ARCHIVIO ISTITUZIONALE
DELLA RICERCA

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

Egyptian Sufis and the State of Medina: A Case Study on Islamic Civil State

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:
Giuseppe Cecere (2021). Egyptian Sufis and the State of Medina: A Case Study on Islamic Civil State. RIVISTA DI STUDI INDO-MEDITERRANEI, 11, 1-20.

Availability:
This version is available at: https://hdl.handle.net/11585/861400 since: 2022-02-20

Published:

DOI: http://doi.org/

Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (https://cris.unibo.it/).
When citing, please refer to the published version.

(Article begins on next page)

11 November 2026

Rivista di Studi Indo-Mediterranei XI (2021)
Plurilingual e-journal of literary, religious, historical studies. website: http://kharabat.altervista.org/index.html
Rivista collegata al Centro di Ricerca in "Filologia e Medievistica Indo-Mediterranea" (FIMIM) Università di Bologna
cod. ANCE (Cineca-Miur) E213139 ISSN 2279-7025

Egyptian Sufis and the State of Medina: A Case Study on Islamic Civil State

di Giuseppe Cecere

Abstract. In the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring' and the 'Tahir Revolution' (2011), Sufis (Muslim mystics) proved to be still a major intellectual and social force in contemporary Egypt, and many of the official and non-official Sufi Ways (*ṭuruq*; sing. *ṭarīqa*) active in the country proposed their own answers to the "demands of the Revolution" (*maṭālib al-thawra*). In this framework, the State-run Supreme Council for Sufi Ways was able to join a flexible "day by day" tactics not to be overcome by the revolutionary process - thus opening up to dialogue with different political players - as well as to elaborate a long-term strategy, mostly in cooperation with al-Azhar, in order to play a leading role in shaping post-revolutionary Egypt.The present paper aims at paving the way for future in-depth analysis of such complex process, by presenting a single but crucially important case study: the debate on the best form of State in Islam that was published in Al-taṣawwuf al-islāmī ("Islamic Sufism"), the official monthly magazine of the Supreme Sufi Council, in such a delicate moment as July 2012, when the political scene was apparently dominated by their longtime enemies the Muslim Brothers. This will hopefully provide some fresh insights into the Egyptian Sufi Council's long-term ideological orientations, with special focus on ideas on what should be the proper relationships between "religion" and "world" (*dīn wa-dunyā*) in Islam.

Keywords. Egypt, Sufism, Supreme Council for Sufi Ways, Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi groups, constitutional debates in post-revolutionary Egypt (2011-2014), notions of "civil State", "Islamic State", "secular State".

1. Introduction

In the stormy couple of years following the "Tahrir Revolution" of 2011, Sufis (Muslim mystics) proved to be still a major intellectual and social force in contemporary Egypt[1]. Far from keeping aloof from political conflicts, many of the some eighty official and of the uncountable non-official Sufi Ways (*ṭuruq*; sing. *ṭarīqa*) proposed their own answers to the "demands of the Revolution" (*maṭālib al-thawra*).

In this framework, the State-run Supreme Council for Sufi Ways, i.e. the governmental body in charge of representing and supervising the officially recognized Sufi groups in Egypt as well as to recognize new groups, was able to adopt a flexible "day by day" tactics not to be overcome by the revolutionary process - thus opening up to dialogue with different political players - as well as to elaborate a long-term strategy, mostly in cooperation with al-Azhar, the central Islamic institution in Egypt and one of the most reputed and influential Sunni Islamic institutions worldwide, in order to play a leading role in shaping post-revolutionary Egypt[2].

With the aim to pave the way for future in-depth analysis of such complex process, the present paper focuses on a single but crucially important issue: a debate on the best form of State in Islam that was published in *Al-taṣawwuf al-islāmī* ("Islamic Sufism"), the official monthly magazine of the Supreme Sufi Council, in such a delicate moment as July 2012, when the political scene was apparently dominated by their longtime enemies the Muslim Brothers.

Analyzing how *Al-taṣawwuf al-islāmī* was dealing with the issue of the State in those crucial times will provide us with some fresh insights into the Egyptian Sufi Council's long-term ideological orientations. In particular, this might contribute to better understand how "religion" and "world" (*dīn wa-dunyā*) are inextricably linked even in the discourse of Egyptian Islamic authorities.

---

1 In the last few years, the conventional definition of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) as "Islamic mysticism" has been challenged by some scholars following "post-colonial" and "anti-Orientalistic" approaches, on allegations that a notion such as mysticism has an outward orientation definitely at odds with the active role that most Sufis played in history. For an excellent presentation of these positions, see Hofer 2015, 3–7. On the other hand, as Sara Sviri pointed out, "modern Arabic has borrowed the term *taṣawwuf* in rendering what in European languages is named mysticism" (2012, 19). So, she argues, what is required is not a "neologism" to define Sufism but a broader understanding of the very notion of "mysticism" as "a current within religions and cultures associated with voluntary efforts aimed at gaining an intensified experience of the sacred" (*Ibid.,* 20). In a similar vein, the prominent Egyptian philosopher and Sufi intellectual Abū l-Wafā l-Taftāzāni (d. 1994), who proudly emphasized the worldly dimension of Sufism as a fundamental and distinctive element of Islamic spirituality, willingly used the word taṣawwuf as an equivalent for "mysticism", including with reference to the non-Islamic context (see in particular Taftāzāni 1991, 15–19; 1996, 47). It is on these grounds that the definition of Sufism as "Islamic mysticism" is used in the present paper.

2 In this framework, a most influential initiative by the Shaykh and the scholarly body of al-Azhar was the issuing of a Declaration on fundamental freedoms (*al-ḥurriyyāt al-asāsiyya*), namely freedom of creed, of opinion and expression, of scientific research, of literary and artistic creation, in early January 2012. Al-Azhar al-Sharīf, Maktab Shaykh al-Azhar, *Bayān al-Azhar wa-l-muthaqqafīn ('an manzumat al-hurriyyat al-asasiyya).* Mashyakhat al-Azhar, 14 Ṣafar 1433 / January, 8th, 2012.

2. The immediate context: the Muslim Brothers and the call for an (Islamic) "civil State" in post-revolutionary Egypt.

During the year 2012, the Muslim Brothers got control over the Egyptian political institutions for the first time in history. After winning the parliamentary elections in November 2011- January 2012[3] and thus acquiring a leading role in the process of drafting a new Constitution for post-revolutionary Egypt, they won the presidential elections in late June 2012[4] (roughly in the same days when issue 404 of *Al-taṣawwuf al-islāmī* was under press). This unprecedented political situation caused, among many other things, a hotly inflamed debate on the notion of "civil State" (*dawla madaniyya*), a formula that the Muslim Brothers presented as an alternative to both "secular" and "religious" State, but that was far from being unanimously defined either among scholars or among political actors[5].

Needless to say, different interpretations of the notion of "civil State" might have had dramatically different effects on the process of constitutional change, especially with regard to the relationships between "divine" and "positive" law. In particular, if in the immediate aftermaths of the revolution secularists had appeared strong enough to call for a removal of the controversial indication of "the principles of Islamic Law (*mabādi' al-sharī'a al-islāmiyya*)" as "the main source of legislation", that had been introduced in the 1971 Constitution (Article 2) and reinforced with an amendment in 1980, the now hegemonic Muslim Brothers, while sponsoring the idea of "civil State", were calling for making the reference to Islamic *sharī'a* even more binding and for providing the Islamic scholarly body of al-Azhar with an official role in the process of law-making[6]. A situation that speaks volumes on how "flexible" such notion of "civil State" could be in the eyes of its supporters.

---

3 The first parliamentary elections of post-Mubārak era were held in different rounds from November 2011 to January 2012. The final results were as follows: Freedom and Justice (Muslim Brothers) 43.8 %, seats 218 (plus 9 other seats to small parties joing FJ in the "Democratic Alliance"); Al-Nur (Salafis) and other Salafi-inspired parties 24,90% , seats 124; the New Wafd (Liberals) 8,43%, seats 40; the Egyptian Bloc (Left) 6,62%, seats 33; other parties and independent candidates 74 seats. Total seats 498. See «Egypt: 2011/2012 People's Assembly election results», *African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project*. EISA (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa). Last accessed online December, 21st, 2021. https://www.eisa.org/wep/egy2012results1.htm . A detailed nalysis of 2011-2012 electoral process is provided in a collection the of papers published online by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: «2012 Egypt Parliamentary Elections». https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/01/22/2012-egyptian-parliamentary-elections-pub-58800#ParticipatingPoliticalParties

4 The Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Muḥammad Mursī was elected in the second round (held on the 16th and 17th of June, 2012) with 51,73% of votes, against the former Minister of Civil Aviation Aḥmad Shafīq, who received 48,27% of votes. See: «Egypt: 2012 Presidential election results», *African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project*. EISA (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa). Last accessed online December, 21st, 2021. https://www.eisa.org/wep/egy2012results.htm

5 For recent analysis of the notion of *civil State* in the discourse of the Muslim Brothers, see Lavie 2017.

6 This objective was "translated" into Art. 4 of the 2012 Constitution as follows: "The noble Azhar is an independent Islamic institution of higher learning. It handles all its affairs without outside interference. It leads the call into Islam and assumes responsibility for religious studies and the Arabic language in Egypt and the world. *The Azhar's Body of Senior Scholars is to be consulted in matters pertaining to Islamic law (sharia).* The state guarantees the financial means needed to fulfill these tasks. The Sheikh of the Azhar is independent and cannot be dismissed from his position. The law determines the process by which he is selected from among the

3. ***A* longue durée *perspective: Sufis and Politics in Egyptian History.***

Soon after the January 25th revolution, Egyptian Sufis were in the spotlight for contrasts with Salafi Islamist groups, some of which were involved in several attacks against Sufi saints' shrines across the country, as part of their fight against the cult of the saints and other core aspects of Sufism[7]. In this framework, the Muslim Brothers, once expressing fierce anti-Sufi attitudes, tried to be acknowledged as "mediators" between the two parts, though without much success[8].

Confrontation with the Salafis paved the way to a large debate on the possibility for Sufi groups to unite around a common political agenda for post-revolutionary Egypt. The controversial Sufi shaykh Muḥammad 'Alā' al-Dīn Abū al-'Azā'im, master of the tariqa 'Azamiyya and leader of a "dissident" group of tariqas contesting the Supreme Sufi Council's

---

members of the Body of Senior Scholars" (Egypt's Constitution of 2012. Consulted online: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2012.pdf?lang=en. Last accessed on November, 5th, 2021.

The now ruling Constitution, approved in 2014, abolished the reference to consultation of al-Azhar in the process of lawmaking, whereas confirming most of the other provisions introduced in 2012. The new formulation of the article on al-Azhar (now Art. 7) is the following: "Al-Azhar is an independent Islamic scientific institution, with exclusive competence over its own affairs. It is the main reference for religious sciences and Islamic affairs. It is responsible for calling to Islam, as well as, disseminating religious sciences and the Arabic language in Egypt and all over the world. The State shall provide sufficient financial allocations thereto so that it can achieve its purposes. Al-Azhar's Grand Sheikh is independent and may not be dismissed. The Law shall regulate the method of appointing the Grand Sheikh from amongst the members of Council of Senior Scholars".

7 Several attacks on Sufi shrines were reported in the press in the aftermaths of the revolution, especially in the first half of the year 2011. See for instance (N.A.), «Destruction of shrines by Salafis triggers protests and condemnation», *The Egypt Independent*, April 2nd, 2011. Last accessed online November, 27th, 2021. https://www.egyptindependent.com/destruction-shrines-salafis-triggers-protests-and-condemnation/; see also Ahmed Osman Zaki, «Sufis feel pressure as Salafi power grows», *The Egypt Independent*, April, 5th, 2011. Last accessed online November, 30th, 2020. http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sufis-feel-pressure-salafi-power-grows On Salafi specifically political polemics against Sufis for having been allegedly too close to the ousted President Mubāarak, see: Shaimaa Fayed, Abdel Rahman Youssef, "Egypt's Sufis see Islamist threat after Mubarak", *Reuters*, June, 14, 2011. Last accessed online December, 23rd, 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-egypt-sufism/egypts-sufis-see-islamist-threat-after-mubarak-idUKTRE75D4S920110614?edition-redirect=in; Nashwa Farouk, "Sufis said to have supported Mubarak clash with Salafis", *Egypt Votes, 25 October 2011*. Last accessed online December, 7th, 2021. HTTP://WWW.EGYPTVOTES.ORG/EN/SOCIETY/ITEM/180-SUFIS-SAID-TO-HAVE-SUPPORTED-MUBARAK-CLASH-WITH-SALAFIS.HTML

8 In April 2011, after the first attacks on Sufi shrines, Dr. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Barr, an *'ālim* (scholar in Islamic sciences) and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Executive Bureau, condemned the attacks with a formula which opened up to partial recognition of the social value of shrines though refusing them any religious value: "Although the shrines did not represent any religious value it was obligatory to at least respect the sacredness of those who have long died and are buried". Al-Saeed Abaddi, "MB condemns the demolition of shrines", *Ikhwan Web*, April, 3, 2011. Last accessed online September, 12th, 2012. http://ikhwanmisr.net/article.php?id=28333

In a similar vein, a few days later, the Muslim Brothers of the Governorate of Beheira (Buḥayra), one of the areas concerned by shrine destructions, promoted a conference for 'reconciliation' between Sufis and Salafis. Although the conference did not lead to the signature of any conciliation document between the parties, the move was partly successful in presenting the MB as a 'centrist' Islamist group working for the unity of all Muslims. See (N.A.), "Sufis and Salafis Unappeased", *Ikhwan Web*, Last accessed online May, 19th, 2012. http://ikhwanmisr.net/article.php?id=28382

leadership[9], went so far as to launch a political party, the *Ḥizb al-Taḥrīr* ("the Liberation Party"), in which he hoped to gather all the estimated "fifteen million Egyptian Sufis"[10].

If Shaykh Abū al-'Azā'im's political calculations were a failure, only a few Sufi masters responding to his call, he was not overestimating, however, the demographic importance and political relevance of the multifarious "Sufi universe" in Egypt. Though not uniting into one political movement, several Sufi groups did actually provide their support to different parties and candidates both in the parliamentary and the presidential elections, usually standing against Islamist political groups[11]. Thus, they were able to play a significant role in the new context determined by the January 2011 Revolution, included in 2012 Presidential elections and in 2013 campaigns culminating in the huge popular uprising, backed by the Army, which led to the ousting of Islamist President Muḥammad Mursī.

All this came as no surprise in the light of both ancient and recent history of Egypt. In fact, Sufis have been deeply involved in the religious, social and political life of the country from at least sixth century AH /twelfth century AD until nowadays[12]. From Ayyubid times onwards, "legalist" Sufi trends inspired by the teachings of such masters as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 910) have been part and parcel of the system of Islamic sciences in Egypt, to such an extent that Sufism "in the line of al-Junayd" was at times described, even in the teachings of al-Azhar, as the fifth Sunni juridical "school" (*madhhab*) in addition to the Shāfi'ī, Mālikī, Ḥanbalī and Ḥanafī schools[13]. This was very much in line with traditional attitudes expressed by the large majority of Sufi masters across centuries.

In spite of still widespread representations of an alleged inherent opposition between 'juridical' and 'mystical' dimensions of Islam, Sufi masters frequently indicated one's compliance with "outward" prescriptions of *sharī'a* as the touchstone of the authenticity of his/her "inward" spiritual experience. On a deeper level, they also theorized the fundamental agreement and complementarity between mystical sciences and other Islamic sciences, on the grounds of a well-known *ḥadīth* in which Prophet Muḥammad is interrogated by the Angel Gabriel on the three key aspects of Islamic religion:

---

9 In 2010, President Mubarak appointed Shaykh 'Abd al-Hādī al-Qaṣabī to the office of President of the Supreme Sufi Council, although the majority of the Sufi masters had expressed their preference for Shaykh Abū al-'Azā'im. This spurred a legal and political controversy, which led some tariqas to unite around Shaykh Abū al-'Azā'im into sort of an "alternative" Sufi Council. On the beginning of the controversy, see: (N.A.), *26 shaykh ṭarīqa ya'tariḍūna 'alā ta'yīn al-Qaṣabī ra'īs[an] li-l-majlis al-a'lā' lil-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya* (="26 Masters of Tariqas Contest the Appointment of al-Qaṣabī as President of the Supreme Council for Sufi Ways"), *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, 11/04/2010 (in Arabic). Last accessed online October, 31st, 2021. https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/40205

10 On this political experience, see in particular «The Egyptian Tahrir Party» in *Parties and Movements*, Jadaliyya and Ahram Online, 13 December 2011. Last accessed online December, 15th, 2021. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24826/Egyptian-Tahrir-Party. As for the estimated number of the Egyptian Sufis, fifteen million was a recurrent indication in the media at the time.

11 See, for instance, (N.A.), «Sufi Orders to choose presidential candidate on Sunday», *Al-Masry al-Youm*, May, 1st, 2012.

12 Interestingly enough, the first attestation of the word *ṣūfī* in the Egyptian context occurs in a political and military context, at quite an early date. The historian al-Kindī (283-530/897-964) narrates a politico-religious rebellion against the governor of Alexandria, in 814 V.E., led by some ascetic warriors who were taking part in jihad on the Byzantine Empire. Those fervent *mujāhidūn* were labeled as *al-ṣūfiyya*, and their leader was known as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣūfī. See al-Kindī 1912, 162. See also Jāsim, 1994, 64-65; Knysh 2000, 39. On the complex relationship between Sufism and jihad in the formative and medieval period, see Bonner 2006, Bonner 2013 (1996), Cecere 2018 (esp. 45.46, 55-57).

13 See Delanoue 1982, vol. 1, 117-118.

- *islām* (voluntary submission to God's will in acts of adoration and in relations with other human beings), which Muḥammad defines as "professing that there is no divinity but God, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God (*rasūl Allāh*), and accomplishing the regular prayer (*ṣalāt*), the legal alms (*zakāt*), the fast of the month of Ramaḍān (ṣiyām Ramaḍān) and performing the pilgrimage to Makka (al-bayt lit.: "the House", i.e. "the House of God") for those who have the possibility";
- *imān* (inner faith, belief), which Muḥammad defines as "believing in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and believing in God's decree (*al-qadar*) be it good or bad (from a human limited perspective)";
- *iḥsān* (spiritual perfection), which Muḥammad defines as "serving (*ta'bud*; also in the sense of worshipping) God as if you were seeing Him, because if you are not seeing Him, He sees you (always)"[14].

According to an interpretation that is traditional among Sufis, and that in recent times has been masterly expounded in a work on the essentials of the Sufi path by prominent Islami scholar Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī Jum'a (*shaykh* of the Ṭarīqa Siddīqiyya Shādhiliyya and former Grand Mufti of the Republic of Egypt), each of these three aspects of the Islamic religion is the object of a specific branch of knowledge: namely, juridical sciences (*'ilm al-fiqh*) are concerned with *islām*, the "science(s) of divine Unity" (*'ilm al-tawḥīd*; a notion which can approximately be rendered with 'theology') is concerned with *imān,* and mystical sciences (*'ilm al-taṣawwuf*) are concerned with *iḥsān*[15]. In this framework, no real opposition is possible between mystical, juridical and theological dimensions of Islam, provided that all of these dimensions are lived in a correct way.

On these grounds, Sufi masters and tariqas have deeply interacted with political authorities for centuries, thus contributing a great deal in shaping religious beliefs, juridical doctrines and social practices in the country[16]. In such framework, especially in the last two centuries, i.e. from the time of Muḥammad 'Alī (ruled 1805-1848) onwards, Sufi groups have undergone a process of increasing control by the State[17]. This resulted into the establishment, in 1895, of the abovementioned "Supreme Council for Sufi Ways" (*al-majlis al-a'lā' lil-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya*)[18]. The State intervention in the life of Sufi groups continued through a series of other measures and has culminated in the Law 118 of the year 1976, which reorganized the whole "area" of Sufi activities by establishing a new set of religious, educational and socio-political objectives for the *ṭuruq ṣūfiyya* in Egypt[19]. If, on the one hand, all this process has been criticized or even ridiculed by some (mostly Western) scholars who labeled it as an

14 This *ḥadīth* is reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Muslim, *Kitāb al-īmān, Bāb ma'rifat al-īmān wa-l-islām wa-l-qadar, Ḥadīth* N° 8 and quoted in full text in 'Alī Jum'a 2019, 6-7.

15 'Alī Jum'a 2019, 6-9.

16 For an historical outline of the Sufi presence in Egyptian society from Medieval to contemporary times, see Taftāzāni 1991, 12-51.

17 On Muḥammad 'Alī's intervention in the field, see De Jong 1978, 33-39. A translation of the firman that Muḥammad 'Alī's issued in 1812 to invest the Shaykh of the tariqa Bakriyya with authority over tariqas (*ṭuruq*) and tariqas-linked institutions in Egypt is provided Ibid. 192-193. For a comprehensive approach to the history of the tariqa Bakriyya in ninteenth-century Egypt, see De Jong 1976.

18 See De Jong 1978, 97-124, 132-139; an English translation of the khedivial decree establishing the Council is provided *Ibid.*, p. 201-204.

19 See Taftāzānī 1991, 31-37.

attempt to "bureaucratize" spiritual life[20], on the other hand such complex interplay between Sufism and State politics has highly contributed to keep Egyptian Sufism alive and well - and widely influential - throughout the major changes that have affected the Egyptian society in the turbulent age of "Modernity".

Since the end of the nineteenth century, indeed, Sufism had been under attack from both progressive and fundamentalist thinkers, who considered it as synonymous – respectively – to shameful backwardness or blameful "innovation" (*bidʿa*) in Islam[21]. Accordingly, some of the most popular and spectacular Sufi practices, such as *mawālīd* (anniversaries of saints), were increasingly labeled as superstitious and/or contrary to decency, and political authorities tended to reduce the impact of such practices on the public space and on the international image of the country. On a more theoretical level, criticism of the Sufi notion of sanctity (*walāya*) by Muḥammad ʻAbduh (1849-1905) and other Islamic "reformists", especially those in the line of Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), laid the foundations for overt and long-standing hostility between Sufi tariqas and Islamist movements[22]. In the aftermaths of the Nasserist revolution, the then leader of the Muslim Brotherhood Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī in 1953 tried to have the Sufi brotherhoods dissolved by the revolutionary government. Ironically, it was the Muslim Brotherhood that were finally outlawed a few months later, whereas Nasser decided to make a political "investment" on Sufi brotherhoods by trying to associate some of them to the agenda of "Arab socialism", and by promoting the formation of new Sufi groups whose leaders were particularly sympathetic with the regime. Sufi brotherhoods were thus valorized as a main channel of "communication" between the State institutions and the different 'classes' of the Egyptian society as well as, at least in some cases, an instrument in foreign politics[23].

The *special relationship* between the Egyptian government and the officially recognized Sufi groups, that continued under Sadat and Mubarak, made cooperation between al-Azhar and the Supreme Council for Sufi Ways even stronger than in the past. All this is iconically exemplified by two prominent figures who were active in religious, intellectual and political life altogether from the 1960s onwards: the highly-reputed Islamic scholar (*ʿālim*) ʻAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd (1910-1978) and the philosopher, Islamic scholar and Sufi master Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī (1930-1994). The former was the Grand Imam of al-Azhar from 1973 to 1978 and wrote some authoritative studies on theoretical and historical aspects of Sufism. The latter was, for a long while, the president of both the Egyptian Philosophical Society and the Supreme Council for Sufi Ways, as well as a member of Parliament, and inspired the aforementioned Law n. 118 of 1976 which 'reformed' Sufi activities in Egypt.

In spite of continuing criticism by some intellectual and political groups (mostly connected with "Islamist" trends), Sufism has then proved a crucially important reality in Egyptian society until nowadays. At the eve of 2011 Revolution, the two most prominent

20 As an example out of many, see the notion of *baraka bureaucracy* in Papas 2021, 256.

21 On increasing criticism against Sufi "innovations" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, see Delanoue 1963, 15-16; De Jong 1978 (esp. 168-171), De Jong 1999, De Jong 2000 (1975). Quite an interesting literary testimony on the often hostile atttudes by "enlightened" Egyptian Muslim intellectuals towards Sufism in the Liberal Age is provided by Ṭaha Ḥusayn, in Chapters 15 and 16 of his famous autobiographical novel *al-Ayyām*. See Ḥusayn 1929.

22 See De Jong 2000 (1975), 198-199.

23 On all this process, see De Jong 2000 (1975), 193-197.

Islamic authorities in the country, namely the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib (appointed in 2010) and the Grand Mufti Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn ʻAlī Jumʻa (appointed in 2003), were both Sufis. In the same period, the Master of Sufi Masters (*shaykh al-mashāyikh*) and President of the Supreme Sufi Council, Shaykh ʻAbd al-Hādī al-Qaṣabī[24], was a member of Parliament and an influential officer of the (until then) ruling National Democratic Party. In such framework, attitudes expressed by the Sufi Council's official journal were far from being irrelevant in the political debate.

4. Some Sufi perspectives on "Islam and State" : A debate in *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*

4.1. Preliminary remarks

The Supreme Sufi Council's journal *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* focused on "Islam and the civil State" in its issue n. 404 (July 2012 / Shaʻbān 1433), with a dossier composed of three articles: a paper by the then Minister of Religious Endowments, the Azhari scholar Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Faḍīl al-Qūṣī[25]; an interview by Aḥmad ʻAṭiyya, one of the main collaborators of the magazine, with the former Grand Mufti of the Republic of Egypt, Shaykh Naṣr Farīd Wāṣil (who had been in charge from 1996 to 2002); an inquiry conducted by the same Aḥmad ʻAṭiyya among some Azhari scholars (one of them being the prominent Islamic intellectual Muḥammad ʻImāra, who was also a regular collaborator of *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*) on proper understanding of the relationship between religion and State in Islam.

Before analyzing the different positions expressed by the contributors, it is worth noting some important common elements:

1. In all of the articles, reflections evolve around three main notions, although these may be differently interpreted by different stakeholders:

a) "religious State" (*dawla dīniyya*);

b) "civil State" (*dawla madaniyya*);

c) "non-religious State" (*dawla lādīniyya*), also referred to as "secular State" (*dawla ʻalmāniyya*) or "the civil State which has no religion" (*al-dawla al-madaniyya allatī lā dīn la-hā*).

2. As for the notion of "Islamic State" (*dawla islāmiyya*), it is worth noting that this expression occurs in several interventions, but at a different level or, more precisely, with a different *status* than the expressions mentioned above. In fact, the notion of "Islamic State" does not designate a special institutional model presented as an alternative to the three aforementioned models. Rather, it constitutes an ideal standard or an archetype, used as a touchstone to measure the acceptability, from an Islamic viewpoint, of the different political models at stake.

3. None of the contributors in this debate does support the idea of a "non-religious" State, so that such option is only evoked as a negative option, or sort of an "anti-standard".

24 On his appointment, see above, footnote n. 9.

25 Dr. Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Faḍīl al-Qūṣī (b. 1944) Azhari scholar was Minister of (Religious) Endowment (Awqāf) from July, 18th, 2011 to June, 24th, 2012.

4. Surprisingly enough, also the notion of "religious State" is unanimously presented as a negative one, on the grounds that Islam does not admit absolutism and "theocracy" and promotes, instead, separation between powers.

4.2. 'Abd al-Faḍīl al-Qūṣī: A Minister of Religious Endowments Against the Religious State?

In a short but extremely dense paper, the Azhari scholar Muḥammad 'Abd al-Faḍīl al-Qūṣī, then Minister of Religious Endowment, expresses a clear rejection of both the "religious State" and the "secular State", and stands in favor of what may be called an "Islamic civil State"[26]. "Who assumes (*ẓanna*) that Islam calls for (*yad'ū ilā)* the religious State (*al-dawla al-dīniyya*) deviates from the path of truth (*jāddat al-ḥaqq*)", states al-Qūṣī in the opening of his article, and he further elaborates on this point:

"In the religious State, the ruler (*al-ḥākim*) [...] claims that he receives his power (*sulṭa*) from a divine source (*maṣdar ilāhī*), this allowing him to take in his hands both kinds of power, i.e. the temporal one ([*al-sulṭa*] *al-zamaniyya*) and the religious one ([*al-sulṭa*] *al-dīniyya*), and giving him absolute authority over the flock of the subjects, so that the latter have no other possibility than absolute obedience (*al-ṭā'a al-muṭlaqa*) [...] Islam does not call for anything like this. Indeed, Islam rejects (*ankara*) such a thing [i.e. the "religious state" as defined above], to such an extent that any unbiased observer may perceive that Islam has built (all its) political organization (*niẓām siyāsī*) on criticism (*naqīḍ*) against such "religious state" in all its steps, inasmuch as the (Islamic) system is based on free choice (*al-ikhtiyār al-ḥurr*), separation of powers (*al-faṣl bayn al-sulṭāt*), the guarantee (*ḍamān*) of (all) freedoms (*ḥurriyāt*) and (equal) sharing of rights (*ḥuqūq*) and duties (*wājibāt*) and equality among (all) human beings (*al-nās*), whatever their different religions (*diyānāt*), ethnicities (*ajnās*), social levels (*ṭabaqāt*). (This includes) the fundamental right (*al-ḥaqq al-aṣīl*) to ask the ruler to account for his deeds (*muḥāsabat al-ḥākim*), as well as to correct the ruler (*murāja'a*) and to control him (*murāqaba*). [...] If, in the long history of Islam, there were actually some periods in which the Muslim community (*umma*) had to cope with some rulers who practised autocracy (*istibdād*) and even tyranny (*ṭughyān*), such rulers indeed were going astray from Islam".

By this argumentation (presented in much an apodictic way), the Azhari scholar al-Qūṣī is pursuing a double goal. First, by providing a carefully restricted definition of the notion of "religious State", which is identified with absolutist monarchy grounded on alleged divine right to rule, he aims at "acquitting" traditional Islamic institutions from any possible charge of "theocracitism". Then, by stating that all basic principles of the modern democratic State have always been there in Islamic jurisprudence, he aims at nullifying any call for "secular" State, on the grounds that Islam does already have in itself all the elements which are required to ensure equal rights to all citizens, and therefore there is no need to separate (Islamic) religion from politics, as he clearly states a few lines below.

If the "religious State" is at odds with Islam, he argues, one should however not exaggerate in the opposite sense. This is what certain "custodians of Enlightenment" (*sadanat*

26 See *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 404 (July 2012 / Sha'bān 1433), 8-9.

al-tanwīr) have done by calling for the "civil State" (*al-dawla al-madaniyya*) as the proper alternative (*badīl*) to the "religious State". In al-Qūṣī's view, in fact, the kind of "civil State" that secularists are calling for should properly be termed as "State with no religion" (*al-dawla lā dīn la-hā*), that is to say a political system in which "the relation (*nisba*) of one religion or another to the State would make no difference".

For al-Qūṣī, such thing would be unacceptable: Islam, he say, does call for a sort of "civil State" implying equality among citizens, but this must absolutely not be confused with the call for "the civil state which has no religion" (*al-dawla al-madaniyyā allatī la dīn la-hā*)". The latter option is to be rejected, he argues, for several reasons:

1. The call for a "non-religious State" would be at odds with the Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution (that we have mentioned above), and this article should not be amended, because it expresses the people's will: "the Article Two of the Constitution has been chosen by the (national) community (*umma*) out of their free will: therefore, touching at it would be an infringement on constitutional rights (*al-ḥuqūq al-dustūriyya*)";

2. Such call would also be at odds with "what Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his famous work on the Social Contract (*al-'aqd al-ijtimā'ī*), named the general will (*al-irādat al-'āmma*), which does not only represent the (community's) present (i.e. contingent) will (*al-irāda al-rāhina*), but (also) the history of the past community (*ta'rīkh al-jamā'a al-māḍiyya*) and its future goals (*ahdāf mustaqbaliyya*)".

3. *Per absurdum*, the call for establishing a State "with no religion" or for amending the Article Two of the Constitution might admissible only "[...] if the dispositions (*qaṭ'iyyāt*) of Islam, its foundations (*uṣūl*) and its Law (*sharī'a*) contained something at odds with the principles of equality (*musāwa*) between citizens (*al-muwāṭanīn*) of different religions (*adyān*), or [...] may be conducive to the establishment of a religious state (*dawla dīniyya*; in the sense specified above)". In al-Qūṣī's view, however, all this would be impossible, because Islam "gathered all human beings "under the umbrella of common humanity" (*al-insāniyya al-'āmma*).

On these grounds, al-Qūṣī finally formulates his idea of an (Islamic) civil State:

"We choose that (form of) civil State in which the community is the source of powers (*al-dawla al-madaniyya allatī takūnu fī-hā al-umma maṣdar al-sulṭāt*) and that protects (everyone's) liberties (*al-ḥurriyāt*), provides rights of equality among (all) citizens without any discrimination (*tamyīz*), and safeguards the principle of the division of powers (*al-faṣl bayn al-sulṭāt*)".

On the other hand, he completely rejects the idea of a secular State:

"With regard to [...] the civil State which has no religion (*al-dawla al-madaniyya allatī la dīn la-hā*), [...] we declare it unjust (*nuẓallimu-hā*) as (a kind of) evident tyranny (*ẓulm mubīn*)".

4.3. Shaykh Wāṣil: "Islam is a creed and a law"

Interviewed by Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya, prominent Islamic scholar Shaykh Naṣr Farīd Wāṣil[27], who served as the Grand Mufti of the Republic of Egypt from 1996 to 2002, stands as clearly as possible for the inseparability of religion and State in Islam:

27 Interview by Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 404 (July 2012 / Sha'bān 1433), p. 10-11.

"Islam is a creed (*'aqīda*) and a law (*sharī'a*). Therefore, separation (*faṣl*) between religion (*dīn*) and State (*dawla*) would be an abominable mistake (*khaṭa' fāḥish*)". This is because "The Islamic Law is (tantamount to) Islamic civilisation (*khaḍāra*) [...] and the Sharī'a is perfect (*kāmila*), comprehensive (*mutakāmila*) and valid (*ṣāliḥa*) for both religious life (*dīn*) and worldly life (*dunyā*)".

In saying this, Shaykh Wāṣil actually confirms a view clearly expressed by his interviewer since the introduction of the article. In fact, Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya states:

"The Islamic civilization (*al-khaḍāra al-islāmiyya*) was built on a distinct legislative organization (*manẓūma tashrī'iyya mutamayyaza*) that is based on divine sources (*maṣādir ilāhiyya*) which are represented by the Noble Qur'an and The Sunna of the Prophet. Thanks to this organization the subsequent Islamic states (*al-duwal al-islāmiyya*) that ruled over large areas of the world were able to realize justice (*'adāla*), safety (*amn*), peace (*salām*), stability (*istiqrār*), and coexistence (*ta'āyush*) between peoples of different regions (*a'rāq*), ethnicities (*ajnās*) and religions (*adyān*)".

This idyllic conditions came to an end, according to 'Aṭiyya, "with the fall of the Islamic Caliphate". Then, the Islamic countries (*al-bilād al-islāmiyya*) fell prey to Western colonialism and, as a consequence, "Islamic laws (*al-qawānīn al-islāmiyya*) started to be replaced by 'positive' laws (*al-qawānīn al-waḍ'iyya*), that were based on a different philosophy than the laws of Islām. The (Islamic laws) in fact were based on on ethics [...] and on the belief that Allāh is elevated above all human being and that He will ask every human being to account for their deeds".

Due to the different philosophical foundations of the two legal systems, 'Aṭiyya argues, "the introduction of positive laws caused confusion (*qalq*) and instability inside the Islamic society (*al-mujtama' al-islāmī*)". Incidentally, the author's choice to use the singular (*mujtama'*, "society") instead of the plural (*mujtama'āt*, "societies") appears quite meaningful ideologically: it is as if he considered different historical communities in different areas of the Muslim world as part of one and the same society, the idealized "Islamic society".

Be that as it may, 'Aṭiyya proudly remarks that reaction against positive laws is now gaining ground among Muslims worldwide:

"Nowadays, in different areas of the Muslim world, some people call for implementing the Islamic Sharī'a (*taṭbīq al-sharī'a al-islāmiyya*) and restoring it in the place of the positive laws. Also, some people argue that implementation of the Islamic Law will be the only way to ensure the progress of the Islamic community (*taqaddum al-umma al-islāmiyya*) [...] and they reject the separation between religion and State (*al-faṣl bayn al-dīn wa-l-dawla*) which secular trends (*al-tayyārāt al-'almāniyya*) are calling for."

On his part, Shaykh Wāṣil apparently shares his interviewer's ideological perspectives. So, questions and answers do often tend to "mirror" each other, as in the following examples:

Q.: "The Islamic State (*al-dawla al-islāmiyya*) ruled over most of the peoples in the world and it had a comprehensive legislative system based on the Qur'an and the Sunna. With the weakening of the Islamic State and the fall of the noble Islamic peoples under European colonialism, the importation of positive laws started to appear [...]".

A.: "The Islamic law is (tantamount to) Islamic civilisation (*khaḍāra*), in its essence (*dhāt*), in its religious doctrine (*ʿaqīda*) and in its ethics (*akhlāq*), and the *sharīʿa* is perfect (*kāmila*), comprehensive (*mutakāmila*) and valid (*ṣāliḥa*) for both religious life (*dīn*) and worldly life (*dunyā*)." [...]. Actual implementation (*taṭbīq ʿamalī*) of the Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) would be a valid and peaceful implementation" inasmuch as it balances the creed (*ʿaqīda*) with ethics (*akhlāq*) and the law (*sharīʿa*)".

According to Shaykh Wāṣil, the "aim (*hadaf*)" of *sharīʿa* is nothing less than establishing peace all over the world (*al-salām al-ʿālamī*) and uniting all humankind into one and the same civilization or, more precisely, restoring the alleged primordial unity of humankind. Therefore, "all human beings do live together in peace (*salām*) within the framework of *sharīʿa*". In the shaykh's view, this is not an utopia but an historical reality: it already happened in the "first periods of Islam", meaning, as he explains, not only to the times of Prophet Muḥammad and of the four "Rightly Guided Caliphs", but also some later phases of Islamic history, such as the time of 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (ruled 717-720), "who is considered as the *fifth* Rightly Guided Caliph".

The shaykh draws a fully apologetical picture of Islamic history: "Under the Islamic Caliphate (*al-khilāfa al-islāmiyya*), it (i.e. the *sharīʿa*) realised its aim, (bringing) civilisation to all humankind both in the East and the West."

Islam was both a common ground and a *melting pot* for all human civilisations, and this paved the way for its allegedly peaceful conquer of the world:

"Even the Western civilization (*ḥaḍārat al-gharb*) is grounded on Islamic civilization. And Islam built up its own civilization, in terms of principles and ethics, by taking advantage of (all) previous civilizations both in material and spiritual things ((...)) This, because all human civilisations are (actually) one comprehensive civilization, and the whole humankind is in the condition described by Allah [...] when He said: *O humankind, We created you from male and female, and made you (different) peoples and tribes so that you may know one another*.[28] Therefore, all humankind is one international family (*usra duwaliyya wāḥida*)".

Shaykh Wāṣil states that "Islam does not make any discrimination, in the fields of material (i.e. worldly) life [...], between humans beings according to their differences in ethnicity (*jins*), skin color (*lawn*), cultural traditions (*thaqāfa*) or creed (*ʿaqīda*)". As for faith (*īmān*) and creed (*aqīda*), Allah will be the only judge: "He is the One who will reckon every human being on this in the Other-life (*al-ākhira*)".

"On these grounds, he says, the Islamic civilisation brought forth justice in human relations in all of the countries that were opened (*futiḥat*; i.e. conquered) to Islam". All Islamic conquests, the shaykh argues, were actually peaceful:

"In all of the countries that were opened to Islam, this did not happen by war (*qitāl*) but by religious propaganda (*daʿwa*) and rational persuasion (*ḥikma*). Also, most countries of Eastern Asia embraced Islam thanks to migrations or commercial expeditions, without armies (*juyūsh*) and without weapons (*asliḥa*). So, (those countries) realised actual civilisation, and furthered civilisation and knowledge".

28 Qur'an 49:13.

For Shaykh Wāṣil, any civilisation is ultimately based on Islam, including "the modern Western civilisation (*al-ḥaḍāra al-gharbiyya al-ḥadītha*)", and "History (*al-ta'rīkh*) bears witness to it".

In line with such premises, all the complex history of Modernity in the Arab and Muslim world is explained by Shaykh Wāṣil as the result of two concurrent evil factors: on the one hand, the weakening (*takhallul*) of the religious side (*al-jānib al-dīnī*) in the life of Muslims, following the deceptive attractions (*ightirār*) of worldly life; on the other hand, non-Muslims' ability to take advantage from such situation in order to sow divisions and conflicts (*fitan*) among Muslims. So, non-Muslims succeeded in "spreading their immoral principles" and introducing discrimination "between one human being and his human brother". In the shaykh's view, this was the cause of all internal and international conflicts that ended in dividing Muslims - until then united "in one Caliphate" (*khilāfa wāḥida*)" - into different "states and statelets" (*duwal wa-duwaylāt*) which easily fell prey to colonialism (*al-isti'mār*) and were thus exposed to the corrupting influence of "the West (*al-gharb*)" and its "merely materialistic civilization" (*ḥaḍāratuhu al-māddiyya faqaṭ*).

Whatever their historical accuracy, such representations provide the Shaykh Wāṣil with a full-fledged ideological background for supporting his views on the proper form of State for Muslims and for all humankind. The notion of "positive law" being presented as a poisoned fruit of Western colonialism, the Islamic Law is exalted as the only possible foundation for State and society alike. Indeed, no real separation is admitted between "religion" and "world".

4.4. Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya and Azhari scholars: "The religious State is a Western invention".[29]

As we mentioned before, the last article on "Islam and State" in issue 404 of Interview *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* presents the main results of an inquiry (*taḥqīq*) that Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya conducted on this subject among some scholars from al-Azhar, namely Professors Muḥammad Abū Layla (from the Faculty of Languages) and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghānī Shāma (teaching Compared Religions) and the Islamic thinker (*al-mufakkir al-Islāmī*) Muḥammad 'Imāra, one of the most famous conservative intellectuals in Egypt, who is also a member of al-Azhar Center for Islamic Research. In the summary, 'Aṭiyya states that all of these scholars agreed on rejecting the "religious State" as incompatible with Islam:

"The religious State (*al-dawla al-dīniyya*) is a Western invention (*ikhtirā' gharbī*) that Islam has never acknowledged. The scholars of al-Azhar declared that Islam does not recognize such an institution as the "religious State", which characterized Europe in the Middle Ages. They clarified that the State in Islam is a civil (*madaniyya*) State based on equality of rights and duties between Muslims and non-Muslims, which is tantamount to what is known as 'citizenship' (*muwāṭana*) nowadays. They also clarified that the foundation (of the Islamic State) is the citizenship (*muwāṭana*) that Prophet Muhammad fixed firmly after his migration (*hijra*) to Medina, where he established a State and laid the foundations for coexistence (*ta'āyush*) between Muslims, Jews, Christians and Idolaters (*al-wathaniyyīn*) on

29 Aḥmad 'Aṭiyya, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 404 (July 2012 / Sha'bān 1433), 13-15.

the principle "What are our rights are their rights, what are our duties are their duties (*la-hum mā la-nā wa-'alayhim mā 'alaynā*)".

In this perspective, the "State of Medina" (*dawlat al-Madīna*), i.e. the political organization set up by the Prophet and regulated, according to the tradition, by the so-called "Charter of Medina" (*Wathīqat al-Madīna*), is explicitly presented as a precedent of the modern idea of citizenship as well as the best model for regulating relations among people in an Islamic State. Muhammad Abu Layla says:

"Indeed, the State of Medina was a civil State (*dawla madaniyya*). In fact, the Prophet (*al-nabī*) [...], although he was protected against sin and error (*ma'ṣūm*) and he was the one that had been sent the Revelation (*al-waḥī*) from Heaven, did not act as an absolute ruler (*lam yastaqill bi-l-ḥukm*), meaning that he did not claim to be knowledgeable in all worldly matters, but asked for consultation and help from the others [...] "The greatest proof (*burhān*) of the civil nature of the State in Islam (*madaniyyat al-dawla al-islāmiyya*) is that the Prophet drafted a special regulation (*wathīqa khāṣṣa*) for the issue of government, and he did not say that the Qur'an or the Sunna were the Constitution (*al-dustūr*). On the contrary, he set up a special regulation concerning (people's) right and duties (*al-ḥuqūq wa-l-wājibāt*) for a society (*mujtama'*) which was multi-religious (*muta'addad al-adyān*) and multi-ethnic (*[muta'addad] al-jinsiyyāt*)".

Abū Layla specially emphasizes that these regulations fostered unity and cooperation between Jews (*al-yahūd*) and Muslims (*al-muslimīn*):

"The Charter of Medina stated that Jews and Muslims represented one community (*umma wāḥida*). Albeit Islam was the foundation (of such community), the Prophet (...), when drafting the Charter of Medina, explicitly dictated that Jews formed one and the same community with Muslims, and acknowledged their rights in the life of their (common) homeland (*waṭan)* as well as their share in the administration of the affairs of the country (*bilād*) [...], granting them all liberties (*al-ḥurriyāt*) and imposing them the duty to defend the city of Medina together with the Muslims".

Once again, an apologetic reconstruction of past events, based on traditional Islamic historical narrative, is proposed in order to legitimize a certain political perspective for the present time. In this particular case, traditional idyllic representations of Muḥammad's attitudes towards the Jews of Medina before their alleged betrayals are presented as a proof of the civil nature of Islamic State, with special emphasis on the possibility of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between Jews and Muslim under the umbrella of Islamic political domination.

In a similar vein, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghānī Shāma uses historical narratives as polemical arguments to discard the notion of "religious State" in Islam: "The expression 'religious State' (*dawla dīniyya*) applies (only) to the State of the Church (*dawlat al-kinīsa*), that existed in Europe during the Middle Ages, before the Renaissance".

In such political system, says Shāma, the supreme religious authority was also acting as the absolute political authority: "The Pope's word was (considered as) equal to a divine inspiration (*waḥī*) descending from Heaven, and nobody could deviate from his decrees (*qirārāt*)".

On the contrary, he argues, Islam did never admit such absolute theocratic power: "Islam, in the whole course of its history, never saw such a form of State. Rather, Muslims

used to oppose (their) Caliphs and rulers and to correct them. Indeed, they even used to oppose the Messenger of Allāh [...] in (purely) worldly matters (*shu'ūn al-dunyā*)".

If these arguments are very much in line with dominant opinions and narratives evoked in the journal's debate, Muḥammad Shāma strikingly departs from the general attitude towards the notion of "civil State": he contests the use of this technical term, on the grounds that the word "civil" might imply a negative attitude towards religion (*tanakkur al-dīn*). So, he opts for such wordings as "the modern State' (*al-dawla al-ḥadītha*) or "the contemporary State" (*al-dawla al-'aṣriyya*), meaning a political system which is open to "evolve according to to the times" but only within the limits and guidelines set by the rules (*aḥkām*) of Islam.

However, in spite of these terminological differences, Muḥammad Shāma comes to the same conclusion as the other contributors in this debate: Islamic countries do not need a "non-religious civil State" in order to protect the rights of non-Muslims, because Islam itself is the source of the notions of citizenship and human rights:

"If someone, by saying 'civil State', intends to support the concept (*fikra*) of citizenship (*muwāṭana*), (know that) this principle was firmly established in the Charter of Medina, issued by the Messenger of Allāh [...]. This Charter established citizenship for all of Muslims, Jews and others, incited them to be hand in hand with each other, and gave all of them equal rights and duties. All this confirms that Islam had the priority (*sabaqa*) in establishing the principle of citizenship (*muwāṭana*), much before modern political systems and charters of human rights".

An even stronger opposition to the notion of "civil State" comes from the renowned intellectual Muḥammad 'Imāra, who considers it as a mere camouflage for the "non-religious State". He ironically says that, though browsing a dozen reference works in political sciences, he has not found such term as "civil State" (*dawla madaniyya*), meaning that such notion did never exist. As for the "religious State", this expression only applies, in his view, to the political organizations that characterized "the West" (*al-gharb*) in the Middle Ages or to the Shi'a notions of the Imamate (*al-imāma*) and of the 'Governance (or Guardianship) of the Islamic jurist (*wilāyat al-faqīh*). In such systems, he says, the ruler (*al-ḥākim*) is "sanctified" (*muqaddas*) and considered as unfailing (*ma'ṣūm*), on the grounds that he rules by divine delegation (*al-tafwīḍ al-ilāhī*)". Therefore, "in the religious State there is no place for the sovereignty of the community (*sulṭat al-umma*), nor for democracy (*dīmuqrāṭiyya*) or the (traditional Islamic principle of) consultation (*shūrā*)".

The opposite (*muqābil*) of such notion of religious State, 'Imāra argues, is "the non-religious secular State" (*al-dawla al-lādīniyya al-'almāniyya*), which is based on a fully materialistic vision of the world and has no relation to religion.

On these grounds, 'Imāra formulates his definition of "Islamic State":

"The Islamic State (*al-dawla al-islāmiyya*) does not identify either with the religious State nor with the secular State. Indeed it is a (political) system (*niẓām*) in which the community (*al-umma*) is the source of powers (*maṣdar al-sulṭāt*), on condition that it does not permit what is forbidden (*ḥarām*) (by the divine Law) and does not forbid what is permitted (*ḥalāl*) (by the divine Law)".

In this discourse, however, 'Imāra does not give any precision on the term *umma* (community), so it is not clear whether he is referring here to the "national community"

(including non-Muslim citizens) or the "Islamic community", both meanings being possible for the word *umma*[30].

Be that as it may, Muḥammad 'Imāra explicitly calls for an "Islamic State" and discards the idea of "civil State" as a trickery used by secularists in order to skirt the hostility of the Egyptian society towards secularism.

Therefore, 'Imāra enjoys Muslims not to fall into the trap of the "civil State", and to proudly call for an Islamic State:

"Why should we (the Muslims) be afraid of declaring that Islam is the solution (*al-islām huwa al-ḥall*), whereas Communists are not afraid to say that Communism is the solution, and Liberals are not afraid to say that Liberalism is the solution? Indeed, the large majority (of Egyptians) is for an Islamic State which makes no discrimination among (citizens on the grounds of their) religions, ethnicities or skin colors".

Ultimately, Muḥammad 'Imāra is thus calling for what the other stakeholders in this debate are calling for, although most of them do call it a "civil State" grounded on Islam, whereas he calls it squarely an "Islamic State". In doing this, Muḥammad 'Imāra is somehow breaking a linguistic taboo. In the same time, he also breaks a political taboo in using exactly the same slogan ("Islam is the solution") that has been the motto of the Muslim Brothers for decades.

5. **Some conclusive remarks: the Medinese alternative as a challenge for future.**

In spite of their different positions on some particulars points, that have been analyzed before, all of the contributors in the debate on "Islam and the civil State" in issue 404 of *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī*, the official journal of the Egyptian Supreme Sufi Council, apparently share some basic positions:

1) All of them reject both notions of "religious State" and "non-religious State".

2) All of them call for what may be defined as an "Islamic civil State" (albeit using different wordings for it), meaning a political system which should be based on Islamic Law and historical traditions and which and that would grant separation between powers and equal rights of citizenship to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

3) They agree on that, in this 'Islamic civil State', the community (*umma*) would be the source of powers on condition of compliance with the Islamic Law: to put it in Muḥammad 'Imāra's words, "the community (*al-umma*) is the source of powers (*maṣdar al-sulṭāt*), on condition that it does not permit what is forbidden (*ḥarām*) (by the divine Law) and does not forbid what is permitted (*ḥalāl*) (by the divine Law)".

On these grounds, most of the contributors agree that an authoritative historical precedent for such a political organisation is to be found in the "State of Medina", that was the form of political structure promoted by Prophet Muḥammad after the Hijra.

With all evidence, this ideal reference to the "State of Medina" as a viable solution for political organization of contemporary societies does present several problematic aspects, both on the historical-critical level, as it is substantially based on idealization of a specific

30 This is also the case with al-Qūṣī, see quotation above, paragraph 4.2.

moment of the Islamic history, and on the level of its concrete institutional and legal implementation, due to the need to clearly articulate the relationship between the notion of citizenship (in Arabic, *muwāṭana*) implying equality between all citizens, and the primacy of a cultural and religious vision over others.

However, the strong political and philosophical value of this perspective, which can be labeled as the "Medinese alternative", lies in being based on the history of a community. It is in the history of Islam and in the history of Islamic Egypt (which has been made up not only of tensions but also of constructive interactions between different religious and ethnic groups), that the proponents of what we called the "Medinese alternative" are seeking those values of freedom and equity which can inspire solutions for the present time. In other terms, instead of referring to an abstract codification of principles imposed from outside and presented as 'universal', the proponents of this perspective intend to promote effective citizenship without sacrificing the historical and cultural specificities of their country.

Maybe this was one of the reasons, if not the main reason, why the "Medinese" perspective was largely successful, in the medium-term, in shaping the revolutionary process. Whereas, beyond the vague formula of the "civil state", the constitutional project of the Muslim Brotherhood of 2012 was finally moving towards some kind of a "religious state", the Constitution definitively approved in the popular referendum of January 2014, in the transition phase following the fall of Muḥammad Mursī, returned to the "traditional" search for synthesis between Islamic identity and pluralism, which has characterized Egyptian constitutional history since 1923. While reaffirming the centrality of Islam as the State religion (*dīn al-dawla*, Art. 2) and reiterating that "the principles of Islamic *sharī'a* are the main source of legislation" (Ibid.), the new Constitution fosters deep innovations in political, social and institutional life. In particular, it engages the State to promote equality between men and women and to counter any form of violence and discrimination against women (Art. 11) and enhances the role of Christian and Jewish religious communities as part and parcel of Egyptian history and society (see, for instance, the reference to the Islamic notion of the "three heavenly religions", *al-adyān al-samāwiyya al-thalātha*, in the Preamble of the Constitution, as well as the explicit reference to the religious laws of Egyptian Jews and Christians in Art. 3).

As with other currents of renewal (from Arab liberalism to Islamic feminism) that have 'reshaped' (more or less succesfully) Egyptian and other Arab-Muslim societies from nineteenth century to the present day, the challenge - theoretical, theological and political – implied by the "Medinese alternative" is trying to open social and political innovation pathways "within" one people's history and identity and not "against" it.

Bibliography

Al-Azhar al-Sharīf, Maktab Shaykh al-Azhar. *Bayān al-Azhar wa-l-muthaqqafīn ('an manzumat al-hurriyyat al-asasiyya).* Mashyakhat al-Azhar, 14 Ṣafar 1433 / January, 8th, 2012.

'Alī Jum'a, Nūr al-Dīn, 2019. *Al-ṭarīq ilā Allāh*. Cairo: Dār al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib.

‘Aṭiyya, Aḥmad, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 404 (July 2012 / Sha‘bān 1433), 10-15.

Bonner, Michael, 2006. *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice*. Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press.

Bonner, Michael, 2013 (1996). *Aristocratic violence and holy war: studies in the jihad and the Arab-Byzantine frontier*. New Haven (Conn.): American Oriental Society, 2013 (1ª ed. 1996).

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: «2012 Egypt Parliamentary Elections». https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/01/22/2012-egyptian-parliamentary-elections-pub-58800#ParticipatingPoliticalParties

Cecere, Giuseppe, 2018. «The Shaykh and the Others - Sufi Perspectives on Jews and Christians in Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt», *Entangled Religions* 6 (2018) 34 – 94.

Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2012.

Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2014.

De Jong, Fredrick, 1976. *Al-mashâyikh al-Bakriyya and the transformation of their authority in 19th century Egypt.* Göttingen: Van den Hoeck & Ruprecht, 1976.

De Jong. Fredrick, 1978. *Ṭuruq and Ṭuruq-linked institutions in nineteenth century Egypt: a historical study in organizational dimensions of Islamic mysticism*. Leiden: Brill.

De Jong, Fredrick, 1999. “Opposition to Sufism in 20th-century Egypt (1900–1970): A Preliminary Survey,” in F. de Jong & B. Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*. Leiden: Brill, 310-323.

De Jong, Fredrick, 2000 (1975). “Ṭuruq and Ṭuruq-Opposition in 20th-Century Egypt,” in F. de Jong, *Sufi Orders in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Egypt and the Middle East: Collected Studies*. Istanbul: The Isis Press (originally published in F. Rundgren (ed.), *Proceedings of the VIth Congress of Arabic and Islamic Studies*. Stockholm and Leiden: Brill).

Delanoue, Gilbert, 1963. «*L’Epître des huit mots* du cheikh Ḥusayn Al-Marṣafī (Analyse)», *Annales Islamologiques* 5 (1963), 1-29.

Delanoue, Gilbert, 1982. *Moralistes et politiques musulmans dans l’Égypte du XIX^{e} siècle*. Cairo: IFAO (Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale), 2 vols.

EISA (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa), «Egypt: 2011/2012 People’s Assembly election results», *African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project*. https://www.eisa.org/wep/egy2012results1.htm .

EISA (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa), «Egypt: 2012 Presidential election results», *African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project*. https://www.eisa.org/wep/egy2012results.htm

Farouk, Nashwa, 2011. "Sufis said to have supported Mubarak clash with Salafis", *Egypt Votes, 25 October 2011*. Last accessed online December, 7th, 2021. HTTP://WWW.EGYPTVOTES.ORG/EN/SOCIETY/ITEM/180-SUFIS-SAID-TO-HAVE-SUPPORTED-MUBARAK-CLASH-WITH-SALAFIS.HTML

Fayed, Shaimaa, & Youssef, Abdel Rahman, 2011. "Egypt's Sufis see Islamist threat after Mubarak", *Reuters*, June, 14, 2011. https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-egypt-sufism/egypts-sufis-see-islamist-threat-after-mubarak-idUKTRE75D4S920110614?edition-redirect=in;

Hofer, Nathan, 2015. *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, 1929. *Al-Ayyām*. Cairo: Maṭba'at Amīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān.

Jāsim, 'Azīz al-Sayyid, 1994. *Mutaṣawwifāt Baghdād*. Paris: Mu'assasat al-Risāla.

al-Kindī, Muḥammad b. Yūsuf b. Ya'qūb, 1912. *Kitāb fī tārīkh Miṣr wa-wulāti-hā*, in in R. Guest (ed.), *The Governors and Judges of Egypt or Kitâb el 'Umarâ' (el Wulâh) wa Kitâb el Qudâh of el Kindî together with an Appendix derived mostly from Raf' el Iṣr by Ibn Ḥajar*, Leiden-London, Brill-Luzac, 1912.

Knysh, Alexander, 2000. *Islamic Mysticsm: a short history*. Leiden Boston Köln: Brill.

Lavie, Limor, 2017. «The Egyptian Muslim Brothers' ideal state model: a religious state – out; a civil state – in», *Middle Eastern Studies* 53/6 (2017), 996-1012.

(N.A.), «Destruction of shrines by Salafis triggers protests and condemnation», *The Egypt Independent*, April 2nd, 2011.https://www.egyptindependent.com/destruction-shrines-salafis-triggers-protests-and-condemnation/;

(N.A.), "Sufis and Salafis Unappeased", *Ikhwan Web*, Last accessed online May, 19th, 2012. http://ikhwanmisr.net/article.php?id=28382

(N.A.), *26 shaykh ṭarīqa ya'tariḍūna 'alā ta'yyīn al-Qaṣabī ra'īsan li-l-majlis al-a'lā' lil-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya* (="26 Masters of Tariqas Contest the Appointment of al-Qaṣabī as President of the Supreme Council for Sufi Ways"), *Al-Maṣrī al-Yawm*, 11/04/2010 (in Arabic). https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/40205

(N.A.), «The Egyptian Tahrir Party» in *Parties and Movements*, Jadaliyya and Ahram Online, 13 December 2011. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24826/Egyptian-Tahrir-Party

(N.A.), «Sufi Orders to choose presidential candidate on Sunday», *Al-Masry al-Youm*. May, 1st, 2012.

Papas, Alexandre, 2021. "Sufism and Worldly Powers", in Alexandre Papas (ed.), *Sufi Institutions.* Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2021, 255-291.

al-Qūṣī, ‘Abd al-Faḍīl, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* 404 (July 2012 / Sha‘bān 1433), 8-9.

al-Saeed Abadi, “MB condemns the demolition of shrines”, *Ikhwan Web*, April, 3, 2011. Last accessed online September, 12th, 2012. http://ikhwanmisr.net/article.php?id=28333

Sviri, Sara. 2012. “Sufism: Reconsidering Terms, Definitions and Processes in the Formative Period of Islamic Mysticism.” *In Les maîtres soufis et leur disciples: iii-v siècle de l’hégire (ix–xi s.). Enseignement, formation et transmission*, edited by Geneviève Gobillot, and Jean-Jacques Thibon, 17–34. Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient.

Taftāzānī, Abū l-Wafā. 1991. *Al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya fī Miṣr*. (Rasā’il al-Majlis al-a’lā’ lil-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya 2). Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Amaniyya.

Taftāzānī, Abū l-Wafā, 1996. “al-Taṣawwuf.” *Al-Jam‘iyya al-falsafiyya al-miṣriyya* 4/1: 47–59.

al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī 404 (July 2012 / Sha‘bān 1433).

Zaki, Ahmed Osman, 2011. «Sufis feel pressure as Salafi power grows», *The Egypt Independent*, April, 5th, 2011. http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sufis-feel-pressure-salafi-power-grows