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THE SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY OF “ISLAMIC TERRORISM” IN EGYPT

ANWAR ALAM

Egypt has been beset by a phenomenon called ‘Islamic terrorism’¹ for more than two decades. The early- and mid-1990s witnessed the most intensive terrorist operations ever carried out in the country’s history. This period also marked a strategic shift in terrorist operations: The targets for their bullets and bombs, according to official and unofficial sources, shifted from Muslim opinion leaders, who frowned on fundamentalism, to foreign tourists, police officers, security personnel, government officials and important public figures. Economic institutions, railway tracks, tourist spots such as the pyramids, and other crowded places were/are selected for terrorist attack. The Islamic threat continues to haunt the Egyptian regime despite sharp falls in terrorist activities of various militant Islamic groups in recent years.

Between 1992 and 1997, there were more than 3,000 victims of terrorism. Of the 1,500 killed, 97 were foreign tourists and more than a hundred Christian Copts.² Victims included noted figures such as the Minister of Interior, Abel Halim Moussa (killed in 1993), eminent writer Faraj Fuda (killed in 1992), and Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (severely wounded in 1994). The list also had less prominent figures, known for their avowed secular outlook and critical stance on fundamentalism. Between 1991 and 1995 a series of assassination attempts were carried out on President Husni Mubarak by militant Islamic groups. Islamic militants also targeted officials of the Egyptian regime abroad. In November 1995, a diplomat working at the Egyptian UN mission was shot dead in Geneva. The same year a car bomb exploded at the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, killing 16 people and injuring 60.

It is now established that most of these terrorist acts, within and outside Egypt, including the infamous Luxor massacre (1997) and the assassination attempts on President Husni Mubarak, were organized and conducted by al-Jama’a al-Islammiya (hereafter al-Jama’a). The al-Jama’a is also known as Islamic Group (IG or GI), al-Jammiyat, Islamic Jammiyat and Egyptian al-Jamma’t

al-Islamiyya. It is considered the largest and most militant Islamic group in Egypt, operating largely in the region of Upper Egypt. This paper focuses on this group in an attempt to demonstrate that the contemporary phenomenon of Islamic terrorism, which tends to be explained as inherently existing in the Islamic ideology, cannot be understood without placing it in its historical and cultural context. The places most affected by al-Jama'a activities have been the southern provinces of Asiyut, Qena, Sohag and Minya, besides Cairo and its peripheral areas. The region of Upper Egypt is popularly referred to as Sai'd and people inhabiting that area and its culture as Sai'di. Sai'd/southern/south/Upper Egypt has been used interchangeably.

The Sai'di background of Islamic militants has been noticeable since the assassination of President Sadat. The assassination of Sadat in October 1981, initially considered the work of al-Jihad acting alone, was, according to subsequent court testimony, the work of both the al-Jihad organization and the al-Jama'a. Tal'at Fu'ad Qasim (an activist and ideologue of al-Jama'a who became deputy to the *amir*, Umar Abd al-Rahman, following his imprisonment in 1989) has claimed that the al-Jihad organization had no role in Sadat's assassination and that it was merely caught up in the arrest campaign of 1981.³ Virtually all of the top leaders of the group accused of Sadat's assassination were Sai'dis: Abdul al-Zummer from Giza; Nagih Ibrahim from Asiyut; Assem Abdul Majid from Qena; and Karam Zuhdi and Usama Hafiz, both from Minya. Among the lower ranks of the accused conspirators, Sai'dis dominated the list. For example, of the 280 al-Jama'a members implicated in Sadat's assassination, 183 were from southern Egypt. Furthermore, of the 21 radical Islamists whom the Egyptian government had executed as of November 1993, ten were from the southern governorate of Qena alone, and the remaining 11 came from other southern governorates like Minya, Asiyut and Sohag.⁴ The only non-Sai'di among the top leaders was Shiekh Omar Abdul Rahman who was born in Tanta but later moved to southern Egypt where his radicalism was influenced by his Asiyut and Fayyum experiences. Moreover, the radicalism of Syed Qutub and Shukri Mustafa also originated in the province of Asiyut.

There have been few serious attempts to locate the phenomenon of al-Jama'a and its violent anti-regime activities within the larger background of social, political and economic history of southern Egypt. In other words, despite the pronounced role of the Sai'dis in anti-governmental violence for more than two decades, scholars have not sufficiently inquired into al-Jama'a's *specific southern character* nor seriously examined possible reasons why the group — which

was unknown during Gamal Abdul Nasser's rule (1952–70) – rose in the 1970s as the most radical Islamic movement and posed the most severe threat to both the Sadat and the Mubarak regime.

Deeper research into the psychology, ideology and actions of the al-Jama'a reveals a kind of southern revolt against northern domination in Egypt. This becomes clear when one analyzes the social and economic impact of the policies of the Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak regimes in southern Egypt. The al-Jama'a's use of Islam and its idioms obfuscate its specific distinction in terms of origin, ideology and objectives from north-based Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Jihad. The literature on 'political Islam' or 'Islamic terrorism/extremism' generally traces the history of terrorism in Egypt to the origin of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose violent legacy is now being carried forward in more militant ways by splinter groups (such as the al-Jihad, the al-Jama'a, the al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, the Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami) owing to the increasingly moderate posturing of the Muslim Brotherhood. This literature broadly analyzes the militant actions as an act of Islamic faith to replace the man-made secular system within and establish an Islamic system of governance, as it was found during the period of Prophet Muhammad and the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs.

However, it needs to be emphasized that an Islamic movement in any country is essentially pluralistic, diverse and complex. Cautioning against the tendency to club the Muslim Brotherhood together with al-Jihad, al-Jama'a and other militant Islamic groups, Eberhard Kienle has rightly remarked,

There is no reason to believe that these groups formed a common and united front The objectives themselves were not necessarily identical, even though, by and large, they involved the implementation of a partly converging, partly diverging interpretation of *Sharia*. In other words, nothing proves that the majority of members of MB, itself composed of various tendencies, was in league with the Islamic Jihad or the al-Jama'a Islamiyya and therefore advocated or endorsed political violence The conflict between the regime and the Brothers was not identical with those between the Jama'a Islamiyya or the Islamic Jihad.⁵

There is a general tendency among scholars to trace the origins of al-Jama'a in Sadat's de-Nasserization policy. It is widely believed that the Sadat regime sponsored al-Jama'a on university campuses in order to eliminate Nasserist and Leftist influences. However, such an interpretation does not explain why lower middle-class elements would find state-sponsored al-Jama'a sufficiently attractive to join,

while bearing in mind the fact that Sadat's policies represented a reversal of the reformist tendencies which drew the support of these elements during Nasser's regime. Furthermore, whether the Sadat regime mobilized disgruntled youth to combat its Leftist and Nasserist opponents or resorted to Islamic symbolism to enhance its legitimacy, there is little inclination to concede that the militant Jama'a had a life of its own, independent of the state.

A few perceptible scholars have offered a sophisticated socio-economic explanation of the origins of militant Islamic groups including the al-Jama'a. Their explanations, however, suffer from the weakness of a grand meta-narrative. In general, such meta-narratives tend to de-emphasize micro-analysis. The Islamic discourse of militant groups is primarily seen as 'the moralist/culturalist expression of frustrated lower-middle classes arising out of a developmental crisis' or is understood in terms of a binary, that is, the collapse of secular nationalism *vis-à-vis* the rise of pan-Islamism. Nazih Ayubi quotes David Apter, 'All these socio-psychological strains are often then expressed in symbolic, ideological forms which may include the use of historical myths, the re-writing of history, the search for a golden age' and says that 'this is precisely what has happened with the Muslim youth'.⁶

The importance of social factors in the growth of Islamist groups has been somewhat shaken by a study on per capita consumption; the study maintains that the Upper Egypt governorates were not substantially poorer than those of Lower Egypt, if differences in consumer prices are taken into account.⁷ The results of this study challenge simplistic explanations that confuse the living conditions of populations defined in geographical terms with the living conditions and biographies of individuals and smaller groups. However, even at the level of individuals and social groups, explanations based on social factors are unconvincing because they seem to ignore the alternatives open to victims of social conditions – alternatives that, in principle, range from secular revolutionary ideologies to forms of 'exit' such as resignation and apathy.

The phenomenon of political Islam thus requires a more complex explanation which, alongside social factors, introduces other variables such as 'awareness of these conditions' and its translation into protest and resistance, both facilitated by higher education and the institutional framework in which they are dispensed. The social aspect then becomes only one, though major, ingredient of the explanation widened to include other factors such as the 'dislocation of society' and the 'political, economic and social bankruptcy of the power elites', with the effects of these variables sharpened by the per-

ceived inequalities between North and South, West and East and Third and First World.

While recognizing the contribution of deprivation theory in terms of identifying social and economic basis of militant Islamic groups in conjunction with the above approach, an emphasis on the local setting's specific social, economic and political factors has the advantage of avoiding the Islamists' trap into which many of the time-obsessed studies have fallen into; that is, tracing the roots of Islamists to their idealized vision of the period of Prophet Muhammad and Four Rightly Guided Caliphs.

In fact, in order to understand a complex phenomenon like al-Jama'a comprehensively, it is essential to locate Islam within the local web of relations in southern Egyptian society, assess the impact of religion on power relations in the southern political structure and examine Islam's function in maintaining the differences and special character of certain social groups. Equally relevant to an understanding of political Islam in Egypt is the recognition of the northern political domination of the south and its impact on local power arrangements. In addition, since Egypt does not exist in a vacuum, it is necessary to recognize how external influences, especially money earned by southerners who worked in the Persian Gulf during the oil boom years, have impacted the rise of the al-Jama'a. It is within this holistic-integrative perspective that one needs to situate the Islamic discourse of al-Jama'a, its growth and violent behaviour.

SOUTHERN EGYPT: A BRIEF OUTLINE

The Sai'd (Upper Egypt) is a narrow strip of land tucked between the hills on both sides of the Nile from the bottom of the Delta to the cataracts of Aswan. It is arid, hot, and until the Aswan High Dam—only partly 'hydraulic' and is naturally an inhospitable part of the country. Historically, Upper Egypt's land was more isolated from activities to the north. It is economically and socially less advanced than the Delta, with distinctly lower standards of living. Government's investment in the development of this region is far below the national average. For instance, state investment in the agricultural sector in Asiyut amounts to one-seventeenth of the national average, despite the fact the majority of people in Asiyut depend on agriculture as their main source of income. The only sign of development in the south is the Aswan High Dam and the few sugar factories. Sugarcane is crucial to the rural economy in Upper Egypt. Of the eight sugar mills located in the region, four are in Qena and two in Aswan. These projects have not influenced southern

culture because their employees have been northerners who live in project towns, which are isolated northern islands in the heart of the south.

In terms of education, health, infrastructure and other developmental indices, Upper Egypt lags far behind the rest of the country. Thus for Upper Egyptian males, the average number of years spent in school is 4.2. Approximately 44 percent of men have no education at all. Only 30 percent of women have any formal schooling. There is a general lack of health facilities. Clinics are rare and the rate of immunization coverage is very low. Only around 38 per cent of the households have piped water. Around 32 per cent of households do not have any toilet facilities and the average number of people sleeping per room is 3.6.⁸ According to the World Bank's senior economist Marcelo Giugale, Upper Egypt has the highest percentage of Egypt's so-called 'ultra poor', those surviving on a day-to-day basis.⁹ With an annual per capita income of just over \$300, and soaring rates of unemployment, illiteracy, malnutrition, morbidity and mortality, Upper Egypt ranks at the bottom of virtually every social and economic indicator for Egypt.¹⁰

Unlike the north, the south was not conquered by any colonial power. Napoleon was defeated at al-Baroud, near Qena, and the British had no posts in Upper Egypt. Ever since the 1952 revolution, the regime had not penetrated the south extensively. Instead, the central government depended on local notables and their traditional authority to ensure order. The fact that various governments neglected or overlooked the south in their developmental programmes has meant that the old social structure continues to retain its hold here more firmly than it does elsewhere in the country. This lack of penetration and the persistence of traditional institutions means that the Sai'dis use local customs in preference to civil law. Thus the Sai'dis consider it shameful to involve the courts or police in their disputes.

ISLAM, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND POLITICS OF DOMINATION IN THE SOUTH

Unlike the north, the Sai'di society is still stratified along tribal lines. Islam and its differing interpretations can easily be used to endorse or undermine the dominance of one group over the other. Hence an understanding of the southern tribal map and the function of the competing Islamic interpretations that assign superiority to one tribe and inferiority to another is basic to understanding of the southern al-Jama'a.

The hierarchy of dominance in the local setting starts with the *ashraf*, followed by the Arabs and then *fallahin*. The *ashraf* claims descent from the Prophet Muhammad. They do not intermarry either with the Arabs or the *fallahins*, both of whom the *ashraf* consider beneath them. Although the *ashraf* share their place of origin with many Arab tribes in the south, they would still consider it an insult to be referred to as Arab. The term Arab in the south does not necessarily correspond to the northern meaning of the word. Whereas in the north everybody who speaks Arabic and lives in the Arab world is considered an Arab, in the south the term is used only to refer to a cluster of tribes who can trace their ancestries to Central Arabia. Of course, not all who claim to be Arabs are indeed so; many genealogies have been invented for the purpose of enhancing a tribe's social status. While Arabness remains a factor of social division (among the Arabs), there are further distinctions between the Hawara and the Juhaina, as well as between the Arab tribes, the Arabs band together if a fight erupts between them and non-Arab tribes.

The Arabs kept aloof from agriculture and normally engaged in carrying arms and some trade; they protected the peasants (Muslims and Christian) and on their behalf, carried out vendettas with other villagers/tribes that might have attacked them. It was probably the nomad's (both *ashraf* and Arabs) disinclination to intermarry with the local *fallahin* (peasant, both Muslims and Copts) that kept the percentage of Copts higher in Upper Egypt than in the Delta.¹¹ Social stratification and status rituals were fairly rigid, with members of the lower groups having, for example, to dismount from their animals, give way and walk on the left in the presence of members of the higher status community.

The majority of non-Arabs in the South are called *fallahin*. In southern terminology, *fallahin* means 'non-Arab Egyptians'. Saidis also refer to the northern people of the Delta as *fallahin*, meaning that they are Egyptians but non-Arabs, whom they consider their inferiors. Southern *fallahin* believe they are descendants of the ancient Egyptians, a claim also made by the Copts and the Nubians. In the southern Arab's lexicon, the *fallahin* also include non-native Egyptians, such as the al-Jama'a, a darker-skinned people who seem racially akin to Ethiopians and Somalis.

In the power struggle among southern groups, Islam plays a crucial, decisive role. Both the *ashraf* and the Arabs have focussed on Islamic sayings that endorse their superiority. They refer to the *fallahin* as 'those who accepted Islam only under the threat of sword', and hence lacking in Islamic faith, weak in character and intellectual ability. According to them, the Prophet said 'those who were superior

before the coming of Islam are your superiors after it'. They also recite the Quranic verses 'We raised some of you above the others by different degrees'. In general, the dominance of the *ashraf* and Arab tribes in economic matters led to the dominance of their discourse, since originally the dominant tribes were the only ones with education or in positions of authority.

The tribal hierarchy of Sai'di society varies from one village or town to the next and, consequently, relations of dominance vary accordingly. Al-Jama'a members usually represent the lowest group in the hierarchy. In the city of Qena, for instance, where there are only Arab and *ashraf* tribes, the *ashraf* are in positions of leadership while al-Jama'a members come from the Arab tribes of Himidat or Jabalaw. In the surrounding villages where *ashraf* are not represented, the Arab tribes dominate the social scene and the al-Jama'a members come from *fallahin* families.

The 1952 Free Officer's revolution in Egypt did not alter the structure of dominance in the south, though it did help *fallahin* sons to obtain an education. Rather, in terms of administration and governance, all governments in Egypt preferred the age-old strategy of relying heavily on the 'intermediary role' of wealthy local notables to control the periphery, both in the north and the south. Scholars have referred to these local notables as 'rural middle class' or the 'second stratum'.¹² According to Rousillon,

The Egyptian state's recurrent problem as a central/centralized state is that of identifying the *intermediaries* through which it may preserve global control—maintain public order and impose the social items regarding which the regime refuses to negotiate. Under the old regime, the role of intermediary between central government and local level was played, in the country side, by the owners of latifundiae enjoying absolute authority over their villages and peasants . . . and, in the city, by the notability system . . . In revolutionary Egypt the Nasirist regime 'coopted' the stratum of 'new kulaks' in the countryside, which the agrarian reform had helped to put in place, and, in the city, was supported by the new worker's elite. Both categories were carefully encompassed . . . by the organization of the Arab Socialist Union. Under Sadat, and more clearly still under Mubarak until the end of the 1980s, the regime attempted to coopt the Islamist trend for this role.¹³

In the south the intermediary class is based on *asabiyya* (tribal solidarity) in addition to wealth and land ownership. Arab tribal solidarity was useful for all those who wanted to control the south from afar. The persistence of this form of governance, whether or

not inadvertently, always favoured the *ashraf* and the Arabs over the *fallahin*. Thus during Nasser's rule, they generally managed to circumvent even the most widely hailed programme, that is, land reforms, which became entangled in the local power structure. As a consequence, only a few of the minor families in the south benefited from it. Most *fallahin* remained landless and relatively powerless.¹⁴ It should be underlined here that almost 90 per cent of agricultural land is concentrated in the Delta, and the rest falls within a narrow ribbon along the Nile between Aswan and Cairo (Upper Egypt) and a strip along the Mediterranean. In fact the southern and northern portions of the Nile River Valley differ greatly. In the south, the Valley is narrow, and the river and fertile land on either side may only be a couple of miles in width. The cataracts, large granite outcroppings make the movement of river difficult in the south. To the north, however, the Nile branches out, forming a wide, rich delta that, together with the Fayyum Oasis, forms the majority of the agricultural land in the country. This specific geographical feature partly explains why, unlike in the north, the land reform programme in the south under the Nasser regime was not successful—there was not enough land to reclamate and to redistribute. Moreover, rural elite influence appeared to be more concentrated in the south than in the north, as reflected by the high number of villages controlled by each family at that time. A study by Hamied Ansari has clearly shown the increase in multiple ownership within a family in the provinces of Upper Egypt and he noted, with specific reference to the south, that 'no significant transformation occurred in the social and agrarian structures under the Nasserist regime'.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that even after Nasser's revolution, most police officials were recruited from important southern families (i.e., former landowners and major tribes). For instance, it was required that an applicant to the police academy came from a family that already had some local authority, that is, an Arab or *ashraf* tribe. It is because of the practice of recruiting security officers only from among the *ashraf* and Arab tribes that the victims of police violence inevitably were/are the *fallahin*. This practice, at an informal level, continues to operate even today. This aspect of interaction between the police and the local population serves to further tribal divisions in the south between the al-Jama'a and the police and helps to move the conflict from state-opposition conflict to local-tribal conflict. The amendment to police law tabled in March 1998 further reinforced the discretionary powers of the minister of the interior in the appointment of high-ranking officials. The government also relied on the heads of Arab tribes or *ashraf* to control localities by appointing their elders as '*umdas*'

(governors) of southern villages; chiefs of minor Arab families were appointed as *shaykh al-balad* (deputy governor). *Fallahin* men, in contrast, have customarily been appointed only as *ghafir nizam* (watchmen). Moreover, being a university graduate during the 1950s and 1960s was enough to move an individual and his immediate family from the working class to the middle class. This mobility helped the Arab and *ashraf* men more than the *fallahins*, for their tribal superiority was reinforced by economic and educational status.

Conflicts started after Sadat came to power in 1970 because his strategy which depended on local notables to ensure order and used Islam as the legitimizing factor, proved contradictory. His *infitah* (economic liberalization) policy proved to be disastrous for the *fallahin* and minor Arab tribes. It favoured the south's old feudal families. In some cases, *fallahin* and minor Arab families, who had been given land belonging to former *ashraf* owners during Nasser's period, were forcibly evicted. Sadat also appointed members of the old feudal families to important government positions: for instance, Jalal Abdul Dahab as Minister of Food Supplies, Abdulhameed Radwan of Awlad-Towaq-Sohag as Minister of Culture and Abdulmunsif Huzein of Isna as governor of Qena. In general, the re-establishment of the former aristocracy in Egyptian national politics threatened both the minor Arab tribes and the *fellahin*.¹⁶

Although Sadat died without completing the process of rolling back Nasser's agrarian reform, Mubarak continued his policies despite the ominous signs associated with the further impoverishment of the Egyptian poor. The pre-1952 elite and their sons also continued to displace other groups in state institutions.¹⁷

During the Nasser regime, the *fallahin* had made use of free education to better their lot. Being educated with no ties to land, many *fallahin* migrated to urban centres, especially Cairo, and managed to get government jobs. However, under Sadat and especially under Mubarak, they no longer received government jobs and faced discrimination in the private sector, where employment was gained through family connections. These social and economic dislocations of the minor Arab tribes and the *fallahin* of the south were the main cause for the rise of the al-Jama'a. Mamoun Fandy noted, 'The Islamists' reform and revolt in the south is informed by the *fallahin's* desire to rearrange the rules of southern social structure and center-periphery relations'.¹⁸ Moreover, religious values appealed to most Egyptians as a way of coping with the defeat in the June 1967 war and the decline of Nasser's socialism.

Before one dwells at length on the origins of al-Jama'a, its discourse and programme, an analysis of how the Sai'dis have been

represented in the literary and cultural life of the north will not be out of place.

NORTH–SOUTH DIVIDE AND CULTURAL CLASH

For people outside Egypt, the word *Misr* refers to the whole country of Egypt. Egyptians, however, reserve *Misr* for what outsiders call Cairo. Cairo/*Misr* dominated the periphery not only economically but also culturally. Egypt's existing political structure gives Cairo absolute domination over the south. The south does not have a voice of its own because it has no media outlets. As a result, the northern narrative dominates the southern public space with only one exception: the mosque.

In the northern Cairene narrative, the southerner appears stupid, stubborn, incapable of cultural accommodation, and resistant to change. Mamoun Fandy analyzed works by two progressive Egyptians: namely the novel *In the Eye of the Sun* by Ahdaf Soueifi and the song 'Wad Ya Abd al-Wadud' by the lyricist Shaykh Imam and discovered a strong streak of 'Orientalism' in their characterization of Sai'dis.¹⁹ He also said that in the mainstream media, novels, magazines, newspapers and films, the southerner fluctuates between a noble savage and a mindless primitive.²⁰

Similar views about the Sai'dis can also be seen in the statements made by northern intellectuals. For instance, the dean of one northern university claimed:

The southern character differs sharply from the Egyptian character: while the Egyptian character is tolerant, friendly and forgets and forgives quickly, the southern character is the opposite of this. Many reasons account for this, such as the harsh climate, the southern society's lack of contact with civilization, and the inability of the colonial powers to enter the south.²¹

According to the deputy editor of *Al-Ahram*,

The south has been away from the centre of culture and civilizations, be it Cairo or other internal centers. It also always has been the choice of rebels – its character has been affected by the rigidity and harshness of the desert that surrounds it. It also is affected by the Bedouin customs that are incompatible with authority and order.²²

The Cairene media as well as the cultural and intellectual elite not only present the Sai'dis as un-Egyptian and stereotype them, as the

above references show, but urge them to change their backward customs if they desire to be a part of civilized Egyptian society. Thus such portraits not only exclude the Sai'dis from the domain of Egyptianness but also affect an understanding of the underlying causes of Sai'di discontent.

ORIGINS AND DISCOURSES OF AL-JAMA'A

The roots of the al-Jama'a are presumed to be in the religious student associations (Jama'at Islamiyya) established in Egypt's universities, particularly at the Asiyut university, the university of the South, in the early 1970s with the tacit support of the Sadat government. It [???] has regional campuses in Sohag, Qena and Aswan. Even the now independent University of Minya (north of Asiyut) used to be a regional campus of the Asiyut university. The southern character of Asiyut University and its regional campuses is further reinforced by the Ministry of Education regulations that require students to stay within their regions (divided along north-south lines) unless the programme for which a student is applying is only offered at a northern university. This official segregation between northern and southern students further widens the cultural gap between the Sai'd and Cairo Egypt and may be a contributing factor to the regional character of the al-Jama'a.

By the early 1980s, the Jama'at Islamiyya seems to have formed several tendencies within one broad organization, which became known as the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. One tendency, centred around the universities of Cairo and Alexandria, supported the philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood. A second tendency, limited to the Alexandria University, adopted the *Salaffiyya* line. A third tendency, found in the universities of Upper Egypt, opposed the truce between the Muslim Brotherhood and the government and rejected the constitutional mechanism with the existing system as futile and dangerous and initially supported the philosophy of the al-Jihad organization. Slowly and gradually leaders from Aswan, Asiyut, Minya, Suhag and Qena asserted the distinct identity and ideology of al-Jama'a in contrast to northern-based Islamic militant organizations including al-Jihad. In a nutshell, from a student-intelligentsia movement in the 1970s it [???] gradually transformed itself into a wider social movement representing Sai'di grievances against northern domination and throughout the 1980s and 1990s posed a severe challenge to the Mubarak regime. According to Sheikh Rifa'ey Ahmad Taha,

The [northern] nationalist party does not even dream of a small portion of the popularity of the al-Jama'a even in one principality of the principalities of Sa'eed. The Jama'a Islamia is spread throughout the Egyptian principalities, especially in Sa'eed, for in the eight Sa'eed principalities, no suburb or village is without an organised presence for the Jama'a, as the Jama'a controls the Islamic activities and receives great support from the people. In fact, in some of the Sa'eed centres, the number of the villages which are represented in the Jama'a in a salient and effective manner exceeds forty villages. The Jama'a also has representation in the trade organisations and the official charitable organisations and associations, even the situation does not permit for them to openly declare their affiliation. As for the student organisations, these are almost completely under the control of the Jama'a, especially the principalities in the middle and south of Sa'eed.²³

The results of the 1992 local elections testified to the popularity and domination of al-Jama'a in the south. For example, although the Islamist coalition composed of the al-Amal party and the Muslim Brotherhood won 115 districts nationally, almost all of these were in the northern governorates. In the south, it won a total of only six districts: four in Minya, one in Asiyut, and one in Sohag. The main reason for the poor result of this supposedly Islamic coalition is that the al-Jama'a did not endorse the coalition. The Wafd party also won the majority of its districts in the northern governorates. In the south, Wafd appealed only to local notables. Like Wafd, Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) depended on the support of the Arab tribes and the *ashraf*.

The al-Jama'a ideology evolves out of Sai'di traditions and Islam as well as Sai'di grievances against the north. This becomes clear when one analyzes the difference in the thrusts of al-Jama'a and the north-based Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the al-Jihad, the al-Takfir-wal-Hizra and others. In fact, Islamist strategists believe that the difference between the al-Jama'a and the northern Islamic movements is a major obstacle to the formation of an Egyptian Islamic alliance similar to Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front.²⁴ However, the fact that the bulk of militant members of the north-based Islamic groups such as al-Jihad has a Sai'di background obliterates the difference between the two. The geographical distribution of 271 members of al-Jihad (tried in the wake of the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat) reveals the following: the provinces of Cairo and Giza together (Greater Cairo) accounted for 135 (49.82 per cent) of the prosecuted individuals, Upper Egypt for 117 (43.17 per cent) and Lower Egypt for only 19 (7 per cent). Given that Lower Egypt

has double the population of Upper Egypt, the percentage of militants from the south is proportionately even higher. It is because of the Sai'di background that many scholars tend to confuse al-Jihad with al-Jama'a. However members of the al-Jama'a have been emphatic in distinguishing themselves from the northern al-Jihad group:

In the south, there is only one Islamic force: al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. Unlike Jihad groups, composed of clusters of secret organizations with different names like al-Fatah, al-Tal'I, al-Khilapha, ad al-Nasr that have no mosques or social relations, we are a social force that conducts our works in the open through our mosques and our relations with the larger society.²⁵

Rifat Sid Ahmed, the head of al-Amal (Labour) Islamic Institute, which is dominated by northern Islamists, has stated the basic differences between al-Jihad and al-Jama'a:

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya is led by university students from southern Egypt. By this, I also refer to the difference in culture and the impact of environment on the mentality of this group. The Jihad movement, on the other hand, is led by military officers, engineers, and doctors and they are from the north.²⁶

Nedoroscik has also concurred that, 'fundamentalist movements in northern Egypt were made up of doctors, engineers and other professionals'.²⁷ Scholars like Stanely Reed have underlined the bourgeois character of Muslim Brotherhood.²⁸ The bourgeois identity of the Muslim Brotherhood was evident in its support for Sadat's de-Nasserization program, as well as during the Egyptian debate on land reforms.²⁹ Muslim Brotherhood's support for Sadat's de-Nasserization policy was, however, also due to the fact that Sadat freed them and allowed them to operate as long as they did not challenge the legitimacy of the regime.

On the other hand, the leadership of the al-Jama'a movement consisted of university students, and its members primarily came from rural, lower middle and working class families.³⁰ It is opposed to foreign investment in particular, and the policy of *infatih* in general, which is quite clear from the various policy pronouncements made by al-Jama'a from time to time. Criticizing government policies, Sheikh Rifa'ey Ahmad Taha, a spokesperson of al-Jama'a stated the following:

On the economic front, the regime has completely surrendered to international bodies such as the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund, etc, and promoted systems of the West despite the obviousness of their failure and the clarity of their goals which aim at the realisation of the interest of international powers with an increase in the siphoning of our wealth and at the expense of our people, who live below the poverty line. These are not mere expressions, or inciteful semantics, they are facts and numbers. You can compare between the economic conditions of Egypt with the other nations of the world 45 years earlier, before martial law governed Egypt and its situation today. Then compare Egypt before 1981 and Egypt today to know that the worst period which is passing over our people is this period which is governed by Mubarak and his cronies . . . then consider the following: the increase in the rate of the unemployed, the closure of many of the national industries, the sale of public assets, the foreign infiltration in the many economic areas, the foreign possession of most of our essential economics, or its ownership by the governing elite and their cronies and their transforming it to personal property which the people can not benefit from.³¹

In this regard Nedorosick has rightly remarked,

As the Muslim Brotherhood grew in force during the distress of the Depression and as a reaction to the influence of Western powers in Egypt, the Upper Egyptian militant movement similarly grew as a result of a regime in power that has been perceived as corrupt, and as a reaction to the implementation of Western policies of economic liberalization.³²

The difference between southern al-Jama'a and northern Islamic movements is more marked in terms of their ideological pronouncement. To a great extent, the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology has been shaped by its focus on the international question, the most important being the Palestine question. In part, this focus arose from its origins in the region of the Ismailiyya on the Suez Canal, and the subjugation of this area/Egypt to western colonialism. Hasan al-Banna's anti-colonial message was further articulated and sharpened by Sayyed Qutb and his latter followers. On the other hand, unlike Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jama'a's main writings do not dwell on larger Middle Eastern questions such as pan-Arabism, the Palestine question, or Israel and the West.

Mithaq al-Amal al-Islami (Conventions of Islamic Action)—written in 1984 by Dr Najih Ibrahim, Asim abd al-Majid and Islam al-Din Dirbala, under the supervision of Umar Abd al-Rahman and published in 1989—is a 231-page explanation of the al-Jama'a goals, beliefs and strategies. Occasionally, the group's leaders pay lip service

to these larger issues when journalists seek their opinions, but they seldom initiate or volunteer a position on their own. Rather their stated enemies are those who do injustice within Egypt, and poverty and injustice in the south seems to be a dominant theme in the al-Jama'a pronouncements. According to an unidentified al-Jama'a leader,

The current regime has led Egypt into the pit, economically, politically and socially, not to mention its human rights abuses. Corruption also has reached its peak. And all of this is occurring at a time when Egyptians are lining up for bread. The current government is nothing but a corrupt clique that will be removed sooner or later.³³

Or, as Sheikh Rifa'ey Ahmed Taha, a spokesperson of al-Jama'a, stated in an interview,

We concentrate in our publications on exposing the reality of the Egyptian regime, the internal policies of which have thrived on corruption and transgression. The blinders which the official press have placed over the eyes of many sections of the public is the factor which worked to extend the life of the regime.³⁴

In order to assert its independent identity *vis-a-vis* northern Islamic movements/groups, the al-Jama'a has abandoned the crescent as an Islamic symbol in favour of the sun.³⁵ Most members of al-Jama'a originally came from the *fallahin*, who aspired to change the dominant discourse and use their own version of Islam to restructure the rules that govern southern society. Most southern Islamists were born after the 1952 revolution and benefited from Nasser's land and educational reforms and graduated from colleges in the 1970s. For the sons of *fallahin*, economic and educational mobility exposed contradictions between their relatively low social status and the improvement of their economic and educational situation. The oil boom in the Persian Gulf further accelerated this process during the 1970s. While Sadat's de-Nasserization programme was divesting the southern small farmers of their gains, the oil-rich Arab states were undergoing an oil boom that led to new socio-economic opportunities for Egyptians, particularly among the *fallahin*. Since the sparse population and shortage of cheap labour in the Gulf countries did not match their ambitious projects, they recruited workers from populous Arab countries like Egypt. Migrant-work usually attracted minor Arab tribesmen or *fallahin* because more prominent tribesmen considered wage-labour beneath their dignity.

Having returned with their savings, the workers walked in the village squares in clean *jallabiyyas* (full, heavy, white cotton robes), instead of rags, and started looking for projects in which to invest

their money. Typically, they bought land from the former land-owners, who were then taking advantage of Sadat's *infatih* to set up import–export offices in urban areas. Thus, return of these workers upset village politics, since owning land traditionally was associated with social prestige and power. The *umdās* of Arab tribes, for instance, has been counting on buying the land of the Christians, who were moving into the import–export business. However, since the returning workers were willing and able to pay higher prices, land became expensive and many of the *umdās* could not afford it.

The economic prosperity of *fallāhīn* led to their social assertion. For though the newly rich bought the land and built better houses, they still lacked the prerequisites for social prestige, namely honourable lineage, since they usually were neither Arab nor *ashraf*. Education allowed the *fallāhīn* to read the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* for themselves and become aware of interpretations other than those of their Arab and *ashraf* landlords. To reconcile the difference between income and low social status, members of al-Jama'a used their new religious learning to emphasize an alternative narrative, using as its centre the Prophet's sayings: 'All are equal in Islam: no difference between Arab and non-Arab except *taqwa* (piety).' They also challenged the religious credentials of the Arabs and *ashraf* and redefined the scope of Islam.

Given their social origin, both the Arabs and *ashrafs* did not need to frequent mosques to demonstrate their Islamic credentials. They demonstrated their religiosity through extravagant Islamic rituals like undertaking an expensive Hajj or building mosques. From their dual desire to offset the dominance of Arab tribes and *ashraf* and to prove their religious credentials, the returning workers not only frequented the mosques, but also spent lavishly on the building of new village mosques. This was irksome to the village notables since a mosque is normally named after the tribe that built it. A previously relatively unknown tribal name thus came to be displayed prominently on the façade of the village mosque. The educated sons of the newly rich preached in these mosques; they emphasized a very different Islamic message from that of their predecessors. The messages from the new mosques undermined traditional tribal hierarchies. Thus the Islamic language of al-Jama'a represented a broad alternative system of meaning and power to the hegemonic system represented by the existing socio-political order, which inevitably marginalized and/or alienated certain individuals and certain social groups. In this sense, the rise of al-Jama'a in Upper Egypt is not only a call for a more Islamic government, but rather a call for a more just government as well as a protest against the dismal *status quo*.

What is Islamic in the south is always fused with what is acceptable traditionally versus what is *bid'a* (new or non-traditional). For instance, the eye-for-an-eye principle that many interpret as the sign of al-Jama'a insistence on the application of *Sharia* (Islamic Law) is also in keeping with the southern custom of tribal honour and revenge. In this regard, anyone examining southern Islamic discourse realizes that Islam, in addition to its religious component, is also the only means southerners have to protect their traditions from Cairo's modern cultural onslaught. The Islamic discourse of al-Jama'a represents their desire to protect the cultural authenticity of the south as well as to fight for their self-respect and social dignity. Thus, in spite of the fragmentation of the south and its stratification along tribal lines, a common desire to preserve southern customs unifies the Sai'dis. Southern dissatisfaction with the north is most obvious in the Sai'dis's common phrase, 'Cursed be Mina', a reference to the ancient southern Egyptian King who united northern and southern Egypt under one crown.

AL-JAMA'A AND SOCIAL WELFARE PROJECTS

The money of the workers and the educated sons of *fallahin* and minor families funded new social services, such as community clinics and local markets, in which prices were more affordable for the poor. These social services attracted many of the poor of Arab tribes, who reluctantly recognized the social status of the *fallahin*.³⁶ Due to the prominent role of *fallahin* workers as recruiters of other villagers to go to the Gulf countries, the *fallahin* managed to gain the backing of poor Arab tribesmen and even some poor *ashrafs*.

For many, thus, joining the al-Jama'a not only represented redemption and access to God but also access to wealth and power on a temporal level. The power of the Islamic network in Upper Egypt rivals that of the government and other social organizations and has emerged as an alternative to the old *umdas* in mediating local conflicts. A typical example of the al-Jama'a emerging as an alternative to the local notables is that of Abdul Raheem Hassanien Shaddad, a poor worker from a minor family who suddenly became the ultimate authority in mediating local disputes through his association with the al-Jama'a. Local people found Shaddad's Islamic arbitration speedier than the courts.³⁷ However, in late March of 1993, Shaddad was killed during a shoot-out between the al-Jama'a and the Egyptian police.

The Sai'di background of al-Jama'a militants is important by itself, but its national impact is made all the more noticeable because the Saidis tend to form a proportionately high percentage of new immigrants into Cairo. Two-thirds of the inhabitants of the urban quarters (67.2 per cent) are immigrants and the rate of room-crowding in these areas is markedly higher among immigrants than among Cairenes moving into these areas from other Cairo quarters (there is an average 5.6 persons per room for immigrants as compared to 4.4 persons per room for Cairenes). In the northern shanties, the province that provides the highest percentage of immigrants is al-Minufiyya, the most densely populated rural province of Egypt. But most other immigrants come from Upper Egypt, especially from the provinces of Asiyut, Minya, Qena, Suhag and Bani Suaif. Predictably, the main source of immigrants for the southern shanties are the Upper Egyptian provinces, especially Asiyut, Suhag, Qena and Minya. In terms of facilities, 35–43 per cent of the buildings had no running water, 29–44 per cent were not connected to sewage networks, 10–12 per cent were not connected to electricity grids, and most did not adhere to regulations regarding space, ventilation, lighting, etc.³⁸

Typical occupations among inhabitants of these quarters or shanties would be minor functionaries and civil servants, clerks, typists, teachers and minor accountants, mechanics, electricians, metal technicians, taxi and lorry drivers, grocers and skilled workers. They will usually have non-working wives and several children who are school or university students, or unemployed recent graduates. This is a typically conservative lower middle-class population, struggling desperately for upward mobility and frightened of downward mobility (as in the case of minor officials, clerks, and some merchants). Side by side, there exists a class of urban sub-proletariat in these shanties. They would be peddlers and itinerant vendors, horse cart drivers, construction and decoration casual workers, minor artisans in leather, plumbing and metals, car body repairs, servants and guards in government offices, factories, and houses etc. Their wives might work as servants, washer women, vegetable or offal vendors. Not only would recent immigrants in such quarters or shanties feel 'morally vulnerable' with regards to their families' 'honour', but also the dreadful housing, sanitation and transportation conditions would simply add insult to injury. Indeed, this is precisely the environment from which the militant Islamists of various shades including al-Jama'a have emerged. Apart from extensive networks of friendship and kinship relationships, they gain legitimacy by offering cheap social services in these quarters or shanties. As one scholar comments,

Such social services and economic assistance programs are common among the Islamist groups, including the al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya, and fill a void created by the government's inability to meet the needs of the growing population. A major reason for the popularity of Islamist groups is their services throughout both the poor districts of northern Egypt, where urbanization, population growth, and the elimination of government subsidies have left many families living in poverty, and southern Egypt, where the state historically has neglected the social needs of the population.³⁹

AL-JAMA'A AND VIOLENCE

The early 1990s witnessed a phenomenal upsurge in political/terrorist violence that has never before occurred in the history of Egypt. The vast majority of bombings, ambushes, assassinations and other armed incidents took place in the governorates of Upper and Central Egypt – in other words, Asiyut, Minya, Suhag and Qena. However, inhabitants of the capital were also among the victims, and not only when they travelled to the most affected provinces. Besides Imbaba, other districts such as Bulaq al-Daqrur, al-Haram, Shubra, Duqqi and Muhandisin were also affected. A majority of terrorist operations were organized and conducted by al-Jama'a.

According to figures published by the Ibn Khaldun Center in Cairo, political violence resulted in the death of 30 persons in 1991 alone, and thus in one year claimed as many lives as in the ten preceding years from 1981 to 1990. The number of victims grew rapidly over the following years. It amounted to 93 deaths in 1992, 266 deaths in 1993, 304 in 1994, 415 in 1995 and finally decreased to 187 in 1996. The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) recorded the same trend—93 deaths in 1992, 207 in 1993, 279 in 1994, 373 in 1995, 174 in 1996, 193 in 1997 and 39 in 1998.⁴⁰ According to figures published by the Ibn Khaldun Center in Cairo, the number of people 'arrested' for political reasons grew from around 8,000 in 1992 to 17,191 in 1993, before falling to 6,251 in 1994 and 3,630 in 1995 and then increasing slightly to 3,993 in 1996. Figures released by the EOHR indicate that the number of individuals 'detained' (not the number of arrests) for political reasons grew from around 5,000 in 1990 to more than 10,000 in 1992 and about 16,000 in 1995. By 1996, their number amounted to 16,708. At the beginning of 1998, EOHR estimated that the number of political detainees amounted to 15–20,000 persons.⁴¹

Al-Jama'a's violence, particularly against state authority in Egypt, needs to be located in terms of a national economic crisis, changing dimensions of the north–south relationship, changing configuration of classes in the south, and the historically accumulated grievances of southern against northern domination in all fields—cultural, political and economic. More precisely, the violent behaviour of the al-Jama'a can be understood within the larger dynamics of the Cairene cultural hegemony (what Johan Galtung calls cultural violence)⁴² that attempts to change the ways of the south, the structural violence, and the system of government regulations that maintain this hegemony. Given the southerners' lack of access to media, and the absence of constitutional right to protest against what they perceive as cultural violence and the structure that privileges northerners, or more specifically the Cairenes, the al-Jama'a has responded with direct action against both northern culture and the structure that oppresses them. This has led to direct violence on the part of the al-Jama'a against symbols of government in the south.

The sense of relative material and cultural deprivation among southerners deepened further with the overall national economic crisis during the 1980s and the early 1990s. According to the World Bank's report, in terms of Egypt's economy, the 1980s and early 1990s could be described as a 'lost decade and a half'. The rate of economic growth (GNP per capita growth) dropped from 7.4 per cent in 1981 to 1.8 per cent in 1992.⁴³ Furthermore, the new decade commenced with the significant fall of Egypt from the World Bank's group of lower middle-income countries to its group of low-income countries. World Bank statistics also indicated a rise in the rate of inflation (from 11.5 per cent in 1981 to 21.3 per cent by 1989) during this period, as well as a drop of 10 per cent in the real income of industrial workers, their share of value-addition declined from 54 per cent in 1970 to 35 per cent in 1989.⁴⁴

According to the Human Development Report for Egypt (HDR) for the year 1996, which refers to the most comprehensive study of changes in household consumption produced so far, poverty increased considerably between the fiscal years 1981/82 and 1990/91. In the rural areas, the proportion of individuals living beneath the lower poverty line determined by the authors of the study and thus defined as 'poor' increased in this period from 16.1 per cent to 28.6 per cent of the total population. In urban areas, it increased from 18.2 per cent to 20.3 per cent.⁴⁵ If the poverty line is put at a slightly higher consumption level, to include all those defined as 'moderately poor', the percentage increased from 26.9 per cent to 39.2 per cent in rural areas and from 33.5 per cent to 39 per cent in

urban areas.⁴⁶ Similarly a study conducted by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) concluded that the percentage of poor in the total population increased from 20.7 per cent in 1990/91 to 44.3 per cent in 1995/96. Thus, the two studies agreed on the general trend of impoverishment of an increasing part of the population during the 1990s.

If conservative calculations can be trusted, unemployment rose from 8.6 per cent in 1990 to at least 11.3 per cent in 1995. According to other sources, between 12 per cent and 17 per cent of the active population was unemployed in this period. Among politically sensitive groups, unemployment increased even more substantially. According to some sources, for school-leavers it rose in the period referred to from 24 per cent to 35 per cent; for holders of university degrees it rose from 16 per cent to 21 per cent. Indirectly, the increase in unemployment is corroborated by an analysis of the creation and destruction of jobs during the 1990s, that not only questions the ability of the private sector to create jobs but illustrates the weakness, even absence, of job creation in agriculture, manufacturing industries and construction and transport. In several industries, including manufacturing, agriculture, oil sector, construction, transport and communication, real salaries roughly halved between 1982/83 and 1994/95.⁴⁷

Since 1991, the government has been implementing an International Monetary Fund-sponsored economic reform programme that slashes or eliminates subsidies on many staples. Between 1990 and 1995, agriculture lost about 700,000 jobs.⁴⁸ Finally, law 96 of 1992 was fully implemented in October 1997 after a five-year transition period. The new law eliminated rent controls on much of the rented agricultural land. Such ceilings, in place since the days of Gamal Abdel Nasser, had protected poor farmers and limited landlords' profits from land ownership. The implementation of law 96 led to significant levels of rural unrest, particularly in the south. Clashes over land issues have been reported more widely in the governorates of Qena, Asiyut, Sharkia, Ismailia, Beni Suef, Beheira and Fayyum.⁴⁹ In the sugar-growing Upper Egyptian villages, many tenants were expelled from their land, while in the cotton-growing villages few tenants were expelled but many tenants left rented land in the first year after the full implementation of the law. The violent rural unrest, particularly in the south, against this law was carried out using the slogan, 'Land for Peace'.⁵⁰

The Mubarak regime chose to characterize the unrest as evidence of either outside trouble-makers or local Islamists. The *Fatwa* high committee of Al-Azhar, headed by the Grand Sheikh, adopted the government position that the new law was consistent with the

Islamic view that people had the right to own private property, but the al-Jama'a disagreed. It made several statements that any legislation that further impoverished the country's poor farmers must be opposed as un-Islamic.⁵¹

Asiyut and Minya in southern Egypt, both with a large percentage of Copts⁵² experienced an especially high share of localized communal disturbances since the late 1970s and into the 1990s, with al-Jama'a attacking Coptic churches, priests and property. The reason lies in the specific pattern of development of these provinces. Apart from the policy of the central government, which has traditionally treated the region with benign neglect, provincial capitals such as Asiyut and Minya represent the cut-off point in rural-urban discontinuities. These are the first areas in a predominantly traditional region to come under the impact of rapid urbanization, due to the opening of universities and increased rate of construction stimulated by the infusion of hard cash through the remittances of migrant workers in the Persian Gulf. Hence, they were/are the most likely places to experience social instabilities manifesting themselves in sectarian and political violence.

The total number of Copts killed between 1992 and 1997 is 80, 18 in 1992, 6 in 1993, 16 in 1994, 17 in 1996 and 22 in 1997.⁵³ The most recent violence against the Copts took place in January 2000 in the village of al-Kosheh (in Sohag, Upper Egypt). Twenty Copts and one Muslim were killed and tens of shops and houses were destroyed in three days of sectarian violence. The data suggest that anti-Coptic violence has still not acquired mass dimensions and is not in essence anti-minority. In this context, it is worth quoting Sheikh Rifa'ey Ahmad Taha,

Our position towards the Copts is clear, our people do not target them, unless they commit something, which classifies them with the governing regime, or unless they reveal conspiracies against Islam or the Muslims. Our target is the regime as it is represented in its upholders and supporters. As some say, as the *Dhimma* of the ruler who throws out Islamic law is not our *Dhimma*, and therefore is not an obligation on the Muslims in any way (people of *Dhimma* are people under the protection of the Muslims and the Muslim state).⁵⁴

Apart from implications of urban-rural dichotomies in southern Egypt, particularly in Asiyut and Minya, the anti-Coptic violence of al-Jama'a can be better understood in terms of the history of economic relationship between the *fallahin* and the Copts, the *fallahin* search for intermediary positions in the social hierarchy of the region by displacing the Copts as the intermediary class and is also due to the customary practice of revenge killings in southern Egypt.

From the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, the city of Asiyut witnessed some economic development, thanks to the British unification of Egypt and Sudan, which made the extensive camel trade between the two much easier. The main camel trade route from Sudan passed by Asiyut and a prosperous class developed in the city that traded in camels as well as in grains, dates and spices from Sudan. Thriving artisan industries also developed: ivory carving, woodworking, cane furniture, and woolen carpets. A significant percentage of the merchants were Copts who, under the new laws of the mid-nineteenth century, could also buy land. Such Copts also extended their commercial activities throughout the country, using the network of permanent and temporary Coptic emigrants to other Egyptian cities – especially Cairo, Alexandria and Suez – where they were involved in the trading of gold, grains, carpets, groceries and fruits, as well as in money-lending. European consulates were established in Asiyut and European businessmen as well as Greek traders preferred dealing with the Copts, who were more mobile and better at foreign languages. Some of the leading Coptic merchants acted as consular agents or representatives of European commercial interests in Upper Egypt, of which Asiyut was regarded as the regional capital. The Copts thus benefited the most under colonial state and this has bearings upon the Muslim–Copt relationship in modern times.

The Islamic radicals of Upper Egypt considered the Coptic concentration in Minya and Asiyut to be using its numerical strength to provocatively demonstrate its superiority. Zuhdi, a leader of al-Jihad that assassinated Sadat accused Copts of collecting arms, distributing *nazarean* propaganda, attacking Islam, and inciting youth to convert; of ringing church bells provocatively during the calls of the *muezzins*; organizing parades of scouts to demonstrate their strength, and distributing copies of New Testaments on buses and in coffee houses. These activities, in his eyes, justified radical violence against them. In Minya, they destroyed churches because church activities were becoming increasingly provocative. Sheikh Umar, Sheikh al-Sharawi and Shiekh Kishk (the firebrand blind fundamentalist preacher), all believe in Christian inferiority and interpret Biblical passages in a way that ridicules Christian beliefs, and use hate-filled rhetoric that inflames fanatic emotions. They have accused the Copts of complicity in the Crusades and in Zionism. For many radical Islamists, the Copts are the religious ‘other’, the mirror image, which is feared as the bearer of all negative characteristics: traitor, exploiter, collaborator, betrayer – a convenient scapegoat for all of life’s evils.

Radical violence against the Copts is also a part of their strategy to destabilize the political system and expose the government’s inability

to maintain control. However, with the widespread practice of revenge killing, it is not easy to isolate which of the murders is a simple revenge killing and which is politically motivated. Since southern Christians are not different from their Muslim counterparts in resorting to traditional revenge killing, the situation is further confused. Until there is sufficient data to reveal clearly which killings are motivated by revenge and which are politically motivated, one cannot claim with any degree of certainty that the al-Jama'a targets the Christian minority in the south because of their different religious belief. Rather, it is likely that local Christian notables can be the targets of the al-Jama'a since the aim of the group is to destroy the old intermediary system of notables and the symbols of their ally, the Cairo government, whether Christians or Muslims represent it. In an interview, a leader from al-Jama'a frankly admitted that 'what is not known is that many of the recent operations were supported by families in revenge for their children against the police and their transgressions'.⁵⁵

The early 1990s also witnessed a marked increase in violence against tourists. Since most of the tourist sites are located in Upper Egypt, such as in Abu Simbal, Aswan, Kom Ombo, Edfu, Esna, Luxor East Bank, Luxor West Bank, Dendera and Abydos, the tourists become an easy target of the Islamic militants including the al-Jama'a. The number of tourists killed increased from 1 in 1992 to 6 in 1993, 5 in 1994, 18 in 1996 and 76 in 1997.⁵⁶ The argument that the Islamists are driven by religious zeal and are thus hostile to Egypt's Pharaonic past and the European dress and customs of the tourists, has gained currency in both Western and Egyptian media. A close examination, however, suggests that members of the al-Jama'a are motivated more by the fact that tourism generates \$4 billion for a regime that reinforces an unfair arrangement of power. Tal'at Fu'ad Qasim, the leader of al-Jama'a and now living in exile, stated the following reasons for targeting the tourists:

First, striking at such an important source of income will be a major blow against the state. It does not cost us much to strike at this sector.

Second, it is a means by which prostitution and AIDS are spread by Jewish women tourists, and it is a source of all manner of depravities, not to mention being a means of collecting information on the Islamic movement. For these reasons we believe tourism is an abomination that must be destroyed. And it is one of our strategies for destroying the government.⁵⁷

If the Pharaonic monuments and even the tourists were considered a threat to Islam, the al-Jama'a would have attacked them earlier. The

movement has matured sufficiently to realize the importance of tourist revenues in maintaining the regime. The al-Jama'a's violence against tourists had resulted in 50 per cent cuts in hotel, cruise and sightseeing bookings during 1992 and Egypt airlines faced a revenue drop of 20 per cent. The earnings from tourism, which had so far been accounting for about \$3 billion a year, that is, 8 per cent of Egypt's foreign exchange earnings had declined by 35 per cent. Indeed, tourism was the only field of activity in which growth was expected to exceed the threshold of 10 per cent. The al-Jama'a thus considers tourist sites legitimate targets.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the argument that the al-Jama'a has arisen in southern Egypt through a combination of social and economic factors pertinent to its local dynamics and setting. The Islamists' reinterpretation of Islam and their emphasis on equality between Arab and non-Arab is meant to undermine the authority of the local power structure (sustained and perpetuated by the north-dominated central government) that considers tribal affiliation more important than wealth or education as the criterion for social status and recognition. In this sense the al-Jama'a signifies a socio-political movement to fight for social equality, justice and dignity as well as to have a legitimate share in the power arrangement of local and provincial administration.

The terrorist activities conducted by the al-Jama'a in the south and elsewhere, particularly in the early 1990s, need to be understood not in terms of a function of al-Jama'a's Islamic ideology, but in terms of the totality of context of historical neglect of the southern region, the cultural and economic dominance of the north and deteriorating social and economic conditions further aggravated by the policies of *infatih* (initiated by the Sadat regime and intensified by the Mubarak regime which resulted in the undoing of the gains accruing to poor *fallahin* during the Nasser regime).

Given the repressive character of Egyptian regimes, the absence of constitutional mode of protest and the predominant influence of Islam in the Arab society including Egypt, the al-Jama'a, like many other Islamic militant groups, is left with no alternative but to use violent/terrorist methods in the name of Islam to achieve their socio-economic and political objectives. Moreover, government control of media outlets and the absence of any Sai'di media make the mosque the only means for the southerners to communicate with each other. These factors give southern grievances their Islamic

colouring. However, what is Islamic for al-Jama'a is generally in accordance with the southern customs and traditions. Thus, by identifying the southern character of the al-Jama'a and pointing out its differences from northern Islamic movements like Muslim Brotherhood and the Jihad, one sees that the Islamic movements of Egypt are formed by different causes and have different agendas.

There is a general decline in al-Jama'a's terrorist activities in recent years. Since the Luxor massacre (1997), no major violent activity by the al-Jama'a has been reported. However, the fact remains that as long as the government continues to exclude the al-Jama'a from the political process and to depend on the support of the local notables hailing from Arab and *ashraf* tribes, the al-Jama'a will continue to use violence as a means to achieve its objectives. The conflict in the south is not about radical change or how Egypt should be governed, but rather about who should be the 'second stratum': those from the minor tribes who received free education under Nasser or the traditional tribal leaders and landowners. It seems that given the social hierarchy of the south and the alliance between the state and the local notables, the al-Jama'a is likely to limit itself to low-intensity conflict in the south—namely intermittent attacks on symbols of government.

NOTES

1. The term Islamic terrorism is not synonymous to Islamic fundamentalism/neo-fundamentalism/revivalism/resurgence/radicalism/extremism/conservatism. Each terminology has a specific connotation. None of the terms connote that terrorism is inherent in the ideological structure of Islam. Second, all fundamentalist organizations are not necessarily terrorist organizations and vice-versa. However, militant fundamentalist organizations retain the tendency to degenerate into a terrorist outfit depending upon the context and its nature of evolution. Here Islamic terrorism only refers to the 'violent acts committed by a group for the particular political ends in the name of Islam'. For a discussion of the problem of defining terrorism, see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press 1998) pp.13–44.
2. Nachman Tal, 'Islamic Terrorism in Egypt: The Challenge and Response', *Strategic Assessment* 1/2 (March 1998) p.2.
3. Hisham Mubarak, 'What does the Gamma'a Islammiya Want? An Interview with Talat al-Fuad Qasim', in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays From Middle East Report* (London: I.B. Tauris 1997) p.320.
4. For details, see Mamoun Fandy, 'Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?', *Middle Eastern Journal* 48/4 (Autumn 1994) pp.607–8.
5. Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London: I.B. Tauris 2001) p.132.

6. Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Polity in the Arab World* (London: Routledge 1991) p.164.
7. See Gaurav Datt, Dean Jolliffe and Manohar Sharma ‘What Do We Know About Poverty in Egypt? An Analysis of Household Survey Data for 1997’, International Food Policy Research Institute (Washington DC: 1997) pp.29–32.
8. For details, see Jeffrey A. Nedoroscik, ‘Extremist Groups in Egypt’, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14/2 (Summer 2002) pp.68–73.
9. Ibid. p.68.
10. Ibid.
11. Ayubi (note 6) p.165.
12. On the intermediary role of the rural middle class, see Leonard Binder, *In a Moment of Enthusiasm: Political Power and the Second Stratum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978).
13. Alian Roussillion, ‘Republican Egypt Interpreted: Revolution and Beyond’, in Martin W. Daly (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Vol 2: Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998) pp.334–93.
14. See John Waterbury, *Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy Of Two Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983).
15. For details, see Hamied Ansari, *Egypt: The Stalled Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1986) pp.97–140.
16. Ibid. pp.195–209.
17. See Robert Spring Borg, ‘State–Society Relations in Egypt: The Debate Over Owner–Tenant Relations’, *The Middle East Journal* 45/2 (Spring 1991) p.245.
18. Fandy (note 4) p.614.
19. Ibid. p.620.
20. Ibid.
21. Quoted in Ibid. p.620.
22. Quoted in Ibid. p.621.
23. Sheikh Rifa’eh Ahmed Taha, ‘An Official From Jama’a Islamiya States: The Islamic State in Egypt is Approaching’, (www.islam.org.au) Taha pp.2–3.
24. Rifaat Sid Ahmed, ‘The Islamists, the Regime and Terrorism’, *Middle East Affairs Journal* 2/1 (Spring/Summer) pp.71–82.
25. Fandy (note 4) p.609.
26. Ibid.
27. Nedoroscik (note 8) p.63.
28. See Stanely Reed, ‘The Battle For Egypt’, *Foreign Affairs* 72/4 (Sept.–Oct.1993) p.102.
29. For details, see Raymond William Baker, *Sadat and After: Struggles for Egypt’s Political Soul* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1990) pp.243–70.
30. Ansari (note 25) p.131.
31. Taha (note 23) p.4.
32. Nedorosick (note 8) p.63.
33. Fandy (note 4) p.610.
34. Taha (note 25) p.5.
35. Fandy (note 4) p.610.

36. In addition to Sai'di urban areas, Islamists have established clinics in the poor sections of Cairo, predominantly inhabited by Saidis. Based on her field research, Janine Astrid Clark found that up to 35 per cent of the cases treated in some Islamic clinics are Christian. See, Janine Astrid Clark, 'The Role of Islamic Grassroots in the Process of Democratization in Egypt: a Case Study of Health Clinics in Cairo', Paper presented at the 1993 MESA Conference, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina Nov. 1993.
37. Fandy (note 4) p.619.
38. See Ayubi (note 6) p.169.
39. Deborah Pugh, 'Upper Egypt', *The Christian Science Monitor* (May 1994) pp.12–13.
40. See Kienle (note 5) pp.134–5.
41. Ibid. p.93.
42. Johan Galtung defines cultural violence as 'those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence — exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical and formal science (logic, mathematics) — that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. See Johan Galtung, 'Cultural Violence', *Journal of Peace Research* 27/3 (1990) pp.291–305.
43. *World Bank Developmental Handbook Report* (Washington DC 1994) p.162.
44. Ibid. 174.
45. Government of Egypt, Institute of National Planning, *Egypt: Human Development Report 1996* (Cairo, 1996) pp.29–32.
46. P. W. Cardiff, *The 1995/1996 Household Income, Expenditure and Consumption Survey, Final Analysis Report* (USAID and US Bureau of Census, 1997).
47. Kienle (note 5) p.149.
48. Ray Bush, 'Land Reform and Counter Revolution', in Ray Bush (ed.), *Counter-Revolution in Egypt's Countryside: Land and Farmers in the Era of Economic Reform* (London: Zed Books 2002) p.16.
49. Land Centre for Human Rights, Cairo, 'Farmer Struggle Against Law 96 of 1992', in Bush (note 50) p.134. For the implication of law 96 and its devastating impact on Sai'dis, see, Ray Bush (note 50) particularly chs 7, 8.
50. Reem Saad, 'Egyptian Politics and the Tenancy Law', in Bush (note 50) p.116.
51. Bush (note 50) p.18.
52. Copts are Egypt's largest religious minority, constituting at least 10 per cent of the population or about 6 million out of 64 million. Most Copts live in Upper Egypt, the largest community being in the province of Asiyut. They also tend to concentrate in bigger cities and towns such as Cairo, Alexandria, Asiyut, Minya and Sohag. They are represented in all social classes in Egypt, with a considerable number in the middle and upper classes. See Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt* (London: Minority Rights Group 1996).
53. Kienle (note 5) p.135.
54. Taha (note 23) pp.7–8.
55. Ibid. p.3.
56. Kienle (note 5) p.135.
57. Mubarak (note 3) p.321.