



Islam, the State and Democracy: Contrasting Conceptions of Society in Egypt

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Islam, the State & Democracy

Contrasting Conceptions of Society in Egypt

Sami Zubaida



Cairo portrait artist selling his wares.

The quest for democratization and human rights in the Middle East has prominently featured the term “civil society.” Oppression and corruption, it is argued, have followed from an over-intrusive state and its bureaucracies. Democratization must include a withdrawal of the state to allow free spheres of social autonomies and initiative, whether economic or associational. These are the spheres of civil society. “The State,” though, is not a



Joan Mandell

unified entity. It has many functions and facets. The conditions for the development of spheres of social autonomy are not only the "withdrawal" of the state, but also an active state intervention of another kind: clear legislation and institutional mechanisms which provide the framework of rights and obligations for these spheres. In the economic arena, for instance, the state must provide a clear and comprehensive framework of legislation on contract, labor, market standards, banking and finance, and so on. Similarly, trade unions and syndicates need enabling legislation as well as clear protection of indi-

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vidual members' rights.

Fragmentary and ambiguous legislation in these spheres, resulting from ad hoc liberalization measures such as those of Egypt's *infitah* (economic opening), result in situations in which the new spheres of activity are burdened with ambiguous regulation, or operate on the margin of the law. As the case of Egypt's Islamic investment companies in the 1980s illustrates, individuals and enterprises are at the mercy of administrative interpretations and applications, and can only succeed through the informal facilitation and evasions of bureaucratic functionaries. They are not autonomous from the state, but depend on another of its facets: the corrupt bureaucracies.



Cairo fruit vendor.

Joan Mandell

Two Conceptions

Egyptian intellectuals currently engaged in debates on liberalization and democratization have utilized two contrasting concepts of civil society. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the well-known sociologist and writer, argues that reinforcement of civil society is the condition for building up democratic sentiments and institutions in the Arab world.¹ He opts for a definition in terms of voluntary associations. This is in contradistinction to the spheres of the state on the one hand, and of "primordial organizations" of kinship, tribe, village or religious community on the other.

Both the state and "primordial associations" are spheres of authority and coercion which can oppress the individual and trample over human rights. Voluntary associations, by contrast, are areas which foster individual autonomy and provide experience in the exercise of social and political rights and responsibilities. The main examples of such associations are trade unions, professional syndicates, voluntary societies and clubs, pressure groups and political parties. These can act as conduits for the expression and organization of members' rights and demands vis-à-vis the state and the wider society. They also protect their members from arbitrary administrative and political measures of state agencies. Interestingly, Ibrahim does not mention the spheres of private property and business enterprise as elements of civil society, although these are central to conceptions of civil society in classical social and political theory.

Ibrahim's ideas are widely shared by liberal and left-

ist Egyptian intellectuals, and inform much of the human rights campaigning in that country. One such campaign is directed against Law 32 of 1964, which seriously impedes the formation and functioning of voluntary associations. This underlines my argument that civil society in the form of voluntary associations is essentially dependent on the "law-state."

To what extent is the Egyptian state a "law-state"? In theory, it is a constitutional state, and the agencies of the state are governed and regulated by the provisions of the constitution. In practice, though, the president has sweeping powers of rule by decree. Over the years, these decrees and emergency regulations, notably Anwar al-Sadat's emergency laws of 1981, which are still in operation, have abolished or suspended many of the guarantees of rights proclaimed in the constitution. State ministries and bureaucracies have, in effect, wide administrative regulatory powers which do not derive from the constitution.

The strategy of human rights campaigns is to challenge some of these provisions as incompatible with the constitution. The Constitutional Court has made a number of crucial judgments in recent years against government decisions, especially regarding licenses for the formation of political parties, and on electoral procedures. On a few occasions lower courts have also ruled in favor of challenges to government regulations, such as that forbidding strikes, on the grounds that they are incompatible with international conventions to which Egypt is a signatory. Lawyers defending striking railway workers in 1986 used this argument successfully, but the court's judgment did not end the interdiction on strikes.

To sum up, the Egyptian government has wide administrative and legal powers which give its organs almost unlimited sway. The exercise of these powers is limited to a small extent by a few independent legal judgments, but to a much greater extent by sensitivity to local and international public opinion, especially in the US and Europe. President Husni Mubarak's government is trying to project a moderate liberal-democratic image to its own intellectuals and to the Western world. This project is constrained by two factors: the inertia of its own entrenched bureaucracy, and pressures against liberalism from the increasingly strident Islamic current.

A different conception of civil society comes from Tariq al-Bishri, a prominent historian and intellectual, previously Marxist but now sympathetic to the Islamic current, who views civil society as an informal network of relationships. The context of his argument is a qualified defense of the Islamic investment companies, which were threatened in the late 1980s with government regulation and control. Bishri argues in terms of authenticity, as well as Islamic legitimacy.² The companies deal directly with investors, bypassing the financial network of official banks. Largely unregulated by government, the companies are, according to Bishri, an extension of traditional practices in the Egyptian countryside and provinces, where a man with savings to invest would never entrust them to a bank. He would resort to a local merchant or landowner to whom he is connected by personal networks, who would invest his savings in his enterprises and give the lender a portion of the yield. This is precisely what the Islamic companies were doing, albeit on a much larger and more impersonal scale. To impose government and central bank regulation on these companies would be to make them part of the official financial establishment, and therefore ruin this authentic traditional relationship. It would alienate the small savers from investing their wealth in the development of Egypt through native enterprise.

Liberal commentators, such as the Wafd newspaper, also defended the Islamic companies against regulation in the name of the *sahwa* (renaissance) of civil society, which must not be stifled by the dead hand of bureaucracy. Civil society, in this conception, lies essentially outside the government, whose regulation would contaminate its authenticity. Informal networks and social relations of reciprocity or dependence are the essence of civil society. The focus of its activity is property and business (in contrast to Ibrahim, who leaves these elements out of his definition of civil society).

Behind Ibrahim's and al-Bishri's concepts lie two contrasting world views—one secular-liberal, the other Islamic-communal.³ One of the important political articulations of the first view is the campaign for human rights and democratic institutions, directed primarily at the government and the law, but increasingly also against the illiberal demands of the second, Islamist, world view. This is not to say that all Islamist world views (and there are many) are necessarily or essentially illiberal. We are dis-

cussing here the specific case of the dominant "Islamic current" in Egypt.

Associations and the Law

In 1984, a group of Egyptian intellectuals, including lawyers, applied to the government to license two human rights associations: one Arab and the other, a branch of the first, Egyptian. Licenses were refused on security grounds. The two associations were nevertheless formed and function without licenses but with a high public profile. This illustrates the contradictions for the regime: an authoritarian bureaucratic rigidity, but also sensitivity to international public opinion, before which Egypt must appear liberal and moderate. The law under which licenses are granted to associations is Law 32 of 1964, itself the object of a human rights campaign.⁴

Law 32 regulates only voluntary associations, not trade unions, professional syndicates or political parties, to which other laws apply. Examples of voluntary associations include community development associations, village associations, educational and medical charities, women's societies, sporting clubs, art and music societies, and political pressure groups, such as the human rights associations.

Before 1952, the Egyptian civil code featured carefully drafted items on the licensing and operation of voluntary associations. The law, generally liberal, distinguished between three types of associations: politico-military societies, which were forbidden; non-profit civil associations directed to any other purpose, which were constituted as legal persons and as such enjoyed full rights under the law; and charities, to which different and specific regulations applied. Infringements of the law by any of these societies could only be established and restituted by the courts. Judgments against societies entailed financial penalties, but not the dissolution of the society or punishment of its officers. In the first half of the century, civil associations, alongside newspapers and universities, played a vital part in the renaissance of intellectual, cultural, political and sporting life in Egyptian society. Cairo University (then Fuad University) was established by precisely such an association. Some associations, along with newspapers, trade unions and political parties, suffered occasional police interference and oppression, but most survived.

In 1956, a Republican decree annulled items 54 through 80 of the civil law dealing with associations. All such associations, as well as political parties and charities, were dissolved and forced to reapply for licensing. Without the empowering legal codes, relicensing was at the whim of administrative regulation and discretion. In 1964, Law 32, rather than remedying this situation, explicitly gave sweeping powers to the Ministry of Social Affairs and local government and their officials to license, regulate, monitor and dissolve associations.

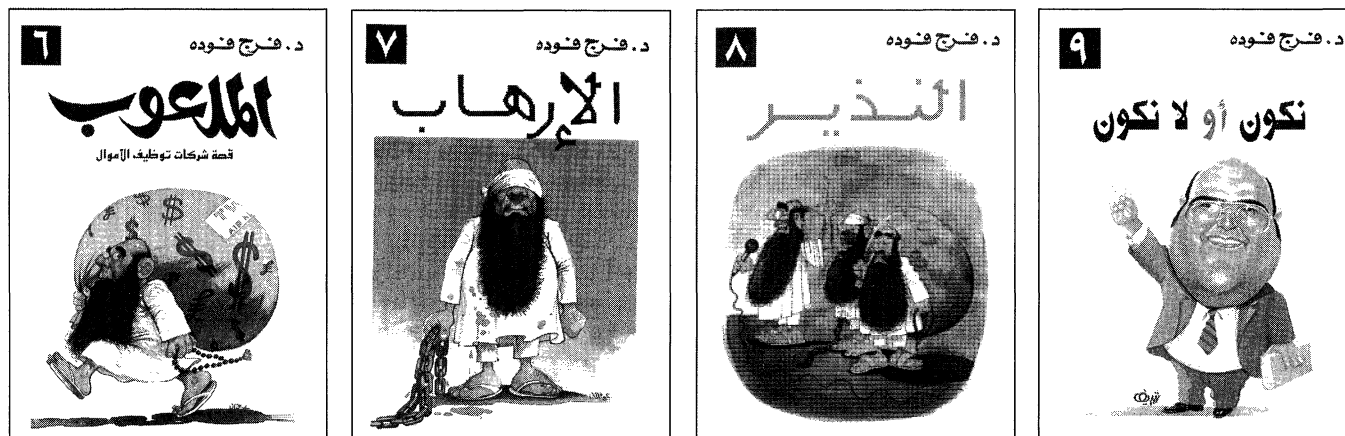
Under Law 32, prospective societies apply to the Ministry of Social Affairs for a license. This ministry must

then send copies of the application to the directorate of security, the National Union (the sole and official political organization), and the sections of ministries in whose areas of competence the proposed society operates. Each of these has to approve the application or express an opinion on its suitability. One clause of the law states that "if a society is constituted which proves to be contrary to public order or morality or if its objectives are illegal or contrary to the safety of the Republic or its social system, then that society is annulled."

Another clause forbids members of trade unions and professional syndicates to form any association to pursue

to do so while all their records, documents and funds are held in the ministry.

A 1972 directive from the Ministry of Social Affairs (No. 754) adds that members of the management boards of private societies and institutions have to obtain permission from the minister at least one month before travelling abroad to meetings or conferences where they represent their societies. Their requests have to be approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and any other relevant authority. They also have to report on the conference to the General Directorate of Societies at the ministry. Local governments at the provincial level have simi-



Covers of books by Farag Fuda. *The Joke: The Tale of the Islamic Investment Companies; Terrorism; Warning; and To Be or Not to Be* (caricature of Fuda).

activities appropriate to that union or profession. This is aimed at interest groups, mutual funds and cooperatives formed among workers and colleagues. That is to say, the government-controlled unions are given complete monopoly over their members. Other arbitrary powers include the right to refuse the formation of a society because there is no need for it or because an existing society fulfills the same functions.

The Minister of Social Affairs can dissolve the board of management of a society and appoint his own nominees for a maximum period of three years. His appointee (usually an official of the ministry) has control over the society's funds. The minister also has the power to dissolve a society or amalgamate it with another which he judges to have similar objectives. In these cases, the board of the society must hand over to the ministry all the records and documents as well as the funds of the society. The minister can annul any resolution passed by the association if he judges it contrary to public order. The minister can also appoint officials or representatives of his ministry to the management board of any society, up to a half of its membership, for an unlimited period.

State Discretion

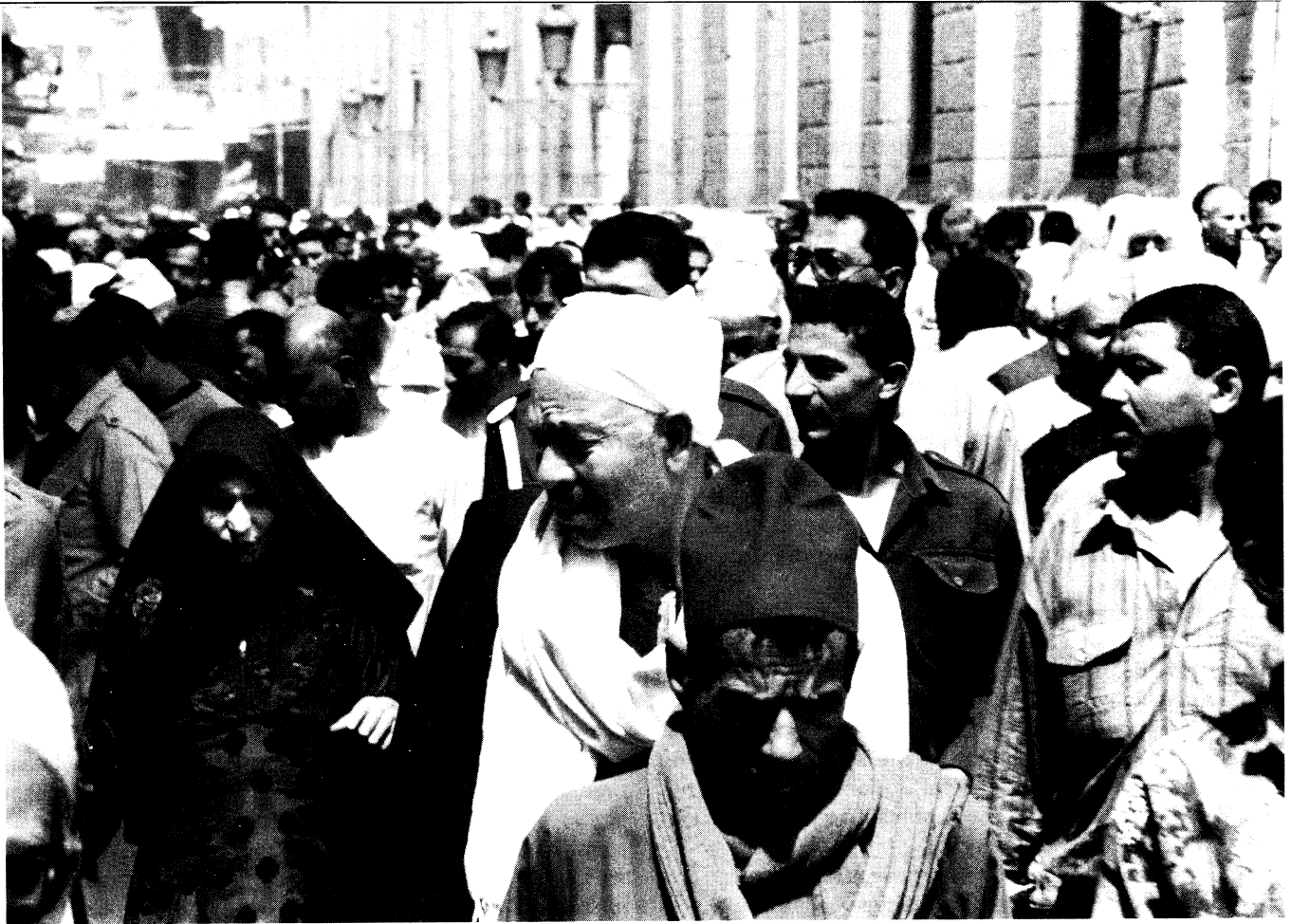
All these powers are administrative. The ministry need never resort to a court or a judge. Members of a dissolved association may take the matter to court, but they have

lar sweeping powers over private societies.

A notable victim of this law is the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), incorporated in Egypt and led by the well-known feminist writer and activist, Nawal El-Saadawi.⁵ The AWSA was dissolved in June 1991 by the deputy governor of Cairo because of alleged financial irregularities, and its funds transferred to an Islamic women's organization. Informal favoritism towards Islamic associations by ministry functionaries is a regular occurrence. The dissolution of the AWSA was unsuccessfully challenged by human rights campaigners in the Administrative Court in May 1992 and is now on appeal.

The powers of the Ministry of Social Affairs are not only regulative and disciplinary; they include the means of dispensing patronage and favor. Certain associations can be placed into a privileged category of "general" or "public" interest. Organizations in this category cannot have their funds confiscated. A recent study found a disproportionate number in this category are societies with Islamic reference.⁶

Societies may receive donations from private or public sources, including foreign agencies, but at the discretion of the ministry. They can also collect funds from the public (with authorization from the ministry). They can generate income by selling goods and services. Foreign donors have been closely involved in the finance of various associations, mainly of a charitable and self-help nature, such as those operating dispensaries and nurseries, and providing professional training. Whether a society can



Leaving the mosque in Khan al-Khalili, Cairo.

Jim Saah

receive foreign funding or not is determined by a clause written into its constitution at the discretion of ministry officials. This authorization can be withdrawn at will. (The recent involvement of foreign aid agencies in human rights campaigns and explicitly in the efforts to reinforce “civil society” is an interesting development, not confined to Egypt.)

Many religious voluntary associations and activities operate under the aegis of *awqaf* (pious foundations) or particular mosques, and as such are not subject to the provisions of Law 32. Some 27 percent of registered associations have an Islamic reference.⁷ Their functions include pilgrimage, teaching the Quran, and social and medical services.

Islamic societies apparently enjoy special favors and privileges with ministry officials. Reportedly, ministry officials are included on the boards of management of many of these societies and paid a salary. This arrangement is apparently legal under Law 32, and in some cases required. Islamic associations are reportedly the most likely to obtain authorization to collect money from the public. These arrangements are consistent with rising Islamist sympathies among government functionaries. It is notable that Islamist political groups and their organs, vociferous in their demands on other constitutional matters, have been remarkably silent on Law 32.⁸

These apparently cozy relations between Islamic associations and government officials are pertinent to the contrast drawn above between the two images of civil

society. Islamic associations here seem to have greater freedom of operation—not by virtue of empowering legislation but thanks to informal or semi-formal arrangements with ministry officials. Law 32 is highly inimical to civil society in the formal legal sense, which requires the state to facilitate and enable its operation. It constitutes a perfect illustration of the authoritarian bureaucratic state directly impeding the free associations of civil society. The Islamic associations get around these impediments through informal arrangements and networks which incorporate state officials.

Unions and Syndicates

Trade unions and syndicates are a central pillar in Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s conception of civil society. After 1952, trade unions were integrated into the Nasirist state. Until recent years, the post of Minister of Labor was reserved for the general secretary of the Trade Union Federation. These unions were, and remain, unions of workers in the vast public sector. They are conduits of formal representation on boards of companies and enterprises, and for communications between workers, management and government. They do not negotiate on pay and conditions, though they do bargain on bonuses and incentives at particular plants. Unions are also the conduits of social welfare benefits to their members, and avenues for education, training and promotion. As such, they have

developed patronage networks which ensure the election of "responsible" officials.

Recent liberalization measures have attempted to separate unions from government and, in the process, make them more credible and less alienating to their members. They remain, however, tied to the public sector. Only the existing single union for each industry remains licensed; the formation of independent unions is forbidden. Strikes remain outlawed under emergency regulations. Important unofficial strikes in the 1980s and 1990s in steel, textiles and railways, were forcefully repressed by the police.

Elections for union officers and delegates in 1991 were reported to have been free. The Islamists and the left were both disappointed; successful candidates were mostly apolitical.

The unions constitute a glimmer of hope for the fortification of civil society in Egypt. They remain at present firmly tied to government and the public sector, in spite of liberalization measures, but the leadership behind the unofficial strikes may have a chance to flourish legitimately if pressure for change in the strike laws and on the monopolies of the official unions is successful. Privatization of parts of the public sector, if it proceeds, may further union autonomy.

The professional syndicates are the most advanced sectors of public life in Egypt, enjoying high status and speaking with an autonomous and respected voice. The lawyers' syndicate has been at the forefront of the campaigns for human rights and the rule of law.*

In the 1980s, the medical and engineering syndicates became largely dominated by the Islamist current. They are, however, quite different from one another in their internal politics and alignments. The engineer's syndicate raises many complex issues, so let us take the simpler example of the medical syndicate.

An estimated 70 percent of Egyptian doctors are under 35 years of age.⁹ Only 25 percent are in private practice; the majority of the rest are employees of the Ministry of Health. Large numbers of recent graduates have brought with them to the profession and the syndicate the Islamist ideologies and commitments prevailing in the universities, and especially the faculties of medicine. The Islamist influence arose in response to corruption in the faculties—the high prices of photocopies of lectures and manuals, the need to buy private lessons from professors at high fees in order to pass exams, and the special privileges accorded the children of faculty members and senior doctors.

Another factor is the increasing importance of medical services provided by hospitals and clinics attached to mosques and Islamic charities. These provide an important avenue of employment for young doctors, superior to that offered by the ministry, as well as a reinforcement of their religio-political commitments.

What does the Islamist dominance in the medical syndicate imply for our argument? The syndicates are important pillars of civil society in Ibrahim's sense. They are democratic and voluntary associations of public interest and commitment. At the same time, and in that capacity, the medical syndicate is becoming involved in the networks of the Islamic sector, the informal civil society that Bishri advocates. To survive as an autonomous and democratic body, the medical syndicate requires enforceable legal guarantees provided by a law-state.

The Economic Sphere

The secure right to private property, freedom of contract and a free market are essential elements of the classic conceptions of civil society, whether liberal, Hegelian or Marxist. Security of private property and of contract were seen in this context as bases for multiple centers of social power which defy attempts at the monopoly of power characteristic of authoritarian and despotic rulers.

Sadat's *infitah* was meant to end state control of economic activity. State bureaucracies, however, in the form of the "public sector," remained firmly in control of the commanding heights of the economy. Private enterprise was at its most successful in partnership (official or unofficial) with or under the patronage of these bureaucracies and their personnel. Osman Ahmad Osman was the perfect example of *infitah* achievement in the Sadat era: a contractor-businessman with firm official and personal connections to the state bureaucracies and with family-marriage connections to the president.

The Mubarak regime remains committed to economic liberalization, including the privatization of public sector enterprises. How much of this will be accomplished remains to be seen. An important element in the program of *infitah* and privatization is adequate legislation to enable the operation of enterprises: contracts, licenses, consumer protection, labor laws, and so on. Here again the law-state is an essential condition for civil society.

The Egyptian case is admirably summed up by Robert Springborg:

Instead of undertaking basic structural reforms which would create an environment truly conducive to private investment, the government of Egypt has been preoccupied with tinkering with the legal superstructure. The tinkering has produced some more liberal conditions governing investment, but the gain is partially offset by uncertainty resulting from the tinkering itself. Moreover, even while seeking to entice private investment through special incentives, the Egyptian authorities have presided simultaneously over the further expansion of the state's role in the economy. Public revenue as a percentage of GDP climbed steadily during the *infitah*, rising from 34.4 percent in 1975 to 43 percent in 1984. The state, far from withdrawing from this arena in favor of private enterprise, has occupied a greater share of it.¹⁰

The resulting uncertainty, together with the corruption of large sectors of the bureaucracy, constitute constraints and incentives for entrepreneurs to acquiesce in easy,

*In September 1992, the candidates backed by the Muslim Brothers won a majority of board seats in the Bar Association election. —Eds.

bureaucracy-dependent money making. This situation does not facilitate the formation of independent and organized business classes, one of the pillars of "civil society" in classical social theory. It does, though, overwhelmingly favor the informal civil society of Bishri as against the social autonomies of Ibrahim. Civil society in this sense is not outside the state, but dependent—indeed parasitic—upon it.

The Islamic investment companies illustrate this point very well.¹¹ Bishri and others defended them in the name of social autonomy from the state: private enterprise outside the regulative dead hand of bureaucracy; Egyptians investing directly in their own economy. This is a myth. These companies only functioned freely because they recruited influential high-ranking officials, both retired and in post, to their boards of directors and consultancies at high fees. When the ruling politicians realized that they were losing control over the loyalties of their own bureaucracies, as well as risking public scandals, they clamped down firmly. And when the government acted, their control was arbitrary: there was no law or constitutional provision to qualify or temper the absolute power of the state to promulgate decrees. True, these companies were involved in all kinds of irregularities and doubtful practices. The ultimate government response to them, however, is an example of arbitrary power which could have been employed against any target perceived as a threat.

The Islamic Sector

There is no organized, unitary Islamic sector. The investment companies do not seem to have strong links to political organizations. The *jama'at islamiyya* (Islamic associations) may be loosely connected among themselves. What they have in common, however, is a mode of operation through private social networks, communal powers, communal welfare provisions, and so on.¹² For instance, the *jama'at* are trying to establish their control over villages and in urban quarters in Cairo and elsewhere. Alain Roussillon puts forward the hypothesis that these groups are attempting to replace the traditional notables who controlled these units, establishing clientalistic networks, mediating with authorities, enforcing rules of morality and order at the local level, and settling disputes. The violence in the 'Ayn Shams quarter in the late 1980s can then be seen as a battle for control against local resistance, and possibly against rival groups.¹³

The "Islamic economy" is not a distinct or unitary sector. There is no evidence of much connection between Islamic banks and Islamic investment societies; the latter prefer Western banks. Medium and small Islamic enterprises have diverse financial sources which may include Islamic banks. The Islamic welfare institutions also operate at different levels, from small clinics attached to private mosques, to the grand, modern hospital in Muhandesin. What they have in common is that they provide a wide range of employment opportunities and

welfare benefits (not free but affordable). The criteria for enjoying these opportunities and benefits are personal and particularistic: adherence to Islam (including the codes of social and family morality), but also networks of patronage and clientship, communal membership and loyalty, and possibly political allegiance.

What kind of civil society is this? It is outside the state, but not necessarily against the state: it fulfills an important function of social control. It could, under certain conditions, be mobilized against the state. But if the quest for civil society is one which seeks a framework for the exercise of human rights and social autonomies, then the model presented by the Islamic sector falls short. It reproduces under modern conditions the authoritarian and patriarchal framework of the associations of kinship, village and religious community at a time when such communities have been effectively loosened and dispersed by the socioeconomic processes of modernity.

"Social Islam" as an Obstacle

Egyptian human rights activists are concerned by the anti-democratic thrust of these kinds of arrangements. It is clear that the authoritarian impulse in Egypt, as elsewhere in the region, does not emanate solely from the state and its organs, but also from various Islamist quarters of authority and communal organization. Islamist sympathies in ministries and among functionaries often combine the two sources. Authoritative voices from al-Azhar, the voice of "official" Islam in Egypt, are raised increasingly against secularist and liberal expressions. They and their Islamist allies seem to have great influence over the media, from which they are able to exclude their opponents. Their call for the banning of books has been successful in many cases, notably that of 'Ala' Hamid's *A Distance in a Man's Mind*, condemned for blasphemy by an emergency court in 1991, and its author sentenced to eight years in jail. The demand to ban Judge Ashmawi's critical books on law and government has so far failed. The recent assassination of prominent secularist writer and activist, Farag Fuda, by a Jihad militant is a tragic example of the campaign of intimidation of opposing voices. The "extremist" Jihad shares the objectives of the "moderate" Muslim Brotherhood and its state-backed Azhar allies.

Authoritarian inputs into Egyptian society also come from communal organizations, the "informal" model of civil society. The control of Islamist groups over some villages and urban quarters has replaced the traditional authority and control of local notables and bosses. Against the romantic view that this is some sort of grass-roots, "authentic" popular expression, Muhammad al-Sayyid Sa'id has pointed out the authoritarian nature of the relationship of Islamist leadership to the masses at the local levels.¹⁴ The religious networks make no effort to recruit local leaders onto their councils of administration, which consist exclusively of their own members. Far



Egyptian Muslim Brothers leader.

Said Elatab/Middle East Photo

from being popular organizations, the Islamic associations constitute the instrument by which the Islamist current controls and directs the masses. They do not encourage or foster autonomous popular organization or action, but treat the masses as objects of religious reform and control. The religious discourse does not give voice to the masses, but is directed at ethical pedagogy at the individual level and political organization at the national level. The levels between the individual and the state are covered by an unalterable *shari'a*.

One of the most disturbing elements of this kind of authoritarian communalism is the attacks on Coptic targets in the towns and villages of Upper Egypt, but also in Cairo, with loss of life as well as property. This is now one of the central problems for Egyptian human rights organizations and activists. Baha' al-Din Hassan, of the Egyptian Human Rights Organization, has recently campaigned in defense of the Christian inhabitants of Manshiet Nasir in the south. They have been subjected to violent attacks by the *jama'at* attempting to control the village by fanning communal tensions and intimidating Muslim inhabitants into taking sides. The police and the Ministry of the Interior have concentrated on protecting their own personnel and installations in the area, ignoring the plight of the inhabitants.¹⁵

The campaigns for human rights, freedom of expression and association, women's rights, and equality of religious minorities come up not only against the authoritarian state but also against religious authority and forms of authoritarian communal organization which borrow

legitimacy from the prevailing religious ambience. These illiberal forces are increasingly represented in government apparatuses, both formally, in the constitutional commitment to the *shari'a* enshrined by Sadat, and informally, in terms of networks and sympathies. Elements of the Islamic sector, such as *jama'at* violence in Upper Egypt, pose a threat to public order. On the other hand, much of the Islamic sector represents a force for social control by providing authoritative social and economic organization and control in sectors of society which could otherwise be disorderly.

In current discourses, there is a ready identification of democracy with the ballot box. Free elections are, of course, an important element in democracy. For democracy to be an ongoing system rather than episodic elections, however, it must be instituted as a constitutional framework. Legal reforms, constitutional guarantees of rights, independence of the judiciary—in short, progress towards a law-state—are necessary preconditions for free elections. The constituencies in Egyptian society in favor of progress in these directions are important: the liberal intelligentsia occupy prominent positions in the state, education, the press and some of the syndicates. They are aided by the desire of the top political leadership to project a favorable image of Egypt as a liberal and moderate country. Western governments may be cynical in their attitudes toward democracy and human rights, but public opinion and the media in the West can exert pressures for democratization. Some of the non-governmental organizations have been active on this front. The obstacles faced by the liberal forces are enormous, but there are a few bright spots where progress is possible. ■

Footnotes

1 *Al-mujtama' al madani wal tahawwel al-dimoqrati fil-watan al-arabi* (Civil society and the transition to democracy in the Arab world) (Cairo: Ibn Khaldun Research Center, 1991).

2 *Al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi*, No. 1018, July 18, 1988, pp. 20-25.

3 It should be noted that Tariq al-Bishri is explicitly in favor of democratic institutions and respect for human rights. What follows relates not to these explicit views but to the implications for these issues of his conception of social and economic "authenticity."

4 For a history of law pertaining to associations, see Amir Salim, *Difa'an 'an takwin al-jam'iyyat* (In defense of the formation of associations) (Cairo: Center for Legal Research and Information on Human Rights, 1991).

5 See Joel Beinin, "Egyptian Women and the Politics of Protest," *Middle East Report*, #176 (May-June 1992), pp. 41-42.

6 Sarah Ben Nefissa-Paris, "Le mouvement associatif égyptien et l'islam," *Monde Arabe: Maghreb-Machrek*, No. 135 (January-March 1992), pp. 19-36.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

9 Alain Roussillon, "Entre al-Jihad et al-Rayyan: phénoménologie de l'islamisme égyptien," in *Modernisation et nouvelles formes de mobilisation sociale* (Cairo: Dossiers du CEDEJ, 1991), pp. 39-69.

10 Robert Springborg, "Egypt," in Tim Niblock and Emma Murphy, eds., *Economic and Political Liberalization in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming 1992).

11 For accounts of these companies, see Alain Roussillon, *Sociétés islamiques de placement de fonds et "ouverture économique"* (Cairo: Dossiers du CEDEJ, 1988); and Sami Zubaida, "The politics of the Islamic Investment Companies in Egypt," *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle East Studies* 17,2 (1990).

12 This is not to say that all Islamist politics must necessarily take this form. In Egypt today there are many prominent Muslims, such as Hussain Ahmad Amin, Hassan Hanafi and Muhammad 'Imara, who favor liberal democracy and are highly critical of the dominant Islamic current which is the subject of discussion here.

13 Roussillon, p. 45.

14 "Métamorphose du champ sociétal à partir du renforcement des mouvements à référence religieuse," in *Modernisation et nouvelles formes de mobilisation sociale*, p. 79.

15 See the report in the *Guardian* (London), May 27, 1992, p. 10.