Center for the Study of Democracy

Symposium: Democracy and Its Development
(University of California, Irvine)

Islamization of the Egyptian Intelligentsia: Discourse and Structure in Socialization Strategies

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Abstract

The paper traces the historical unfolding of the Islamization strategy during Mubarak's reign. It examines and compares the practices constituting this strategy and the State's reaction to it. The relational approach adopted in this study gives weight to structured agency through analyzing how ideational and organizational levels interact. It evaluates the political efficacy of counter-hegemony as a political strategy, bringing to the forefront its practical, as well as its theoretical limitations.

CSD Center for the Study of Democracy
An Organized Research Unit
University of California, Irvine
www.democ.uci.edu

Why has the successful Islamization of civil society not resulted in an Islamist take-over of political power in Egypt? In the Gramscian formulation, "the State = political society + civil society" (1971: 263). The conquest of political power is preceded by a gradual conquest of civil society. But in the Egyptian case, the Islamist movement's conquest of civil society, through a long-term counter-hegemonic strategy, did not lead to the conquest of political power. This paper argues that the State aborted the Islamist movement's strategy before it was able to shift from the civil to the political arena. By focusing on the movement-state power struggle, and examining the specific practices constituting that struggle during the past twenty-five years, the paper exposes the limitations of Gramscian counter-hegemonic strategies vis-à-vis modern authoritarian states; a conclusion that could be generalized beyond the Egyptian case.

Gramsci explains how the modern State relies less on coercion, and more on "the acceptance of the ruled of a 'conception of the world' which belongs to the rulers" (Fiori 1973: 238). The ruler's worldview is "internalized by the majority of people" and becomes the "defining motif of everyday life," i.e., "common sense." His theory of "consensual power" provides the key to developing strategies for sociopolitical change (Boggs 1984: 160-64). Overthrowing an existing political regime requires first the undermining of its consensual basis within civil society, i.e., its "hegemony," and the development of an "alternative hegemony" (Adamson 1980: 171). In Gramsci's depiction, the State is supported by "powerful system of fortresses and earthworks;" that is, civil society. This type of State could only be challenged through a counter-hegemonic "war of position" (1971: 233-39). In this model, civil society is distinguishable enough from the political society that that it "can be independently conquered" by a sociopolitical movement, but it is also linked closely enough to that political society so that "its conquest will be guaranteed to have political ramifications." Gramsci perceived civil society as institutions active in disseminating worldviews and creating consent, and political society as institutions of coercion. In this dialectical conception of the relations between civil and political societies, the State emerges as the arena of both ideological and political struggle.[1] When "civil society and political society enter into contradiction," the outcome is State crisis because the political regime, though still dominant, is no longer hegemonic, and the oppositional movement exercises considerable hegemony but without domination (Adamson 1980: 215-19, 225). In its struggle against the State, therefore, a movement must adopt a counter-hegemonic strategy aimed at transforming consciousness, "the whole range of values, attitudes, beliefs, cultural norms, legal precepts, etc." that permeates civil society (Boggs 1984: 160-66).

In the Islamist context, this counter-hegemonic strategy of ideological dissemination in civil society is referred to as Islamization: the strategy aimed at making Islamism the dominant social ideology. This strategy has two components: first, the ideational component, *al-da'wa* (the call), which is geared towards reviving Muslims' religious commitments in general, and the duty to organize their polity according to Islamic law in particular; second, the structural component, *al-tanzim*

(the organization), which is concerned with creating and/or making use of specific organizations in promoting Islamism. But before advancing any further, an elaboration of the main concepts and categories employed in this study is in order. Most importantly, what is Islamism, who represents it in Egypt, and why did Islamists adopt a counter-hegemonic strategy in their conquest for power?

Islamism is a contested concept.[2] In this paper it is defined as a political ideology claiming that Muslims are religiously obliged to organize their political-military, socioeconomic, legal and cultural affairs according to *al-Shari'ah* (Islamic law). While it is crucial for society to recognize and accept this obligation, the actual implementation of *al-nizam al-Islami* (the Islamic order) requires political power. Islamism thus embodies both a social vocation and a political project. The social role is achieved through activities aimed at promoting Islamism. The political element constitutes activities contesting the power of the ruling regime. Islamism is thus an ideology aimed at transforming society as a first step towards achieving political domination, and then using political power instrumentally to re-organize society. Two things should be noted here. First, Islamism rejects class, ethnic, or other social divisions. This position reflects, on the one hand, Islam's conception of society as "individuals possessing a common faith and goal, coming together in harmony with the intention of advancing and moving their common goal" (Shari'ati 1979: 119), and on the other hand, the fact that Islamists come from diverse social groups and target Muslim society in its totality. They are thus defined according to their ideological function, rather than their social composition. Second, Islamism is a modern ideology conceived in the late nineteenth century in response to the secularization of the Islamic world and the relegation of religion to the private sphere (Zubaida 2005: 5).

Islamism in Egypt is represented by a center and a periphery. The center is occupied by *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brothers),[3] an illegal sociopolitical movement.[4] The periphery comprises various social movements, informal networks, and individuals active in achieving Islamist goals. Because of the semi-clandestine nature of *al-Ikhwan*, it is difficult to determine how much it coordinates with the periphery. This loose center-periphery structure, however, has always been part of *al-Ikhwan's* strategy. Its founder envisioned a *tanzim* with a solid hierarchical core and a vibrant populist periphery (see al-Banna 1977). Hence, *al-da'wa* was framed as a general call to return to Islam, rather than an invitation to join a clandestine oppositional group. In that way, *al-Ikhwan* avoids the burden of disciplining disparate activists, while guaranteeing a wide enough access into diverse social enclaves.[5]

Why did *al-Ikhwan* adopt a counter-hegemonic strategy? Islamists invoke the model for gradual social change applied by Prophet Mohammed in Mecca and Medina to justify why they are investing so much in creating a moral community before directly contesting political power. Practically speaking, however, *al-Ikhwan* had little choice considering the "integrationist and hegemonist" nature of the State that had emerged in Egypt following the 1952 Revolution (Vatikiotis 1978: 220). The State propagated an "eclectic ideology, comprising a mixture of Egyptian nationalism, socialism and Arabism" (Vatikiotis 1978: 195), and consolidated its power through:

> **[T]otal control of the armed forces…the neutralization and eventual destruction of other existing loci of political power – the monarchy, political parties, senior officials, land-owning, financial, industrial and commercial members of the old ruling class…the control of education, the media, professional syndicates, trade unions, the rural structures in the countryside, the religious institutions and orders,[6] the administration and bureaucracy, eventually, the whole society** (Vatikiotis 1978: 127).

This was "authoritarian statism" par excellence. According to Poulantzas "authoritarian statism is marked *by the hold of the summits of the Executive over the upper administration and by the increased political control of the former over the latter*. Here too the State "does not produce a unified discourse, but several discourses" adapted to various groups (2000: 224, 29). The new State under Nasser ordered the dissolution of *al-Ikhwan* in 1954 and detained the Supreme Guide and five hundred of its members. This was followed in 1966 by the detention of thousands of Islamists (Vatikiotis 1978: 135). Sadat's regime briefly used Islamists in the late 1970s to fight communism at universities, and then put them back in prisons in 1981. When Mubarak came to power in 1982, he decided to concede limited space for *al-Ikhwan* in order to counter militant Islamist trends (Price 1999: 45-46). It is within that space that *al-Ikhwan* began implementing their counter-hegemonic strategy. This paper suggests that the movement's choice of strategy was determined by the incorporating nature of the State. The State's control of religious institutions and all political structures, including opposition parties, in addition to its entrenched military-security apparatus left the movement without allies and very little space for maneuver.

The paper traces the historical unfolding of the Islamization strategy during Mubarak's reign.[7] It examines and compares the practices constituting this strategy and the State's reaction to it. The relational approach adopted in this study gives weight to structured agency[8] through analyzing how ideational and organizational levels interact. It evaluates the political efficacy of counter-hegemony as a political strategy, bringing to the forefront its practical, as well as its theoretical limitations.

Islamization – Ideational aspects

Islamists framed their message as a *da'wa* to return to Islam. This was a challenging endeavor in light of the following: First, Egyptians constituted an already fairly religious society. "Of sixty-five societies included in the World Values Survey, Egyptians were found to be the most pious, with 98 percent declaring their religiosity" (Bayat 2007: 147). Second, the State was not openly secular. It did not abandon or combat religion, but rather claimed to represent it. The incorporating nature of the Egyptian state made space for both secular and religious trends and symbols. Legal codes, for instance, were partly positive and partly Islamic.[9] The State licensed secular and Islamic financial institutions. It funded secular and religious schools and universities. It allowed both secular intellectuals and clerics airtime on State owned media. And officials appeared regularly on both national festivals and religious celebrations. So on the societal and State levels, what Islamists were calling for was not really a return to religion per se, but it was rather an appeal to accept their ideological interpretation of Islam. What is interesting, however, was that *al-Ikhwan* did not publicly denounce the State as an enemy to Islam, calling for a political revolt against it. According to Bayat, their primary aim was to build an "ideological community" and postpone challenging the legitimacy of the State till some later point (2007: 8). *Al-da'wa* was thus framed as apolitical and in-line with the 'spirit' of the official religious discourse.

Shukrallah highlights how with "each new [social] space it carves out for itself, Islamist discourse experienced a process of de-articulation, reconstitution, and re-articulation." During the 1980s, *al-Ikhwan* was striving for acceptance and validation from the mainstream. Islamists discourse was therefore "moderate,

pragmatic, and reassuring" (1989: 91). The message was general and minimalist: that 'Islam is the solution' to Egypt's problems (Wickham 2002: 114). By the 1990s, *al-da'wa* became a call for cultural purity. Advocates of secular ideologies, especially leftists and liberals, were systematically marginalized, defamed, and portrayed as rogue voices. Islamists emphasized how the values of freedom and social justice were better guaranteed in Islam than in Western secular ideologies. The terminology of democracy and citizenship found its way into Islamist vocabulary. In a document circulated in 1995, *al-Ikhwan* asserted that Islam endorses political pluralism (Norton 2005: 140). Typical leftist themes, such as social justice and anti-imperialism, were incorporated into its pamphlets (Al-Ali 1999: 139). An Islamist feminist discourse, distinctive from that of the West, was also articulated (Abdo 2000: 147).

So the priority in *al-da'wa* was given to cultural themes,[10] especially those related to identity (Ibrahim 1999: 41). Baker offers a few examples reflecting this prioritization. Al-Qaradawi, a highly revered cleric associated with *al-Ikhwan*, argued that political regulations alone never create societies; that "societies are established on cultural values," and that these values need to be nurtured first before discussing politics. Similarly, al-Ghazzali, another influential scholar and supporter of *al-Ikhwan*, devoted the bulk of his writings to highlighting how colonialism had left Egyptians with "deformed personalities…far from their heritage," criticizing the adoption of the "ways of the conquerors." He described secularism as a cultural disease that had "eroded the sense of identity that Islam affords." Fahmy Huwaidi, an Islamist columnists in the official *Al-Ahram* newspaper, warned against "secular Western[ized] intellectuals" who are trying to dilute Islamic identity (2003: 42, 7-10). Wiktorowicz notes how Islamists "couched their grievances in language akin to Huntington's 'clash of civilizations', whereby mobilization was viewed as a response to insidious Western desires to undermine the culture of Muslim societies" (2004:7). Muhammad 'Abd al-Qudus, the Islamist journalist and member of *al-Ikhwan*, equated secularism with Westernization. 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Messiri, a renowned scholar and leader of *Kifaya*, Egypt's broadest opposition front, criticized "Western materialist secularist philosophy." Mohammed 'Immara, historian of Islamist thought, accused all secularists of serving Western interests, and attacked the works of Egyptian secularists for their fascination with the West (Abaza 1999: 95-101).

Esposito points out how under the influence of this identity-based cultural discourse, several of Egypt's prominent intellectuals "returned to Islam" (1999: 51-52). In the interviews he conducted in Cairo in the summer of 2004, Remnick reports the widespread social acceptance of the cultural concerns of Islamists. Gamal al-Ghitani, novelist and editor of a leading literary journal, expressed his fear that his "culture is targeted by a superpower that is acting stupidly." Son'allah Ibrahim, the famous Marxist novelist, criticized the West for having no moral values and discrimination against Muslims. 'Abd al-Mun'im Sa'id, head of *Al-Ahram* Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt's most influential think-tank, blamed the West for creating chaos under the banner of liberating Muslims. Diaa' Rashwan, a well-respected academic researcher, complained of the "cultural war to change the Middle East, and create a new Egypt." Mohammed Salmawi, liberal playwright and editor of a French-speaking newspaper, blamed the West for giving secularism "a bad name in Egypt" (2004: 7-9). In interviews conducted with thirteen novelists and screenwriters, participants invariably expressed their belief that the Islamist cultural agenda has dominated the Egyptian intellectual scene (Fakhri 2001).

But by focusing on cultural identity, Islamists projected themselves not as a counter-hegemonic movement working against the State, but rather as a cultural trend

confronting an elusive enemy that was sometimes presented as corrupt Western societies, sometimes as Westernized Egyptian intellectuals, and sometimes as regimes adopting Western political models. In his interview with Remnick, Montasser al-Zayat, the celebrated Islamist lawyer, declared: "people…are moving toward Islamic groups" mainly because they believe that "their identity is being threatened" (2004: 4). This purely cultural narrative launched a search-for-identity campaign basically through resisting cultural otherness. But it emerged as a counter-cultural discourse instead of a politically oriented oppositional discourse that is specifically directed against the State. This prioritizing of culture over politics was detrimental. With the overemphasis on personal piety and identity-based issues, the ideational component of the Islamization strategy seemed off mark. Instead of using cultural as a platform for an explicitly counter-hegemonic political campaign, as the Gramscian model implies, *al-da'wa* became exclusively cultural and apolitical.

Islamization – Socialization structures

Islamists believed in the power of their message. They were not blind, however, to the fact that attractive ideas could not permeate society without the help of socialization structures. Islamists thus turned to some of the existing structures in Egypt. This section of the paper examines how they negotiated their entry into and domination of these structures.

 Political parties: When the Egyptian state established, funded, and handpicked leaders for political opposition parties in the late 1970s, it had meant for these parties to remain politically sterile. But instead, the structural dependence of these parties on the State made them strive for autonomy by flirting with popular "Islam-based politics" (Shukrallah 1989: 47-48). Capitalizing on the "deep Islamic sentiments of the populace" was the result of the parties' desire to win elections, coupled with a realistic estimation of their inability to rally support on their own (Auda 1993: 399). Electoral alliances with *al-Ikhwan* guaranteed support from religious voters; especially that *al-Ikhwan* presented voting as a religious obligation.[1] Opposition parties, in return, offered *al-Ikhwan* a legal venue for participating in elections.

 The first of these alliances was between *al-Ikhwan* and the liberal *al-Wafd* in the 1984 elections. Despite *al-Wafd's* strong secular roots, the Islamists insisted that it declares its commitment to considering *al-Shari'ah* in legislation. In an article published in *al-Wafd's* mouthpiece, Omar al-Telmessani, the then Supreme Guide of *al-Ikhwan* declared that *Wafdists* must support God's law. This caused a split within the ranks of the party, eventually leading to the termination of the alliance (Shukrallah 1989: 30). But only after it had captured 15 percent of the vote (58 seats) and became the largest opposition group in parliament (Norton 2005: 136). For the first time, Islamists were elected to parliament. In 1987, a similar deal was negotiated with the socialist party, *al-'Amal*. But instead of a temporary electoral alliance, *al-'Amal* agreed to a "Muslim Brethren takeover." The party surrendered its socialist platform, changed its slogan to 'Allah is Great', and proclaimed its allegiance to Islamism through its principle spokesman, Adel Hussein. This merge attracted another odd member: the liberal *al-Ahrar*, which suffered from an almost complete lack of popular support (Shukrallah 1989: 24, 38). The new Islamist-led tripartite alliance won 17 percent of the vote (60 seats) and led opposition in parliament (Norton 2005: 136).

 Through these electoral alliances, Islamist ideas permeated election campaigns, opposition newspapers, hearing committees, and parliamentary sessions.

Members of other political parties, such as the communist *al-Tagammu'* and the Arab-nationalist *al-Nasseri*, had to accommodate some Islamist themes (Shukrallah 1989: 47). By the end of the 1980s, "Islamists became the leading opposition force in parliament…and other political parties began Islamizing their discourse and programs" accordingly (Wiktorowicz and Hafez 2004: 74). This development caught the State by surprise. But even after outlawing such alliances (as discussed below), *al-Ikhwan* still won votes. In the 2000 elections they ran as independents and won 17 seats – more than the total number of seats won by all opposition parties combined – and became again the largest opposition block in parliament (Norton 2005: 138). A more striking victory occurred in the 2005 elections, when *al-Ikhwan* secured 88 seats, more seats than those won by any opposition party since the 1952 revolution.[12]

Professional syndicates: Ibrahim claims that Islamism's "most stunning performance" was its ability to capture a majority of seats in Egypt's professional syndicates (1999: 32-33). In less than a decade, "twenty-one professional syndicates, encompassing about 2.5 million members, fell into their hands." The signal success was in the Medical Syndicate in 1986, followed by the Engineering, Pharmacist, and other syndicates. But the development that reportedly "stunned Mubarak" was their controlling of 75 percent of the seats of the Lawyers Syndicate in the 1992 elections (Norton 2005: 138). This latter syndicate was considered "a virtual citadel of secularism since its creation in 1912" (Abdo 2000: 95). These victories continued in most syndicates well into 2007.[13]

Educational facilities: Schooling provided another medium through which Islamists quietly encroached on civil society. Since the 1980s, almost all Arabic and religious studies teachers were reportedly related to *al-Ikhwan*. A 1997 study of 354 elementary education teachers revealed that 86 percent of them were Islamists. An important reason might be that *al-Ikhwan* faculty dominated the Teacher Training College, which trained future schoolteachers. As a result, classes often turned into sessions for Islamist indoctrination (Bayat 2007: 170-71). Islamists also controlled university students' unions. Shukrallah emphasizes how Islamists came to represent "the strongest political force available for the expression of students' discontent" (1989: 79). Throughout the 1980s, Islamists dominated unions in Cairo, Alexandria, Asyut, Minya, and other major universities (Esposito 1999: 53). Since 2000 they became active in the American University in Cairo (AUC); traditionally considered the bastion of secular elites in Egypt (Bayat 2007: 147). When the State restricted Islamist activity in campuses (discussed below), *al-Ikhwan* formed shadow unions – Free Students Unions – in 2006 (*IHRC*, May 2007).

Non-governmental organizations: Islamist NGOs constituted, according to Wiktorowicz, "another set of widely used structures" (2004: 11). Ibrahim points out that in the 1980s the better financed and managed Islamist NGOs mushroomed throughout the country, outnumbering secular organizations. Out of 14,000 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, 8,000 were Islamist (1999: 32-3). Yet the most central institution they relied on in civil society was 'the mosque'. Out of Egypt's 46,000 mosques in 1981, the Ministry of Religious Endowments administered only 6,000. By 1993, the number increased to 170,000 mosques, and the ministry operated only 30,000 (Yohannes 2001: 261). In the course of ritual activities, a great deal of informal interaction took place, information was communicated, new members were recruited, and worldviews were formulated (Ross 2002: 53). These "activist mosques" promoted "a feeling of belonging and an intimacy with peers based on shared commitments and routines" creating "powerful pressures for social conformity" (Wickham 2004: 233-34). Mosques were usually associated with popular

sheikhs, like al-Sha'rawi and Keishk, who swayed the middle lower and lower classes. For the middle and upper classes, modern-styled sheikhs, like 'Omar 'Abd al-Kafi, 'Amr Kahled, and Khaled el-Jindi, carried *al-da'wa* to the comfort of "private homes, clubs, and the stylish mosques of posh neighborhoods." The "active piety" preached by these sheikhs encouraged recruits to go out and convert others to their beliefs and practices thus enlarging the circle of followers (Bayat 2007: 149-21). The desire to become "better Muslims" created social capital "setting in motion a trickle-down effect that reaches into society at large" (Abdo 2000: 140).

The Media: Islamists were very "active in cultural production" (Wickham 2002: 101). They published books, newspapers, and voiced their opinions through radio and television. Funds were made available through Gulf patrons, who, according to Basheer, used petro-dollars to "buy the Egyptian media and publishing world" (1999: 9). Eickelman describes how oil money was used to subsidize Islamist books, making them "inexpensive, attractively printed, and accessible" (2005: 44-45). *Al-Ikhwan's* periodical, *al-Liwa'*, increased in circulation from 35,000 in 1987 to 95,000 in 1991 (Wickham 2004: 102, 240). Islamists also became entrenched in state-owned media. Radio and television were made to open and close with Qur'anic recitations, and the call to prayer regularly interrupted all programs (Yohannes 2001: 253). Islamist activists frequently appeared on government-controlled television (Price 1999: 49). One striking example is the broadcasting of the 1992 Cairo Book Fair debate between al-Hudaibi, *al-Ikhwan's* supreme guide then, and al-Ghazzali, the renowned Islamist cleric, on the one hand, and the secular writer Farag Fouda, on the other hand, concerning the question of applying *al-Shari'a* in Egypt (Baker 2003: 7). Islamists made additional use of new technologies (Hefner 2005: 12). Islamist Internet sites, such as Islam-online, became popular. Many satellite channels, such as *Iqra*, were devoted to promoting Islamism; others aired programs sympathetic to Islamist views, such as *al-Shari'a wal-Haya* on al-Jazeera. The proliferation of Islamism through the new media facilitated the circulation of its ideas and practices (Eickelman 2005: 37-49). Even music was not immune to the "rise of pious passion." Leading pop singers, like 'Amr Diyab and Mohammed Munir, produced religious songs for mass consumption (Bayat 2007: 148).

Religious establishment: *Al-Ikhwan* frequently criticized the "civil servant" clerics of al-Azhar who became State tools (Abdo 2000: 49).[14] Since the 1980s, however, al-Azhar jurists decided to support the "advocacy of Islamic orthodoxy in the public sphere" (Zubaida 2005: 164-5). They censored several novels, movies, and scholarly works at the behest of Islamists (Yohannes 2001: 266). Also a core of conservative clerics allied themselves to *al-Ikhwan*. Unlike their predecessors, who maintained allegiance to the State, these new rebellious clerics "formed relationships with those involved in the political Islamic movement." Examples include Isma'il Sadiq al-'Adawy, Sayyed 'Askar, Gamal Qutb, Yahya Isma'il, and 'Atiyah Saqr. There were also clerics who became members of *al-Ikhwan*, such as al-Qaradawi and al-Ghazali (Abdo 2000: 31-51).

Court system: Islamists used the legal system to censor intellectual and artistic works that promoted values contrary to theirs. Islamist lawyers, such as Youssef al-Badri, sued journalists, writers, artists, and even actresses. In 1996 alone, Islamists brought 60 *hisba*[15] suits against a host of targets and won most of them (Yohannes 2001: 257). Examples include a 1991 case brought to court by Mustafa al-Shaka'a, an Islamist professor, against broadcasting of the Ramadan Riddles, which featured female entertainers performing "Westernized singing and dancing routines." A second incident occurred in 1994, when al-Ghazzali attacked a television series, The Family,

for expressing heretical views; thus triggering a court case that sanctioned religious censorship on cultural products (Baker 2003: 53-76). In this "domineering witch-hunting culture," tens of novels and scholarly works were banned (Abaza 1999: 108-12). There were also lawsuits filed against specific people, such as Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Chair of the Sociology Department at AUC, who was accused of defaming Islam (*Rose al-Youssef*, January 15, 2005), and Nawal al-Sa'dawi, the secular feminist, who was sued for rejecting hijab (*October*, January 16, 2005).

State Reaction

Reaction to Islamists was typical of the post-revolution State in Egypt: "slowly, indirectly, and subtly, until a sledgehammer suddenly comes down" (Abdo 2000: 74). Norton considers the parliamentary elections of 1990 as the beginning of the end of Mubarak's tolerance for Islamism. Electoral Law 206 redrew voting districts in favor of the candidates of the regime and revoked judicial oversight. The 1990 elections were marked by fraud, intimidation, and an "unprecedented level of violence;" leading some to describe it as "the worst in Egyptian history" (Norton 2005: 136-141; Wiktorowicz and Hafez 2004: 74). In the 1995 elections, Islamist candidates were preemptively detained to prevent them from running altogether. The single Islamist that made it to parliament was removed by the state a few months later because of his "membership in an illegal organization" (Kassem 2004: 63). *Al-'Amal* party, the Islamists main collaborator, was suspended from operating (Bayat 2007: 144).[16]

To counter the Islamist foothold in professional syndicates, the State issued Law 100 of 1993, which imposed stringent conditions on the electoral process. An almost identical law was applied to students' unions elections. And in 1994, the Universities Law was amended to end the practice of electing deans and chairs (Norton 2005: 139). In May 1995, police occupied the Engineers Syndicates' headquarters and confiscated files and assets and detained dozens of activists, and then placed the syndicate under *hirasa* (state guardianship). This was repeated in the Lawyers' and other syndicates. Court rulings invalidating the *hirasa* were ignored. Accordingly, future Islamist victories in syndicates became practically useless. "Troops were stationed at the campus gates" and armed University Guards "became a permanent fixture on campuses" (Abdo 2000: 79, 105-16). To entirely seal off civil society in the face of Islamists, the State systematically closed down private mosques, took over some 60,000 mosques, and forced prominent preachers to choose between banishment and the abandonment of their Islamist agenda, requiring them to obtain a government clearance before conducting public sermons (Bayat 2007: 144). In 1996, Hussein Tantawi, a State loyalist, was appointed Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar to bring back the religious establishment to the service of the State (Abdo 2000: 62).

Steps to disarm civil courts began with Presidential Decree 370 of 1992 referring cases against Islamist activists to Military Courts without a right to an appeal (Abdo 2000: 184). In June 1995, the government started a series of detentions and military trials of leading *Ikhwan* activists. The organization's headquarters and over five thousand of its offices were shut down. From 1993 to 1995 more than a thousand Islamist activists were detained (Bayat 2007: 144, 171). And between November 1995 and February 2007, ninety-five *Ikhwan* activists were sent to prison (*IHRC*, May 2007). In 1998 a law prohibiting individuals from filing *hisba* petitions to courts was passed. All petitions were to be referred to the State prosecutor, who gets to decide which would be pursued (Bayat 2007: 172). To counter a violent Islamist reaction,[17]

the State amended the Penal Code and the State Security Law via Law 97 of 1992, which expanded the definition of terrorism to encompass "obstructing the work of the authorities" (Kassem 2004: 155). Finally, in December 2006, Mubarak prompted parliament to amend thirty-four articles of the Constitution: banning any reference to religion in political activity, revoking judicial supervision over any elections, and replacing Emergency Laws with a new Anti-Terrorism Law, which gives security officers a carte blanche in dealing with Islamists. This was followed by a State-led campaign aimed at eradicating *al-Ikhwan*. For the first time, *al-Ikhwan's* financial assets were confiscated, and its Deputy Supreme Guide, along with forty of its heavyweights, were all referred to a military court in the summer of 2007 (*IHRC*, May 2007).

Analysis & Outcome: Limitations of Counter-Hegemonic Strategies

What has Islamization achieved for Islamists in Egypt in the past twenty-five years? For one thing, their counter-hegemonic strategy succeeded in transforming popular consciousness and winning the sympathy of a sizable majority. This was not only evident in election results, but also observed in the changed social attitude towards Islam.[18] Bayat describes this as "an Islamic 'revolution by stealth'" (2007: 138). Abdo, in turn, asserts that such a "quiet revolution," embodied in the transformation of society's "mores and value system," poses a definite danger to the State (Abdo 2000: 25, 43). But although it has been theoretically argued that "ideational factors" contribute significantly to the success of any political project (Wiktorowicz 2004: 15-6), this has not been the case in Egypt. Islamists have not taken over political power, nor is there evidence that they are anywhere close.

What happened instead was that the State successfully aborted the Islamist strategy: it blocked its access to civil society (such as syndicates and universities); it disrupted center-periphery relations (by taking over mosques, marginalizing civil courts, and so on); and it dealt decisive blows to the central organization (through detentions and confiscations). Despite the popularity of *al-da'wa*, Islamists stood helpless against these measures. Members and sympathizers of *al-Ikhwan* were not equipped to challenge the State in any meaningful way. In short, without undermining Islamism as an ideology, the State shackled its structures. It became clear that the Islamist counter-hegemonic strategy was not only incapable of overpowering the State, but that it also depended on the approval or at least tolerance of the State. By the time Islamists became entrenched enough in civil society, the State withdrew its acquiescence to preempt *al-Ikhwan* from considering a serious political move. And this is a pattern that would probably repeat itself as long as the Islamists stick to their strategy, and as long as the State remains as pervasive as it is today.

An empirical evaluation of the outcome highlights how Islamization helped many Egyptians realize a higher degree of personal piety and a greater appreciation of their Islamic identity, but without creating a sector disposed towards radical politics or mobilized against the State. On the contrary, the focus on gradual moral change diminished any potential revolutionary impulse by encouraging individuals to channel their frustration inwards, spending most of their time and effort on becoming better Muslims, instead of outwards against the ruling regime. In a sense, Muslims learned to blame themselves for their religious shortcomings rather than blame the State for distorting religion. The most active among the Islamists acted more like social reformers than political dissenters. Even in parliament, Islamist members were either

consumed in cultural battles (censorship of cultural products) or participated with secular members in campaigns against corruption or other public issues that were neither particular to Islamists nor radically denounced the legitimacy of the State. In short, the Islamist revolt remained confined to the private sphere, without any prospects for being realized politically.

How could this outcome be explained theoretically? If the Islamist strategy is evaluated according to the theoretical model for social change inspired by Prophet Mohammed, one major difference stands out. It is true that the model emphasizes the creation of a moral community as a first step towards securing political power. But it is also obvious that this strategy was applied against a decentralized constantly shifting alliance of tribes, rather than a modern authoritative State. *Al-Ikhwan* dismiss that difference, claiming that if they succeed in brining society back to religion, God will reward them by granting them political power (see al-Banna 1990). Divine intervention, of course, is equally effective against modern States today as it was against tribes and ancient empires back then. This belief makes Islamists feel less accountable for the results of their strategy; if they fail to reach political power, it is because society is not yet sufficiently purified. And the solution is to devote more time and resources to moral reform rather than reconsidering the efficacy of the whole strategy. So in a Kautskian sense, Islamists were hoping that their strategy would lead to a "peaceful growth into the revolution." Their continued reference to *jeel al-nasr al-manshoud* (generation of anticipated victory) resembles Kausty's vision for socialist revolution; that it is enough to recruit elements that are "*potentially*, not *actually*" revolutionary (2007: 7), and that:

> **[W]hen times of revolutionary ferment come, the tempo of progress all at once becomes rapid…masses of the population learn in such times and achieve clarity…their courage and their desire to fight…their political interest is spurred in the most powerful way by the consciousness that the moment has arrived for them to rise by their efforts out of the darkest night into the bright glory of the sun (Kautsky 2007: 60-61).**

The limitations noted above could be generalized to the Gramscian model. What is so problematic about Gramsci's theory for radical social change is "*how ideas become practical forces*" (Fiori 1973: 93). Bayat points out that "discourse is *not* power unless it is given material force" (2007: 6)[19] Gramsci believed that an expanding counter-hegemony would eventually transcend the boundaries of civil society to the political sphere. He emphasized how ideas possess a certain "material reality of their own" because they have the power to inspire people towards action (Boggs 1984: 158). But how exactly does this process unfold? How does the success of a counter-hegemonic strategy in creating a basic contradiction between the civil and political societies be resolved in the form of radical political change? Does the ruling regime of an authoritarian state step down or simply 'wither away' under social pressures? In short, how does change in the world of ideas trigger a corresponding change in the world of political reality? Adamson points briefly to this limitation in Gramsci's model. Counter-hegemonic strategies presuppose a situation where the State is not "so powerful and pervasive as to disrupt all organized, collective challenges;" that it is sufficiently dependent on its hegemony so that an alternative hegemony would effectively paralyze it. Adamson concludes that this is an unlikely situation; that the capacity of the modern State to block counter-hegemonic strategies is "unprecedentedly high" (1980: 179, 239). It is thus possible that while Gramsci's consensual conception of power offers interesting insight into the nature of State

power, it also misrepresents it to some extent. In the final analysis, while hegemony might mystify power, one must not forget that the State, stripped from all ideological pretensions, is brute force – a fact encapsulate in Poulantzas' criticism of Gramsci:

> **Only too often does emphasis on the State's role in ideological relations lead to underestimation of its repressive functions. By repression should be understood first and foremost organized physical violence in the most material sense of the term:** *violence to the body*. **One essential condition of the establishment and maintenance of power is the coercion of bodies and the threat of violence or death. To be sure, the body is not simply a biological entity, but a political institution** (Poulantzas 2000: 29).

Counter-hegemonic strategies could at best create a 'transitional' phase where the legitimacy of the State would be weakened enough to pave the ground for a direct power struggle. In other words, while a counter-hegemonic strategy does not shift the balance-of-power, it places the movement in a favorable position to pursue a counter-balancing strategy that attempts to overpower the State through political alliances based on material interests.[20] In that sense, *al-Ikhwan* is confronted with two alternatives: either to confine its role to moral preaching, or to restructure itself into an explicitly sociopolitical revolutionary movement, and shift from a counter-hegemonic to a counter-balancing strategy aimed at overthrowing the State; a strategy that would require *al-Ikhwan* to devote itself to building class alliances, winning over possible defectors among the State elite, and bidding for external support.

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[1] For comparable views on the division of ideological and coercive apparatuses in civil and political society, and their unison under the State see Poulantzas (2000), Althusser (2001), and Mitchell (1991).

[2] See for example Wiktorowicz (2004: 2); Burke III and Lapidus (1988: 19); and Lahoud (2005: 68).

[3] Islamism began with Hassan al-Banna, the founder of *al-Ikhwan* in 1928. Islamist organizations around the Arab world were all created as branches of *al-Ikhwan*; some remain so until this day.

[4] The organization functioned as a legal civil association from 1928 to 1948 before its license was revoked. It was accused of political subversion. The license was reinstated briefly from 1952 to 1954, and then it was revoked for good for the same reason.

[5] Bayat refers to Islamism in Egypt as a "complex web of dispersed and heterogeneous organizations, activities, and sympathies around a distinct core embodied in the…Muslim Brotherhood" (2007: 137), and Abdo describes *al-Ikwan* as "the most convenient vehicle through which…Islamists, and ordinary Egyptians" could create the Islamic society they desired (2000: 75).

[6] In 1955, autonomous *Shari'a* courts were abolished; all mosques were brought under the control of the new Ministry of Religious Endowments; an administrative reform law in 1961, transformed al-Azhar (Egypt's religious establishment) into "an arm of the state." The law subjected all aspects of the institution's administration to State control. For the first time, the president appointed the Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar, instead of having him chosen by his peers. The State also created new religious agencies and committees to counterweight al-Azhar (Abdo 2000: 51).

[7] This is the period when Islamization seemed to have achieved measurable results. Its influence expanded beyond the traditionally religious peasants, workers, and petit bourgeoisie to include the middle class and the westernized haute bourgeoisie.

[8] Gramsci's sociology of power recognizes "the active role of subordinate people in the operation of power" (Jones 2006: 41).

[9] The State supported an amendment to the Second Article of the 1971 Constitution proclaiming that Islam is *the* source of legislation. But then neglected the review of existing laws to make sure they were all formulated in accordance with *Shari'ah*. The result was mixed laws, which drew on secular as well as religious sources.

[10] Culture is defined here in a Gramscian sense as "the disciplining of one's inner self; the mastery of one's personality; the attainment of higher awareness, through which we can come to understand our value and place within history, our proper function in life, our rights and duties" (Gramsci 1994: 10).

[11] In their electoral campaigns, *al-Ikhwan* used slogans like 'Islam is the solution' and 'God is our objective, the Prophet our leader, and al-Qur'an our constitution', in addition to the powerful dictum: 'Give your vote to Allah, give it to the Muslim Brotherhood' (Wickham 2002: 92). Islamists were also better funded, securing considerable publicity for their candidates through massive deployments of posters and banners in cities and villages (Ebeid 1989: 43-44).

[12] For a more detailed analysis of these electoral alliances see al-Awadi (2004).

[13] For more details see chapters 3 and 4 in Schlumberger (2007).

[14] An often-cited exemplar of this behavior is when Nasser was threatening war in 1967, al-Azhar clerics asserted that the conflict with Zionism is a holy struggle; and when Sadat negotiated peace with Israel, al-Azhar emphasized how Islam preaches reconciliation (Abdo 2000: 31).

[15] This is a law allowing Muslims to bring to court those who, in their view, offend Islam.

[16] For a more detailed analysis of the State's reaction against opposition parties see Stacher (2004).

[17] From 1992 to 1997, Egypt witnessed a violent Islamist insurgency. Militant Islamist organizations, like *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* and *al-Jihad*, were not associated with *al-Ikhwan* and therefore will not be examined here. The State crushed the insurgency and pursued its campaign against moderate Islamists.

[18] Nowadays, "ask any Egyptian and he will say that the years the country muddled through secularism were the exception," and that Islamic doctrines, which "encompass all aspects of man's existence," have guided the country since its conversion to Islam and should continue to do so (Abdo 2000: 25).

[19] The problem is that Bayat resolves this dilemma by suggesting the possibility to "*socialize* states and political elites into society's sensibilities, ideals, and expectations" from below only if the movement

could perfect what he calls "*art of presence* in harsh circumstances" and learn how to carve out social space (2007: 14, 201). It is clear from the case of Islamists in Egypt that this is not sufficient.

[20] Counter-balancing strategies should not be equated with the Gramscian War of Maneuver or Trotsky's frontal attacks. They do not involve force, but rather alliances with social classes, defecting State elites, and external powers. The Islamic Revolution in Iran offers a good example.