

Chapter 15

The reconfiguration of the Egyptian Islamist social movement family after two political transitions

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The 2011 Arab uprisings have helped to refine existing understandings of Islamist groups' evolution.¹ New opportunities to participate in free and fair political processes have presented a unique chance to re-examine previously covered issues ranging from their decision and strategy-making processes² to the study of their constituencies.³ Moreover, the electoral successes of a few Islamist groups affiliated with al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (Muslim Brotherhood, MB) and their subsequent endorsement of governmental responsibilities have generated important empirical and theoretical discussions of their pragmatism⁴ and inspired noticeable calls for innovative methodological approaches including cross-country⁵ and micro-level studies.⁶

Although new studies have substantially enriched existing analyses of Islamist groups and movements, post-2011 research has frequently exposed two biases: (1) the study of political opportunities as electoral processes only and (2) a primary focus on Islamist groups' elites and factions. The prevailing study of Islamist groups' decision and strategy-making in consideration of their interpretations of new electoral means to reach political power and mobilise their constituencies has generated very detailed case studies that often overlook non-electoral political opportunities and remain centred on these groups' leaders and prominent factions. However, the Arab uprisings have also generated non-parliamentary political opportunities and facilitated the emergence of new repertoires of protest for Islamist and non-Islamist movements alike, whose consequences have not been fully analysed. Furthermore, whilst Islamist elites' positions and factional divergences need to be fully deciphered, Islamist movements cannot be solely understood through the positions of their leaders without comprehending how they are simultaneously influenced and constrained by the reactions of their members and their broader *milieu*.

This chapter accordingly develops a relational approach to the reconfiguration of the Egyptian Islamist Social Movement Family (SMF hereafter),

which is defined as a ‘nationally based, historical configuration of movements that – though they have different specific goals, immediate fields of struggle and strategic preferences – share a common worldview, have organisational overlaps, and occasionally ally for joint campaigns’,⁷ after 2011 and the 2013 July military coup. This relational approach focuses on intra and inter-movement interactions and their consequences, with the premise that Islamist groups’ ideological and behavioural evolution should be analysed conjointly. These groups indeed share common ideational and organisational resources and overlapping constituencies, which suggests that their respective choices and associated outcomes influence their decisions over time. However, existing research has primarily examined the impact of these groups’ interactions with non-Islamist actors⁸ and paradoxically overlooked cross-Islamist interactions.⁹

This chapter argues that the 2011 Egyptian uprising and the 2013 military coup have destabilised the Egyptian Islamist SMF in contrasting ways. The liberalisation of the political process after 2011 stimulated the institutionalisation of loosely organised movements, challenged the organisational cohesion of established Islamist groups, and empowered Islamist constituencies through the development of new repertoires of contention. The subsequent removal of President Mohamed Morsi (r.2011–13) from the MB marginalised established Islamist groups, challenged their organisational control over their constituencies and impeded the development of political alternatives to armed violence.

A relational approach to the Egyptian Islamist Social Movement Family

Academic research on Islamist movements has long investigated the impact of repression and political participation on their ideological and behavioural evolution. This corpus posits that Islamist movements accommodate political liberalisation with political participation, while exclusionary and reactive repression can spark their militarisation.¹⁰ The decisions of MB-affiliated movements to participate in electoral processes in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen have accordingly been rationalised by the necessity to protect their preaching activities and sustain the Islamisation of society by providing legal cover and non-Islamist allies in civil society.¹¹ The prevailing consensus on the consequences of political participation underlined in the so-called ‘inclusion-moderation’ thesis additionally states that electoral participation can moderate these groups’ ideological leanings, although ideological moderation is less applicable with regards to several issues associated with Islamic law.¹²

The 2011 Arab uprisings have generated new studies examining Islamist groups' performance in power, their electoral constituencies and their comparative political choices across cases. However, two important biases still characterise the study of Islamist politics after the Arab uprisings. The first bias pertains to these studies' understandings of post-2011 political opportunities. Generally defined in social movement studies as the 'features of regimes and institutions that facilitate or inhibit a political actor's collective action and [...] changes in those features',¹³ political opportunities include political participation, although they are not limited to parliamentary access to state institutions. Yet most post-Arab uprising studies have extensively analysed Islamist groups' political and governmental participation without thoroughly covering the development of new repertoires of contention,¹⁴ including street demonstrations and organised forms of activism, and their consequences. But new repertoires of contention can influence Islamist groups' internal cohesion and decisions beyond the electoral calculus.

The second noticeable bias of post-2011 studies is elitism. Although there are exceptions,¹⁵ research on Islamist politics has often relied extensively on Islamist elites and prominent factions and their disputes to explain Islamist groups' political decisions after 2011. For example, the Egyptian MB's internal factionalism and contest for power between the *da'wa* faction, the pragmatic conservatives and the reformist youths have provided critical information on the group's decision-making processes and diverging preferences following the January uprising.¹⁶ While the elite and factional perspectives are essential, focusing exclusively on them tends to isolate these groups from their members and constituencies and overlooks additional internal and external dynamics. These analyses are therefore less convincing in explaining the impact of new repertoires of contention on Islamist groups' positions and the influence of these groups' constituencies on their leaders. Analysing only Islamist elites generates top-down explanations that can only be partial from a social movement perspective.

Several pre- and post-2011 uprising studies have indeed already suggested that Islamist groups' internal and external relational patterns yield considerable influence on their leaders and members. For instance, the Egyptian MB's participation in professional and student syndicates has shaped their members' political views on non-Islamist actors and generated important moderating cognitive processes,¹⁷ while cooperation between the MB and non-Islamist political parties has generated limited ideological changes in Jordan.¹⁸ More importantly, a rich political ethnography of the Moroccan Islamist SMF substantiates that, in contrast to prevailing assumptions, Islamist sympathisers do not follow their leaders blindly but make informed choices based on their interests, identities and preferences.¹⁹ By focusing on the dynamic ideational market constituted by the Islamist SMF, this author contends that Islamist movements have to be responsive to the expectations of their followers if they

want to maintain their popularity. Moreover, considering that Islamist groups share valuable resources and constituencies, their respective decisions are naturally influenced by each other's choices and their associated outcomes. Islamist groups therefore cannot be studied individually without considering general patterns of interactions with their *milieu* and broader SMF.

The present chapter similarly adopts a relational understanding of the Islamist SMF after the 2011 uprising and the July 2013 military coup. Relational approaches are rooted in broader theoretical academic debates in relational sociology and social movement studies.²⁰ In contrast with 'substantialist' studies dedicated to single actors,²¹ relational approaches contend that social movements cannot be studied in a vacuum but should be analysed relationally with their environments. An actor's ideational and behavioural evolution is indeed shaped by relational patterns of interactions with interdependent allies, contenders and milieu. For example, inter-organisational ties regulate social movement organisations' strategic actions and choices and can stimulate the adoption of similar forms of contention.²²

Relational approaches to social movement studies examine social movements from a multi-level perspective, explaining how different types of political opportunities at the macro-level are constructed, interpreted and mediated by meso-level organisational dynamics and micro-level developments. While drawing on the theoretical tools and concepts of social movement theory, relational approaches investigate more specifically the constraints and opportunities inherent in a social movement's internal and external relational patterns of interactions, arguing that the structure of different types of relationships determines the diffusion of information, resources and repertoires that cannot necessarily be understood by focusing on a single social movement actor.

The decision to examine the Egyptian Islamist SMF instead of a single Islamist actor is justified by this chapter's relational approach. Focusing on the broader Islamist SMF in Egypt facilitates the study of the impact of various types of political opportunities on patterns of interaction inside and across Islamist actors as well as with non-Islamist actors. This perspective therefore keeps its distance from elite-centred analyses in order to examine how Islamist groups have been divergently affected internally and externally by post-2011 environmental developments.

The multi-dimensional impact of the 2011 uprising

In January 2011, unprecedented demonstrations destabilised the Egyptian authoritarian regime and sparked the downfall of its president Hosni Mubarak (r.1981–2011).²³ These demonstrations paved the way for an opening of political opportunities that objectively altered Egypt's political configuration

as well as social actors' subjective understanding of available modes of mobilisation. New constitutional provisions temporarily broadened political participation and bolstered freedom of assembly and demonstration between January 2011 and June 2013.

The main observable impact of the January uprising is the unparalleled development of the institutional and organisational components of the Islamist SMF. Before 2011, the Islamist SMF was forcibly disjointed by Egypt's political system. The assassination of president Anwar al-Sadat (r.1970–81) by armed Salafis in 1981 catalysed the separate development of the MB, the Salafis and the proponents of violence by imposing the choice of confined approaches to political action, which were associated with specific mobilisation and socialisation processes that limited internal interactions inside the Islamist SMF.²⁴ The MB endorsed political participation in professional and student syndicates and presented candidates in the legislative elections.²⁵ Mainstream Salafis favoured informal modes of mobilisation and distanced themselves from the proponents of armed violence in order avoid state repression. Finally, unaffiliated and 'new' Islamists and personalities engaged the public sphere independently.²⁶

After 2011, pre-2011 dividing lines quickly eroded. Non MB-affiliated movements joined the political process, including many Salafis²⁷ and ex-jihadis.²⁸ Independent Salafi preachers and institutions formed the new Majlis Shura al-'Ulama (Council of the Scholars),²⁹ while al-Azhar scholars defended its independence,³⁰ and a plurality of formal and informal groups emerged from the middle class *salafiyocosta* (the Salafis of Costa Coffee) to the more radical Ansar al-Shari'ah (Supporters of Islamic Law), al-Haraka al-Islamiyya li Tatbiq shar' Allah (Islamic Movement for the Application of Islamic Law), and Tulab al-Shari'ah (Students of Islamic Law). An unprecedented Islamist organisational diversity materialised in only a few months.

Organisational pluralism unfolded in parallel with the growth of new repertoires of contention. Broadly defined as 'the ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests',³¹ post-2011 repertoires of contention ranged from electoral participation, public street protests, sit-ins and assemblies to an array of private activities. While single repertoires used to be associated primarily with specific actors before 2011, most Islamists subsequently diversified their approaches to political action. For example, political protests used to be circumscribed to an educated minority or workers affiliated with trade unions before 2011, with the exception of several wider protest movements organised on foreign policy issues (the war in Iraq and Palestine).³² In turn, Islamists scarcely socialised publicly with one another before the uprising. The post-2011 political configuration was therefore an unprecedented opportunity for the Islamist trend to attend public

demonstrations organised in defence of wide issues ranging from Egypt's Islamic identity and Islamic law to the Syrian jihad and bearded army and police officers. The new public sphere facilitated the intermingling of internal components of the Islamist SMF and further blurred pre-2011 dividing lines. The new competitive Islamist market presented more opportunities and choices than ever before to Islamist constituencies, which virtually affected all Islamist actors. Islamist groups' organisational challenges differed. The MB's strong organisational cohesion and hierarchical norms, rationalised in an authoritarian environment by the necessity to survive state repression, were contested by the younger generation's demanding a bigger share of responsibility and say in the group's decision-making processes.³³ Unusual disputes regarding the group's political positions on the post-2011 setting sparked the departure of leading MB members, including the prominent reformist Abdel Mone'm Abu al-Fotouh, and the creation of new splinter political parties such as Misr al-Qawmiyya (Strong Egypt Party, SEP) and al-Tayyar al-Misri (Egyptian Current Party, ECP) which recruited younger MB members and leading reformists. According to the author's extensive field research, Muslim Brothers with more conservative outlooks conversely participated in Islamist public protests and became closer to Salafi-leaning Islamists on the ground and effectively distanced themselves from younger reformist MB members. The MB was therefore torn on both sides of the spectrum by political liberalisation. These new dividing lines, which partially reflected social and geographic internal divisions, mean that the group's conflicting political positions cannot be analysed solely as an elite intra-MB conflict.

The Salafis initially attempted to follow an opposite direction towards greater organisational cohesion. Since the loose organisational structures and mobilising processes characterising pre-2011 Salafism proved unsuited to party politics, several Salafi political parties were created in order to capitalise on political liberalisation and promote their agenda. The most successful party, Hizb al-Nour (Party of Light, PL), used the pre-existing mobilising structures of the Alexandria-based al-Da'wa al-Salafiyya (Salafi Call), while Cairo-based Hizb al-Fadila (Virtue Party, VP) and Hizb al-Asala (Authenticity Party, AP) faced vigorous organisational challenges informed by the absence of similar pre-existing structures and pre-2011 divisions.³⁴ The PL, the most organised Salafi political party, faced a notable predicament: its religious leanings became increasingly popular in society but political realism imposed a postponement of unadulterated religious demands in the political sphere. Moreover, the absence of established and legitimate organisational structures akin to those of the MB and the internal competitiveness of the Islamist SMF signified that the group's voters could not necessarily be considered secure and loyal in the long run.

The Salafi loose cannon Hazem Abu Ismail is a manifestation of the diversification of the Islamist SMF and its competitive ideational market. A television religious preacher who was supported by the MB in the 2005 legislative elections, Abu Ismail exploited the expansion of the Salafi revolutionary *milieu* to position himself as its leading figure.³⁵ Revolutionary Salafism, which combines a Salafi heritage with revolutionary repertoires, mobilised unaffiliated youths on the margins of Salafi party politics and Salafi jihadism around the idea that Islamic law should be implemented immediately.³⁶ As an emerging social movement, revolutionary Salafism aggregated young Egyptians who were socialised individually, in small groups or institutions, with different Salafi tendencies before 2011. After the uprising, they united and converged around a shared Islamic revolutionary platform according to field research. Revolutionary Salafism epitomises the hybridisation of repertoires of contention associated primarily with secular movements in the 2000s, including street protests, and a Salafi outlook. At the same time, loose modes of organisation and mobilisation implied that no structured group managed to claim a monopoly on this *milieu*, and that populism prevailed. Abu Ismail's popularity among Salafi revolutionaries is easily explained by his firm political positions and astute public performance, which reinforced his popularity from Salafi–jihadi sympathisers to MB members.

Islamist competition inside the post-2011 newly diversified SMF generated two contradictory outcomes for Islamist political parties, contextualised by the expectations of a demanding Islamist constituency versus the requirements of political realism. On the one hand, the development of a competitive ideational market – noticeably marked by rising Salafi forces – reinforced assertively religious references and demands, from a description of the constitutional referendum in March 2011 as an early Islamic expedition³⁷ to subsequent calls for the Islamisation of the constitution. Street support of the Islamist SMF and public calls for the immediate application of Islamic law pressured Islamist parties to endorse wider religious claims, and the MB – which had softened its position on the application of Islamic law in Egypt before 2011 – felt particularly pressured to accept these new religious constitutional demands. This development does not necessarily reflect a long-entrenched ideological commitment, as is sometimes claimed.³⁸ Political support for religious law and Egypt's religious identity³⁹ is a direct outcome of outbidding processes affecting the newly competitive Islamist SMF. On the other hand, party politics imposed some level of pragmatism. For example, many Salafi political parties, including the PL and the political party formed by the ex-jihadis of al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, Hizb al-Bina' wa al-Tanmiyya (Building and Development Party, BDP) refused to endorse the zealous candidature of Hazem Abu Ismail in the 2012 presidential elections and recognised that political realism should prevail

considering the circumstances, according to personal interviews. Senior members of PL leadership further upheld the primacy of politics when they split and created a new political party, Hizb al-Watan (Homeland Party, HP), in response to the Salafi Call's religious sheikhs' control over the party's political strategy.⁴⁰ The contradictions and tensions between religious dogmatism, stemming from their constituencies' pressure in support of Islamic law, and political realism, informed by the requirements of party politics, thus became apparent within the Islamist SMF before the July 2013 military coup.

Finally, the diversification of the Islamist SMF finally informed ideational developments on domestic and international issues from a social movement perspective. At a domestic level, the Islamist SMF broadly endorsed the political process despite pre-2011 contentions over Islam and its incompatibility with democracy.⁴¹ The development of a credible political alternative to preaching and violence legitimised political participation in the eyes of most Salafis who had formerly considered party politics akin to apostasy. Extensive field research also suggests that a majority of young Salafi-jihadis supported the candidature of Hazem Abu Ismail, to the dismay of some jihadi-Salafi scholars, such as Abu Mohamed al-Maqdisi, who rebutted Abu Ismail's candidacy on his online mouthpiece *Minbar Tawheed wa al-Jihad*. The legitimisation of political participation is hence not solely a choice imposed by Islamist elites on their followers. Indeed, the reverse may well be the case, with Islamist elites being pressured to accept political participation by their constituencies on the ground.

While the Egyptian Islamist SMF broadly rejected the resort to armed violence after the uprising, a simultaneous legitimisation of violence in another Muslim country crystallised. The repression of the Syrian uprising by the regime gradually justified the use of violence against Syrian armed forces in the public sphere. In Cairo, Syrian-led demonstrations were backed by Egyptian Salafi of all persuasions, whose legitimisation of armed violence became consensual within the Islamist SMF. Pre-2011 opposition to armed violence in Muslim countries dissipated in Syria, long before President Morsi and Salafi political parties' participation in a massive conference in support of the Syrian jihad in June 2013. As in the legitimisation of party politics, support for armed violence in Syria was not necessarily elite-led.

Competition inside a plural ideational market, the development of new repertoires of contention, and the contradictions and tensions between political idealism and realism, have considerably altered the making of the Egyptian Islamist SMF after 2011. Beyond stereotypical portrayal as blind followers of their political leaders and religious sheikhs, Islamist constituencies challenged Islamist actors and used post-2011 political opportunities to contest the latter's monopoly over the ideological making and repertoires of

contention endorsed by the Islamist SMF. This development was nonetheless interrupted by the July 2013 military coup, which suddenly ended Egypt's democratic experiment.

The repercussions of the 2013 military coup

Opposition to President Morsi escalated in Spring 2013 and climaxed on 30 June, when mass protests organised throughout the country demanded his resignation. On 3 July, an army-led coalition suspended the Egyptian constitution and removed Morsi from power. In the next few months, thousands of Egyptians were killed during the violent dismantlement of the sit-ins organised by opponents to the military coup in the Rabaa and Nahda squares and tens of thousands were arrested and detained in atrocious conditions.⁴² The military authorities terminated Egypt's democratic experiment and restored a militarised and brutal version of Hosni Mubarak's regime.

The post-2013 political configuration was formerly unknown to the Egyptian Islamist SMF. Previous authoritarian regimes – with the possible exception of Nasser's brutal repression of the MB in the 1950s and 1960s – always manifested some level of tolerance for some of the activities of the Islamist SMF,⁴³ even when they were repressing specific Islamist groups and their members. Egypt's new autocrat Abdel Fattah al-Sisi conversely decided to asphyxiate the Islamist SMF with an unparalleled level of repression that affected the entire Islamist spectrum and its constituencies. Although the regime officially claimed that it was only fighting terrorism, every Islamist actor was affected in specific ways.

The main target was the MB. Along with the classification of the group as a terrorist organisation, the MB's first- and second-tier leaders were arrested or had to quickly depart the country. The Brotherhood was virtually decimated on the ground as a structured group and the hierarchical norms that previously characterised its organisational structures vanished. In the absence of the organisational cohesion and consensual deliberation that previously typified the MB's approach to political action, younger MB members have become increasingly active in the streets of the country and have gradually pushed for a confrontational approach to the military authorities that the MB's old guard has been both reluctant to endorse and unable to prevent.⁴⁴

Smaller Salafi political parties and institutions have attempted to eschew state repression by endorsing a lower profile that substantially contrasts with their pre-2013 public pre-eminence. Many mainstream Salafi preachers associated with the Majlis Shura al-'Ulama, who had become vocal after 2011, left the country. Moreover, although most Salafi political parties supportive of

the MB had joined al-Tahaluf al-Watani li-Da‘m al-Shari‘ah (National Alliance in Support of Legitimacy) in favour of the reinstatement of President Morsi, they never crossed the new regime’s red lines by attacking the president or the army, nor did they obtain any noticeable political concession from it. The main backlash to Egyptian Salafism, meanwhile, stems from the regime’s exploitation of religion in the public sphere and associated insistence that religious extremism, more than political repression, caused the wave of violence witnessed after 2013. The regime has accordingly called for a religious revolution and promoted an unprecedented ban of traditionalist Islamic scholarship associated with Salafism, control over Egypt’s mosque networks, and a monopolisation of the Friday sermons against independent Salafi preachers.

Against this post-2013 political backdrop, the main Salafi political party, the PL, has faced a unique predicament. Whilst the party, in contrast to all major Salafi actors, was used by the military when it supported the coup, regime-led charges against Salafism inevitably affected its subsequent political orientation. The PL has consequently muted its pre-2013 religious constitutional demands and strived to defend its existence as a non-religious party with an Islamic frame of reference only in order to thwart public calls for the application of a general ban on religious political parties. The PL’s inconsistent political positions, combined with the public backlash against political Islam on the one hand and a feeling of betrayal by Islamist constituencies on the other, contextualise its post-2013 unique electoral losses. Whereas Alexandria-based Salafis managed mostly to eschew repression after 1981, when they distanced themselves from the proponents of violence,⁴⁵ the post-2013 backlash against the Islamist SMF prevented a similar development owing to the new regime’s strategy of delegitimising Islamist political actors *in toto*.

The most challenging developments, however, have occurred on the ground, among Islamist constituencies. In contrast to pre-2013 developments, political repression (rather than a competitive Islamist SMF) has reinforced the marginalisation of organised Islamist groups in the streets of the country. Unprecedented waves of arrests, combined with a unique degree of repression and isolation of Islamist political parties, have hindered the development of a political alternative in the Islamist SMF. The younger generation sympathetic to the latter has therefore taken the lead by engaging in street protests around the country’s universities and in specific neighbourhoods. Moreover, the spiral of violence has fuelled the legitimisation of armed conflict in the absence of a political solution. According to many personal testimonies,⁴⁶ violence has been paradoxically perceived as less risky than non-violent forms of resistance, considering that the high personal risks taken during public marches contrast with the lower chances of being caught while participating in clandestine armed actions.

Although small skirmishes occurred only on an irregular basis before July 2013, armed attacks against various types of targets have significantly escalated since. Violence covers an array of repertoires ranging from the use of hand grenades in hit-and-run attacks against the security forces to more sophisticated selective assassinations and car bomb attacks. This diversity suggests the existence of various groups and networks with access to diverging logistics and military expertise.

The most notable of such armed attacks have taken place on the Sinai Peninsula and are attributed to the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis group (Partisans of the Holy Place/Jerusalem), later renamed Wilayyat Sina' (Sinai Province, WS hereafter). The WS formally emerged after the 2011 uprising, although its origins can be traced back to the early 2000s. The group's inception is rooted in the peculiar socio-political conditions of the region and its antagonistic relations with the Egyptian state.⁴⁷ Armed militancy in the Sinai Peninsula emerged in response to economic and political marginalisation combined with harsh state repression. The growing use of violence by the WS after 2013 was primarily the result of the state's iron fist approach after the removal of Morsi.

Two additional patterns characterise the violence perpetuated from within the Islamist SMF in mainland Egypt after 2013. The first pattern is defined by the absence of military expertise and its targets (the security forces, broadly defined). These attacks are characterised primarily by the use of light weaponry against army checkpoints, police stations and members of the security forces. Limited logistics and military experience suggest that the perpetrators of these attacks are not formally affiliated with violent networks or groups. Indeed, these attacks are probably conducted by local groups of friends and acquaintances, considering the risks involved. Some of the low-level attacks have been self-attributed to al-'Iqab al-Thawri (Revolutionary Punishment), although this designation appears to be a generic name used by unaffiliated or loosely connected individuals.

The second pattern refers to professional and selective armed attacks committed against prominent targets. High-ranking individuals affiliated with the security forces, the Ministry of Interior and the judiciary have been executed by unknown networks and groups. These attacks reveal a higher degree of professional expertise that significantly contrasts with those perpetrated by previously unaffiliated individuals. They range from the assassination of General Mohamed Said in January 2014 and Egypt's state prosecutor Hisham Barakat in June 2015, to failed attempts against the Minister of Interior.

The proliferation of low-level armed contention, combined with the marginalisation of virtually all organised Islamist groups, constitute two complementary facets of post-2013 Egypt. Such complementary developments

are, in fact, commonly traced in social movement studies. Indeed, scholars of contentious politics have long asserted that armed violence tends to emerge on the periphery of mainstream social movements at the end of cycles of protest, when the 'prevailing behaviour of the movement families [are] more confrontational and the political culture polarised'.⁴⁸ Moreover, the inability of mainstream Islamist groups such as the MB to provide a credible political alternative and influence their members and sympathisers on the ground has fuelled the narrative that violence is the sole response to state repression. The Egyptian regime has triggered a self-fulfilling prophecy: designating established Islamist groups as terrorist entities has effectively marginalised them, radicalised their members and obstructed the development of non-violent political alternatives.

Conclusion

Charting the evolution of the Egyptian Islamist SMF since 2011 constitutes an important contribution to current understandings of Islamist politics after the Arab uprisings. While most studies in the field have chosen to revisit the 'inclusion-moderation' thesis or investigate Islamist groups' electoral constituencies, this chapter has sought to show that is equally important to examine the Islamist SMF more generally as well as the emergence of new repertoires of contention among its supporters. This focus substantiates that, beyond the calculus of Islamist elites, new relational patterns of interactions inside the Islamist SMF altered its organisational making and shaped new ideational developments that cannot be solely comprehended by a top-down logic. Far from being blind followers of their groups and sheikhs, Islamist supporters contested established hierarchies and ideas and developed new forms of political activism. In turn, established and newly created Islamist groups had to adapt to the expectations of their sympathisers and be answerable to their demands. Unfortunately, the July 2013 military coup abruptly terminated this new experiment.

The military coup and its repercussions on the Islamist SMF, meanwhile, constitute a textbook case study of social movement radicalisation. A brutal authoritarian regime crushes a broad social movement, dismantles its organisational structures, prevents the development of a non-violent political opposition, and eventually bolsters the proponents of armed violence. The articulation of a radical theology of violence cannot be studied as the manifestation of a violent Islamist essence. In Egypt, in fact, it was largely a response to an unprecedented wave of repression obstructing any non-violent political alternative.

If/once the al-Sisi regime realises that the mainstream Islamist opposition has to be reintegrated into domestic politics, the main challenge of the Islamist SMF and organised Islamist groups will be the presentation of a viable alternative and the integration of its younger constituencies, who are not likely to submit to their leaders unconditionally and accept not being fully part of these groups' decision-making processes.

Notes

1. Research for this chapter was supported by a scholarship from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).
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