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Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Sudan

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This article compares the evidence from two related movements: the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the cluster of organisations that have been closely associated with Hasan al-Turabi in Sudan, in order to query the extent to which Islamism is compatible with liberal democratic politics. The answers suggested are, in the Egyptian case, hopeful, but for Sudan decidedly pessimistic. However, there are complexities within both stories. The comparison indicates ways in which the outcomes are related to the framing circumstances, but also points out the limitations of the information currently available in the academic literature.

How far is Islamism compatible with liberal democratic politics? This question, which was implicitly posed by the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and later at the decolonisation of countries with large Muslim populations, has been widely seen as more pressing after the end of the Cold War, and particularly after the events of 11 September 2001 (Huntington, 1993, 1997; Esposito and Burgat, 2003; Abou El Fadl, 2004). Of course, Islamism has in the contemporary era varied in its character and effects in different times and places, but we would broadly define it as a politics which promotes systems of governance and political solutions in terms of religious doctrine rather than, say, utilitarian considerations, or the supposed interests of classes or nations. The factors that influence the variations in organisations committed to such a politics are consequently of great interest. One way of learning about them is to compare cases which have substantial areas of similarity, but also significant differences. The present article tries to do this through a comparison of the acts and experiences, tactics and strategies, of Islamist groups that share the heritage of the Muslim Brotherhood in the neighbouring countries of Egypt and Sudan.

The Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, hereafter abbreviated as MB),[1] was founded in Egypt, 1928, by a young schoolteacher, Hasan al-Banna. In its first twenty years it gained about half a million members in some two thousand branches throughout the country. Many were involved in co-operative and charitable community work, creating and running mosques, schools and social clubs; small hospitals, firms and trades unions. Members were engaged in these programmes of good works at the same time as encouraging and monitoring each other as regards the precepts of personal morality laid down in Islamic Law (*Shari'a*). But the MB also had a larger political vision. Banna continued a tradition of Islamic ideological responses to the decay of the Ottoman Caliphate (the prime embodiment of a Muslim polity) and the encroachment of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism. The MB was consciously a movement of resistance – which became apparent in the 1940s. Its leaders considered that Islam intrinsically opposed Westernization not only in matters of personal belief and comportment, but in public culture, law and political constitution. And this was not only in each country individually, but also

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geopolitically, uniting Muslims everywhere against domination pursued by the West through such acts as the creation and inflation of the state of Israel.

Nevertheless, the MB has of necessity pursued its struggle mostly in the circumstances of particular nation-states. In Egypt, the context has on the whole been one of severe constraint, varying between conditional licence and outright repression by governments, initially a monarchy that was heavily dependent on Britain, then (from 1952) the authoritarian regimes of Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Until the late 1930s, at least, the MB functioned as a movement of social revival rather than of open political agitation. Membership could be compatible with activism in other political parties (Mitchell, 1969:18). In this way it developed a wide-reaching organisation. But although Banna sometimes said that the aims of the movement were primarily educational, some of its forms and activities suggested a preparation for seizing state power, by force if necessary, although it was denied by Banna. The MB seemed to be using many of the same organisational technologies that had been adopted by communist and fascist revolutionary movements in the early twentieth century: attention to propaganda, programmes of physical and ideological training, insistence on discipline and obedience, secret cells, a large youth corps. In 1942 Banna declared himself a candidate in the national elections, but was instead persuaded to withdraw and support the party of the Prime Minister in return for greater freedom for the MB's activities, and government action against the trades of liquor and prostitution (Ibid. pp. 26-27); the agreement did not hold for long. Three years later, Banna and other Muslim Brothers actually stood in elections, but were defeated, probably as a result of rigging (Ibid. p. 33). Meanwhile the MB had sprouted a secret military unit. This was probably behind the assassinations in the late 1940s of British army officers and Egyptian governmental officials, including (following his banning and attempted dissolution of the MB in December 1948) Prime Minister Muhammad al-Nuqrashi. The MB supported Nasser's revolution in 1952, but returned to violence (including an attempted assassination attempt on Nasser) when it became clear that he was not going to co-operate with them. Nasser, in return, set in motion an even more virulent programme of suppression, in which not only were the assets of the MB confiscated, but six of its leaders executed, thousands of its members arrested, and many more imprisoned and tortured without open trial.

The MB eventually re-emerged in the 1970s and provided inspiration for new organisations in Egypt and other countries. In these new cases there has usually been a recurrence, in some form, of the conflict of priorities between, on the one hand, moral and spiritual consolidation at the level of the individual, family and local community and, on the other, the projection of Islam politically at the level of the state and beyond. Within the latter there is always a question of legitimate means, and whether practices of deception, subversion and violence are justified by the Qur'anic concept of *jihad* (holy struggle). Usually, it has to be said, these MB-related organisations do contain at least a fringe of activists for whom such an interpretation of *jihad* is attractive. It is a stance which, as we show next, has helped bring a MB-related group to control of the state in Sudan, but has not enabled it to build anything resembling an ideal Islamic polity. And, as will be seen afterwards, it is a stance from which the contemporary MB in Egypt appears to be trying to distance itself.

The Islamist Project in Sudan: The Path to Government

The independent MB organisation established in 1954 in Sudan faced a rather different set of opportunities and constraints from that of al-Banna in the Egypt of 1928. First, although colonial rule was more formal in Sudan than it had been in Egypt, its duration was not indefinite; indeed it was due to end imminently, at the start of 1956. The challenge was thus to address the society and politics of a newly-independent state, rather than to build a framework of resistance under a foreign-dominated administration. There was also a big difference in the composition of the country. Sudan, spatially far more extensive than Egypt, had seen much less modernising development. Communications between centre and periphery were far more tenuous. It was ethnically heterogeneous; indeed, vast areas (particularly in the southern part of the country) were occupied by people who were non-Arab and/ or non-Muslim.[2]

A third difference was in the available space for political mobilisation. Egypt, due to its proximity to Europe and a long history of more or less formal colonisation, had developed a large – and largely secular – political elite. Between the world wars, a section of this had broken away from dependence on both the king and the British to form a dominant nationalist party, the Wafd. The Wafd relied on supporters among local patrons – including diverse sheikhs of Sufi sects – to mobilise the wider population (de Jong, 1983). Since MB membership was initially compatible with activism in the Wafd it was evidently not too hard for the organisation to become established in localities through educational work and other projects, before the phase in which the MB became a political competitor on the national stage. But in Sudan at the time of independence the educated elite was much smaller, and the main political parties were subordinate to one or other of two long-established and competing sects: the Ansar, belonging to the al-Mahdi family; and the Khatmiya, led by the al-Mirghani family.[3] The networks of these sects were already practising an Islamist politics, linking religious teaching and observance in their localities with the articulation of policies at the national level (Voll, 1983; Warburg, 2003). True, compared with the mechanism that the MB pioneered in Egypt, their workings were less modern and disciplined organisationally and doctrinally. Mohammed Salih (2004:162) criticises the sects for failing to invest in formal kinds of education). Nevertheless, their influence presumably presented the MB with a greater obstacle to its establishment in the villages of Sudan than it had faced in Egypt. Furthermore, it meant that the task for the MB here was to destabilise and reconstruct an existing Islamic hegemony, rather than to introduce religion into a predominantly secular political system.

The struggle between religious and secular politics had long predated the arrival of the MB in Sudan. Colonial officials had tried to control and limit the influence of the major sects through techniques of administration using designated tribal chiefs, and by partitioning off areas of the country that did not have a predominantly Muslim population, notably the Nuba Mountains and the South (Warburg, 2003:57-103). They even established an orthodox school of Islam to administer *Shari'a* under the supervision of the government (Khalid, 1990:50-51). Later they tried to nurture a secular politics in Sudan by the establishment of a Graduates General Congress in 1938, and through the creation of a Socialist Republican Party in 1951. But the sect-based power-blocs took over the first of these, and made the second irrelevant (Khalid, 1990:104-141). By the time of Independence (1 January 1956), the best hope for secularity was that competition between the parties associated with the Ansar

and Khatmiya would make them focus on representing the interests of different constituencies and on forming alliances with minority groups, and that in this way the explicitly religious element would gradually diminish.

But another dynamic was at work. The people who, in ever increasing numbers, advanced in formal education were more likely to take a critical view of the traditional sects. Some became less overtly religious, but many adopted a view of Islam that was internationalist and fundamentalist (Voll, 1983:137). It was among intellectuals – with a nucleus among staff and students at Khartoum University – that, in 1954, an independent MB organisation was created in Sudan (Esposito and Voll, 1996:88; Sidahmed, 1997:45-47; Woodward, 1997:98).

As in Egypt, the Sudanese MB at first refrained from setting itself up as an outright competitor with existing political parties. When it established a political front, it did so on a single issue that already had much support among the Muslim majority: the creation of an Islamic constitution, which would make *Shari'a* the pre-eminent form of law. This Islamic Front for the Constitution (IFC) played a considerable role up to 1958 in preventing the entrenchment of secularism, for, once the call for an Islamic constitution was raised, it was hard for sectarian parties to reject it outright (Fleur-Lobban, 1991:77-78; Esposito and Voll, 1996:88; Abdelmoula, 1997). In each of Sudan's periods of parliamentary rule (1956-58, 1964-69 and 1986-89) the dual question of constitution and *Shari'a* became a hot topic and a rallying-point for Islamists, but each time the process was interrupted by a military coup. Each time, the Islamists grew in strength and used different tactics.

After the fall of Sudan's first military dictatorship (the regime of General Ibrahim Abboud) through a popular uprising in 1964, the MB reorganised itself. Hasan al-Turabi – a lawyer who had taken postgraduate qualifications in Europe, and who was the son of one of the *qadi*s (state-sponsored *Shari'a* judges) that the British had hoped would help insulate law and administration from the politically-powerful sects (Ibrahim, 1999) – emerged as the MB's leader. Turabi argued that the movement should aim for political power in its own right, rather than resting content with educational and lobbying activities (Esposito and Voll, 1996:89-90; Sidahmed, 1997:191-192). Accordingly, the IFC was superseded by the Islamic Charter Front (ICF) – a political party rather than just a pressure group. It was formally separate from the MB, but in fact represented the latter's views and interests. Despite being new, the party was awarded a cabinet seat in each of the two transitional governments that followed Abboud's fall, thanks to its relatively strong mobilisation among the urban elite, and especially the students who had demonstrated against Abboud (Sidahmed, 1997:76-79; Lesch, 1998:40). In the 1965 general election, the ICF won only a few seats in parliament (Esposito and Voll, 1996:90; Sidahmed, 1997:88; Holt and Daly, 2000:158-159); it was a bare toe-hold but it was important. In November 1965, when a Syrian communist speaking publicly in Sudan mocked religion, the MB organised demonstrations that amounted to an attack on secularism generally. A measure was passed by parliament in response, banning and dispossessing the Communist Party (Holt and Daly, 2000:161; Sidahmed, 1997:89-94). This particularly assisted the MB in the students' union, as the CP was its main opponent there (Sidahmed, 1997:203-4). Furthermore, it contributed substantially to destabilising the political system (by setting the legislature against the judiciary) in a way that the MB was later to exploit (Simone and Simone, 1994:51; Miller, 1996:189-190). The ICF continued to press the major parties on the matter of an Islamic Constitution. In 1968 a clause was introduced to the constitutional bill

saying that Islamic jurisprudence should be the 'source of law'. Most of the canvassed constitutional drafts since that time have addressed the question of 'source' or 'sources'; it is a loaded question, as it can hardly be answered without giving a dominant role to *Shari'a* (Abdelmoula, 1997). In May 1969 the sectarian parties agreed the principles of an Islamic constitution.

But the path was again blocked by a military coup, later in 1969. Jaafer Numeiri came to power as a leftist and banned most of the existing political parties, including the ICF. Its leaders were detained or forced into exile and Turabi himself was imprisoned for several years. But in 1977, when Numeiri found that he needed to shore up his rule through a process of 'national reconciliation', Turabi agreed to cooperate with a strong-man who still nominally espoused radical socialism (Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:33). He joined the regime and soon became Attorney General. From this political eminence he was able to supervise an expansion of Islamist activity. The MB greatly increased its membership, and Islamist-controlled banks, companies, newspapers and voluntary organisations began to appear (El-Affendi, 1991:115; Miller, 1996:192). All this was powerfully fuelled by the oil boom of the early 1970s. For many of the Gulf magnates, organisations linked with the MB had a particular attraction as investment opportunities and outlets for charitable activity. At the same time, there was a great increase in the number of Sudanese providing migrant labour in the neighbouring oil-rich countries. New Islamist financial organisations in Sudan, which had been given a privileged position in the economy, channelled many of their remittances and, it has been claimed, came to control a substantial black market (Shaaeldin and Brown, 1988; Brown, 1990:177-178; Simone and Simone, 1994:37; Burr and Collins, 2003:23-24; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:52-54). By 1979 Turabi was able to justify his pragmatic accommodation by its success. 'We have eliminated secularism', he said, adding that much work remained to be done as regards the creation of an Islamic society (al-Turabi, 1979 quoted in Voll, 1983:135). As Numeiri tried to cling on to power he increasingly appealed to Islamic sentiment; this culminated in September 1983 with the promulgation of a legal code based on *Shari'a*. There is some disagreement in the literature over what formal role, if any, Turabi played in drafting the code. It seems to have been the case that Numeiri was trying to take possession of the public agenda that Turabi had fostered (Johnson, 2003:56). Although the September Laws came to be widely recognised as poorly-drafted and hard to apply fairly, no subsequent government proved ready to repeal them until a new formulation of *Shari'a* could be put in their place.

Turabi was again imprisoned in the latter months of Numeiri's rule, but he refused to endorse the Charter of National Salvation drawn up by a coalition of the regime's opponents, on the grounds that it was too secular. His resistance was shrewd. When Numeiri fell, in 1985, an interim government was formed under the former defence Minister, Suwar al-Dahab. Dahab and his prime minister both proved to harbour marked Islamist sympathies (Lesch, 1998; Burr and Collins, 2003:34-35). Their administration, besides declining to repeal the September Laws, adopted an amended version of the old interim constitution that increased the emphasis on Islam as the basis of national life.

Prior to national elections, Turabi reassembled his Islamist movement in a new party – the National Islamic Front (NIF). Unlike the ICF, the NIF incorporated within itself most of the grassroots network of the Sudanese MB. In the elections of 1986, the NIF emerged as an important parliamentary force. The pattern of its constituency

victories – mostly in Khartoum and from the college of graduates (Lesch, 1998:72) – indicated that its support was mainly among the urban elite. This parliamentary presence was large enough to bring the NIF a share of government in 1988, during the course of Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi's attempts to balance atop an unstable collection of political forces. As the price of his support, Turabi demanded the promulgation of a new set of Islamic laws within sixty days. Al-Mahdi agreed, but failed to deliver. Whilst apparently amenable to an Islamist agenda, he has always sought to locate himself in a pivotal position, closer to the centre ground of Sudanese electoral politics than Turabi. The reason for Al-Mahdi's broken promise seems to have been that the NIF's ultimatum galvanised a powerful opposing alliance, between the Khatmiya and the many people (notably including senior officers in the army) who wanted to negotiate an end to the civil war against the predominantly non-Muslim insurgents in the south of the country. Counter-ultimatums by the Sudanese army's high command helped push al-Mahdi in 1989 towards a peace process which would be based on secular values. As part of the process, the application of traditional Islamic *hudud* punishments (such as amputation of limbs in cases of theft) was suspended. It was to prevent the process going further that, on 30 June, NIF sympathisers within the army, led by Omar Hasan al-Bashir and other middle-ranking officers, carried out their coup.

The Islamist Project in Sudan: A Compromised Government

Turabi, like many other leading politicians, was imprisoned in the immediate aftermath of the coup, but his imprisonment seems to have been a matter of disguising the nature of the new regime and also, perhaps, keeping him safe in the early months. He soon came to be widely seen as the state's prime mover. He may not have been personally involved in planning the coup, but the Islamist network within the army owed much to his work, and the NIF's wider cadres were quickly incorporated in the regime. Non-Islamists were purged from the judiciary, army, civil service and unions. Turabi became chair of an unofficial but influential 'Council of Forty' guiding the regime according to Islamist ideology and strategy. (Lesch, 1998:114-115; Burr and Collins, 2003:1-12; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004:84-85).

The capture of the state in 1989 was a partial vindication of the strategy that Turabi had laid down in 1964. Stage One had now been successfully completed. A new *Shari'a* code was set in place in 1991. Next, the Islamist task was to use state power to create a new society approximating to an Islamic ideal. Turabi and his colleagues had theorised widely on this subject (al-Turabi, 1983; National Islamic Front, 1987; Moussali, 1994, 1999:155-180). Many of these texts available in English stress a convergence of a modern conception of Islamic governance with Western democracy. It is sometimes hard to gauge the likely practical implications of theoretical differences[4] but there are some telling clues. From his published work in the early 1980s, it appears that Turabi sees *Shari'a* not just as a matter of private morality or family life, or a symbol of the community, but as a binding political force. The ideal Islamic republic is:

> *not strictly speaking a direct government of and by the people; it is a government of the Shari'a. But, in a substantive sense, it is a popular government since the Shari'a represents the convictions of the people and, therefore, their direct will* (al-Turabi, 1983:244).

Turabi supposes that shared religious belief can overcome conflicts of opinion and interest, hence obviating the need for Western-style political parties:

> *[A]n Islamic government should function more as a consensus-oriented rather than a minority/majority system with political parties rigidly confronting each other over decisions* (1983:245).

In order to find the correct consensus, there is a role for *ulama* or religious scholars. Turabi does not here equate *ulama* with the people usually designated as such under existing structures of Islamic authority, such as links to the al-Azhar mosque school in Cairo; rather, he says that it can include 'anyone who knows anything well enough to relate it to God' (p. 245). He thus holds open a prospect for special channels of influence by educated and religiously-committed people, people rather like the MB's core members.

For the young Bashir-Turabi regime, mechanisms of 'guided democracy' were already familiar from the Abboud and Numeiri periods. It quickly started setting up its own committees to dispense patronage and exert control in parallel with existing structures of local government (Woodward, 1997:102; Lesch, 1998:120-121). These committees doubled, in theory, as sites of popular representation, elements of that well-known alternative structure to liberal democracy: a pyramid of congresses. However, having consolidated power some years later, the regime organised its first show of a national election by having only about 30 per cent of MPs elected through the congress system, and the remainder through geographical constituencies, though the banning of political parties and widespread reported intimidation and other irregularities suggest that the results were generally rigged (Lesch, 1998:122-125). Bashir, standing for President as a civilian, was duly awarded an impressive majority of the vote. Turabi became speaker of the National Assembly.

The Assembly ratified a new constitution for the Sudan in 1998. It stopped short of declaring Sudan explicitly to be an Islamic state, and was presented by the regime internationally as a liberal document (al-Turabi, 1998). However, it entrenched *Shari'a* and many of its provisions appealed to the Qur'an and Muslim tradition (Republic of the Sudan, 1998; Tier, 1998). It envisaged the existence of 'political associations', but provided scope for severe regulation of political parties.

Less than two years after putting the new constitution in place, Turabi sought to amend it. The matter at stake increasingly appeared to be personal power. He sought to make the President more accountable to parliament and to transfer many of his powers to an executive Prime Minister. By December 1999 it seemed likely that the amendments would succeed and that the latter post would eventually be taken by Turabi himself. With timing reminiscent of the 1989 coup, Bashir dissolved the Assembly and imposed a State of Emergency to halt the process. Turabi appealed to the Constitutional Court, but the judiciary had long since lost any robust independence, and his petition was rejected. In May 2000 he was removed as Secretary-General of the ruling party. Since then, he has been allowed limited freedom to pursue political activities, no longer assisted by the state's facilities for coercion and patronage. Many of his former close associates have aligned themselves to Bashir, notably including Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, Sudan's current Second Vice President, who many believe is now the real power behind the throne (Lusk, 2004). Turabi's ambition of establishing a model system of Islamic governance had proved too far beyond even his adeptness as a political tactician (de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004:106-113). National elections in December 2000 theoretically allowed the participation of opposition parties, but the main parties boycotted them, as did UN and EU monitors (Amnesty International, 2002).

The Islamist regime also failed to get near to realising the Islamic ideal of treating non-Muslim minorities with respectful fairness, let alone the liberal-democratic ideal of affording equality under the state. For hundreds of years, the economy of Sudan has been geared to the dispossession of people in peripheral areas for the benefit of capitalists and traders in and around Khartoum (and, through them, to foreigners) (Johnson, 2003:1-7). The economic pattern here, as in the history of the world economy generally, is facilitated by racism in which religious sentiment plays a part. It has led to civil war in southern Sudan for almost the whole of the post-independence period. In peace talks, Northern governments tried to insist that the rights of non-Muslims were guaranteed. But the main rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) had no confidence that practice would match this theory. Their trust was not enhanced by the religiose brutality with which the Bashir-Turabi regime often fought the war. Amid numerous public promises that the rebels would be crushed in a *jihad*, hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed by counter-insurgency tactics, including the inducing of famine (African Rights, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Prendergast, 2002). A theology of martyrdom facilitated the sacrifice of tens of thousands of young people from the North. Yet the rebels, with support from the US and other Western countries, refused to be crushed. When a peace agreement was reached in 2005, it could only be done by agreeing to let the South vote on its secession. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement agreement involves replacing the 1998 constitution with a new interim arrangement in which the dominance of *Shari'a* is restricted to the north of the country (GOS and SPLM/A, 2005). But if the hope of some Northerners was that this amputation would create a peacefully homogenous Muslim population, the current Darfur conflict has shown how far they underestimated the capacity of actually-existing Muslims to slaughter each other (Flint and de Waal, 2005).

As in many parts of the world, charitable activity in Sudan has helped govern the borderlands between the realm of civic life and the territory of people who may not be considered quite fit as citizens or as beneficiaries of the natural resources that they occupy (Duffield, 2001a, b). Islamist volunteers and NGOs have been active in the peripheral areas of Sudan, such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile. Some of their work seems to have been genuinely benevolent (see, for instance, testimony about the work of Muslim Brothers in the Darfur of the early 1980s, Flint and de Waal, 2004:18-20). But much, particularly under the government's programme of *al da'wa al shamla* ('comprehensive call') has clearly supported cynical political and military policies (African Rights, 1995:242-274, African Rights, 1997:186-235; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2003:80-106; M. Salih, 2004:155,177-178). In terms of governmental provision of basic social services, the performance of the regime appears to have been weak and discriminatory, even compared with other sub-Saharan African countries, and even after the coming of substantial oil revenues (see data in the report of the Joint Assessment Mission, Volume III (2005:143-190).

Internationally, the Bashir-Turabi regime supported Islamist rebel groups in Zaire, Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia partly as a way of retaliating against neighbours that assisted the SPLM/A. But it also – initially at least – used the Sudanese state as a resource for militant Islam on a wider international stage. It supported Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War and Turabi established the Popular Arab Islamic Conference (PAIC), with headquarters in Khartoum, as an alternative to the more conservative Arab and Islamic international groupings. Prominent terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, were sheltered in Sudan during the early 1990s. Sudan was implicated in an attempt to assassinate President Mubarak of Egypt in 1995.

However, as international sanctions on Sudan accumulated, it appears that Bashir tried to restrain such costly expressions of ideology. Bin Laden was asked to leave in 1996, the PAIC headquarters was removed in 2001, and US security agencies are reported to have received co-operation from al-Qaeda in the aftermath of 9/11. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, Sudan remains on the US's list of states supporting terrorism (Johnson, 2003:177-178; de Waal, 2004; Lusk, 2004; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:79).

The regime's inability to find a convincing source of legitimacy, its retreat from pan-Islamism, its participation in moral atrocities and its sordid in-fighting have led some recent authors to characterise the period since 1989 in terms of a Islamist revolution that failed (Burr and Collins, 2003; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004). This seems to say that there is no longer a unified project in which Islamist ideology credibly coheres with political action. And yet Bashir remains head of state, *Shari'a* operates as the basis of law in the North of the country, and Islamists friendly to the government have benefited greatly from cronyism, particularly as a result of the sell-off of public assets in the early 1990s (Simone and Simone, 1994:36-40; Elbeely, 2003; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004:85; Sidahmed and Sidahmed, 2004:107-111). It isn't a failure for everyone.

Conclusions from the Sudan Case

In the Sudan case, then, a network which was apparently elite-based and opportunist, basing its ideology and methods on those of Hasan al-Banna's MB, succeeded in gaining control of the state without showing any great commitment to liberal democratic politics, either on its way to government or afterwards. Indeed its rise depended upon – and considerably contributed to – the instability of Sudan's parliamentary system. Its apparent negligence of the problem of basic social services for many parts of the rural population is one of the features that suggest that it does not see itself as bound by a strong social contract.

At the time of writing, the National Congress party of Bashir and Taha has formed a Government of National Unity incorporating the SPLM/A. It intends to hold office until new elections, probably in 2009. This is as per the stipulations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in which the United States and European countries have invested a great deal (Lusk, 2004; de Waal, 2005). Hence there is likely to be more external pressure on the government in the coming years to conform to a model of liberal democracy. But if the elections are open, how will the Islamists fare? Will Turabi (who has formed a new party, the Popular Congress) regain the upper hand against Bashir and Taha? Will they patch up their differences to defend the modern Islamist position against the old sectarian parties and the secularists? And if so, can they demonstrate that they have used their years in power to build up a wide base of electoral support in the country? If the South secedes and the other regions gain more constitutional autonomy, does that create an easier space in which Islamism can find an accommodation with liberal democracy?

The difficulty of answering these questions reveals the weakness of available evidence, in English academic literature at least, about the nature of the Islamist movement in Sudan. We have presented this evidence broadly in the form to which it most readily seems to lend itself: that of an historical narrative around the career of Hasan al-Turabi. Turabi conveniently combines the roles of politician and published theoretician. His career thus shapes a story almost on the lines of

Shakespearian tragedy, in which ideas, actions and events seem naturally related. Motivated by a dubious mixture of high ideals and personal ambition, the protagonist schemes to capture the state. He succeeds in this, but his attempts to use the political high ground to change the nature of the polity go horribly wrong and he is toppled from power. But the fascinating figure of Turabi has perhaps distracted us too much from our ignorance about what goes on backstage. This opens up a range of more fundamental questions: What is the shape of the Islamist network in Sudan? How much is it dependent on government patronage or foreign donors? How far, and by what means, does it control the economy? How is it organised in the cities and villages? How and why do its core members think as they do? To what extent and in what ways does the Sudanese population (as Abdelwahab El-Affendi asserts in his book review, this issue) increasingly feel the attractions of modern Islamist ideology and institutions as opposed to Sufi traditions? Directly-relevant information on these questions is fragmentary, sparse and mostly anecdotal, reflecting the difficulties of serious field research in Sudan in the modes of sociology and political economy. The opportunities in Egypt are a little better.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

The experience of the MB in Egypt has been somewhat different to the case of Sudan and unlike the Sudan case there is evidence to suggest that the MB has been moving towards secular politics, characterised by a change in its shape and character. This has resulted in the MB changing its ideas, behaviour and attitudes in order to harness the legitimacy required to operate in the context of secular politics in Egypt. For example, the MB has systematically changed its views and positions on issues such as the rights of Coptic Christians, human rights, the role of *Shari'a*, democracy, relations with the wider Muslim world, and resistance to the West (El Said, interview, 2004). The MB's view and positions on such issues are becoming clearer in response to the wide media coverage it has gained since its success in the 2005 legislative elections, in which the MB acquired 88 out of 444 seats. As a result of its position in the legislative assembly, it is likely that there will be a continuation of the shift towards secular politics, which has characterised the MB from the late 1970s to the present day.[5] The key catalysts for the changing shape and character of the MB are a new cadre of activists, known as the New Guard, which joined the organisation during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The New Guard are distinct from the Old Guard which have dominated the power structure of the MB since its emergence in 1928 (Altman, 2006; Choubaky, interview, 2004). Importantly, formal politics has been viewed in a pessimistic manner by the Old Guard as a result of the oppression which the MB faced from the Nasserite state during the 1950s and 1960s (Choubaky, interview, 2004; Rishwan, interview, 2004). For example, the present leader (*murshid*), Mohammed Akif, who was already a member before al-Banna's assassination in 1949, was sentenced to death after the failed 1954 assassination attempt on Nasser and was imprisoned until 1974. He and others of his generation are generally more zealous, conservative, and committed primarily to long-term spiritual work and to preserving the movement's unity. The Old Guard remains deeply suspicious of other groups and unforgiving toward such former political rivals as the Nasserists, Arab-Nationalists and marxists due to ideological differences and bitter past confrontations. Therefore formal political participation did not really enter the mindset of the Old Guard.

In contrast, the New Guard is made up largely of student leaders from the 1970s, when Anwar al-Sadat allowed the MB to take over the university campuses in order

to combat the influence of the Left. This relative openness and the New Guard's experiences in student politics – involving daily interaction with students of different ideologies, alliances with different student groups and standing for student union elections – seems to have influenced their thinking and behaviour, bringing them more into line with secular politics. The New Guard of MB activists includes people like: Essam El-Eryan, Assistant Secretary-General of the doctors' syndicate, Ibrahim El-Zaafarani, Secretary-General of the Alexandria chapter of the same syndicate, Mohamed Habib, an Assiut University professor and Abu Al Futuh from the Guidance Bureau Council (al-Awadi, 2004). The New Guard has assigned greater importance to the political than to the spiritual role of the movement. They see Egypt rather than the Muslim world as the MB's real frame of reference, and show interest in building alliances with other political organisations. These two competing trends in the MB have been in conflict with one another for the last 25 years, with the New Guard gaining ground. This was enhanced by the limited pluralism granted by Hosni Mubarak during the 1980s. The willingness of the New Guard to participate in secular politics can be seen through their participation in the 1983, 1987, 1995, 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections, their building of alliances with political parties from the right to the left and their willingness to enter a policy of accommodation with the secular Egyptian state.

The New Guard & its Art of Secular Politics

A key indication of the New Guard's taste for secular politics can be seen through its involvement and participation in the politics of professional syndicates. This became a key pillar of MB strategy in order to challenge the power of the Egyptian state in the 1980s and 1990s. There are approximately 24 professional syndicates in Egypt, representing a number of professions ranging from pharmacy to teaching. Membership is important for a new graduate who wishes to gain employment. In addition, syndicates offer economic benefits, such as pensions, subsidised goods and cheaper health insurance. These institutions represent the educated middle class in Egypt and have historically played an important role in challenging the economic and political power of the Egyptian state. This was the picture in the 1970s, when the lawyers' syndicate challenged the Egyptian state's liberal economic reforms and the Camp David Accords with Israel. The social make-up of the syndicates and their ability to contest power made them an enticing political prospect for the New Guard in their drive for power, but importantly would also demonstrate their commitment to secular politics.

The New Guard assumed an active political role when they started to prepare and organise themselves during the 1980s in order to contest syndicate elections (Nafa, interview, 2004; Hamzawy, interview, 2004; el Said, 2004). The rise of the New Guard in the syndicates was facilitated by the existing state of syndicates. Constituents had become dissatisfied with the performance of the syndicate boards, which had led to the paralysis and disablement of most syndicates. Problems endemic within the syndicates included a lack of transparency, no clear decision making processes, political in-fighting, corruption and financial mismanagement. Leading New Guard individuals such as Abu al-Futuh and Abu Ella Madi tackled head-on the problems present in the syndicates. Campaigns were launched on a wide variety of the issues and concerns which plagued them. For example campaigns against *fasad* (corruption) were attractive and won favour from syndicate members who had been negatively affected by fraudulent behaviour (Fahmy, 2001; Qandil, interview, 2004). The New Guard was successful in halting major abuses of

resources and ensuring more transparency and accountability in the allocation of syndicate resources. The fight against corruption and improving the management of syndicates was assisted by the experience of individuals like Abu Futuh and Ella Madi. Both had gained vital knowledge concerning the management and administration of resources from their time on university campuses during the 1970s. They realised that the need to develop social legitimacy, trust and credibility amongst the syndicate members was a priority, before moving onto political work. This would allow them to use the syndicates to construct a social base in order to challenge state power (Ella Madi, interview, 2004).

The success of Abu Futuh in the medical syndicate elections in 1984 led the New Guard to contest elections in the other syndicates. Soon they were on the council boards of all major syndicates. In 1986, the MB took control of the engineers' syndicate, and in 1988 of the pharmacists' syndicate (al-Awadi, 2004). The MB continued to make progress in syndicates throughout the late 1980s as a result of their superior administration and financial management. During the 1990s, the New Guard intensified their efforts in the syndicates especially given the fact that they decided to boycott the 1990 elections.

The early 1990s was important from a syndicate perspective, as the New Guard began to shift from merely using syndicates as platforms to develop social legitimacy through the provision of public services, to using syndicates as political platforms. This shift allowed the New Guard to demonstrate their understanding of secular politics at a national level (el Said, 2004). They began to use the syndicates to hold meetings and conferences on political reform, economic policy and foreign policy. Importantly, there was an audience in the syndicates who wanted to listen to what the New Guard had to say on pressing economic and political issues. The growing strength of the New Guard in syndicate politics was demonstrated in 1992 when they secured electoral success in the lawyers' syndicate. This development shocked the Egyptian state and the secular opposition, as the lawyers' syndicate had been a vanguard of secularism, and comparatively well-managed. The ability of the New Guard to use a blend of pragmatism and secular politics, instead of ideology as practised by the Old Guard, had appealed to the lawyers' syndicate members, in addition to their good performance in other syndicates. Despite the New Guard's commitment to secular politics, the potential capability of the New Guard to mobilise syndicates in order to contest power worried the Egyptian state (Al Fatah, 2004). Concern within the Egyptian state was heightened as it had recently adopted economic reforms and it feared that the New Guard could use the lawyers' syndicate to mobilise opposition and dissent against them.

It did not take long for the government to bring the New Guard's domination of the syndicates to a halt. In 1993, the government issued Law 100 which was a direct attempt to reduce the influence of the New Guard in the syndicates. The government defended the law on the basis of its attempts to increase voter participation in the syndicates but the real objective behind the introduction of this law was clear for all to see. The law specified that for the elections to be valid there must be at least a 50 per cent turnout, and if this mark was not reached, the elections would be re-run twice. If a turnout of 33 per cent was not attained in the second re-run, the syndicate would fall under the administration of officials appointed by the government until new elections were held (Kienle, 2001). The law remains in effect to this day and the 'nationalisation' of the syndicates has been a major control on political life in Egypt, in particular the New Guard's drive for power.

Prospects for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

The New Guard's involvement in syndicates, along with participation in municipal and national elections, has been indicative of the changing shape and character of the MB. The New Guard represents a secular-leaning Islamic approach towards politics and has been instrumental in reforming and changing the MB along these lines. The use of religious ideology in the discourse of the New Guard is still central to mobilising grassroot support but it plays a minimal role in their discourse in contrast to the Old Guard. The latter sees this civil approach as a threat to its position and power in the MB. The New Guard, as it continues to fight for political power and demonstrate its commitment to secular politics, is likely to push for further changes in the shape and character of the MB, possibly leading to a head-on clash. The Old Guard continues to control the main levers of power in the MB, but it has had to provide room for the New Guard to express itself to prevent a rupturing of the MB. The New Guard continues to be looked upon suspiciously by the Old Guard, which sees a potential challenge to its domination in the MB, mounted by individuals such as Mohammed Habib and Abu Futuh. These individuals are public figures in Egypt and have been able to construct a following in the MB, a base to potentially challenge the Old Guard. One will have to wait and see what develops in the future but not all is smooth and comfortable in the MB, with a divergence of views and approaches becoming more evident and apparent than ever before.

At the time of writing, the Egyptian government has launched a campaign of arresting MB members throughout Egypt. This has raised tensions in the MB between the two camps, as to whether it is in the interests of the MB to continue its political activities, given the draconian measures being applied by the state. The future political strategy of the Egyptian government will also have an impact upon discourse in the MB. It is an interesting time to observe developments in the shape and character of the MB.

Conclusion

The cases of Sudan and Egypt seem to give contradictory answers to our question about the compatibility of Islamism with liberal democratic politics. The story of the MB and its legacy in the Sudan indicates, at the very least, that the Islamist agenda is one that is susceptible to co-option by people who try to re-engineer democracy and are willing to flout many democratic values in the process. We have particularly noted that it has not shown itself greatly concerned with securing its legitimacy through consistent provision of basic social services to the population as a whole, though it has used relief and other welfare provision tactically in different times and places.

In terms of the Egyptian case, the MB followed a different path, with a strong commitment to social welfare as a means to build up its following, and it now shows a movement towards secular politics. This has been driven by the New Guard, distancing itself from the conservative approach of the Old Guard. The New Guard has been a key actor in changing MB views on crucial issues such as democracy and human rights, and bringing them more in line with secular politics. It seems, then, that religious ideology can be taken in different directions, according to circumstances, even among organisations that share a common root. But these organisations remain poorly-understood by outsiders. The next few years will certainly see interesting developments in them, and hopefully also some more detailed research.

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Endnotes

1. This paragraph and the next, on the foundations of the MB draw on overlapping accounts in Mitchell (1969), Gomaa (1983), Esposito (1998:136-148), Armstrong (2000:218-232), Abdel Salam and de Waal (2004:26-35).

2. It is widely estimated that about two-thirds of the national population is Muslim. Non-Muslims mainly live in peripheral areas and have usually been electorally under-represented, partly because those areas have often been deemed too insecure for popular elections to take place.

3. Both of these sects, though they have important differences in character, can be labelled Sufi. That is to say they incorporate mystical traditions of religious practice such as special reverence for hereditary holy men. See Trimingham (1949), Karrar (1992), Warburg (2003).

4. See de Waal and Abdel Salam (2003:83-84) for an interesting characterisation of al-Turabi's writings in Arabic.

5. This has been the case for the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey which has become extremely pragmatic in order to survive in a secular polity held together by the coercive arm of the military.

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