REACTION ESSAY

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Conferences on the Muslim Brotherhood and related Islamist movements generally address dynamics in just one or two countries. This project, though, enabled me to consider in a detailed way how the twin shocks of Egypt's 2013 coup and the rise of ISIS affected Brotherhood analogue movements spanning Morocco to Malaysia. This broad survey emphasized to me, more than ever, the sheer diversity of these movements and the primacy of structural and contextual factors in shaping their evolution and responses.

What we have here is a multiplicity of Islamisms. Just as scholars have begun exploring the concept of "multiple secularisms," we have much work to do in looking comparatively at various iterations of Islamism, and the factors that spur Brotherhood-inspired movements to rebalance religion and politics in very different ways from one socio-political context to another.

A major takeaway for me was the realization that we as scholars and analysts need to reflect more deeply on the comparative costs and benefits of *partification*, or the process of morphing what were originally religious movements into "normal" political parties. For many social movements—unionists, feminists, Islamists, etc.—the choice of whether, when, and how to become a political party incurs various costs and benefits depending on the political context. I was especially struck by Avi Spiegel and Steven Brooke's papers on [Morocco](#) and [Egypt](#).Brooke suggests that the Sissi regime's crackdown is forcing the Brotherhood to move away both from further investment in electoral politics as well as its more traditional club goods model of above the ground, non-discriminatory service provision. Writing on Morocco, Spiegel asks us to consider whether non-electoral forms of activism, represented by movements like Al-Adl wal-Ihsan, may in fact be more effective or advantageous than the party political structure we associate with Islamist groups like the Justice and Development Party (PJD).

I found Spiegel's encouragement to focus more on non-electoral activism quite prescient. Indeed, it has often seemed to me that, as political scientists, we assume the superiority

of *hizb* (party) over *haraka* (movement)—the notion that, as movements become more sophisticated, they naturally develop into parties, and that parties are more effective, evolved counterparts to movements. That's not necessarily the case. As many of the papers and interventions in this project demonstrate, the extent to which Islamist groups invest in *haraka* (movement activities, often including religious study groups and "club goods" model service provision) vs. *hizb*(party activities, including mobilization for electoral competition and bargaining with other political actors) varies depending on the carrots and sticks available in different political contexts. *Haraka* and *hizb* are not totally separate categories—indeed, for social movements of many stripes, movement and party activities melt into one another. But the extent to which movements, particularly confessional movements, choose to invest in party style organization over "movement" activism is a fascinating question for comparative researchers, and one that I think has been quite undertheorized in the existing literature on Islamist movements.

These questions have real relevance for my own case study, [Tunisia's center-right Islamist Ennahda](#) a party whose internal dynamics I've been studying since 2011. Unlike [the Egyptian Brotherhood](#) and most of its regional analogues, Ennahda did not have the powerful network of social service provision typically associated with Islamist movements. The party began as a religiously oriented movement inspired by the 1970s *sahwa* (revival), and developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s as an increasingly religio-political actor whose roots were in theological study circles and religiously oriented community-building activities. Regime repression during the 1990s and 2000s, however, made it virtually impossible for Ennahda to operate openly in Tunisia, curtailing its ability to develop and sustain a strong organization of *haraka*-oriented activism. Ennahda's activities during the 1990s and early 2000s focused mainly on providing limited, underground forms of support to its beleaguered activists in Tunisia.

This absence of a strong, above ground system of social service provision, however, proved partially advantageous. When Ennahda re-entered the political scene following Tunisia's January 2011 revolution, it came back as an essentially political party, nimble and unburdened by the demands of a competing parallel movement. This allowed Ennahda to act more flexibly and pragmatically than Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), for example, which functioned as a constrained auxiliary to the larger Muslim Brotherhood movement.

The writings and discussions we've shared in the Rethinking Political Islam project have also inspired me to think more deeply about two other issues: the oversimplification of "hawks" vs. "doves" dichotomies, and the importance of generational tensions in magnifying certain intra-party cleavages and shaping group recruitment.

As David Patel pointed out in [his paper on the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood](#), and as many other contributors echoed in their writing, traditional modes of analyzing Islamist groups' intra-party tensions often fail to capture the lived realities of the actors themselves. Patel focused on the importance of ethnic cleavages (Palestinian-Jordanian vs. "indigenous" Jordanian) and the importance of political considerations—namely to what extent the Brotherhood should engage in politics on the monarchy's terms—in shaping intra-party tensions and cleavages. In this respect,

the main sources of disagreement between Jordanian Brothers don't seem as closely linked to religious or "ideological" divides as previously assumed. Traditional dichotomizing methods of discussing intra-party Islamist tensions, which often employ the snappily illustrative terms "hawks vs. doves" and assume religious or theological issues will often provoke the most important disagreements, often elide Islamists' lived realities.

This certainly echoes my own experiences with Ennahda leaders and supporters throughout Tunisia. While religious issues have definitely sparked intra-party disagreement, I've been fascinated to discover that—more often—the major sticking points for leaders and supporters have been related to political concessions, principally concessions made on "revolutionary," or revolution-related, issues. These include the leadership's opposition to a proposed electoral exclusion law that was hugely popular with Ennahda's base, its decision not to run a presidential candidate in 2014, and its strategy of not just partnering with its major anti-Islamist rival, Nidaa Tunis, but seemingly supporting certain Nidaa policy initiatives that would erode the pursuit of transitional justice, an extremely important issue to Ennahda's base.

Lastly, I found reflections on the importance of generational tensions—raised most powerfully by Raphaël Lefèvre in his paper on Syria and Avi Spiegel in his work on Morocco—worthy of more sustained reflection. Scholarly work and journalistic reporting on Islamist movements often reflects the perceptions of a handful of those movements' national leaders – usually older men. Yet, young people, male and female, are at the heart of those movements' efforts to recruit and to refresh and sustain their activities moving forward. As my paper on Tunisia discussed, generational tensions—concerning religious and revolutionary concessions—have been one of the most prominent axes of disagreement inside Ennahda over the past four years. The party's leadership acknowledges it has paid insufficient attention to developing a renewed educational curriculum for young recruits, and that it has lost members—especially young members—as a result of some of the party's concessions.

About this Series:

The *Rethinking Political Islam* series is an innovative effort to understand how the developments following the Arab uprisings have shaped—and in some cases altered—the strategies, agendas, and self-conceptions of Islamist movements throughout the Muslim world. The project engages scholars of political Islam through in-depth research and dialogue to provide a systematic, cross-country comparison of the trajectory of political Islam in 12 key countries: Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Libya, Pakistan, as well as Malaysia and Indonesia.

This is accomplished through three stages:

- A **working paper** for each country, produced by an author who has conducted on-the-ground research and engaged with the relevant Islamist actors.

- A **reaction essay** in which authors reflect on and respond to the other country cases.

- A **final draft** incorporating the insights gleaned from the months of dialogue and discussion.