

EGYPT AFTER MUBARAK: A COURSE ON ISLAMIZATION?

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At the end of December 2010 in Tunisia after an act of self-immolation of a street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, whose goods had been destroyed by the police due to lack of licenses, riots broke out. The result of uprisings, which lasted for a month, was the flight of President Zine El-Abedin Ben Ali to Saudi Arabia.

The suddenness of this kind of situation, which was taking place in Tunisia, is interesting in itself. Compared to other Arab states, Tunisia seems a fairly prosperous state. Ben Ali came to power in Tunisia during a bloodless coup carried out in 1987 against the first president Habib Bourguiba. During the 23 year rule of President Ben Ali, Tunisia had a very high degree of political stability. During the early years of his reign, Ben Ali managed to get rid of the threat of Islamists, and they did not appear on the political horizon until the events of January 2011. Jacques Chirac, in the 1990s, noted that President Ben Ali, 'made a miracle' by not allowing Tunisia to be plunged into civil war, as happened in neighboring Algeria, and brought the state the threat of terrorism that shook Egypt.

Nevertheless, the regime of President Ben Ali has fallen. The success of street demonstrations in Tunisia served as a catalyst to the increase of popular demonstrations in Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Sudan and, most importantly, in Egypt. The essence of the requirements of demonstrators out in the streets boiled down to one thing, a complete change of the political establishment. The 'Jasmine Revolution' in Tunisia, which resulted in the dissolution of the government, parliament, and most importantly the escape of President Zine El-Abedin Ben Ali from the country, has created an 'Arabic, which means that the dictator in power for decades can be overthrown not only by a military coup, but through popular uprisings. This, in turn, gave a powerful impetus to the development of anti-government movements throughout the Arab world, and especially in Egypt.

Tunisia has shown that a relatively small number of days of action, seemingly invincible and oppressive, can become democratic without any Western influence. The resignation of Ben Ali was a message to other leaders that power is not guaranteed to anybody, a signal to them that the people were bored with.

However, the Egyptian government has not focused due attention on the situation in Tunisia. The Egyptian foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, considered the possibility of implementing the Tunisian scenario in other Arab countries to be nonsense: "To talk

about what happened in Tunis, dissemination to other countries – is nonsense, every country has its own conditions of development. If the Tunisian people decided to choose this approach - it's their personal choice" (Al-Malky 2011).

In this regard, the possibility of extending the Tunisian revolution to Egypt was perceived very differently by the Egyptian government, the opposition, and Western experts. Not paying due attention to what happened in Tunisia, the Egyptian government, headed by Mubarak, which repeatedly suppressed all opposition demonstrations in the past 30 years, could not believe his own helplessness in front of the crowds of people. In many respects, the totally contemptuous reaction of the Egyptian president and his cabinet on the possibility of a recurrence of the Tunisian scenario in Egypt gave additional impetus to the Egyptian opposition, which managed to surprise the ruling regime.

The reaction of the Egyptian opposition, concerning the 'Jasmine revolution' in Tunisia was united. Representatives of the party Al-Gadd, Kefaya movement, 6 of April, and the Youth movement for justice and freedom, and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), characterized the situation in Tunisia, as the natural outcome of political discontent, of opposition to the police regime, and monopolization of power in the hands of one party: "The Tunisian revolution - an earthquake, whose consequences will affect all neighboring countries, especially Egypt, where long overdue global changes was rather unfinished" (Elyan and Hussein 2011).

Several opposition leaders looked optimistically into the future, wondering about the post-revolutionary future of Egypt. Paying attention to the fact that after the revolution, the country could fall into chaos, as took place in Tunisia, a former coordinator of Kefaya George Ishaq appealed to the Egyptian regime 'to allow political movements to act freely, in order to avoid this [Tunisia] script' (Elyan and Hussein 2011).

In contrast to the Egyptian opposition, which is optimistically looking at the outcome of the Tunisian revolution, Western analysts are mostly very critical about the chances of the Egyptians' success. First of all hopes of the opposition were connected with Western European countries and the U.S., which quickly intervened in what was happening in North Africa and the Middle East, playing such an important role in their geopolitical policies in order to prevent the fall of the regimes loyal to them. In addition, the economic losses associated with the fall of the regime of Mubarak, may at times be a more painful blow to the economies of Western countries than in the Tunisian case. Secondly, Egypt is considered to be a country more free in terms of expression and organization of opposition groups than Tunisia, and the Egyptian authorities had conducted a more flexible policy than President Ben Ali. Thirdly, Egyptian society is 'less homogeneous, which reduces the possibility of social tension, it also means a smaller national unity in the event of a popular uprising' (Elyan and Hussein 2011).

Demonstrations were scheduled for January 25, 2011; the date of manifestation was chosen because this day marks National Egyptian police day. Its history dates back to 1952, when the police of Ismailia rebelled the British soldiers; this gave rise to the subsequent overthrow of King Farouk and British rule in Egypt. Choosing January 25 as the

date of protest, a glorious national holiday in Egypt, the organizers ensured not only a certain symbolism, but also expressed a certain amount of irony and sarcasm. After all, the Egyptian police today are fundamentally different from 'those brave defenders of Ismailia' (Fahmy 2011).

After the National Association of Change was chosen as the start date of demonstrations, only two political parties of Egypt confirmed their participation in the demonstrations: Al-Gadd and the Democratic Front. However, the main question was; whether the Muslim Brotherhood would participate in the planned protest? Being the most experienced, organized and strong oppositional force in Egypt, the decisions of the association relative to their participation in demonstrations in many respects was crucial. Commenting on the situation surrounding the possible involvement of the MB in the protests; scheduled for January 25, a Kefaya member of the movement and the National Association for Change, Karim al-Hifnavi, named a part of the association as 'certainly a positive development' and noted that 'even if they do not participate as a group, members of the MB are usually involved in the protests individually, which serves as a catalyst to join other opposition groups' (Elyan and Hussein 2011).

On January 20, 2011 on the web-site Ad-Dustour, there appeared a statement from one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, Essam Al-Iryani, stating that the association will not take part in the demonstrations planned by the National Association for Change. The MB argued its position that the initiative to encourage people on the streets, originating from Facebook, was not addressed by the political parties and movements, but was directly from the people. In this regard, the Muslim Brotherhood decided not to participate in the protests as an organized group, but did not prohibit its members from participating in the demonstrations individually.

The position of the oldest Muslim association can be explained by the fact that at the start of the demonstrations in Egypt, none of the organizers was sure of their successful outcome. Over 30 years of Mubarak's power, the police were ruthless in suppressing the slightest manifestation of civic engagement. There was no argument in favor of the success of the operation this time. Being banned during the rule of Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood feared further reprisals in his address in case of involvement in demonstrations.

Secondly, the Muslim Brotherhood as the only significant opposition in Egypt, feared that the revolution in Egypt would be perceived in the 'green' color. An awareness that the Islamists would be at the forefront of the Egyptian revolution could scare off a number of representatives of the secular opposition movements, and would hardly be welcomed by the West.

However, the brothers were just waiting for a chance to take part in organized protests, so not to risk formally adopting a position in opposition to the protesters, while the outcome of their activities was not known. The individual representatives of the Association took an active part in the revolutionary events around Egypt. On January 25, the National Association of Youth, via Facebook, could bring a few thousand people

onto the streets of Cairo, and even for some time to hold Tahrir Square, where they were subsequently ousted by the Egyptian police. But as soon as the next day, the demonstrators tried again to go to the streets, but they were immediately arrested by the intelligence service, who were watching the protesters, and waiting for them at the designated places.

On Friday January 28, millions of Egyptians went to the mosque for Friday prayers as usual. After finishing prayers at about 15.00 local time, crowds of people appeared on the street, they were no longer required to be taken to the streets anywhere. The Muslim Brotherhood had foresight this time, and had already christened the day 'The Friday of Anger', and led the people towards Tahrir. Having extensive experience in various protests and being the oldest opposition group in Egypt, for more than 80 years, most of which was an underground existence alone the MB organized thousands of people who came to Tahrir: implementing communication between them by distributing prepared food and an organized Tahrir medical center in one their mosques.

Another key role of MB was 'holding the Revolution' on February 2. An emotional speech by Hosni Mubarak to the nation on February 1, in which he said he would leave his post in September, and would not transfer power to his son Gamal, made a huge impression on many Egyptians. Many were satisfied with the achievements and some of the demonstrators began to disperse to their homes. The next day, senior officials of the NDP under the leadership of Gamal Mubarak, were conferred with power within the party from his father, as well as the NDP Secretary, General Safwat Al-Sherif, and organized the clash between supporters and opponents of the regime; thugs on camels and horses, under the guise of police, raided Tahrir Square, and began to attack the demonstrators. In many ways it was a great achievement and the high level of organization of the Muslim Brotherhood that allowed the protesters to reflect the attack by the President's supporters.

Since then, the MB announced its total involvement in the Egyptian revolution throughout Egypt, which in turn largely contributed to the success of the 'march of millions'. After that followed an invitation from the Vice-President of Egypt, Omar Suleiman, who addressed the opposition forces of the country, including representatives of MB, to sit at the negotiating table. This was a historic moment in the history of relations between the regime of Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been banned for 31 years of his reign. The de facto regime recognized the Muslim Brothers and they for the first time since they appeared from hiding since their unsuccessful attempt on Gamal Abdel Nasser.

On February 10, 2011 Omar Suleiman announced the resignation of President Mubarak, as the president of Egypt and the transfer of power in the country's Supreme Council to the Armed Forces. Almost immediately thereafter, defense minister field marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, as chairman of the Council, announced the establishment of a constitutional committee, to develop a draft amendment to the constitution. The committee included representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood, which clearly showed the beginning of change in Egypt and escape from dictatorship.

By the end of the work of the constitutional committee on February 26 at a referendum 11 proposed amendments were issued: eight were amended, one cancelled, and

two added. The presidential term would be reduced to four years with a two-term limit (Article 77). Future presidents would need to appoint a vice president within 60 days of taking office (Article 139). Presidential candidates would need either to secure the support of 30 members of the two houses of the country's parliament or the backing of 30,000 eligible voters across at least 15 governorates, or they would need to be nominated by a registered political party with at least one member elected to either the People's Assembly, the lower house of parliament, or the Shura Council, the upper chamber (Article 76).

The proposed amendments also required that the president be at least 40 years of age, and of Egyptian parents and no other nationality, and not married to a non-Egyptian (Article 75). They state that elections must take place under full judicial supervision (Article 88), and they give the Court of Cassation - the country's highest judicial authority - the final say about the legality of the membership of parliaments (Article 93), while also stating that the two houses should nominate a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution for the country (Article 189).

Article 179 of the present constitution empowering the president to refer civilians to military tribunals was abolished as a step towards eliminating the 30-year-old emergency law. If they are approved at Saturday's referendum, the changes will lay the groundwork for parliamentary elections in June and a presidential vote in August or September.

Representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Al-Wasat party called the prepared amendment the 'first step on a long journey out of the bottleneck we have been stuck in for years towards a period of stability' (Essam El-Din 2011).

However, unlike the Islamists, supporters are being urged to vote 'yes' to the proposed amendments to the constitution, representatives of the secular political parties appealed to their constituents to vote 'no'. As in the case of Constitutional amendments, the parliamentary elections in Egypt will be held in June 2011, and presidential elections in September 2011. The two main presidential candidates: the secretary general of the Arab League, Amre Moussa, and the former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El-Baradei also called on to vote against the constitutional amendments. The latter stated that the amendments will insult all the achievements of the youth revolution of January 25.

Amre Moussa explained his position: he stated that at first people must elect a president for a term of four years, during which time a new constitution will be drafted, a new parliament elected, and a transition to a democratic regime will start.

Supporters of the amendments focused on the fact that by pushing the parliamentary elections forward by a year, Egypt would return to the situation prior to the revolution on January 25, when life in the country was under military control. In turn, representatives of the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces of Egypt, on its Facebook page, published a statement saying: "when we took power on 13 February, we issued a constitutional declaration that created a favorable climate for freedom and transition for democracy, archived mainly in the form of drafting a number of highly cherished constitutional amendments" (Essam El-Din 2011).

Immediately after it became known that, in accordance with amendments to the constitution, parliamentary elections must be held within six months, it became obvious that the Egyptian opposition needed more time to prepare for the elections, otherwise they would win MB's victory in the elections. The vast majority of the parties, with the exception of the ruling National Democratic Party, are badly organized, or have no clear program and structure, and accordingly have very low chances of winning the election; hence the demands of the secular opposition parties and movements to give them at least a year of transition for the proper preparation for the elections. Otherwise, not all opposition forces in the country will be in the same position. In particular, each party is forced in such a short period of time to collect 5 000 signatures from potential members who should represent at least ten governorates of Egypt. While the secular opposition has nothing against the appointment in September's presidential elections – the fight will be for only the post of president and the Muslim Brotherhood will not apply for it, as they said.

The greatest concern in connection with the adoption of possible amendments to the constitution has caused Copts' solicitude. During president Mubarak's ruling only three ministerial portfolios were confirmed for the Copts, and even they were not the most important: the minister for the environment and the minister of finance, have been controlled by the Coptic diasporas since the days of Muhammad Ali. Coptic fears stem from the fact that of a majority of seats in parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood will take away the two ministerial portfolios assigned to them and deprive them of some civil rights, and in particular, make them pay *jizya* - the tax for non-Muslims living in Islamic countries. Another concern of the Copts is due to the fact that at a time when in Egypt, there was high rate of unemployment, many Christians will be dismissed and their places will be given to Muslims.

"Christians were initially hopeful of the dawning of a new future, a civil society, a fully-fledged democracy that guarantees the rights of religiously minorities. Then the unfortunate incidents occurred and the Copts were sorely disappointed. People must understand what partnership and participation in decision-making process actually means. We know that Egyptian Christians are religious and conservative by and large, and so are Muslims. However, in a democratic and secular state we do not want to see either Muslim religious leaders or Christian clergy ruling us. Religious leaders have other duties and responsibilities, but indulging in political intrigue is not the prerogative of religious leaders" (Nkrumah 2011), said Bishop of Helwan Anba Basant.

Preceding the vote two weeks of debate between supporters and opponents of the amendments divided the chances as one or the other on the successful outcome of the vote on a 50-50 basis. Be that as it may the referendum on Saturday March 19, 77.2% voted for the amendments to the constitution. Immediately after the announcement of the results, the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces of Egypt expressed its satisfaction with the outcome of the referendum, and expressed the hope that after six months soldiers would be sent back to barracks. Thus, the National Democratic Party and the Muslim Brotherhood have a good opportunity to win the forthcoming elections in the

Egyptian parliament, leaving their opponents from the liberal parties and movements far behind them.

The referendum passed without incident', and very quietly, except in the case of an attack on a potential challenger for the presidency of El-Baradei at a polling station in Mukattam. According to official data, of the 45 million Egyptians who are entitled to vote at the polls about 18 million did so, which is much higher than was recorded in the previous parliamentary elections in 2010; 14 million voted in favor, while only 4 million Egyptians voted against.

The main question that troubled Egyptians was the following: do those who voted in favor, associated their choice with a 'green' (the color of Islam)? If so, at the time of the referendum MB had 14 million supporters.

Of course, religion in this case played a major role, but many of those who voted in favor, above all, looked for economic and political stability. After January 25 the flow of tourists into the country abruptly stopped, which caused even more unemployment and rising prices. Most people wanted to return to a normal lifestyle, devoid of turmoil and revolution, and wanted to put an early end to the transition period, established Egypt.

In this regard, there it is striking that all the potential presidential candidates - Mohamed El-Baradei, Amre Moussa, Hisham Bastawisy, Hamdin Sabah - voted against the amendments to the constitution, while the majority of Egyptians said 'yes'. Thus, 'it seems none of candidates knows what the Egyptian people want' (Howeidi 2011).

The referendum on March 19, in which the majority voted for the adoption of amendments to the constitution, Islamists dubbed the 'Battle for the ballot box', where they managed to win. Immediately after the announcement of the vote, a Muslim fundamentalist Mohammed Yaqub Hussain, made a statement that those who said 'yes' based on their religious viewpoint'; and those who disagree with the results of the referendum 'can go to the U.S. and Canada' (Kader 2011).

A few days later, after a speech by Yakub, Islamists in Quena, a town in Upper Egypt, announced that Sharia is the only source of law in the city. As a demonstrative action, Islamists cut off the ear the of one of the Copt's and destroyed his apartment and car. Almost immediately after the Mubarak's offset Islamists became frequent guests on Egyptian television and radio stations, where they were given the majority of air time, using the fact that there was launched a criminal investigation against the leadership of a number of pro-government newspapers and TV channels Egypt's prosecutor general.

In turn, representatives of youth movements were quick to say that they 'spent three weeks in Tahrir Square not to bring on an Islamic state...and not to replace Mubarak with Badei' (Ezzat 2011). So, representatives of the National Association of Youth and other secular movements associate Muslim Brotherhood's coming to power with the replacement of a secular dictator, a religious dictator ruling, on behalf of God. *'When we opposed Mubarak we were a considered political minority but if you oppose someone who rules in the name of God you become an infidel'*, – said Islam, one of the participants of the revolution on January 25 (Ezzat 2011).

On the other hand, representatives of the MB justly appealed to the fact that they carried the chance to give them by the Constitution. Which provides the same political rights as the representatives of other parties and movements: to express their point of view, to lobby for their interests, and such: "It is true that we made our position heard first as we acted as a political and not a religious group. The church's call was religious. It was clearly sectarian and provoked many people to vote yes in response to what they saw as an attempt by the church to impose its view, - said Nasser, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria" (Ezzat 2011).

At the same time, Hamdi Hassan, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and a member of the People's Assembly of 2005–2010, which is going to run for parliament in the coming elections, said he would actively promote the establishment in Egypt of an 'Islamic-style State', which implies that all branches of law would be Sharia-compliant, including constitutional law. Moreover, in his view, an Islamic state, by definition is a civil state based on Sharia, and not a theological state. Basing his view on the fact that the majority of Egyptians (80% according to him) under this system of government will live a lot more comfortably, it derives from the famous maxim: 'the majority of the minority must obey'.

As for the liberal parties, in order to make serious headway in the upcoming parliamentary elections, need to learn some lessons. The threat of the Islamization of Egypt today is very high: "If you have a constitution that observes civil rules of political engagement and a civil president - and so far the indicators are that the next president will be non-Islamist– then we have a chance to avoid an Islamic state. If not then an Islamic state is a serious possibility" (Ezzat 2011).

First of all, liberal parties need to unite. If united, Al-Wafd, The Democratic Front, Al-Gadd - the party with an identical agenda that could win over 20 million voters. Pushing the same and similar slogans referring to the same calls, they risk simply confusing their message. This alignment is unlikely, given the fact that the opposition still has no single leader. Also the liberals will first build their campaign around Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution, which prohibits the creation of parties based on religion.

On the other hand, the liberals have no support in small towns and villages and the poor areas of Cairo and Alexandria, where the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood who promised cheap education and health during the 30-year rule of Mubarak, was sensible everywhere.

Today the situation is as follows. While liberals and young people continue to protest and mourn the results of the referendum, which will not change, the Muslim Brotherhood, is already much better prepared for the upcoming parliamentary elections which are in full swing and are preparing for them. At a March 26, 2011 Brotherhood Youth Conference: 'An Inside Vision', it was decided to start a political party. Following the conference, it was decided to create a founding committee consisting of the 1000 delegates who would choose the name of the future party, its president and members of its electoral platform, independent of the MB. 'Logistical support' Muslim Brotherhood at the same time

should not exceed 25% of its budget for the first two years. The MB's participation in the founding committee may not exceed 30% of the total number of its members, with 30% given to representatives of youth, 25% to women and 10% – the Copts.

However, the situation in which the Muslim Brotherhood will freely go to elections as a united party, is historic for Egypt as a whole, and MB in particular. Never before 2011 did the MB have an opportunity to consolidate and to take part in parliamentary elections, and they took seats in parliament only as individual candidates. This in turn puts before them a number of new issues which were not on their agenda, especially its relationship with political forces, which still eye the MB with suspicion, accusing it of dissimulation and political opportunism as regards its alliances, its participation in the democratic process and its commitment to democracy. More than that, MB faced with the opportunity to participate in political process openly and not to act secretly, as was the case under the previous regime. Important fact is that a future Egyptian parliament would be de facto multi-party, in contrast to the preceding, and will unlikely be controlled by one party. It will force MB to propose solutions to problems rather than simply criticize the ruling regime.

Another dilemma that today is faced by the Muslim Brotherhood is the nature of its future interaction with the party established by them, which will put them in parliament. In the Arab world at the moment there are two options for such cooperation: Moroccan, on the one hand, as well as an Algerian and a Yemeni scenario, on the other. In the first case, the Movement for Unity and Reform, after several years of negotiations, came to an agreement (on party participation) with its political wing, called the Party of Justice and Development. Its essence was a strategy for separating religious proselytism from politics, which is based on the premise that the movement is an Islamic component of Moroccan society the aim of which is to promote the faith.

In the second case, the Islamist movement is actually absorbed by their parties by modifying only a few positions. A similar situation took place in Algeria, where the Movement of Society for Peace is actually merged into its political party, which in turn is extremely difficult for dialogue between them and the government. It resulted in the murder by Islamists of two presidents and a bloody civil war, which killed 200,000 people. It is hoped that the Muslim Brotherhood will follow the path of Morocco.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF MAIN PRIESTS THROUGH THE WORSHIP OF MAMI WATA AND MAMA TCHAMBA IN SOUTHERN BENIN.

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Introduction

Mami Wata and *Mama Tchamba* are public *vodun* cults that began to appear in the coastal part of southern Benin in the mid-twenties. These “new *voduns*”, that came from neighbouring Togo and Ghana, together with other foreign *voduns* such as *tron*, *Golo vodun*, *Atingali* or *Kpe vodun*. *Mami Wata* and *Mama Tchamba*, flourish mostly in urban settings and share some common characteristics. As ocean female deities, they are linked to an acquisition of wealth and draw rich symbolism from the historical phenomenon of the slave trade on the one hand and from the modern world commodity market on the other. *Mami Wata* and *Mama Tchamba* are typical syncretic cults, their ritual practices and system of belief are highly dynamic and eclectic. *Hounons* – main priests of cults *Mami Wata* and *Mama Tchamba* – practice a traditional *Fa* divination together with the worship of classical popular *vodun* like *Legba*, *Hovi*, *Sapata*, or *Hevioso*. “These new *voduns* cooperate with traditional ones in order to be more powerful”, explained a *hounon* from Porto-Novo.

The religious syncretism embodied in the appearance of both deities is evident at first sight. The iconography of both *voduns* draws on visual imaginary from Fon, Yoruba, Hindu and European mythology.

As both deities are venerated in Africa and the African Diaspora (particularly in Haiti, Cuba and Brazil), worshippers put a special emphasis on multi-ethnicity. Whereas classical *voduns* are rather inclusive and primarily based on family kinship, membership in new cults of *Mama Tchamba* and *Mami Wata* the regrouping of heterogeneous categories of worshippers is more open and not limited by age, gender, kinship or place of living. As a result, these *voduns* are regarded as “international”, crossing both geographical and ethnic boundaries. The internationality is openly proclaimed by *hounons* themselves by saying, “*vodun* has no borders...it is like the air, free for everyone”. This openness and free-thinking is also reflected in a readjustment of ritual practices. In contrast to classical *vodun*, where the recruitment of new adepts cannot be decided by themselves but only by the oracle, *Fa* is revealed by a main priest and conditioned by permission of the adept's kinship community, the *hounons* of *Mama Tchamba* and *Mami Wata* are ready to recruit any local or foreigner novice who is willing to join the cult either from his or her conviction or curiosity. Moreover, the majority of *hounons* accept revised conditions concerning initiation¹⁷⁸, in particular a shortening of the time period spent in an initiation camp for

¹⁷⁸ Since the 1990s the religion *vodun* has undergone important changes initiated by the local government. The