The Politicization of Sectarianism in Egypt: "Creating an Enemy" the state vs. the Ikhwan

This article looks at the way in which a certain understanding of sectarian violence and discourses has been historically employed as a political tool by the Egyptian government, especially in regards to the systematic repression and discrimination against the Muslim Brotherhood (al-ʾIkḫwān al-Muslimūn) throughout the organization's history. Such an understanding is particularly significant as it looks at sectarian divisions along religious and political lines taking place between two political entities within the context of a state in which Sunni Islam is the official religion, therefore tensions have been constructed by the regime on the basis of "moderate" VS. "radical" interpretations of Islam. Looking at the historical relationship between the state and the Islamist organisation, it is rather easy to identify a repeating pattern of short periods of cooperation alternated to much longer interludes of brutal repression, the overarching aim of both being the safeguarding of the regime's fragile perceived legitimacy. It follows that the politicisation of sectarian hatred and strategies at the hand of the state has led to the Muslim Brotherhood being constructed and perceived as "the other", which has arguably hindered the organization's political development and created a stigma that is still negatively impacting on the understanding of the its role and narrative today.

Introduction

This article looks at the way in which a certain understanding of sectarian violence and discourse has been historically employed as a political tool by the Egyptian government, especially in regards to the systematic repression and discrimination against the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) throughout the organization's history. This article does so does so with the aim to challenge the mainstream perceptions of sectarian violence in Egypt that, following on what seems to be a familiar occurrence in its neighbouring states, focus on sectarian struggles mainly taking place between opposing religions and ethnicities. The general understanding of sectarian struggles within Egypt is that of conflicts taking place between the overarching Muslim population and the Coptic Christian minority, a relative novelty for a country that is not generally perceived as being "deeply divided" or indeed as multi-ethnic (Tadros, 2011, 26-31). On this matter, Hibbard (2011) notes that the escalating tensions between Christians and Muslims are not endemic nor reflective of 'ancient hatreds', but are rather a manifestation of the way in which Arab nationalism has increasingly played a part in defining (national) identity since the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the 1970s. While this article is in no way diminishing the significance or gravity of such events, it puts forward the argument that there are much older manifestations of sectarian conflict within the country that have historically been ignored, and that therefore need to be unpacked and understood to make sense of the contemporary situation.

The term "Sectarianism"

The term "sectarianism" is one that is increasingly being used when referring to contemporary events in the MENA region, and is often presented as an explanation or even a justification for the outbreak of bloody civil wars and conflicts, such as in the Syrian case. However, the term itself cuts across various disciplines in the social sciences and lacks a universal definition, which lends it to be politicised and used in different contexts at the same time. Broadly speaking, the terms is often used to refer to instances of tensions, divisions, insecurity, and conflict within societies, with these being identified as happening mostly within nations formed by various groups of different ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs. However, this process is not exclusive to religious or ethnic minorities and can therefore happen within a majoritarian context or group as well, such as in the case of competing understanding and usage of Sunni Islam in Egypt. For the purpose of this article, sectarianism will be understood as "any religious or sectarian barrier that is based on inherited beliefs against the 'other'", and as "the tendency to undermine social cohesion by pushing for the reproduction of ancient beliefs and separations". In essence, sectarianism is formed by all those practices that are used to turn diversity into conflict, where notions of identity politicised and weaponised to create divisions between the "sectarian self" and the "other" (Kaileh and Shams, 2014. Therefore, once we acknowledge that sectarianism goes beyond religious difference and divisions, it becomes clear that both the terms and its associated practices are intrinsically connected with politics, and are consequently often used as justifications for processes of securitisation. The notion of the "construction of 'the other'" is key here, as it leads to manifestations of religious/political violence, dehumanisation, and scapegoating for political purposes, which are all elements that can be easily identified when examining the relationship between the MB and various Egyptian regimes. In the particular context central to this article, is also the understanding of sectarianism as being characterised by competing claims of and to legitimacy and authenticity, which is here exemplified by the use of Sunni Islam in Egypt as a source of legitimacy and political power.

Therefore, for the purpose of this article, sectarian tensions in Egypt will be understood as happening within a majoritarian religious context, as in the continuous struggle between the state and the MB, i.e. as violent conflicts and repression taking place between two politically minded movements that are also religious and political actors. Thus the aim of this article is to unpack and problematize perceptions of sectarian violence in Egypt, shifting the focus away from Muslims VS. Copts tensions and concentrating instead on the understanding of sectarianism as a political tool in the hand of the state. Through the analysis of the historical relationship between the state/armed forces and the Islamist organization it becomes clear that different Egyptian regimes have consistently portrayed the MB as the "other" in order to fulfil their political aims, discriminating against its members along both political and religious lines, despite the overarching framework of Sunni Islam being the official state religion. This is the case as the interconnectedness of governance and religion has deep and ancient roots in Egypt, with the question of what role Islam in particular should have played in the state's structure coming to the fore after the removal of King Faruq by the Free Officers in 1952. Therefore, the regime had always had to rely on some form of institutionalised Islam in order to be perceived as legitimate, a state of affairs that has made it impossible not to engage in some form of dialogue with the MB, arguably the oldest and most organised Islamist organization in the region. It follows that the politicisation of sectarianism at the hand of the state has been used historically used to try and preserve the regime's fragile legitimacy, as opposed to the popular support for an Islamist organization that, despite being outlawed for the majority of its history, has been able to mobilise the population against its own government on a countless number of occasions.

Hence, while it is important to acknowledge contemporary manifestations of intra-faiths sectarianism, there is also the need recognise the decades of sectarian violence between political actors with competing understanding of Sunni Islam and of the role that religion should play within the state. Arguably, state-sponsored violence against the MB and its members is a prime example of sectarianism as a political tool being used to create a defining "other" since the organization's very inception, a trend that has now reached its peak under Al Sisi's military regime.

In order to demonstrate this, this article will identify and analyse three clear "eras of repression", corresponding with the presidencies of Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak, tracking the rise in sectarian violence and strategies by looking at the relationship between the regime and the MB throughout these eras, culminating with a reflection on Al Sisi's rule. This of course does not justify the MB's recurrence to violence as means to its political ends or the times in which the organization did was indeed radicalised by some of its ideologues, but rather aims to provide a framework for understanding such trends.

Framework

The intertwined relationship between the Islamic faith and Egyptian society has ancient roots, as this particular coexistence dates back to the Arab invasion of the 7th century, which was to turn the country into an Arabic speaking and Islamic nation (Abdo, 2000, 10). Having been conquered by caliph Umar, companion of the prophet Mohamed, meant that the vast majority of Egyptians converted to Sunni Islam, making the country very homogeneous in its Islamic component, a characteristic that is quite a rarity in the region (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999, 8). Therefore, from the 7th century onwards the Islamic faith became a major component of Egyptian national identity, a trend that would drastically intensify under British colonialism and that made it impossible for the various Egyptian presidents to ignore the interconnectedness of Islam and governance. The narrative portraying the Islamic faith as being historically understood as a source of identity against colonialism and external interference in fact strengthened at the turn between the 19th and the 20th century, when the anti-colonial movement started to gain momentum, and arguably reached its peak with the creation of the MB in 1928. It follows that manifestations of sectarian violence between the state and the MB have been historically based on the debate over the role of religion in society, and over which of these two actors was perceived to be more legitimate to rule in the eyes of the Egyptian population. In particular, the government's hostility has been increasingly fuelled by the growing role of Islamist organizations, and of the MB in particular, as providers of services such as healthcare and education to the poorest parts of the population, which have been consistently ignored by the state for decades (Weber, 2013, 154). This is the case as the MB, faithful to its roots as a grassroots organization, reacted to the state's proscription and therefore to the impossibility to directly take part in the country's politics by reinventing itself as a civil society actor, a trend that was followed by many other religious movements and that arguably led to the wave of Islamic resurgence in the 1970s.

Therefore, it follows that historical manifestations of sectarian violence in Egypt have been taking place within the broader framework of Sunni Islam, between two different politically minded actors, and that have been inter-faith rather than intra-faith. What makes this alternative understanding of sectarianism even more interesting is the fact that, when compared to many of the other Arab countries, Egypt presents a rare homogeneity of the Islamic faith, as approximately 90% of the 82 million Egyptian are Sunni Muslim, with the remaining 10% accounting for Shi'a Muslims, Coptic Christians, and other Islamic cults (Sullivan and Abed-Kotob, 1999, 19). This inter-faith context was

strengthened even more in 1980, when a constitutional amendment under President Anwar Sadat made Islam the official state religion (Morsy, 2011). On the back of such a significant event, another amendment to Article 2 of the Constitution stated that "Islamic Shari'a will be the principal source of Islamic legislation", *de facto* turning Egypt from a secular into a religious country(Lombardi, 1998, 83). Therefore, it is clear that this rather homogeneous religious context makes for an understanding of sectarian tensions within Egypt that goes against the mainstream perception of said frictions. As said before, sectarianism within the country is broadly understood as Muslim violence against Christian Cops, a trend that is undeniably intensifying in the post-Mubarak era as questions of identity and belonging have come to the fore again(Tadros, 2011, 26-31). However, this approach is arguably disregarding decades of sectarian violence and discourse being perpetrated by the state against the MB, which has consistently been portrayed and scapegoated by the various presidencies and as the "other". Said state-sponsored violence and systematic repression against the Islamist organization is arguably a prime example of the use of sectarianism as a political tool, which has created an "us VS. them" narrative that was made incredibly clear by al Sisi's (2015) in his speech on New Year's day, when he called for a reformation of Islam based on moderate VS Islamist lines. Hence, such tensions have arguably misled to an extent the regional and international perceptions of the MB, reason why the historical relationship between the state and the Islamist organization needs to be understood within a sectarian context, especially now as repression and brutality are reaching their peak under al Sisi's dictatorial rule.

Muslim Brotherhood

Inception and Narrative
The Society of Muslim Brothers (*al-ʾIkḫwān al-Muslimūn)*, better know as the Muslim Brotherhood, was founded in Egypt in March 1928 by the Islamic scholar and school teacher Hassan al Banna, and is considered to be one of the oldest and most influential Islamist organizations in the MENA region (Wickam, 2002, 4). Represented by the slogan "Islam is the solution", the Brotherhood benefitted from the start from its comprehensive ideology and understanding of Islamic values as core pillars of society, which rewarded it with an unprecedented level of domestic and regional support (Johnson, 2012). Al Banna conceived the Brotherhood as a grassroots religious movement aimed at the gradual Islamisation of society through the practices of *da'wa* (preaching) and *tarbiyya* (education), reason why the MB is renowned for combining political activism and revolutionary activities with Islamic principles and social/charity work, while aiming at constituting an inclusive society that is regulated by the teachings contained in the Quran and the Sunnah (El-Hudaibi, 2010). As said before, the MB also successfully embodied the struggle against British colonialism and external influence, which made its appeal resonate throughout all classes of the Egyptian population (Ayoob, 2008, 65). Overall, it was its nature as a socio-religious movement characterised by nationalist goals and rejection of Western influence that made the MB stand out amongst all others religious organizations, and the gradual evolution of this original narrative to encompass contemporary issues and themes is what would eventually lead its members to clash with the various Egyptian governments and national elites (Weber, 2013, 516).

Politicisation of a Religious Movement
Until the mid-1930s the MB's nature and narrative remained relatively untouched, while al Banna and its followers worked hard to widen the organization's scope and appeal by founding evening schools to "combat illiteracy and teach Islam", establishing committees for charitable and welfare work, and generally providing for the part of the population that was being largely ignored by the

Egyptian government (Harris, 1964, 154) . In particular, the organization's scope remained largely undefined until the Brotherhood's fifth conference in 1938, when al Banna openly declared that "The idea of the Muslim Brothers includes in it all categories of reform … a Salafiyah message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic company and a social idea." (Mitchell, 1969,32). Such statement made clear that despite its grassroots nature, the MB was more than just a Pan-Islamic organization dedicated to the provision of social services to the Egyptian population, but that it indeed sought to participate more actively in the country's political arena (El Ghobashy, 2005, 376-377). The Brotherhood's transition into a powerful political actor was marked shortly afterwards by the organization's participation in the 1941 Parliamentary elections (Munson, 2001, 489) when it was at the peak of its popular success, with approximately 150,000 supporters and more than 300 branches spread across the country (Wright, 2001, 175-179). The Brotherhood's capability to mobilise such a significant amount of people was instrumental for the success of the increasing popular protests and strikes that were taking place at the time, and is an aspect that will be analysed further as it made the group both a threatening opposition force and a potential powerful ally for the Egyptian regime.

Just over 10 years after its creation, the MB had come to embody a powerful religious and political opposition to the Egyptian government and, as the country's leading Islamist movement, successfully presented itself as the defender of Muslim dignity and Egyptian national interests against the colonial occupiers and the national political elite (Ayoob, 2008, 65). However, a more active political involvement came with a huge price to pay for the organization, as it triggered the start of cycles of repression at the hand of the government along sectarian lines, and also provoked huge internal schisms over narrative and ideology. It is indeed necessary to note that the history of the organization has been characterised by recurrent internal schisms over matters of ideology and leadership, and that its political evolution has therefore been less than harmonious. Arguably, this is mostly due to the continuous and brutal state-repression that the Brotherhood and its followers have been consistently subjected to, but it is also due to deep ideological fractures amongst its membership.

With the gradual politicization of the Brotherhood's aims also came increasing discrimination and "othering" against the organization. The Brotherhood has frequently been linked to the radicalized use of violence for political means and to *jihadism*, however, while sometimes undeniably true, these perceptions are often the result of governmental scapegoating, and of the sectarian portrayal of the organization as the fundamentalist and dangerous "other" (Bergesen, 2008, 6-8).
Because of its high levels of popular support and influence over Egyptian society, the MB has been consistently targeted by state-sponsored violence and discrimination since the 1940s. In turn, this led some of its members to move away from what was the organization's mainstream, peaceful narrative, and to go down more radicalized ideological paths. In particular, there are two "waves" of radicalization that can be identified when looking at the Brotherhood's history, and that need to be understood as being defensive rather than offensive, and as encompassing splinter groups rather than the "original" organization in itself.

Radicalization?
In terms of ideology and recurrence to political violence as a mean to an end, the first radicalization wave hit the Brotherhood at the peak of its popularity in the 1940s, when a divide started taking place between the "traditional" Brothers and those who wanted to be more actively involved in the country's politics. The result of this schism was the creation of the Secret Apparatus, a paramilitary group that interpreted the slogan "jihad is our way" literally and therefore countered the

Brotherhood's commitment to peaceful and constitutional means (Stilt, 2010, 76-78). The Secret Apparatus was particularly active in the years between 1947 and 1949 and the escalation of violent activities linked to the paramilitary group led to the dissolution and outlawing of the "mother" organization in 1948 (Zahid, 2010, 75-77). The second wave of radicalization came in 1954 after Gamal Nasser's crackdown on the organization and with the emergence of "Qutbism", and can therefore be understood as being defensive rather than offensive. Understanding the concept of *jahiliyya* (Islamic ignorance) as the core characteristics of secular regimes, Western values, and Nasser's government, Qutb argued that these were all obstacles to the achievement of an Islamic society. Qutb subsequently developed a very precise set of notions that justified the use of violent *jihad* as opposed to peaceful means to express opposition against the regime, which appealed to many Brothers especially during Nasser's oppression and consequently led to a deep ideological division within the organisation (Qutb, 1990, 8). Such radicalised narrative kept on fascinating numerous Muslim Brothers even after Qutb's death in 1966, and his legacy still lives on today. Subscription to Qutb's radicalised narrative is the main reason why the MB is so easily linked to extremism and political violence, but it needs to be pointed out that the existence of a paramilitary wing and the recourse to violent means is and has been condemned multiple times by the mother organization. While the group's affiliation to such practice is undeniable, one must always keep in mind the Brotherhood's diversity and internal divisions.

Therefore, because of its growing popular appeal and radical past, the MB soon came to be perceived as both a political resource and a potential threat by the regime, which initiate long cycles of short cooperation and brutal, sectarian repression. In turn, persistent discrimination and incarceration perpetuated internal division within the organization, but El Houdaiby (2012) notes that there are a few core principles that kept the Brotherhood united despite the varied ideological leanings of its members, these being: A belief that Islam is an all-encompassing system, rejecting violence as a means of political change in domestic politics, accepting democracy as political system, consequently accepting political pluralism, and supporting resistance movements operating against foreign occupation. This search for common ground has kept the Brotherhood united throughout decades of state-sponsored repression, and in the early 2000s led to the emergence of a strong organization with exponentially growing membership and enormous room to manoeuvre due to the diversity of activities in which the group was engaged (El Houdaiby, 2012, 133).

Eras of Repression

It is now clear that soon after its creation the MB became one of Egypt's most influential religious and political actors, thanks to its huge contribution to civil society and ability to mobilize unprecedented numbers of people. Its success meant that the group quickly came to be perceived as both a threatening opposition force and a potential powerful ally for the Egyptian regime, because of the legitimising role that the Islamic faith played within political and governmental circles. The Brotherhood's inclusive ideology, based on the understanding of Islamic values as core pillars of society, is what made alliances with the organization look appealing to the various Egyptian presidents, as it would have also meant popular support and the legitimization of their authority. On the other hand, the Brotherhood's ever-increasing popularity meant that the organization soon came to be perceived as a threat to the state's authority and legitimacy, which triggered harsh cycles of persecution and repression along sectarian lines that would characterised the Brotherhood for most of its history.

This article will now move onto the examination of three eras of repression that also coincide with the presidencies of Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, noting how there is a common pattern of short alliances followed by unprecedented crackdowns that can be identified. It will do so by analyzing the country's socio-economic conditions at the time, therefore making some sort of state cooperation with the Brotherhood necessary, and then moving onto the investigation of state-lead violence and repression. This article will do so with the aim to demonstrate that the politicization of sectarianism has been the tool that the Egyptian regimes has used to deal with the Brotherhood for decades, the price of which is still being paid by the organization today.

Nasser's Era

Nasser's years were full of topical events for both the country and the Brotherhood, which despite internal and external difficulties started developing its political identity. Al Banna's assassination by the Egyptian police in 1949 marked the end of the Brotherhood's golden era, as the already illegal organisation further descended into chaos while thousands of its followers were arrested and grew divided over matters of leadership and affiliations (Zollner, 2009, 14). While the Brotherhood struggled to stay united the country was increasingly plagued by protests against the monarchy, widespread corruption, and worsening dissatisfaction towards the continuing British presence on Egyptian ground. The Free Officers' popular nationalist drive easily captured the sympathy of the population by blaming the unsettling events of the previous decade on government's corruption, and was set to transform the country into a Republic (Alexander, 2011, 536-537). Even if not effectively defeating authoritarianism, but rather replacing it, it is undeniable that the 1952 Revolution marked the start of a new era in Egyptian politics, and would arguably not have been possible without the Brotherhood's cooperation and support.

Egypt in turmoil and the Rise of the Free Officers

The end of WWII confirmed British dominance in the Arab World and in particular over Egypt, which given its fundamental strategic position was occupied by over 50,000 British troops, a fact that further accentuated popular dissatisfaction (McNamara, 2003, 16-17). Domestic discontent was rising high and was further fuelled by the Egyptian defeat against Israel in the 1948 first Arab-Israeli war as, in a time when the Palestinian struggle was already being seen as that of the Arabs as a whole, the creation of the state of Israel was perceived as yet another colonial imposition and therefore significantly worsened Egypt's already fragile internal situation (Kenneth, 1997, 57). The election of the anti-colonial Wafd Party into government led to the rescinding of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty, which was welcomed enthusiastically by Egyptians and followed by the outbreak of disruptions aimed at complicating the British permanence on the ground (Hahn, 1991, 128-130). These episodes of popular violence soon evolved into the protesters' rage being directed against the monarchy (Khadduri, 90-95), meaning that on "Black Saturday" 26 January 1952 King Farouk was obliged to dissolve the government for inaction and loss of legitimacy, fuelling grievances and discontent (Gordon, 1989, 208-209).

It was in a climate of such unstoppable political upheaval that a covert military group of junior military officers, comprising Gamal Abdel Nasser, started manifesting their dissatisfaction towards the government. Young Nasser and his colleagues had founded the Free Officers after the Egyptian defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, which being both revolutionary and clandestine in nature had the overarching aim of toppling the monarchy and defeating the British occupiers once for all (Tignor, 2010, 257-260). The Free Officer's *coup d'etat* began on 23 July 1952, captained by Naguib but thought out by Nasser, while its aims and justifications were broadcasted all over Egypt by the

voice of future president and Free Officer Anwar Sadat (Cook, 2012, 37). The movement claimed that the military coup was being carried out against decades of corruption and bad governance, and asked for the deposition of King Farouk and the government's dissolution in the name of social and economic reforms, a message and course of actions that was cheered by the population all over Egypt (Osman, 2010, 40). King Farouk was exiled to Italy and that led to the nomination of Naguib as the first President of Egypt, while the 23 August is since then celebrated by Egyptians as "Revolution Day". After the deposition of King Farouk the Free Officers took up the task of reconstituting the government, founding the Revolution Command Council and nominating Mohamed Naguib as Prime Minister (Elbendary, 2012). Interestingly, soon after the coup the Free Officers did not seek to institute a new government nor they claimed to have brought about a Revolution, as they simply aimed at reforming the previous system after the final removal of the monarchy . Initially more concerned with social justice rather than politics, Nasser and the Free Officers did not aim at directly ruling the country as they lacked both a guiding ideology and a realizable long-term plan, but it was not long until they realised that in order to keep the people's favour they had to start delivering (Gordon, 1989, 212-213). However, despite the initial good intentions and revolutionary narrative, the combination of a serious lack of experience and guiding ideology coupled with the extraordinary challenges posed by Egyptian politics soon meant that the Free Officers were headed towards authoritarianism and despotic governance, rather than adopting a gradual and moderate approach to the transition from the previous government's faults (Bradley, 200, 13-16).

Nasser & the Brotherhood: a deteriorating relationship
Having been a member of the Secret Apparatus, Nasser (Al Ahram, 2012) employed a nationalist narrative very similar to that of the Brotherhood, as the Free Officer's core objectives were the removal of British colonialism, reformation of the corrupted parliamentary system and the issuing of reforms to tackle the ever-worsening socio-political situation (Cook, 2012, 40). Nasser in particular was initially deeply committed to a gradual Islamization of society, which further accentuates the communality of views between these two political movements (Aburish, 2004, 11-12). In the winter preceding the July Revolution the Free Officers relied heavily on the Brotherhood's narrative and support, as their lack of a clear ideology required them to gain some much needed followers through other already well-established political parties and organisation (Farag). This brought back the question of which role the Islamic faith should play within the government, as although the Free Officers' regime is typically seen as "secular" and "modern," Nasser was not above invoking religion for its own aims. On the contrary, the regime sought to mobilize popular religious sentiments for their own purposes, therefore striking an alliance with the Brotherhood on purely self-interested basis was the easiest way to gain it (Hibbard, 2011, 89). This ideological and political opportunism seemed to work extremely well at the start, as when the Free Officers seized power and established the Revolution Command Council they did so with the Brotherhood's general guide al Hudaybi's approval, who also defined the military coup as a "blessed revolution" (Elbendary, 2012). The Officers's removal of King Farouk was in fact considered by many as a proxy victory for the Islamic Organisation, as they also made promises of Islamic reforms and committed to a definite removal of foreign influences from Egypt, both core elements of the Brotherhood's narrative (Zollner, 2009, 414). Alexander even argues that for the first phase of the Officers' regime the Muslim Brotherhood acted as a domestic ally in the political arena, therefore challenging its Wafd opponents and even providing its organisational structure, while also recruiting supporters for the new regime (Alexander, 2011, 535). Most importantly, the Muslim Brotherhood somehow "owed" to the Free Officers its re-legitimatization, which therefore strengthened the links and initial collaboration between the two. However this harmonious period soon started to crumble,

especially when the Free Officers started undertaking the systematic dissolution of all the Egyptian political parties in January 1953 (Podeh and Winckler, 2004, 18).

However, it was not long before these two entities clashed over their differing interpretations of the role that Islam should play in a governmental context. In turn, these disputes led to the first instances of the MB being scapegoated and targeted by the state, which portrayed the organization as a radical and dangerous "other" that sought to take over the country. By the spring 1953 the initially cooperative relationship had nearly entirely deteriorated, as while the Free Officers' popularity started to fade Nasser sensed the potential political threat posed by the Brotherhood to his regime, and demanded them to suspend the Secret Apparatus, disregard their agencies within the armed force, and to cease recruiting followers (Zahid, 2010, 80). These tensions were not only due to inherent political rivalry, but also to fundamentally different conceptions of the nation: while Nasser and his allies sought to modernize Egypt along secular and socialist lines, the Brotherhood advocated a more central role of religion in public life, therefore making the conflict boil down to whether the new government ought to create a religious or a secular state (Hibbard, 2011, 90). All Hudaybi's refusal to step down provided the regime with an excuse to dissolve the organisation in January 1954, making the Brotherhood precipitate into an illegal status that lasted until the end of the 2011 Revolution. The conflict between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers reflected not just different interpretations of religion but fundamentally different visions of society. The outlawing of the Brotherhood's marked the start of sectarian violence being perpetrated by the state against its members, who were discriminated against along political and religious lines. Nasser was clever in portraying the entirety of the Brotherhood as being behind the Secret Apparatus' attempt to murder him (Rubin, 1990, 10-13), therefore turning Muslim Brotherhoods into the fundamentalist and dangerous "other" the government needed at the time in order to regain some of its lost legitimacy. Moreover, such event marked the start of the government crackdown against the Brotherhood and of the long decades of violent repression, imprisonment, and torture at the damage of the organisation that the Nasserist era is famous for.

Just as we have learnt to expect in instances of minority religions sectarian conflicts, several thousand members of the Brotherhood were arrested, and individuals sympathetic to the organization within the military, the police, and other areas of Egyptian society were purged. A military tribunal subsequently convicted eight hundred members of the Brotherhood on charges of conspiring to overthrow the state, and six of its leaders were executed. With these actions, the Brotherhood's influence in Egyptian politics was greatly diminished, and Nasser had temporarily put an end to the debate over whether Egypt would have a religious or secular state (Hibbard, 2011, 91). There are plenty disturbing accounts of Muslim Brothers being targeted in the streets and locked away in concentration camps, where they suffered unspeakable torture, while thousands were imprisoned and hundreds got sentenced to death, including both Sayyd Qutb and Hassan al-Hudaybi who were executed in December 1954 (Rubin, 1990, 10-13). The Brotherhood's repression pursued by Nasser continued undisturbed throughout his entire rule, meaning that the organization's lost nearly 4,000 followers while its political power had been consistently eroded, an hard blow that took decades to recover from. Moreover, the brutality and techniques used by the regime against the Brotherhood are undeniably sectarian in nature, as they discriminated against its members along religious and political lines, and turned the organization into an "other" the Egyptian population should have been afraid of. It is interesting to note that Nasser's successors would follow very similar patterns and techniques when it came to managing relationships with the outlawed MB, which was alternatively tolerated or targeted depending on the government's political aims and circumstances.

Sadat's Era

The Nasserist era brought about major changes for Egypt and is generally remembered as a time of social reforms, Arab pride, modernization, and as the highest peak of Egypt's regional and international influence. However, Nasser's years were also marked by growing authoritarianism, repression, and to the sectarian targeting of the Muslim Brotherhood, which led to the formal dissolution of the organization in 1954 and to the imprisonment and detention of thousands of its members. Arguably the discrimination and brutalities to which the Islamist group were subjected in the 1960s were even harsher than those experienced under Hosni Mubarak, and that strongly contributed to the further splitting of the organisation and to the radicalisation of its narratives.

When Sadat was appointed President in 1970 he inherited an extremely challenging set of issues, as the deceased Nasser left the country in a growing economic descent, authoritarian structures, and dependence on global powers such as the USSR. All these conditions reflected those that led to the outbreak of the 1952 Revolution that put the Free Officer into power, and contributed to the perpetuation of popular discontent and Egyptian revolutionary nature that are some of the most striking characteristic of the country. However, the appointment of Sadat marked the beginning of a completely new era for Egypt, as he moved away from Nasserism and entirely revolutionised the country instituting economic liberalism and embracing multipartyism, although remaining an extremely controversial figure.

Comparatively, it needs to be noted that Sadat revealed himself to be inherently opposite to Nasser and ruled the country accordingly to an anti-Nasserist narrative, actively promoting a theologically conservative vision of Islam in public life. While Nasser had used Islam to provide legitimacy to his rule, Sadat embraced it with much greater fervour, and interpreted in a drastically different way. Sadat promoted a more theologically conservative view of Islam that was aimed at legitimising a more politically conservative set of policies. Ultimately, the goal of the Sadat regime was to use Islam to consecrate his political power and to develop a basis of nationalist legitimacy that was more explicitly religious in nature (Beattie, 2000, 168-172). His devotion earned him the name of *al-Rais al-Mumen* (the Believer President), however there are many who argue that the creation of an image of personal piety was a part of this strategy (Hibbard, 2011, 92). Regardless, because of Sadat's relative openness to Islam, his era witnessed the political evolution of the MB, which started reconstituting itself and growing as an organised political actor, by filling the gaps left by the state, supporting opposition, and further developing its Islamic revolutionary narrative.

Sadat's Era: New Approaches to politics

In open contraposition to Nasser, Sadat started a "Corrective Revolution" that led to the purge of Nasserists supporters from both the government and the security forces, which consequently made the President freer to pursue his own goals (Tucker, 1968, 6). Despite portraying his reforms as a continuation of the 1952 Revolution Sadat effectively started "correcting" Nasserism, opening up to government to multypartism and renaming the country the "Arab Republic of Egypt", while also substituting the National Assembly with the People's Assembly in 1971 therefore putting emphasis on a "state of laws and institutions" rather than men (Hinnebush, 1981, 444). This led to the temporary re-inclusion of previously suppressed parties and political associations into political life and, even if still illegal, the Brotherhood was allowed to re-start some of its social programs and even to publish their weekly newsletter (Kepel, 2002, 83). On this pluralist wave Sadat even released

many imprisoned political activists, among whom there were also many Muslim Brothers jailed under Nasser, which once again gave a new sprint to the organization (Zahid, 2010, 81).

The reform that marked his definitive break from Nasserism was the enforcement of *Infitah*, a policy of laissez-faire, open-doors economic liberalism that for the first time allowed foreign and private investments in Egypt and aligned it with Western powers (Aulas, 1982, 7). In Sadat's mind, pursuing economic liberalism was the quickest and most efficient way to tackle the economic shortcomings provoked by Nasser's commanded economy, and by doing so avoiding the further worsening of poverty that could have led to discontent. However, while highly innovative in some aspects, these policies also backfired really harshly on the government and further fuelled the popular dissatisfaction that was simmering in the background. In fact the involvement in the Arab-Isreali conflict that gave Sadat domestic and international resonance in 1973 failed him in the follow-up, as the role he played in the stipulation of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty led to widespread discontent and opposition (Vatikiotis, 1992, 443). Similarly, economic liberalism was not as beneficial as expected and in being too ambitious it ended up widening the social gap between the elite and the working class (Osman, 2010, 120-121) . Therefore, Sadat's regime was characterised by constant discontent, and even if the riots only lasted a couple of days they started a series of internal uprisings that led to the radicalisation and closure of the previously liberalised mode of governance and to Sadat's disputed assassination in October 1981.

Sadat and the Brotherhood: competing "Islamisms"
The successful re-building of the MB in the 1970s was strongly aided by Sadat's openness, and in particular by his desire to seek legality and support through the opening up of political life. In order to gain supporters Sadat released many political activists that had been jailed under Nasser and adopted a multi-party system in 1971, an action that was highly beneficial not only for the Brotherhood's political development (Hinnebush, 1981, 444). However, it needs to be reminded that the Brotherhood openly supported Nasser after the success of the 1952 Revolution, who just as Sadat enforced some degrees of pluralism and even re-legalised the organisation after its first dissolution in 1948. Zahid (2010) notes few similarities between the reasons that led the two Presidents to cooperate with the Brotherhood, most important of all the role that religion played in assuring legitimacy to a new government in Egypt (Zahid, 2010, 81-83).

Whichever the reasons behind it, the relationships between Sadat and the Brotherhood at the initial stages of the new regime were indeed collaborative, and to some extents even mutually beneficial. Sadat gained popular support by opening up the political system and being on good terms with the Islamist group, and the Brotherhood was allowed to re-start publishing its newsletter and to recruit followers (Mitchell, 1969, xi). Moreover, the creation of the People Assembly in 1971 also coincided with the re-drafting of the Egyptian constitution, which confirmed the role of Shari'a law as the principal source of jurisprudence and therefore stressed the relevance of Islam within Egyptian society. This meant that one of the two main objectives that the Brotherhood was pursuing at the time, which was the achievement of their aims trough legal and political means, was officially achieved as the recognition of Shari'a law as the main legislative source had indeed a fundamental place within the Brotherhood's political agenda (Berkley). Even if the Brotherhood never officially declared its support for Sadat's policies, their initial collaborative relations were clear to everyone and highly beneficial to Sadat, as the regime supported Islamist (or fundamentalist) organizations in order to counter the influence of the secular left in Egyptian politics. As part of a negotiated agreement, the Brotherhood agreed to renounce the use of violence and promised not to engage in anti-regime activities in exchange for the ability to peacefully advocate for Islam(Hibbard, 2011,

92). In fact, even if Sadat was initially genuinely committed to pluralism, he did so only as long as its rule was not directly challenged, only allowing political parties in the opposition enough freedom to make them believe that Nasser's authoritarian times had been left behind (Wickam, 2011, 441). As Sadat's popularity started to decrease because of the failures of his *Intifah* economic policies and his growing collaboration with Israel, his rule increasingly started to move right, and the political freedom he once allowed became more and more fragile (Hinnebush, 1981, 441).

In such a context the political parties composing the opposition had had the time to re-organise themselves and started raising their voices, and the MBd was particularly critical of his American and Israeli connections (Hinnebush, 1981, 441). After Sadat's refusal to legally recognise the Brotherhood and his closure on political pluralism, probably caused by the fear of being potentially overthrown, the relationship with the MB had definitely soured and was on its way to end. The MB was quick to join the ranks of those asking for his removal, and allegedly played a controversial part in both the political uprisings of the late 1970s and in Sadat's assassination in 1981 (Al Arian, 2011). On this note, it can be seen that there is indeed a parallel between Nasser and Sadat, as they both sought legitimacy and popular support through cooperation with the Brotherhood and both ended up having to go back on their steps in fear of being overcome. However, especially during Sadat's time, the failed cooperation between the government and the Brotherhood was highly beneficial for the shaping of the organisation's political identity and narrative. Even if the MB did not face violent repression until after Sadat's assassination, towards the end of his rule the organization was nevertheless once again portrayed as the "other", as the two competing Islamisms that the government and the organization were pursuing were just not compatible anymore.

Mubarak's Era

Sadat's assassination signified the end of a challenging but very prolific era for the MB, and also marked the start of Hosni Mubarak's 29 years long rule. No one was aware at the time that the young officer who took over the presidency was set to be one of Egypt's longest rulers, and that the country was headed towards unprecedented authoritarianism and repression. The MB would not be the only victim of the despotic three decades that were about to envelop Egypt, as repression, human rights violations and huge discriminations are the main elements that characterised Egypt during the past 30 years. Regardless, the Brotherhood had consistently grown as political actor during Sadat's time, slightly diverting from a uniquely religious narrative and starting to fully develop its legal and political drive. Such evolution had been made possible by Sadat's initial relaxation towards opposition group and to the decrease (but not disappearance) of internal schisms within the organisation. Even if still illegal and un-recognised as a legitimate political party, for the first time since its foundation the Brotherhood began committing to the gradual achievement of its aims through legal and political aims, in this way seeking legitimacy and undisputable results. However, the systematic political repression to which the MB had alternatively been subjected since its inception made its return during the last years of Sadat rule, undermining the Brotherhood's hopes to gain legal status and inaugurating what could be understood as the most challenging three decades in the history of the organisation.

Mubarak's authoritarianism and domestic repercussions

After his confirmation as President by the People Assembly in October 1981, Hosni Mubarak declared his commitment to rule accordingly to the policies set up by his predecessor (Taha and Kortam and El Behairy, 2013). He manifested his intentions of pursuing economic liberalisation by following Sadat's *Infitah*, although switching the focus from consumption to production (Chapin

Metz, 1990). Aside from political continuation the President also swore to bring Egypt towards a better and less authoritarian future by dispensing "democracy in doses", as the last years of Sadat's government had once again thrown the country into political repression and economic failure (Zahid, 2010, 81-83).

Mubarak indeed portrayed his government as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism—and a defender of the secular vision of modernity— while in practice continuing to promote an illiberal vision of Islam in public life. The close association of religion and the state that emerged under Sadat remained a trademark of the Mubarak era. The regime initially tolerated, though constrained, the MB while responding harshly to those who directly challenged the state. The Mubarak regime has also used the official religious establishment—including the *ulema* of Al Azhar and the Dar al Ifta (House of Fatwas) headed by the Grand Mufti—to sanction government policy. It similarly employed the media, the educational system, and other institutions of the state to promote a vision of Islam that was supportive of state authority and the continuation of military rule (Hibbard, 2011, 92). In particular, Mubarak distinguished more carefully between political dissent and direct challenges to the authority of the state. Islamist groups such as the MB were allowed to participate in political and economic life throughout the first years of his rule. They published newspapers, run civil society organisations, and were powerful both within universities and professional organisations. Recognizing the strength of such Muslim sentiment, the government itself attempted to enhance its Islamic credentials. In particular, it published its own Islamic newspaper, *al-Liwa al-Islami* (The Islamic Standard), whose circulation of 750,000 copies soon rivalled that of al-Ahram (Esposito and Piscatori, 1991, 429).

Brownlee notes that just as his two predecessors sought legitimacy and popular support through the opening up of the political system, so did Mubarak, and the proliferation of opposition parties, non-governmental associations, and the diminished crackdowns on Islamist elements are indeed characteristic of his first years in power. Similarly, the fact that the opposition grew to constitute more than the 20% of the parliament after the 1987 elections was taken by the majority of observers as an indisputable proof that the government was indeed allowing others into the political sphere (Brownlee, 2002, 7). However, accordingly to the continuation of a cycle that the Egyptian population was sadly familiar with, the initially liberal narrative of Mubarak's rule soon started turning into what would become unprecedented despotism. Solely the fact that Mubarak's appointment happened in conjunction with the re-imposition of the 1958 Emergency Law, subsequent of Sadat's assassination, can be seen as a prelude of what was to come.

Ruling under the Emergency Law meant that state censorship was allowed and widely employed, just as police power to incarcerate and detain prisoners without charges, and the undetermined suspensions of citizens' constitutional rights (Schenker, 3). Indeed, the continuing imposition of Emergency Law was one of the main grievances behind the Papyrus Revolution of 2011 (Madrigal, 2011). While his powers grew Mubarak became increasingly self-centred and soon turned into the infamous dictator who ruled Egypt for nearly 30 years, and who eventually led it to its final breaking point. The short-lived political openness characteristic of the first years of Mubarak's rule gave place to a flawed electoral system that allowed the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) to constantly defeat its opponents, mirroring what happened during the previous regimes, and practically turning Egypt into a one-party state (Zahid, 2010, 217-219). As the authoritarianism partially characteristic of Nasser's and Sadat's era re-entered Egypt, the brutal crackdowns on political opponents became a daily event and seemed to target particularly the MB, given its growing political successes (Saikal, 2011, 531-532). In short, Egypt was once again descending into the brutality of dictatorship and

despotism, something that despite the worsening circumstances was strongly fuelling the determination of all the opposition forces, among which the Brotherhood occupied a significant place. The growing brutalities, coupled with the huge economic discrepancies and indiscriminate governmental crackdowns, plus the growing rage accumulated by generations of Egyptians, were going to lead to one of the most revolutionary changes in the history of the country.

The Muslim Brotherhood & Hosni Mubarak
The relationship between the MB and Mubarak developed along a pattern very similar to those outlined earlier, starting with a short period of cooperation followed by brutal sectarian crackdowns. The very first years of Mubarak's rule were characterised by some degree of liberalisation and political openness, in a clear attempt of finding legitimacy and gain popular support. Mubarak was also very conscious of the growing popularity of the Brotherhood and of the influence that religion had on both daily and political life, and understood that a government's crackdown on Islamists would have seriously damaged his figure. Therefore, although alternating between toleration and repression, in the 1980s, Hosni Mubarak permitted the MB to participate in Egypt's political life and to take part regularly in elections (Weber, 2013, 520). However, this initial peace was soon broken as Mubarak's power started to increase, and the Brotherhood started to be identified as a substantial threat to the government's legitimacy and therefore heavily targeted. In a very similar way to what happened to both Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak's rule grew more authoritarian and despotic by the year and, despite being at the peak of its political activities and relevance, the Brotherhood was once again heavily suppressed and discriminated.

Soon after his appointment as President, in an attempt to show his commitment to democratisation Mubarak proceeded to release from prison all the political activists that had been jailed under Sadat's last few years in power, among whom there were numerous members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mubarak allegedly did so with the aim to seek reconciliation with Islamists and to distance himself from the authoritarian rule of his predecessor, just as Sadat had done after succeeding Nasser in 1970 (Walsh, 2003). The first years of the Mubarak regime were characterised by a strong democratization and political participation of opposition parties, reason why the Brotherhood was allowed to participate in both the 1987 and 2000 elections despite still being illegal (Laub). However, Mubarak soon realised that the Brotherhood was gaining an unprecedented number of supporters, as its influence was steadily growing amongst university students, workers' associations and cooperatives, reaching its peak in 1994 (Paison). When it became clear that the government could not control or benefit from the Islamisation process anymore, the Brotherhood was once again perceived as a growing menace and repression measures started to be taken against its members. The fragile relationship between the government and the Brotherhood had been broken once again, and given the validity of the Emergency Law, the Muslim Brothers started being periodically subjected to indiscriminate arrests and prolonged detention (Davidson, 2000, 85-87). Governmental censorship and propaganda were focused on disregarding the authority of the organisation and on accentuating the schism between its members, in a clear attempt to provoke a split that would cause the Brothers to abandon political activities (Ottaway, 2010, 9).

The Brotherhood's political stratagem to make its candidates run as independents won a staggering 88 seats (20% of the places) in the 2005 Parliamentary elections, establishing the organization as the main opposition block and angering the government even more (Traub, 2007). Such unprecedented victory makes a very clear break with the past, as for the first time in its history the Brotherhood did not collapse under governmental pressure and achieved an undeniable political

recognition of its influence, something that its members had sought for decades. However, as a consequence, Mubarak harshened his iron fist even more and the country fell victim of uncontrolled despotism, which manifested itself in corrupted elections, censorship, and police brutalities. Indiscriminate arrests increased daily, and Ottaway (2010) notices that the closets parallel that can be drawn between Sadat and Mubarak is the brutality of the continuous crackdowns on the MB. By the time of the 2010 contested elections, which are now considered as one of the main motives behind the outbreak of the 2011 revolution, hundreds of political opponents and Muslim Brothers had been jailed, with Mubarak portraying the Brotherhood through sectarian lenses as "illegal organization with ties to extremist groups" (Wickam, 2013, 214). As one Muslim Brother clearly stated "we were always treated as second class citizens under Mubarak. If you are a member of the MB you will not join the army, become a minister, or a governor", therefore creating a strong sense of deprivation and exclusion (Al Anani, 2015, 539). However, it can be easily argued that Mubarak brutally target the Brotherhood not because they were terrorist, but because they were not. Once again, the sectarian portrayal and targeting of the organization as a dangerous "other" was being used by the state as a political tool, in order to avoid threats to its own fragile legitimacy.

Al Sisi and the Politicization of Sectarianism

After the successful toppling of Mubarak brought about by the January 25th uprisings, the Muslim Brotherhood enjoyed a short period of legality and freedom within the country political realm, an absolute first that set a drastic milestone in the organization's history. The formation of the Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party and the election of Mohamed Morsi as President in June 2012 arguably marked the peak of the organization's political development, and freed the Brotherhood after decades of sectarian discrimination and repression (Kirkpatrick, 2012). However, such golden era was set to be incredibly short lived.

Mohamed Morsi was deposed in July 2013 by a *coup d'etat* led by former military chief Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, who has been ruling the country since, and has quickly re-instituted Mubarak's deep state (Al Jazera, 2013). Under Al Sisi's military dictatorship, the MB is facing what is arguably the harshest repression of its history, with sectarian discourses driving governmental policies and brutalities. Looking at numbers and statistics that are available because of the contemporary nature of this particular conflict, it is impossible to deny the politicisation of sectarianism that Al Sisi is employing as a means to a political end.

Soon after the *coup d'etat*, Al Sisi set up the sectarian discourse that is still characterising the regime's approach to the Brotherhood today. Egypt's new president clearly stated that "There will be nothing called Muslim Brotherhood during my tenure" and "Muslim Brotherhood is the origin of all Islamic Extremism" and even braded the organization as "terrorist" (Loveluck, 2014), once again creating a perceived Islamist "other" against which the regime could define itself in order to legitimise its actions (Marcus, 2015). The amendments Al Sisi made to the constitution make the persecution of the Brotherhood's members perfectly legal, but still fail to mask the sectarian nature of his actions. The definition of "terrorism" under the new Egyptian anti-terrorism law is extremely broad, and includes any "act" that might obstruct the work of public officials, institutions, embassies and so on. This catch-all language and new counter-terrorism measures could target anyone who joins peaceful protests or takes part in a strike, and authorises a prison sentence up to ten years for anyone who is part of a group that "harms national unity or social peace", that is to say, the MB *in primis* (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Similarly, the controversial and hugely restrictive Freedom of Assembly Law gives authorities the power to disperse any meeting of "public nature" of more than

10 people in a public space, allows police to forcibly disperse any public meeting or protest, and sets heavy prison sentences for vague offences such as "attempting to influence the course of justice" (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Under these new laws, an estimated 41,163 Egyptians were arrested in the period between July 3, 2013 and May 15, 2014, including 36,478 detained during political events, the vast majority of which are accused of being affiliated to the MB. According to lawyers at ECESR (Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights), only a quarter of these prisoners have been released, while accounts of torture and police brutality are coming out daily (Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2014). Moreover, as of late 2014, an estimated 42,000 people were being held in custody, including almost all of the Muslim Brotherhood's top leadership and thousands of its members and supporters. Hundreds of cases of torture, deaths due to abuse or lack of medical care while in detention, sexual assault, and forced disappearances among dissidents affiliated with the Brotherhood have been documented by Egyptian and international groups (Brown and Dunne, 2015, 5).

In terms of national reconciliation, all dialogues with the MB failed and the Islamist organization is facing the worst repression of its history so far. Together with being branded as "terrorists", thousands of Muslim Brothers are being imprisoned, tortured, sentenced to death, and sent to prison structures that scarily resemble concentration camps. Thousands are also being sentenced to death, in a trend that even surpasses the brutality shown by Nasser in 1954. On March 22, 2014, 529 MB supporters, the majority of whom have been tried *in abstentia*, were sentenced to death for having allegedly participated in an anti-Al Sisi's protest during which a police officer lost his life. Defence layers were not allowed to present witnesses or explaining their case, and the ruling was over in less than an hour (BBC News, 2014). On April 28, 2014, the same judge sentenced 628 more people to death under similar circumstances, MB Supreme Guide Mohamad Badie and the Freedom and Justice Party chairman Saad El-Katany were amongst those condemned (Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2014). If this was not enough to prove the extent to which Al Sisi is willing to go, it is important to notice that the sectarian crackdown on the Brotherhood does not come only with proofs of unprecedented breaches of human rights, but with crippling consequences for Egyptian civil society and welfare system. The Islamist organization has in fact historically acted as a fundamental civil society actor, providing education, job training, and healthcare to the millions of Egyptians that are being neglected by the state. This harsher than ever crackdown is seriously impacting on the organization's past capability to keep working on the provision of social services, and therefore risks to terminate a network of welfare support that took years to develop and on which the majority of the population is reliant. Funds of MB's affiliated institutions have been frozen, and a network of Brotherhood's hospitals that serve more that 2 million patients especially in poor and rural areas, the Islamic Medical Association, is also heading towards this end (Fahim). Even if it is too early to speculate, the question of who is going to step in and fill the gap left by the Brotherhood's social institutions within Egypt's civil society inevitably arise, and cast yet another shadow on Egypt's uncertain and unstable future.

Conclusion

After everything that has been said so far, it is now clear that the historical relationship between the Egyptian regime and the MB is characterised by cycles of short cooperation and brutal repression, and most of all by the use of sectarian violence and discourses as a political tool at the hand of the state. This is the case because of the central role of the question over which role the Islamic faith should play in governance, and Islam's capability to legitimise or delegitimise political authority. Therefore, as an Islamist organization characterised by political aims and an

encompassing ideology, the MB has historically represented both an appealing ally and a potential threat for the regime, which has led to the systematic oppression and discrimination of a group for political means along sectarian lines.

To conclude, this article has argued that it is necessary to reconsider what is meant by "sectarianism" within the Egyptian context, and to shift the focus away from Muslim on Christian violence and concentrate instead on the historical relationship between the regime and the MB, therefore understanding sectarianism in Egypt as a political tool in the hand of the state. By doing so, it becomes clear that the discrimination and repression of the Brotherhood along sectarian lines has been used as a political tool for decades, and has negatively affected the way in which the organization and its ideology is being perceived both regionally and internationally. The construction of sectarian discourses and use of violence at the hand of the state to gain legitimacy has now reached its peak under Al Sisi's dictatorial rule, with potentially disastrous consequences not just for the state of Human Rights in the country, but for Egypt's civil society and welfare system as well.

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