RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS AT WAR

INTRODUCTION: ISLAMISTS AT WAR

By Marc Lynch

Islamist movements have been deeply involved in a wide range of civil wars over the last decade. How, if at all, has their involvement differed from the role played by non-Islamist groups? How has their participation in these wars changed these movements, whether in terms of strategy, ideology, organization or external alliances? Do different types of Islamists – Sunnis and Shi'ite, Muslim Brotherhood organizations and salafi-jihadists, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State – engage differently with wartime conditions? In an earlier contribution to this Newsletter, I laid out the case for the rigorous study of Islamist participation in war.[139] This special section presents a number of the papers presented at the January 2019 Project on Middle East Political Science workshop.

The contributors to the workshop were asked to approach the question of Islamist participation in wars through the lens of their own research focus. Steven Brooke, drawing on his research on the social services provided by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, asks whether the mechanisms by which Islamists gained political advantage in stable authoritarian contexts also operate in war zones.[140] Elizabeth Nugent draws on her research on the impact of state repression on Islamist radicalization and moderation to consider how warzones might impact their ideology and behavior.[141] Nicholas Lotito, in his contribution, uses conflict data to demonstrate differences in how effectively Islamists fight compared with non-Islamist counterparts. Khalil al-Anani asks whether prison conditions are conducive to rethinking Islamist ideology and strategy. Morten Valbjørn and Jeroen Gunning, in their contribution, carefully examine the logic and theoretical framing for understanding the operation of such mechanisms, especially those related to identity.

These short essays help to frame an important new research programme with questions and puzzles which cut across disciplinary and methodological orientations.

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PRISON, EMOTIONS, AND IDEOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON EGYPT'S CRUEL AND OVERCROWDED PRISONS

By Khalil Al-Anani

Does prison affect ideology? And if so, how does it shape individuals' worldview and stance from critical issues such political participation, democracy, violence, war, etc.? If we consider ideology as a socially constructed reality, in Berger and Luckman's words, then prison, as a space and experience, can become a key factor in creating, altering, or maintaining it.[142] However, this process of constructing or changing ideology doesn't occur or operate on vacuum. Several factors are in play including personal experiences, emotions, grievances, which can have significant impact on ideology.

This memo focuses on emotions as an intermediate factor in shaping individuals' worldviews and ideology, particularly in peculiar settings such as prisons. Ideology, broadly defined, can be viewed as a constellation of ideas that stem from our senses, sentiments, feeling, and what we make of the surrounding world. Put differently, our senses are the underlying ingredients of our ideas, beliefs, and ideology. Without delving further into the debate over the definition(s) of ideology, it is important to stress its role in informing and directing one's behavior and actions.

In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, French philosopher Michel Foucault stresses the devastating and lasting impact of prison on human body, mind, and soul.[143] For him, prison is not merely a control and disciplinary tool but also it redefines and delineates power relations, which in turn have a strong impact on individuals' conception of the world. Likewise, as Antonio Gramsci reminds us in his *Prison Notebooks*, ideology is the "science of ideas," which "had to be broken down into their original "elements", and

these could be nothing other than "sensations."[144] Thus, as Roger Petersen points out, "the role of emotions should be examined within the context of the real-life experiences that generate them."[145] Emotions in politics is not something new in scholarship particularly in the study of social movements[146], however, it is still understudied in the case of Islamism.

In Egypt, thousands of individuals have been languishing in prison for the past seven years, including political activists, opposition leaders, NGO's members, and ordinary people. Some of them have been undergoing different experiences that impact their feelings, sentiments, beliefs, and worldviews. Methodologically, while it is extremely difficult to conduct field research in Egypt, let alone with political prisoners, it is significantly important to make sense of their personal experiences and how they shape and construct their world of meanings. Over the past three years, I have been collecting data about political prisoners in Egypt (former and current), particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, in an attempt to draw a clearer picture on the ongoing ideological and political changes within the movement especially among the youth. These data were collected through different methods including online interviews using different technological and communicative tools; prisoners' blogs, notebooks, and social media accounts; and human rights organizations' reports.

In this memo, I focus on a 110-page-long notebook that was leaked from an Egyptian prison at the end of 2018. The notebook reveals significant

changes in the worldviews of those who drafted and wrote it. One of them is serving a life in prison sentence in one of Upper Egypt's prison after standing before a military trial and four others have been in a pre-trial detention for almost six years now. I had the opportunity to chat with a couple of these people which gave me an inside look into the circumstances of writing and sharing this notebook in prison. I have chosen to keep their identities anonymous to protect them from potential repercussions.

The *Notebook* is called "The Shock" (*as-sadma*) and considered by this group of members to be a radical revision (*muraj'a jazriyya*) to the Brotherhood's ideology, discourse, and political tactics. The *Notebook* is composed of twenty epistles that were written between 2015-2017. Before analyzing the *Notebook*, two points are worth mentioning. First is that while those who wrote the *Notebook* claim that an early draft of the *Notebook* was shared and discussed widely within the Brotherhood, the impact of this *Notebook* on the rank-and-file is still unknown. Second, while these members stress that there was no political pressure from the state to issue this *Notebook*; one cannot dismiss such pressure giving the cruelty of the current regime. In fact, there is a great interest of the regime to use this "ideological" revision to deepen divisions within the Brotherhood and vindicate the brutality against its members. The regime believes that more pressure on the Brotherhood could lead to ideological revisions such as what happened with Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyya in the late 1990s.

The content of the *Notebook* revolves around three key themes. First, it presents a profound and critical revision of the Brotherhood's ideology, with harsh criticism of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb's views and of the very idea of Islamizing state and society. Second, it rebukes the Brotherhood's leadership for its political blunders, particularly after taking power in 2012 and after the coup of 2013. Third, it offers personal accounts of their decision to abandon the Brotherhood ideologically and organizationally. The *Notebook* reveals significant changes in these members' views and perception of themselves, the Brotherhood, and the world.

On ideology, the *Notebook* criticizes the Brotherhood's views on social and political change and describes them as "unrealistic." Moreover, it considers the Brotherhood as a "useless movement that caused a lot of problems to the entire Muslim world." The *Notebook* goes on to blame al-Banna's "bottom-up" strategy for change which led, according to the *Notebook*, to "catastrophic mistakes." As one of the *Notebook's* contributors points out, "the problem with al-Banna's views on change is it created a parallel organization that competes with society and seeks to take over which was not only naïve but also problematic."[147] Another contributor criticizes the indoctrination and socialization process of the Brotherhood which, according to him, tends to focus on "religious and preaching" components without giving attention to political learning except during elections seasons.[148]

On the role of leadership, the *Notebook* holds the Brotherhood's leaders responsible for the mistakes and problems that occurred after taking power in 2012. One of the contributors believes that the presidential election of 2012 was an "entrapment" for the Brothers, who should have not run for the presidency. The *Notebook* blames the Brotherhood's leadership for rushing into power without serious and transparent deliberations. It refers to the power centers in the movement and how the conservative wing pushed the movement away from the objective of the January 2011 uprising. The authors also believe that Morsi's presidency was hijacked by the Brotherhood's Guidance Bureau (*maktab al-irshad*) which undermined Morsi and distorted his image as an independent president. Moreover, the authors of the *Notebook* believe the coup of 2013 was not inevitable and it could have been avoided had Morsi agreed to accept the opposition's demand of holding early presidential elections. They invoke the decision of Turkish Islamist and former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to step down after being pressured by the military in 1997. "Had Morsi done what Necmettin Erbakan in 1997, he could have saved many lives and maintained the democratic transition," one of them said.[149]

This particular group of young members has decided to leave the Brotherhood. While there are different reasons behind this, prison plays an important role in shaping these members' decision to do so.[150] This role can be either as a result of reflection or despair and disillusionment. As one of the Brotherhood's members puts it, "in prison, I have time to rethink, reflect, and decide for myself without organizational or family pressure."[151] While some members abandoned the entire ideology of the Brotherhood, others decided to disassociate themselves from it organizationally. This abandonment has become a pattern in the past few years. Several interviewees have expressed the feelings of frustration, discontent, and loss. Some of them decided to leave the Brotherhood and others went beyond and abandoned religion itself and became atheists.

Clearly, prison, as a space and experience, has given young Brotherhood an opportunity to rethink and reassess not only their leadership's political strategy over the past few years but also to reflect on the movement's very basic ideas, slogans, and beliefs. Recently, four letters have been issued and leaked from prisons by a wider group of young Brotherhood.[152] The letters emphasize and convey similar views to what was mentioned in the *Notebook*.

Notwithstanding, ideology is not something static or immutable, for Islamists as well for as any other actor. It is not clear why certain changes occur in certain contexts/times/spaces (i.e. war, prison, exile, etc.) or why some individuals/members can be more prone to change than others. Therefore, explaining Islamists' ideological and political changes requires a careful understanding of these circumstances and settings. Similarly, while studying Islamism as a collective actor is important, understanding Islamists as human beings with emotions, feelings, sentiments, and different personalities is crucial to understand the underpinnings of their worldviews and how they evolve over time.

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the entire territory. It is comfortable with redemption, and among its activists are those who work towards the construction of the Third Temple in our times. One member of the steering committee of the movement, Geula Cohen, was herself a member of the Lehi from 1943 until the movement split up, and on the website of the Sovereignty journal she is listed as a Lehi fighter. http://ribonut.co.il/AboutSection.aspx?NewsHomeItemId=3&lang=2

129 http://www.ribonut.co.il/?lang=1

130 Exponential rise in the use of the term in news (through google search, April 7,2020) in two-year blocks seen in a preliminary search for ribonut (in Hebrew) on Google under the "News" tab. 2008-2009: 43 mentions, not with the meaning of domination. 2010-2011: 149 articles mentioning ribonut with the meaning of domination; 2012-2013: 289 articles; 2014-2015: 646 articles 2016-2017; 1210 articles. 2018-2019: 5320 articles.

131 https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/west-bank-annexation-could-move-forward-as-early-as-july-623802.

132 Brown, Wendy. *Walled states, waning sovereignty*. MIT Press, 2017.

Hermann Notes

133 Hermann, T. et. al., 2019. The Israeli Democracy Index 2019. Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute

134 For the Israeli Voice surveys entire data set see (idi.org.il).

135 By the Economist Intelligence Unit political participation index Israel scores

136 This trichotomy is hardly relevant for the Israeli Arab citizens as they put themselves almost totally on the Left.

137 The three blocs are very different in size: about 55-60% identify with the Right, about 15% with the Left and 25-30% with the Center.

138 When the two surveys were conducted the Deal of the Century was not yet on the table and relations with the Palestinians were hardly on the agenda of any party as the matter seemed dead ended.

Marc Lynch Notes

139 Marc Lynch, "Is There An Islamist Advantage At War?" APSA MENA Politics Newsletter 2(1), available at https://apsamena.org/2019/04/16/is-there-an-islamist-advantage-at-war/

140 Steven Brooke, Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

141 Elizabeth R. Nugent, After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transitions. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Khalil Al-Anani Notes

142 Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, (London: Penguin Books, 1966).

143 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

144 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971)

145 Roger Petersen, "Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

146 See for example, Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); G.E. Marcus, "Emotions in Politics.", *American Political Science Review,* 2000 3:1, 221-250, and Roger Petersen, "Emotions as the Residue of Lived Experience.", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Volume 50, Issue 4, October 2017, pp. 932-935.

147 Interview, August 24, 2017

148 Interview, August 24, 2017

149 Interview, August 24, 2017

150 Mustafa Menshawy, *Leaving the Brotherhood: Self, Society, and the State*, (New York: *Palgrave Macmillan, 2019*)

151 Interview, November 12, 2017

152 Mada Masr, 9/9/2019 at https://madamasr.com/en/2019/09/09/feature/politics/in-a-letter-from-prison-jailed-muslim-brotherhood-youth-call-on-prominent-public-figures-to-mediate-with-authorities-to-secure-their-release/

Steven Brooke Notes

153 Steven Brooke, *Winning Hearts and Votes: Social Services and the Islamist Political Advantage,* (Cornell University Press, 2019); Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, "Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17 (2014), pgs. 187-206; Tarek Masoud, *Counting Islam: Religion, Class, and Elections in Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). Thomas Pepinsky, R. William Liddle, and Saiful Mujani ,"Testing Islam's Political Advantage: Evidence from Indonesia," *American Journal of Political Science*, 56:3 (2014), pgs. 584-600.

154 Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Columbian Civil War,* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Governance in Civil* War, (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War,* (Cornell University Press, 2011).

155 Steven Brooke, "From Medicine to Mobilization: Social Service Provision and the Islamist Political Advantage," *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:1 (2017), pgs. 42-61.

156 Melani Cammett and Aytuğ Şaşmaz, "Political Context, Organizational Mission, and the Quality of Social Services: Insights from the Health Sector in Lebanon," *World Development*, 98 (2017), pgs. 120-132.

Nicholas J. Lotito Notes

157 The combined data include 352 groups, of which 38 (11%).