were always monitored by Assad’s security apparatus in order not to defy his rule. In the late 1970s, and early 1980s, the Assad regime faced confrontations due to its corruption and favoritism, which resulted in the Hama massacre in 1982 (a response to economic troubles) and the confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood who opposed the Alawites. However, both cases resulted in the quiet down of the conflict through oppression.

31 Ibid, 36.
33 Ibid, 37.
and violence and the masking of the Assad regime as a better option than that of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood.¹

Bashar al Assad took the Presidency in 2000 after his father’s death.² Bashar Al Assad tried to change some of his father’s old policies, including the economic policies and issues of corruption. As a step towards change, Bashar tried to liberalize the economy.³ Nevertheless, corruption and economic instability remained, along with the sectarian-based policies. And so, the rich were visibly richer and other people still suffered from economic problems. As all the attempts at privatization and economic liberalization had mainly benefited the Assad family and its affiliated circle.⁴ Moreover, unemployment rose to up to 20%, whereas poverty rates rose to up to 44%.⁵ Corruption by Assad’s ruling clique remained, and the evident divide, which proclaimed, if not directly but indicatively still put the Alawites on top.⁶ And so, with such internal struggles and the regional eruption into uprisings against the then regimes, Assad’s regime was not able to consolidate its power long enough and Syria joined the Arabs who contested the rulers and their regimes.

⁴ Ibid, 73.
⁵ Ibid, 73.

Brief overview of the Syrian crisis:

In March 2011, the Syrians took to the street to protest the corrupt and unjust rule of Bashar al Assad, joining other Arab nations in the series of uprisings that have come to be known as the Arab Spring. While in some cases the regime stepped down and not a lot violence was used, the Syrian government was different as Bashar used violence to suppress the uprisings. A few months in, people started to split between pro and anti-regime supporters and pro and anti-regime rhetoric started to fill the news and the political agendas of different regional and global powers. In 2012, the uprisings turned into a civil war and due to the deaths and displacement of thousands, it has to become one of the most devastating events in modern history.⁷

Decoding the conflict through sectarian premises

While corruption, social injustice, and economic problems were factors that contributed to the rise of anti-regime narratives, political ideology also motivated some of the actors and due to the nature of instability, sectarian lines where further reiterated.⁸ Sectarian rhetoric began to fill the media and the streets. And, whether it was true or manufactured, it played a huge role in shaping the conflict. Assad and other persons of

⁸ Christopher Phillips, Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria, Third World Quarterly, 36:2, 2015, 360. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1015788
interest played upon the rhetoric of sectarianism. Assad’s regime denoted the uprisings as terrorist attacks and used rhetoric that highlighted sectarian conflict and how the Sunnis have become a threat to the Alawites and other religious sects, dismissing the political, economic, and social connotations of the uprising. If we can apply Mazur’s theoretical framework, we can see that different groups have had different reactions to the uprisings. Alawites who share the ethnical and sectarian background of the regime, along with the patronage networks, stood hand in hand with and supported the Assad regime, calling the uprisings terrorist moves and further deepening the sectarian conflict. While groups who were “doubly excluded”, meaning those who did not share the regime’s ethnic and sectarian background and were not part of its patronage, such as the Sunnis of Derra and Hawran area (initially) are the ones who rebelled against the regime.

In addition, the Assad regime and other interest groups further stressed the existence of a sectarian rift in the country. Further on in the conflict, the attacks by the regime’s security apparatus on the Omari mosque in Deraa, which was a Sunni religious and historical attribute, fostered the sectarian rift and reiterated the narrative of a sectarian conflict unfolding in Syria. This can be understood as an effort by the regime to maintain a sectarian rift and to reiterate the rhetoric in the media, in order to prevent Syrians from over-crossing sectarian sentiments. Thus, collectively allying along the lines of nationalism and maintaining the image that the Assad regime is the only option at maintaining a stable a-sectarian hegemony among all Syrians.

Subsequently, with the rise of sectarian rhetoric and as actual rifts began to shape, supporters of certain sects in the conflict began taking action in Syria. Shi’i militias were recruited by Shi’i supporters (including Hezbollah, Iran, and other Shi’i supporters) to defend the Shi’i religious sites in Syria. This shows that the interest has become religious as it began transcending the state’s sovereignty and maintaining stability and became about supporting a certain religious sect.

On the other hand, Sunni cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi urged Sunni Muslims to travel to Syria and aid fight against the regime. This shows how the narrative has come to divide the region with different non-Syrian actors calling for the aid of their Syrian sectarian counterparts.

Sectarianism in Syria: A factor or a consequence of the civil war (2011-present):

As discussed above, Syria is very sectarian in nature due to the policies rooted in

the rule of the Ottomans, followed by the French Mandate in Syria and the artificial state borders and lines that were created by the colonizers. Nevertheless, different sects lived together within harmony and even sometimes conflict, but it never escalated to a civil war. The uprisings in Syria that began as a call for social, political, and economic rights, as in all other countries of the Arab Spring, have turned into a civil war that has become inflicted with sectarian rhetoric and clashes that could take years if not decades to fix. We can say that the rhetoric used by Assad’s regime and the involvement of other actors led to the evolving of sectarian divisions into a reality of sectarian conflict. This of course does not mean that the Syrian civil war is confined to sectarian conflicts that transcend state borders or that it is only sectarian-based. There are political, social, and economic constituents that the Arab Spring uprisings shared in general. However, due to the sectarian nature of the regime and the politicization of sectarianism, a huge aspect of the Syrian civil war has turned into a sectarian crisis for Syria and maybe even the region. According to Gledhill, the “historically rooted religious differences” were used by leaders and were turned into a politicized narrative that had the sole aim of guaranteeing the regime’s survival, disregarding the long-term rifts that were caused by mobilizing such rhetoric.

**Regional conflict?**

The question that has been raised by scholars, such as Jenkins, is whether such sectarian conflict that began in Syria and started to include the involvement of outside parties on Syrian land will transcend and become a regional (proxy) war between Sunnis and Shi’is? The already existing rift and fight for regional domination between Sunni and Shi’ite states exists. So, can the Syrian civil war with its sectarian elements further that fight for domination? It can be argued that the Syrian refugees who are a product of the civil war will add to that regional conflict, as they might be recruited to fight along sectarian wars. Moreover, we can come to think whether this sectarian rift might lead to the creation of new sectarian-based borders, replacing the colonial borders. However, since the Syrian civil war is still unfolding (2018), final assumptions cannot yet be made about the fate of the region.

**Conclusion**

Sectarianism in the region has historical roots that date back to Ottoman times. People of the Middle East have learned to co-exist in harmony and sometimes conflict, along those sectarian lines. Nevertheless, recent developments in the last few decades have paved the way for the escalation of the sectarian division into a full-fledged conflict. The Ottomans and their successors, the European colonizers have previously manipulated the sectarian lines in order to consolidate their rule and to prevent their overpowering by any regional power. Recent developments, including the Iranian revolution and the Shi’i government of Iraq, have zoomed the microscope on the sectarian

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rifts, internally in the respective states and regionally. The Arab Spring which was a series of uprisings that demanded social, political and economic rights has taken a different turn in Syria. Both Hafiz and Bashar al-Assad in their combined forty years of rule have manipulated sectarian rifts, especially since the coming of Hafez al Assad marked the change from a majority Sunni led regime to a minority Alawites led regime. With both their corruptive and sectarian manipulative policies, uprisings took place as Syria followed suit the other Arab uprisings. However, Bashar has manipulated the sectarian dimension within the state, stating that there are sectarian actors who are trying to create a sectarian conflict, claiming that his regime is the only way Syria will ever be united. With that, region sectarian actors took upon the chance to interfere to consolidate the power of their sects. Thus, a sectarian dimension has evolved out of the Syrian civil war that has led to a sectarian-based regional rift, all the while through the manipulation of the Assad regime to consolidate its power. And the question remains; is the sectarian rift going to die out with the dissolving of the Syrian civil war?

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Islamists as a Vehicle for Neoliberalism

A Focus on the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt

By: Omar El-Gammal

Introduction

The Egyptian revolution of the 25th of January 2011 brought to the streets millions of Egyptians in revolt against their political, economic, and social conditions, that were primarily produced by the market-orientation of the state. After 18 days of protests, Egyptians celebrated the overthrowing of Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt for 30 years. The Muslim Brotherhood (the “Brotherhood”) was perhaps the most important actor in the period that followed. Shortly after the revolution, it rose to power, at least partially, through its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). The policies and actions of the Brotherhood/FJP demonstrated that it did not aim to challenge the neoliberal structures that produced the revolution. How can it be explained that a major opposition force to the Mubarak regime reproduced
comparable neoliberal policies when it rose to power? This article puts forward the argument that the neoliberal orientation of the Muslim Brotherhood is a product of the political and socioeconomic context in which it existed. Similar to the rest of society, the Brotherhood was affected by neoliberalism which was able to take-over the organization by altering its social makeup. Neoliberalism combined with Islamism in the organizational body of the Muslim Brotherhood and manifested itself in the Brotherhood’s policies and actions. More generally, religion in Egypt was neutralized by the reshaping of religiosity in a way that conforms to the neoliberal value system.

Following Bayat (2005), this article does not treat Islam as a uniform and static doctrine that exists in isolation of the socioeconomic pressures the society goes through. Instead of attempting to deduce a fixed character for Islamists from the Islamic doctrine(s), I deal with Islamism as a social movement ‘in constant flow and motion’ that ‘should be studied as a historical phenomenon in a span of time.’

The article explores the interactions between Islamists and neoliberalism by placing Egyptian Islamists, at the centre of which lies the Muslim Brotherhood, in the historical context in which they operated. Similar to Treanor, I identify neoliberalism as a project that strives for the extension of market rationality into all areas of life by turning ‘every action of every being …[into]… a market transaction, conducted in competition with every other being.’

Building on Wendy Larner’s work, I do not reduce neoliberalism to a supranational project that is perpetuated via ‘top-down impositional discourse,’ the essay is rather situated within the literature that argues neoliberalism is found in combination with local political projects.

The Neoliberal Causes of the Revolution

The neoliberal policies that signalled the demise of the Egyptian developmental state were a major cause for the eruption of the revolution. After the 1952 coup in Egypt, President Gamal Abdel Nasser led the establishment of an authoritarian developmental state that built part of its legitimacy on an element of wealth redistribution through the direct redistribution of agricultural land, guaranteed employment by the state, and extensive subsidisation of basic commodities and consumer goods.

Initially, the Egyptian developmental state

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was performing impressively and achieving high growth rates. However, this did not last long as Egypt’s bad exports performance created a balance-of-payments crisis that, coupled with a humiliating military defeat in 1967, put the developmental model under significant pressure. By the mid-1970s, President Anwar al-Sadat, who succeeded Nasser, was inaugurating an economic opening (Infitah) and ushering towards a neoliberal transition.

The Egyptian revolution of the 25th of January was, at least partially, a response to more than three decades of neoliberalism that followed Sadat’s infitah and intensified in the 1990s, under Mubarak. Reduced earnings from oil exports, the Suez Canal, and remittances put fiscal strains on the Egyptian state leaving it in a deep economic crisis, in the 1980s. In reward for its participation during the Gulf War (1991), Western powers exempted Egypt from a considerable part of its debt. This was subject to Egypt’s implementation of an economic restructuring program. Indeed, in 1991, Egypt implemented the Economic Restructuring and Adjustment Program (ERSAP) which entailed the revocation of the state’s social welfare policies, privatization of the public sector, liberalization of the market, and the flexibilization of Egypt’s labour laws.

The privatization schemes, and ensuing economic restructuring benefited businessmen who were politically connected to the regime, and to whom public enterprises were transferred. Privatization produced a class of crony capitalists which eventually, under the leadership of Mubarak’s son, Gamal, hegemonized the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and shaped its agenda in a manner that benefited the emerging bourgeois class. Crony capitalists became directly responsible for setting national policy. Six important seats in Ahmed Nazif’s government (2004 – 2011) were occupied by some of Egypt’s biggest businessmen. For example, Rachid Mohamed Rachid, Zohair Garana, and Hatem al-Gabally, led the ministries of trade and industry, tourism, and health. The three of which are owners of large family businesses in these sectors. At the same time, businessmen constituted about a third of the People’s Assembly, in 2005. Some of these used their connections to establish monopolies over strategic sectors in the economy (e.g. steel and

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10 Adly, Too Big to Fail, 5.
cement). A prime example is Ahmed Ezz who was able to control two-thirds of steel production in Egypt while playing a leading role in the NDP and heading the Budget Committee in parliament.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, in 2007, Ezz produced an amended antitrust law that privileged him personally.\textsuperscript{12}

On the other hand, the vast majority of the Egyptian people were disempowered and dispossessed. Labour flexibilization and privatization of public enterprises led to massive worker layoffs, which the private sector was not able to absorb. Job losses, wage stagnation, and unemployment were coupled with the state’s withdrawal from its earlier social commitments leading to significant increases in the costs of living. On the eve of the 25\textsuperscript{th} of January revolution, unofficial unemployment estimates were at 25% and 40% of Egyptians were living under the poverty line.\textsuperscript{13}

The widening wealth gaps were leading to an observable increase in social tension and eventually created the conditions for the revolution.\textsuperscript{14} Workers launched what became the biggest wave of labour protests, in Egypt, since the 1940s.\textsuperscript{15} An estimated 1.7 million workers participated in a total of 1,900 strikes in the period from 2004 to 2008.\textsuperscript{16} At the same time, less organized marginalized citizens, especially among rural populations, initiated their own wave of dispersed “market-relations-based” protests, in reaction to the state’s failure to provide basic services. Even the pro-democracy movement, comprised of a wide coalition of students, political activists, and professionals, which was primarily focused on putting forward political demands, such as calling for the freedom of association, was also demanding the reversal of the neoliberal policies which have led to a deterioration in its members’ economic conditions.\textsuperscript{17} Protests by workers, marginalized citizens, professionals, and pro-democracy activists planted the seeds of rebellion and created a new “culture of protest” that paved the way to the January 25\textsuperscript{th} revolution.\textsuperscript{18}

**The Muslim Brotherhood: Neoliberal Business as Usual**

When the January 25\textsuperscript{th} revolution erupted, the Muslim Brotherhood was the strongest and most organized opposition group in Egypt. Soon after the revolution, the Brotherhood was able to ascend to power through its political arm, the FJP.\textsuperscript{19}

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\textsuperscript{11} Joya, *The Egyptian revolution*, 339-361.
\textsuperscript{12} Adly, *Too Big to Fail*, 6.
\textsuperscript{13} Joya, *The Egyptian revolution*, 339-361.
\textsuperscript{16} Dahi, *The Political Economy*, 47-53.
\textsuperscript{18} Alexander and Bassiouy, *Bread, freedom, social justice*, 2014: 98.
\textsuperscript{19} Al-Anani, *Devout Neoliberalism?*, 1-20; Görmüş, Evrim. The economic ideology of the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood: the changing discourses and practices. *Journal of Emerging Economies and Islamic Research* 4, no. 3
Paradoxically, however, although the Brotherhood reached power because of the revolution, its policies and rhetoric displayed comfort in maintaining the same neoliberal policies that produced this societal explosion.\textsuperscript{20}

In the first parliamentary elections after the revolution, in November 2011, the FJP was able to attain 47% of parliamentary seats.\textsuperscript{21} Shortly afterwards, by mid-2012, the Brotherhood’s presidential candidate, Mohammed Morsi, became the first democratically elected President of Egypt. In both elections, the Brotherhood did not put forward an original “Islamist” economic model.\textsuperscript{22} Morsi’s campaign was based on a political platform called the \textit{Nahda} (Renaissance). It was designed by Khairat al-Shater, one of the Brotherhood’s most prominent figures and businessmen, Deputy to the General Guide, and the organization’s initial candidate for presidential candidacy.\textsuperscript{23} This platform showed that the Brotherhood did not interpret the revolution as a reaction to certain social structures, but rather saw in it a reaction to the corruption and nepotism of the Mubarak regime.\textsuperscript{24} The \textit{Nahda} political platform, did not entail any kind of redistributive measures but rather encouraged volunteerism and emphasised the role of \textit{zakah}\textsuperscript{25}, \textit{sadaqah}\textsuperscript{26}, and \textit{waqf}\textsuperscript{27} in achieving social justice. In its platform, the Brotherhood neither called for a redefinition of Egypt’s relations with the world economy, nor did it call for a re-formulation of the state-market relations as they existed following Sadat’s \textit{infitah}.\textsuperscript{28} This faith-based development program stressed the role of individuals in achieving prosperity and outlined the importance of educating Egyptians to satisfy the private sector’s labour demands. At the same time, it proposed to alleviate poverty by providing individuals with equal opportunities and resorting to market-based solutions, such as supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).\textsuperscript{29} The Brotherhood, no different than the Mubarak regime, was pushing for the private control of the production process.\textsuperscript{30} Most importantly, the \textit{Nahda} called for a resumption of the privatization efforts.\textsuperscript{31}

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\textsuperscript{20} Zakah is the third pillar of Islam. It obliges Muslims to pay 2.5% of their qualifying wealth to support the needy.
\textsuperscript{21} Sadaqah is voluntary charitable giving. It can be paid in addition to Zakah.
\textsuperscript{22} Waqf is an endowment made for a charitable cause.
\textsuperscript{24} Atia, \textit{Building a house in heaven}, 164; G{"o}rm{"u}s, \textit{The economic ideology}, 1-15.
\textsuperscript{25} Adly, \textit{Between Social Populism}, 61-78.
\textsuperscript{26} Gamal, Wael. \textit{Lost Capital: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s Neoliberal Transformation}. Carnegie \textit{Middle East Center}, 2019: 1-5.
after the revolution, reflected its unwillingness to defy the status quo. The Brotherhood put considerable effort into assuring Western investors and governments of its pro-market orientation. For example, in a meeting with the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, al-Shater stressed on the importance of Egypt’s economic ties with the West and the major role the private sector is to play, even when it comes to the provision of basic services such as water and electricity. In another instance, Hassan Malek, another leading businessman of the Brotherhood, expressed his view that structural reforms and foreign investments are the essential ingredients for development.

It was not especially difficult to spot the Brotherhood’s bourgeoisie during the transitional period. Immediately after the revolution, the Brotherhood established the Egyptian Business Development Association (EBDA), under the leadership of Malek, along with some of its other key businessmen. The association was concerned with supporting (SMEs) as a primary means for development. More crucially, it served as a link between businessmen and the Brotherhood. It brought together the same business figures and companies that were active during the Mubarak era. Businessmen close to the Mubarak regime, such as Mohamed Farid Khamis (textile) and Ahmed el-Sewedy (cables), did join the association. These were accompanied by brotherhood affiliated figures such as Samir al-Najjar and Abdel Moneim al-Saudi. At the same time, the Muslim Brotherhood worked during its one year in the presidential palace to expand its own businessmen’s hold on the economy. Businessmen linked to the Islamic movement were increasing their market shares in areas such as construction and real estate.

Policy frameworks put by the Brotherhood’s government further entrenched neoliberal economic policies. Although the Brotherhood used to oppose IMF loans based on the pretext that they constituted ribā, and that they furthered US hegemony, this seems to have only been a tactical maneuverer rather than being an ideologically motivated position. During Morsi’s year in power the Egyptian

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32 Joya, Neoliberalism, 339-361.
34 Al-Anani, Devout Neoliberalism?, 1-20; Gerges. The Islamist moment, 389-426
35 Adly, Too Big to Fail, 8.
36 Al-Anani, Devout Neoliberalism?, 1-20 ; Joya, Neoliberalism, 339-361.
37 Gamal, Lost Capital, 3 ; Görmüş, The economic ideology, 1-15.
38 Adly, Between Social Populism, 61-78.
40 Adly, Between Social Populism, 61-78.
42 Atia, Building a house in heaven, 164; Dalacoura, Islamism and neoliberalism, 2016 ; Joya, Neoliberalism, 339-361.
43 Ribā is charging interest on loans. It is forbidden in Islamic Shariah.
44 Adly, Between Social Populism, 61-78; Al-Anani, Devout Neoliberalism?, 1-20.
government was involved in several rounds of negotiations with the IMF, in the hopes of securing a $4.8 billion loan. In order to meet the IMF’s conditions, the government aimed to reduce the size of the public sector and introduced subsidy cuts on fuel and food. These measures, coupled with the introduction of a regressive Value Added Tax (VAT), were a guaranteed hit to the poor. At the same time, FJP rescinded the commitment it made in its platform to introduce a tax on capital gains. The introduction of a progressive tax system and a property tax were also deferred.

The neoliberalism the Brotherhood practically advocated for was served with a dash of “Islamism,” which was largely cosmetic and served to appeal to its support base. For example, the FJP’s platform was calling for a gradual replacement of ribā transactions with ones that are Shariah compliant. It also introduced new Islamic banking regulations that allowed for the issuance of sokuk. On the topic of tourism, which stirred quite some debate in Egypt because of tourists usually “un-Islamic” attire and drinking habits, FJP declared that it welcomes tourists as long as they respected Egyptian values and traditions. Other cosmetic “Islamist” policies advocated by the Brotherhood included the introduction of a Shariah compliance index for companies.

**The Muslim Brotherhood: The Neoliberal Takeover**

The Brotherhood’s discourse mixed between Islamism and a globalized neoliberal development discourse. The question that begs an answer is: how did the Brotherhood develop its neoliberal tendencies? This question cannot be answered by a focus on Islamic scripture and thought. Islamism, similar to any religion-based ideology, is quite fluid. Its approach towards socioeconomic issues is neither inherently for or against capitalism, and it can be observed changing significantly across time. Such changes reflect the changing interests of the various groups forming the movement. Islamism has been employed by different organizations as both a systemic and an anti-systemic moving ideology. While the Islamic holy scriptures are static, their ambiguity allows for them to be employed differently at different times, depending on the political and economic circumstances the Islamist movement is subject to, at a certain point in history, along with the rest of society.

Islamist literature, which contains references to both socialism and capitalism, is evidential of the malleability of the

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45 Al-Anani, *Devout Neoliberalism?*, 1-20.
48 Sokuk are shariah compliant bonds.
49 Atia, *Building a house in heaven*, 164.
Islamic doctrine(s). During the 1950s and 60s, in the heydays of socialism, Islamists displayed socialist leanings. For example, Shaikh Mohammed al-Ghazali, an esteemed Islamic scholar, and a member of the Brotherhood at a certain point in time, put emphasis in his writings on the importance of social justice in Islam. Similarly, Moustafa al-Sibai, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, gave one of his books the title “The Socialism of Islam”. At a later period, perhaps due to Nasser’s crackdown on Islamists, Islamist ideologues began to shun Nasser’s proclaimed socialism. Instead, they stressed on Islam’s respect for private property as it is, so they argued, the source of Zakah and it is the subject of the inheritance rules stipulated in the Shariah. The neoliberal tendencies of the Brotherhood can be explained by changes in its class structures which were produced by the neoliberal policies of the state. Subject to persecution by Nasser in the 50s and 60s, many members of the Islamist movement found refuge in neighbouring Gulf countries where they were involved in business and were able, because of the oil boom, to accumulate wealth. In 1974, Sadat started contracting Nasser’s developmental state by announcing his Infitah. To strengthen his position vis a vis the Nasserists, Sadat released Islamists from prison and gave them room to operate. The Muslim Brotherhood welcomed these developments and saw in economic liberalization a dismantlement of Nasser’s oppressive state. Muslim Brotherhood members were able to return from their exile in the Gulf states and, armed with Gulf oil wealth, engaged freely in business. Subsequently, an Islamic bourgeoisie started emerging under Infitah. Enterprises that had connections with the Brotherhood could have constituted up to 40% of the private sector and were mainly in real estate and currency speculation. The elders of 8 out of 18 families that controlled Egypt’s private sector, in 1980, were Islamists. In the 1980s and 1990s, Brotherhood businessmen were able to establish presence in sectors such as furniture, computers, and retail clothing. This was reflected in the power structures inside the Muslim. By the end of the

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1 Gamal, Lost Capital, 2019: 1-5
2 Al-Anani, Devout Neoliberalism?, 1-20.
4 Ates, Economic liberalization, 1-20.
8 Beinin, Political Islam, 111-139.
9 Al-Anani, Devout Neoliberalism?, 1-20; Beinin, 2005.
10 Beinin, Political Islam, 111-139.
11 Beinin, Political Islam, 111-139.
1990s, the Brotherhood’s businessmen started to ascend to senior positions.\textsuperscript{14} Individuals such as Malek, Youssef Nada, and al-Shater, who amassed substantial wealth in the 90s, practiced considerable influence on the organization.\textsuperscript{15} The professional middle-class, which historically occupied the Brotherhood’s senior positions, was gradually replaced by a new business elite.\textsuperscript{16} The organization’s orientation more and more became a reflection of the views of its “economically conservative” members.\textsuperscript{17} In effect, the organization was turned into “a bourgeois force, with a middle-class periphery.”\textsuperscript{18}

**The Neoliberal Champions of the Poor**

The Muslim Brotherhood was essentially a systemic force that employed a religious discourse, a network of socioreligious organizations, and identity politics, to obtain the victims of neoliberalism’s support for neoliberal policies. The organization’s understanding of justice does not challenge the structures that produce social injustice. Similar to most Islamists, they claim to represent society in its totality and turn a blind eye to social class. Instead, they attempt to achieve justice, as they perceive the concept, through charity and the benevolence of those who have wealth. The neoliberal policies of the state provided the Brotherhood with the finances and the opportunity to grow its charity activities, which led to growth in its bases of popular support. The State’s withdrawal from its social and economic responsibilities was employed strategically by the Brotherhood, to build support for itself at the grass-roots level. It moved to establish its own schools, independent mosques, and charity organizations. The financial presence established by the Brotherhood’s members, and Islamists in general, under Sadat’s *infitah* was used to finance, in part, these welfare services.\textsuperscript{19} The Brotherhood’s social associations gave it a “reputational advantage.” The urban and rural poor perceived the Brotherhood as faithful to the welfare state and redistribution policies.\textsuperscript{20} This, however, was not the case. Islamists merely distributed foodstuffs and provided health and education services while withholding from challenging the neoliberal transformation, except for shedding light on “corruption.” The Brotherhood was perhaps challenging the regime in the

\textsuperscript{14} El Houdaiby, Ibrahim. *From prison to palace: the Muslim Brotherhood’s challenges and responses in post-revolution Egypt*. FRIDE working papers, 1-14. \textsuperscript{23} 2013.

\textsuperscript{15} Görmüş, *The economic ideology*, 1-15.

\textsuperscript{16} El-Houdaiby, *From prison to palace*, 1-24.

\textsuperscript{17} Gamal, *Lost Capital*, 2; Allinson, Jamie. “Class forces, transition and the Arab uprisings: a comparison of Tunisia, Egypt and Syria.” *Democratization* 17, no. 3 (2010): 421-457.

sense that it sought to replace it. It did not, however, challenge the neoliberal framework employed by the regime.\textsuperscript{21} The religious nature of the Brotherhood gave it an advantage over other political forces whose views perhaps better represented the aspirations of the rural and urban poor that was largely supporting the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood’s embeddedness in dense networks of religious organizations gave them a comparative advantage over their opponents. These networks provided it more opportunities to communicate with voters. Similar opportunities to communicate with the population, in the authoritarian context of Egypt, were not available to the Brotherhood’s opponents. For example, despite most poor Egyptian voters being in favour of considerable redistribution and welfare provision by the state, which are policies espoused more by leftists, there are fewer networks, based on social class, which leftists could utilize to communicate with potential supporters.\textsuperscript{22} The Muslim Brotherhood’s emphasis on identity politics also contributed to obscuring its neoliberal tendencies.\textsuperscript{23} After the revolution, the Islamist forces dragged society to a battle on the ambiguous subject of the Islamic identity of the state. Campaigns were based on identity politics rather than economic policy. The coalitions that formed in the aftermath of the revolution and preceding the 2011 parliamentary elections, demonstrate that religious identity was the main point of contention between political forces. For example, the right-wing Free Egyptians Party formed a coalition with the left-wing Tagammu Party just on the fact that they were both “secular” parties. In the presidential elections of 2012, there was little to differentiate the main contenders when it came to economic policy.\textsuperscript{24}

The Emergence of “Pious Neoliberalism”

As mentioned earlier, Sadat had his political motives behind allowing Islamists, with the reformist Muslim Brotherhood at their core, some room to operate. The Mubarak regime as well, to divert youth away from the revolutionary Islamists, who were taking arms against the state in the 1980s and 90s, tolerated the activities of the reformist Brotherhood, to an extent. By the late 1980s, the Brotherhood was at its peak. It was at the center of an intricate network of grassroots socioreligious organizations. It was the focal point of a wide movement that included other Islamist youth and women groups, Islamist student activists, and numerous Islamist public figures, such as Salim al-‘Awa and Mohamed Emara, who were also calling for


\textsuperscript{22} Masoud, \textit{Counting Islam: Religion, class, and elections in Egypt}, 155-182.

\textsuperscript{23} Dalacoura, \textit{Islamism and neoliberalism}, 2016.

\textsuperscript{24} Kinninmont, \textit{New socio-political actors}, 3.
an Islamic revival. This wide movement had much influence over society. State control over civil society began to recede against a rising dominance of Islamists, and the Brotherhood in particular. This could be observed in the Brotherhood’s influence over mosques, professional syndicates, student unions, schools, and NGOs. The Brotherhood was even starting to infiltrate state institutions. The success of the Brotherhood dragged the state to the Islamist’s playfield. The state competed with Islamists on seeking legitimation through religion. Al-Azhar, the religious institution endorsed by the state, started expanding its religious and social activities. Both the state and the only major opposition force to it were working on the Islamization of society. As a result, religious conservatism gained prominence in the Egyptian society and reflected in Egyptians’ attire, the kinds of media and books they consumed, their language, and their behaviour.

The elite produced by neoliberalism was affected by this overall rise in piety in the Egyptian society. It, however, approached religion in a way that allowed it to conform to its neoliberal values. The interaction of the neoliberal elite with religion produced a hybrid between the two rationales. A new variant of religiosity, which centered around ‘personal salvation, ethical enhancement, and self-actualization’ emerged. This is evidenced by observing the rhetoric of Amr Khaled, who was the most popular Islamic preacher in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Khaled’s lectures were phenomenally successful in terms of the crowds they drew. Large numbers of elite-class youth and women flocked to his ceremonies. He appealed to his audience by presenting productivity and entrepreneurship as ways to get closer to God. Khaled, a charismatic orator, put together a version of Islam that claimed a compatibility between piety and participation in a neoliberal economy. Khaled is an obvious example of a wide process that was unraveling in Egyptian society. The state’s neoliberal orientation was combining with the observed increased piety of Egyptians producing “pious neoliberalism.” Pious neoliberal subjects internalized neoliberal values in the form of a re-narrated version of Islam that claimed compatibility between the market rationale and religion. This version of neoliberalism was consumed primarily by the privileged. The only exception could be workers who migrated to the Gulf and upon their return to Egypt constituted a petite bourgeoisie. In that sense, religion did not constitute any meaningful threat to the preponderance of neoliberalism and the value system it propagates. In fact, Islamic religiosity was

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28 Atia, Building a house in heaven, xv-xvi; Bayat, Making Islam democratic, 151-155; Sika, Dynamics of a stagnant religious, 72.
29 Atia, Building a house in heaven, 2013.
appropriated to serve the neoliberal project.

**Conclusion**

The Egyptian revolution of the 25th of January was a reaction to three decades of the state adopting neoliberal policies. These policies have benefited well-connected businessmen while disempowering most Egyptians. As the strongest and most organized opposition group in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood ascended to power following the revolution. Its actions, policies, and rhetoric, in that period, revealed it was not attempting to challenge the neoliberal causes behind the revolution. Instead, it reproduced the same neoliberal policies of Mubarak’s regime. In attempting to explain the Brotherhood’s neoliberal orientation, this essay showed that the Brotherhood was itself a victim of the neoliberal policies of the state. These policies changed the social makeup of the Brotherhood as an elite class of businessmen, produced by neoliberalism, took over the leadership of the Brotherhood, and dictated its economic orientation. Despite this, the rural and urban poor largely supported the Brotherhood following the revolution. The Brotherhood’s socioreligious activities, although not anti-systemic in nature, gave them the reputation that they were pro-redistribution and social welfare provision by the state. Neoliberalism was, thus, able to take over the organizational body of the Brotherhood and used it to garner the support of the victims of neoliberal policies. Not only was neoliberalism able to appropriate the Brotherhood for its project, but it was also successful in recasting religion in a form that was compatible with the value system it propagated. In that sense, neither Islamic religiosity nor Islamist organizations obstructed the neoliberal project. In fact, both were used for the furtherance of neoliberalism.
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