

Portrayal of the Egyptian Revolution in the Polish media

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Abstract

The article describes political protests in Egypt from the perspective of the Polish press. The Arab Spring proved to be a breakthrough for a completely different reason than previously thought. It did not bring about the democratization of political life, extension of civil rights or an increase in the freedom of the Arab individuals and societies. Counter to what was expected, it resulted in partial dismantling of social and political institutions, limitation of civil rights and, above all, challenging of the institutions of the state as such. The Arab Spring exposed the weakness of the state with regards to its legitimacy. Previously, researchers of the region emphasized the Arab identity crisis and the constant search for a new formula for the revival of Muslim culture. They also gave hope for the restoration of this identity to the extent that would allow for an effective functioning of the Arab societies in a globalized world and for the strengthening of national identities. As a result of the revolution, the authority of the president and the excessive power of the police in Egypt were limited. This was followed by an increase of anarchy and the paralysis of the state. Consequently, the army seized power in the country and enforced stricter law: censorship of the press and media was strengthened, further restrictions on the rights of the individuals and the activities of non-governmental organizations were introduced, while military courts for civilians and a state of emergency were upheld.

1. Introduction

The Egyptian Revolution has been present in the Polish press and media from the very beginning. Egypt is one of the most popular holiday destinations for the Poles. The educated Poles also appreciate the immense significance of the cultural heritage of this country. However, this is not the only reason why Egyptian issues occupy an important place in the Polish media. Many politicians see analogies between the Polish “Solidarity” movement from the 1980s and the national Egyptian uprising in January 2011. The issues of systemic change have a long tradition in Poland due to the transformational changes that occurred in the 1990s.

As rightly pointed out by Jerzy Wiatr: “The fate of the democracy in the Arab states (and other Islamic countries) depends on whether there will exist strong democratic groups capable of effective action, which will be in favour of the secularism of the state. Their weakness makes the army the only protection against the flood of Islamic fundamentalism. The army, however, regardless

of the intentions of its generals is not a democratic force. In the best case scenario, it acts as a mediator, as recently happened in Egypt.

Egypt, the largest Arab state, which in July 1952 marked the beginning of a wave of revolutions which eliminated inept and corrupt monarchies, is and will be of crucial significance for the future of the democracy in Islamic countries. Therefore, the twists and turns of the Egyptian revolution have implications reaching far beyond the scope of this state.³

At the beginning of my article I would like to briefly describe the Polish society, as our national identity as well as cultural and social determinants significantly influence the perception of the events in Egypt. The modern Polish society is socially diverse, although ethnically homogeneous. Before the Second World War, we were a multi-ethnic, culturally diverse society. Apart from the Poles, about one-third of this multi-ethnic and religiously diverse mosaic in the then Polish republic consisted primarily of Jews, Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Roma. Currently, the dominant religion in Poland, declared by about 98% of Poles, is the Roman Catholicism in a decidedly conservative/folk form and far removed from the ecumenism of Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis.

This Christian conservatism of the Church in Poland is extremely visible when it comes to the issues of gender, women's position in society, attitude to abortion and sexual life of the believers, which – according to the Polish church – is to be focused solely on procreation. The status of the Catholic Church in Poland is extremely high, as since the end of World War II and during the influence of the Soviet Union, the Polish church acted as the main institution of resistance against the communist regime and preserved national identity. This situation can be compared to the activity of Muslim clergy and the role of Islam in Algeria during the French occupation of the country. Currently, Poland has only two significant political parties: the ruling liberal- centrist Civic Platform and the opposing right-wing/nationalistic Law and Justice. Although during the transition period after 1989 we had about three hundred parties, the consolidation of the democratic system brought the number of political parties down.

2. Polish Press

I would like to focus mainly on the Polish press, as the TV information in Poland regarding the events of the past three years in Egypt focused primarily on the dramatic and violent incidents without fully depicting their political and cultural conditions. Balanced analyses appeared mainly in the socio – political press.

Polish mainstream press: „Polityka”, „Tygodnik powszechny”, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, „Do rzeczy” and „Gazeta Polska”, emphasise this ideological division of the Polish society, represented by the following opinion-forming milieus:

- Liberal / leftist circles, which include progressive Catholics
- Rightist / nationalistic circles, including conservative Catholics. Press titles associated with these two opposing world views are available to the main liberal and right-wing circles in the country, as well as to the political parties.

In the comments on the Egyptian revolution, one can see a clash of discourses regarding the Arab world, which have existed for a long time in the European intellectual traditions. In addition to the world view divisions typical for the contemporary Polish society, there are still three perspectives in thinking of the Middle East, stemming from Western European ideas:

3 Jerzy J. Wiatr, Kryzys czy fiasko rewolucji arabskich?, „Myśl socjaldemokratyczna”, Nr 1/ 2 2013, s. 56.

- the perspective of civilisational superiority of the West (the Western orientalism described by Edward Said), namely the right, deeply-rooted in the European mindset, to assess all the events and processes taking place in the Arab world according to the paradigm of the civilisational and cultural superiority of the West and the inferiority of the East;
- the perspective confronting the final outcomes of the civilisation processes and mutual relationships between the West and the East, manifested in considering the consequences of colonization in the Middle East: delayed development, modernisation, and above all, an intra-civilisation split - a particular tension between tradition and modernity existing in Islam;
- (and finally) the perspective based on understanding and examining the internal dynamics of civilisation processes of Islamic societies.

The first perspective adds nothing new to our understanding of the Arab world. In fact, it is a reproduction of the commonplace prejudices and cultural stereotypes. It is, however, still present in the comments on the revolution in Egypt. It also means judging all the events of the revolution from the viewpoint of Western democracy and its standards. The second perspective „is detached from the views and judgements specific to one civilization, and recognizes the diversity of forms of perception and accounts of the history of other civilisations⁴” It focuses particularly on the outcomes of Western European colonisation in its political, social, economic and cultural aspects. The colonisation of the Arab world, in addition to well-known political and economic effects, has increased its internal social conflicts, the Europeanisation of the elites and generated a civilisation conflict between the East and the West⁵. The third perspective considers „the civilization as a state, a way of life for people of different cultures and nations” to be the starting point and recognises the diversity of the development of Arab societies and the values carried by the Islamic civilization in its internal dynamics as the main frame of reference .

In their assessment of the events in the Middle East, some political commentators find it difficult to give up their Orientalist prejudices. Some researchers even speak about the creation of a new myth – a neo-orientalism, which does not allow to adequately present the processes that are happening before our eyes. This myth presupposes that Islamic radicalism has only one side, predictable and known to all: the implacable hostility towards the West, the rejection of modernity and its achievements, the strict application of Sharia law in accordance with a literal interpretation of the Koran and the tradition, restrictions on the rights of individuals, especially those of women and religious minorities living among the followers of Islam. Furthermore, it feeds on the belief that Islamic political parties seek only to build some form of theocracy as soon as they gain power. Then – as the advocates of this theory claim – they will reject the democracy and show the world their true face. Public opinion in the West finds it very difficult to part with their perception of the East, accrued over centuries and sustained by the mass culture. In the Muslim socio-cultural magazine „As-Salam” published in Poland we read: „The images of crowds in the streets of Casablanca, Rabat, Tunis, Cairo or Benghazi, expressing their opposition to the authorities’ denial of basic liberties and political freedoms, guarantees of safety and development prospects are a proof that concepts such as citizenship, political subjectivity, autonomy and dignity of the individual or the spirit of republicanism are not limited to one – Western / European

4 Jan Kieniewicz, *Wprowadzenie do historii cywilizacji Wschodu i Zachodu*, Dialog, Warszawa 2003, s. 13.

5 Hieronim Kubiak, *Europejskie transformacje i ich wpływ na zmiany cywilizacyjne współczesnego świata*, „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe”, Arabska Wiosna Rok Później. Numer 1, Kraków 2012, s. 27.

– cultural sphere, its traditions and historical experiences, but constitute a part of much broader, universal heritage and values which should be defended regardless of latitude, wealth, language, skin colour or religion.”⁶.

All political, social or cultural changes occurring in the Middle East will be associated with Islam, as it is the real source of culture and identity for everyone inhabiting the circle of this civilization. Therefore, we should not expect the Middle Eastern societies to renounce their religious roots in the name of secularism, which for Westerners is the foundation of freedom and dignity of the individual and is synonymous with progress. These values can be achieved and implemented in accordance with Muslim tradition⁷. Moreover, as the Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun said in an interview for “Gazeta Wyborcza”: „Democracy is not owned by the Europeans. It is a universal system”. And he goes on to say, „There is no ‘clash of civilizations’, but a ‘clash of ignorance’”. There prevails an acute lack of knowledge about one another, which creates an insurmountable wall. And ignorance is accompanied by arrogance. The belief that one knows everything best does not encourage one to deepen one’s knowledge about other religions and cultures.⁸

In my opinion, the best chance to explain the current situation is offered by the third perspective and the reconstruction of the Arab identity.

The shaping of the Arab identity after the colonial period was based largely on the perceptions and myths that have never been implemented, and which were most fully expressed in pan-Arabism. The first of these was the myth of the creation of one common Arab state, which would gather the scattered political entities on a single territory, under the guidance of a strong leader. In the 1960s, the pursuit of the political unity of the Arab world corresponded to the belief of the masses which recognized the Egyptian President Nasser as the undisputed leader of all Arabs. This search for unity was supported by another belief, which assumed that the boundaries between individual Arab countries are artificial and designated by the European imperial policy employing the help of local regimes. It was this very myth that Saddam Hussein referred to while trying to legitimize the attack on Kuwait and its partial annexation in 1990. The third notion rooted in the Arab mindset was the conviction of the existence of common political, social and economic interests of all Arab countries. The development of oil monarchies ended even those hopes.⁹ It was then that the new concepts of unity and solidarity of Arab societies appeared in the form of religious revival and the recognition of Islam as the main element of identity and the foundation of community. In the light of Islamist ideology, Pan-Arabism and secularism were exposed as the tools of European colonialism and imperial policies of the United States. Religion was to become the foundation of the solidarity of Arab societies, reaching beyond national identification and referring to the existence of a spiritual community of the Arab world. The nation-state was the product of European history and the influence of Western ideas. In contrast, according to the fundamentalists, authentic unity could only materialize in the form of *umma* – a religious community, transcending the cultural and historical determinants that constitute the Arab identity. Nowadays, Arab societies are experiencing conflict, the object of which is the shape

6 Bracia Muzułmanie. Neo-orientalizm a mit islamskiego radykalizmu, “As-Salam”, nr 1, 2011, s. 3.

7 Katarzyna Brataniec, Niepewne losy rewolucji. Egipt, Maroko, Tunezja, Libia, “Zdanie” 2012, nr 1–2, s. 75.

8 Wywiad Jolanty Kurskiej z marokańskim pisarzem, Kobieta rewolucja islamska, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 30.11–01.12.2013, s. 38.

9 Emanuel Sivan „Arab Nationalism In the Age of the Islam Resurgence”, w: I. Gershoni, J.Jankowski [ed.] “Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East”, <http://www.ciaonet.org/book/jankowski/jank11.html>

of their identity. Despite the feeling of common fate and the political crisis caused by the U.S. policies in the region, some argue that there is no community of Arab states, and talking about it is only a confirmation of the illusion. Each of the countries in the region has its own foreign policy either in cooperation with the United States or against them. The Arab countries are connected solely through their language, and the only shared belief across the Arab world refers to a state of deep crisis, in which Arab societies presently are¹⁰.

Modern Arab states refer to a specific concept of the nation as a community of beliefs, language and civilisation, expressed through the ideals of ethics¹¹. This notion rejects the understanding of the state functions limited solely to the political sphere. According to Islamic tradition, the idea of freedom has no place in the concept of the state and has no political or social significance. Symbols of freedom in this tradition have always equalled actions against the state. Such was the understanding of every movement transgressing the domain of the state: nomadism, tribalism and in the religious sense – Sufism. The traditional societies preserved the balance between state and society, and autonomous groups had a margin of freedom. During the colonial expansion, this particular balance was destroyed, and every independent activity was eliminated in the name of building a strong state.

3. Colonial heritage

Having gained independence, most Arab countries preserved the post-colonial structures of political power in the form of advanced army, complex administration and centralized communication. The Western modernization of the Arab world resulted in reducing the freedom of its citizens and strengthening autocracy. The centralized state limited the democratic participation of the public in politics. Colonial power structures accounted for the authoritarian dimension of the political modernization in the Arab world¹². This dual heritage of European imperialism and autocratic reformism shaped the newly emerging political systems. They called themselves monarchies or republics governed in accordance with the will of the people, but the second half of the twentieth century replaced these systems with military regimes or one-party rule in almost the entire region. At the same time, this period was characterised by political stabilization and economic development. In Egypt, the regime was in power continuously since 1952, starting with the rule of Gamal Nasser, through Anwar Sadat to Hosni Mubarak. In Syria, the Al-Assad family has ruled since 1970. In Morocco, King Mohammed VI has been the head of state since 1999, taking over the throne after his father, who ruled the country from 1961. In Libya, Gaddafi was a leader from 1969, and in Tunisia, Ben Ali has been in power since 1987. Jordan and Yemen also experience this continuity of leadership.

The regimes created their legitimacy by mobilizing society around the slogans of national unity, freedom, justice and development. Some of them focused on identifying an internal mission or on the defence of traditional values. They also applied the discourse of democratization and human rights. The validation of power was mainly based on the fear of political chaos and an Islamist takeover in case of their fall. Paradoxically, in Egypt, by denying the citizens the right to participate in the political life, the regime strengthened the authority of the Islamic establishment

¹⁰ „Al-Ahram Weekly”, April 24–30; May 15–21, 2003.

¹¹ Nazih N. Ayubi „Over-stating The Arab State. Politics and Society in the Middle East”, I. B. Tauris Publishers, London New York 2001, s. 19.

¹² John O. Voll, „Islam and Democracy; Is Modernization a Barrier” w: Sh. Hunter, T.Malik, „Modernization, Democracy and Islam, Westport 2005, s. 91

in the public sphere. Mubarak also allowed religious institutions to control the judicial system and the society through passing a law regarding defamation of religion¹³. In the Arab world, political parties are weak, although in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Yemen, governments opened up to a multi-party system. However, it served more to maintain the illusion of political pluralism rather than genuine political freedom. Multi-party system in the Arab world strengthened, in fact, the power of the ruling party. It was an authoritarian rule with a democratic façade. In Egypt, the National Democratic Party was in power from 1978, although there were 24 parties operating legally¹⁴. In the liberal opinion-forming circles, culturally and politically oriented towards Europe, there dominates a positive perception of changes which began with the revolution in 2011, although it is not free from the anxiety about the fate of the democratic processes in Egypt. At this point I would like to present the main elements of this discourse. I want to pay particular attention to them also because liberal magazines in Poland are free from prejudice and in my opinion provide reliable information about the situation.

4. “Polityka” magazine

Patrycja Sasnal (an analyst in the Polish Institute of International Affairs) “Pharaoh takes off his mask. The new president was elected, but the army will continue to rule the country. The Egyptian army is one of the largest cross-industry corporations today.” “Polityka” no. 26, 27 June–03 July 2012. Marshal Tantawi became the temporary head of state. In this article the author focuses on the social dimension of an authoritarian state. She claims that the Egyptian society is authoritarian and “replicates the style of Mubarak’s rule at home, at work, in the street. This behaviour is enhanced by patriarchy – in everyday life it is the father who makes the decisions, while the tender mother remains silent.” Egyptian Family restricts personal freedom and individual rights. According to Sasnal, the education system is similarly based on obedience and lack of any creativity. “Social change in Egypt has not yet caught up with political change.”

Patrycja Sasnal “The Brothers divide the Family” “Polityka”, no. 50, 12–18 December 2012. “Everything is ready. Egypt under the rule of Mohammed Morsi is once again on the verge of revolution. The new president, assuming power, led the Egyptians to the streets.” Morsi has been called the “second dictator” and “shed the image of the president who is at the mercy of the army by having two of its heads retire. In return, he left alone the immense estates of the army, and the new draft of the constitution does not assume civilian control over the military forces. Hence, the Army moved to the back seat and quietly remains on good terms with the Brotherhood.” In her words: “Many Egyptians boycott the civilian production of the army in protest against its secretive dual power.” Officers were relieved to see the Freedom and Justice Party take responsibility for the condition of the State. “Mubarak has disgraced capitalism to the point that today some Egyptians turn to socialism.” Patrycja Sasnal ends her article by stating that the second revolution in Egypt is inevitable, because the social divisions have intensified, the sense of security among the Egyptians has declined drastically, the police has disappeared from the streets, and the economic situation of the country is disastrous. Meanwhile, Morsi called for a referendum on the draft of the new constitution with a strong position of the president (the referendum on December 15).

13 Policing Belief: The Impact of Blasphemy Laws on Human Rights”, Freedom House Report, October 2010.

14 Emad El-Din Shahin, „Political Parties in Egypt: Alive, but Not Kicking” w: Kay Lawson, Saad Eddin Ibrahim [ed.], „Political Parties and Democracy”, Vol. V, The Arab World, Praeger, Santa Barbara, California, Denver Colorado, Oxford England 2010, s. 9.

„Egypt is putting its head in a noose. The disgruntled in the streets of Egyptian cities have called for military assistance, as they were disappointed by their democratically elected Islamist government. They may soon regret it” is the title of Artur Domoślawski’s article in one of the opinion-forming weekly „Polityka”, no. 28/2013, 10–16 July

Domoślawski admits that the Brothers contributed to social discontent and mass criticism, and yet he doubts whether it was justified to call the army to overthrow the first democratically elected president in the history of Egypt. The Polish commentators felt that the decision of the Egyptian society is completely incomprehensible. Why did the young Egyptian democracy voluntarily impose on itself a restriction in form of the control of the army? Is a democracy fashioned by the army becoming the norm? Why does the society let the army use violence and repression against its political opponents? And if the next government disappoints a large number of people, will the military take control yet again?

Polish commentators do not understand the respect the Egyptian society feels for the army. Democracy does not allow a coup. Signatures collected by Tamarod are not impressive.

Domoślawski writes: “Some Egyptians believed the propaganda of the old regime claiming that as soon as the Brothers come to power, they will turn Egypt into a religious state. A year of the Islamist rule of Mohammed Morsi did not confirm these fears. Overthrown by the army, Morsi committed several extremely grave sins in politics, though of a completely different category.” Domoślawski is wrong, because it was Morsi’s rule that created the version of the constitution, in which the Salafists of al-Nour insisted on Article 219, turning Egypt into a religious state. He emphasises, however, the incompetence in the administration of the state, unresolved economic problems and social crisis. Domoślawski highlights the fact that the Brothers – successful in charitable activities (for example, the earthquake in Cairo in 1992 and the extraordinary mobilization of syndicates of doctors and engineers) – “could not replace the experience of social work with any state policy that would give hope for the future.” Furthermore, in his opinion, Morsi broke the underlying principle of the Brothers regarding politics and used violence against his political opponents after the announcement of the decree providing him with immunity in November and December 2012, and the riots which this decree induced. Domoślawski believes that the Brothers represent the non-liberal democracy trend, namely they disregard the rights of religious minorities and discriminate on grounds of gender, religion, language, health condition and social status. The main accusation made by the Brothers against the opposition concerned its glorification of the rights of religious minorities and freedom of speech with the simultaneous disregard for the will of the voters, an issue which is still audible in successive demonstrations against Sisi’s government.

Łukasz Wójcik: “Dangerous straitjacket”, „Polityka”, no. 29, 17–23 July 2013: “The fall of the Islamists in Egypt will be of tremendous significance for the future of political Islam in the whole region. After all, Islamists’ reconciliation with democracy was one of the most important changes in recent years in the Middle East. This was made possible largely due to the Egyptian Brotherhood, which in the 1970s first renounced violence, and two years ago, taking advantage of the fall of their sworn enemy Hosni Mubarak, entered the realm of official politics. Now, the way Islamists in other countries of the region will act depends to a large extent on the fate of the Egyptian Brotherhood. And for the time being, the Brotherhood has chosen a direction of the head-on collision.”¹⁵

„Islam has become a useful excuse for both sides of the conflict in Egypt. The Army gained a

¹⁵ Łukasz Wójcik Niebezpieczny kaftan bezpieczeństwa, „Polityka”, nr 29, 17.07–23.07.2013, s. 41.

tacit approval of the West for its activities, explaining that it took the power away from the fundamentalists. For the Brothers, on the other hand, it is convenient now to argue that they have become martyrs for their faith, although they did develop disastrous economic and social policies and it was because of that – not because of religion – that millions of Egyptians wanted to take their power away.” Wójcik indicates that Morsi constituted a serious threat to all authoritarian Arab regimes, firstly, because he was democratically elected and spoke on behalf of millions of Arabs, and secondly, as he openly criticized them for „stifling national democratic aspirations.” Therefore, after his fall, Saudi Arabia supported the military government with billions of dollars in loans. According to the commentator, the greatest achievement of the Brothers was the renunciation of violence and active participation in politics within the democratic system. It would be a pity if this process were compromised.

“Sisi, the son of Nasser”, *“Polityka”*, no. 35, 28 August–03 September 2013, the headline says: “After the recent tragic events in Cairo, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi became the hero of liberal Egypt. Even though he was brought to power by the Islamists”. Patrycja Sasnal argues that “the Egyptians, always susceptible to the cult of the individual, have a leader yet again, a father and master in one person.” On the other hand, even “the liberal cream of the Egyptian society anointed Sisi to be the leader, starting with writers, actors, to philosophers.” The author indicates numerous parallels between Sisi and Nasser: their charisma, the application of street dialect in their speeches, the use of al-Azhar to legitimize the military power in the country, as well as violence and repressions against the Islamists. She also talks about the formation of a new alliance of non-democratic countries in the region: Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Kuwait, along with Russia and China.

5. “Gazeta Wyborcza” newspaper

Thursday, 4 July 2013. Robert Stefanicki “The Coup in Egypt. Mohammed Morsi is no longer the president. There will be a new civilian government, though at the army’s bidding.” The constitution was suspended, and a plan of temporary seizure of power was discussed with a number of political groups. Stefanicki emphasises that Morsi was the first president elected in free elections, and the first Islamist to lead a democratic Arab state. “Over the last year, through its incompetence and greed, the Brotherhood, the strongest political organization in the country, embezzled the capital of social trust, accumulated over the period of 60 years of persecution from the hands of the army.” In a survey conducted by the Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies in Cairo, 82% of respondents were in favour of the army’s return to power. *Wyborcza’s* comment refers to the words of an Egyptian blogger: “The Egyptians are facing a difficult choice between a junta and a theocratic dictatorship. We deserve more, but we were not able to work out a better alternative.”

Friday 5 July 2013, Marta Urzędowska “Army rules Egypt”. “Adli Mansur is to rule temporarily, and his function is likely to be purely symbolic, because in reality it was the army that seized the power.” “... The army is doing everything to deprive the infuriated Islamists of their leaders. Warrants have been issued for the arrest of hundreds of important activists of the Brotherhood and their leader – Mohammed Badi – has already been arrested.” As a commentary on these events, Urzędowska interviewed Yasser El-Shima, an analyst from the International Crisis Group in Cairo. In his opinion, it is difficult to stabilize the country if the Islamists removed from power are not involved in the process of forming a new government. “Should the Muslim Brotherhood be persecuted yet again, as it was during Mubarak’s rule, should they be imprisoned or detained without charge anew, it would be a massive step backwards and a great tragedy for the democratization process, or even for the stability of Egypt.”

6. Social democratic thought

In his article "Crisis or failure of the Arab revolutions"¹⁶, Jerzy Wiatr notes that the policy of Western intervention in the internal affairs of Arab countries has proven to be unsuccessful as it is impossible to create democracy through military intervention. Roman Kuźniar, a Polish political scientist, accused such actions of "abandonment of morality in favour of the easy rhetoric of human rights."¹⁷ Wiatr indicates the following factors relevant to the development of events in the Arab world and in Egypt, which have contributed to the outbreak of the revolution: demographic changes, the increasing influence of education and educational success experienced by these societies, the role of the young generation and its sensitivity to democratic ideas, a kind of diffusion of these the ideas resulting from the third wave of democratization and the awareness of the corruption of existing governments.

Wiatr cites the oft-quoted words of Zbigniew Brzeziński: "In Egypt, we will have a state ruled either by religious fundamentalists or by the military."¹⁸ Thus, he opts for the idea, popular in the West and supported by authoritarian regimes, that as a matter of fact, dictatorships protected the Muslim society against Islamic radicalism. According to Wiatr, religious fundamentalism is incompatible with democracy and respecting the rights of minorities within it. Only a secular or ideologically neutral state can provide the conditions for the coexistence of the diverse ethnic and religious groups. He adds: "Christian Europe needed a few centuries in order to to understand and accept this principle, though even here one can sometimes see how difficult it is to implement this principle in practice."¹⁹

The Polish press features all these three perspectives, so depending on the editorial assumptions there dominates a paternalistic approach or the one taking into account the civilisational autonomy of the Arab world. A completely different perception of the role of the Muslim Brotherhood is presented by the right-wing press, which in its evaluation of the events of the Egyptian revolution often falls into the trap of not only Orientalism, but even of Christian fundamentalism. I do not intend to spend too much time on this discourse as I consider it an expression of prejudice and xenophobia, which you will see for yourselves. I am also forced to tone down some of the wording as I do not want to embarrass myself.

7. Right-wing press

The extreme attitudes towards the Islamic civilisation, referring directly to medieval prejudices and teachings of the Church Fathers are reflected on the pages of the right-wing press. Starting from the Middle Ages, European civilization has remained primarily Christian and it was the religious differences that determined the context of perceiving such distinct cultures as Islam. The Church Fathers – John of Damascus, Peter the Venerable and Thomas Aquinas – formulated interpretations of Islam which were binding for many centuries. They considered Islam as heresy, the creation of a man who used a fake revelation in order to gain power²⁰. They pointed to the

16 Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Kryzys czy fiasko rewolucji arabskich?*, „Myśl socjaldemokratyczna”, Nr 1/2 2013.

17 Roman Kuźniar, *Nieznośna lekkość zabijania*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17–18 grudnia, 2011.

18 Zbigniew Brzeziński, *Szach królowej*, „*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, 5–6 listopada 2011 cyt. za: Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Kryzys czy fiasko rewolucji arabskich?*, „*Myśl socjaldemokratyczna*”, Nr 1/2 2013.

19 Jerzy j. wiatr, dz. cyt., s. 55.

20 R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge – Massachusetts – London 1978, s. 38.

practical, not spiritual dimension of Islam: lack of miracles in Muhammad's activities, excessive attachment to worldly possessions and a sensual idea of Paradise. The image of Islamic paradise made Christians believe that Islam is a religion devoid of a spiritual or supernatural dimension. The depicted vivid description of Muslim Paradise contrasted with ascetic Christian ideas.

For them, Islam was a parody of Christianity, an inadequate copy of its practices and rituals. It was criticized for the doctrine of the holy war and violence against infidels. These old ideas are referred to by Tomasz P. Terlikowski, a Catholic columnist in „Do rzeczy” magazine (which means “to the point” but should rather be called “nonsense”), no. 17, 20–26 May 2013, in his article titled “Taming of the Islamic lion”, which represents the right-wing discourse and constitutes the essence of Catholic fundamentalism and its understanding of Islam. He regards Islam as a religion with contempt as well as any attempts at dialogue and cooperation, going as far as criticising the ecumenical policies of John Paul II and Pope Francis. It is worth quoting a few elements of this discourse:

According to this Catholic publicist, the Crusades and the Reconquista in Spain were necessary actions of Christians against the power of Islam, a battle for living space and a defence against persecutions by the Muslims. Terlikowski consistently negates the coexistence of the two religions in Andalusia calling this historical period “a myth of peaceful cooperation”. “The power of the West and the fall of Islamic superpowers later caught the West off guard, and the new strategy of Muslims, who replaced the army of warriors with an army of women having children in the West, made the Europeans forget about “the missionary nature of Islam” and the fact that its purpose is to subjugate the whole earth.” He goes on to say: “the gesture of John Paul II, who kissed the holy book of Islam, has made it increasingly difficult to talk about the “falseness” of this holy book”. However, Terlikowski does not give up and continues: “But in fact, from a Christian perspective, it is difficult to look at Islam and its holy book as anything other than false”. “The teachings of the Koran are, however, a regress not only from the Christian, but also Jewish perspective”. Quote: “The God of the Koran – [...] is not and can not be close to his followers”. And another quote as a summary: “Islamism, as well as Islam (although one needs to be aware of the difference between the two), should therefore be considered to be a threat also to the Church and to the Western civilization, in the same way that communism or Nazism once were (radical fundamentalism, in facts, draws from both). Which means that it is necessary not only to minutely analyse the anthropological and religious principles of this religion and its political branch, but also to indicate how they may impact the social life and how the Christians should defy it”. Unfortunately, this Catholic fundamentalist considers Islam be one of the most serious threats to Christianity in the twenty-first century and places Islam in the same category as relativism, aggressive secularism, civilisation of death and gender ideology²¹. He sees the coming to power of the Muslim Brothers and their policy of confrontation with the Copts in Egypt as synonymous with religious war .

“Do rzeczy”, no. 30, 19–25 August 2013, Jacek Przybylski talks to Frederik Encel, a French expert on the Middle East, in an interview entitled: “There will be no safety under the Pyramids”. Right after the tragic events in Tahrir, Encel prophesies that Egypt “is rapidly approaching a fully fledged civil war”. He compares the situation in Egypt to the Algerian conflict in the 1990s.

„Gazeta Polska”, 10 July 2013, Antoni Rybczyński: “How the army stopped Islamization” describes the reasons why Morsi lost his power and the withdrawal of public support for the Brothers. “Gazeta Polska”, 08 July 2013, Krzysztof Warecki (in his article) „Egypt faces power struggle. After the overthrow of Morsi / The Muslim Brotherhood does not know the concept of 'com-

21 Tomasz P. Terlikowski „Oswajanie islamskiego lwa”, „Do rzeczy”, nr 17 20–26 maja 2013, s. 75–76.

promise”, clearly regards the Brothers’ rule in Egypt as the introduction of principles of radical Islamic elements. The Brothers applied the democracy in an instrumental way in order to impose their authority on the entire society. “Gazeta Polska” highlights the Brothers’ attitude towards the Egyptian Christians and their persecution. It treats the support of Obama’s administration for the Muslim Brothers as an expression of ideological indoctrination and his leftist beliefs. Warecki advocates decisive actions by the Egyptian army so as to stop the violence and prevent anarchy. He quotes a statement by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry: “What we had in Egypt was an exceptional situation, which became a question of life or death, threatening with the outbreak of a civil war and extensive violence, whereas now we are dealing with a rapidly progressing constitutional process”. “Gazeta Polska” in a way justifies the military actions as the Brothers “blindly refer to the electoral legitimacy” and use violence against their opponents. Because their actions constitute a threat to the state security, they will no longer be tolerated by the army”.²²

8. Women during the revolution

The Polish press has devoted quite a lot of space to the women’s role in the Egyptian revolution, recognizing their unique role in the protests against authoritarian rule, their participation in demonstrations and their experience of violence at the hands of the police and security services.

Agnieszka Krzemińska, “Break the bracelets! The Egyptian upheaval is to lead to political, but also social changes. Will women benefit from it, so far living in the shadow of men?”, “Polityka”, no. 13–26 March, 2011. The author emphasizes the low social status of the Egyptian women and the deep social division that they experience – into the educated residents of the cities and the illiterate village inhabitants with no prospects for the future. On the one hand, Egyptian feminists are fighting for a shift in social awareness: a departure from the infibulation procedures and a greater participation of women in public life. On the other hand, despite the 2008 ban, about 90% of women still become circumcised, and the power of tradition is not decreasing, as evidenced by the data from 2009 mentioning 2.7 thousand suicide attempts made by educated women because of their spinsterhood.

Artur Domosławski (“Egyptian suffragists”, “Polityka”, no. 10, 7–13 March 2012) referring to Shahinda Miqlad, claims that women “have been and will be in the vanguard of the fight for rights in Egypt” – not only women’s rights, but human and civil rights as well. During the revolution, the women of Egypt declared a full-scale war against sexual harassment and this – according to Hoda Elsadda – resulted in an improvement in the situation in the streets of Cairo. Domosławski emphasises that the wave of political Islam strengthened the Islamic feminism, namely the movement of devout Muslim women, for whom Islam is a religion of equality between men and women.

Marta Urzędowska (“Gazeta Wyborcza”, 09–10 June 2012, “Women of Tahrir betrayed by the Egyptian revolution”): “Just like men, they fought with the police, they were arrested, humiliated and tortured.” However, only a few women entered the parliament, though there were hundreds of female candidates. The author points out that 70% of the new MPs are Islamists “for whom the place of women is at home, not in politics.”

“Gazeta Wyborcza” 31 December 2012–January 1, 2013, Marta Urzędowska “The strength of Muslim Sisters”. It is estimated that “the expanding Muslim Brotherhood has about one to one and a half million members, at least half of whom are women”. During the election campaign, women were mainly occupied with recruiting the voters. However, according to the rules prevail-

22 Krzysztof Warecki, „Gazeta Polska”, 07.08.2013, s. 17.

ing among the Brothers, women should not occupy significant public positions or serve important functions in the Brotherhood. On the basis of her interviews, Marta Urzędowska argues that being a Sister “is an unofficial position” – women are mainly focused on propagating the principles of Islam and on social work, they do not contribute to the funds. A number of them joined the Freedom and Justice Party, which “organized workshops to teach them how to run an election campaign and contact the media.” According to the author of the article, such a large proportion of women in the organization results from the political persecution of the Brothers. When men were sent to prisons, it was the women that took care of the continuity of the organization. “Since they have never been treated as a serious threat by the regime, they are able to operate more freely.” Which, of course, radically changed after the overthrow of President Morsi, evidenced – among other things – by the verdict of 28 November 2013, which sentenced 21 girls to 11 years in prison for peaceful demonstration supporting Morsi²³. There is a newly established youth branch of the party, called Nur, at the Ain Shams university. Its aim is to promote the knowledge of Islam and to take care of the problems of female students, e.g. improving the conditions in the dormitories and security on campus²⁴.

Having won the elections, the elected representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood paid a courtesy visit to Poland, which took place from 22 to 27 March 2012. Their purpose was to gather information about the Polish structural changes after 1989. They were particularly interested in the issue of withdrawal of the military power in Poland. This visit received no attention either from the Polish or from the Egyptian press.

9. Conclusion

Edward Said believes that the greatest progress that has been made in the contemporary theory of culture is the belief that cultures constitute a heterogeneous mix and are interrelated and mutually interdependent.²⁵ Any attempt at unification or creation of insurmountable barriers between civilisations contradict the human experience of history and contributes to the impoverishment of individual cultures: speaking of “‘Western civilization’ means supporting the ideological fiction suggesting a certain impartial superiority of some values and ideas, none of which really matter outside of history conquest, immigration, travel and mixing of peoples, which provided the Western nations with their present mixed identity.”²⁶ Every division of cultures and peoples, according to Said, is responsible for the false representations and misstatements, and more importantly, identifies the differences between people with hostility, which in turn results in wars and imperial control.

However, the revolution in Egypt has not been completed. Some say it has come full circle and once again the army is in power, and its new face is general Sisi. The army skillfully fuels the hostility towards the Brothers and their supporters. However, in my opinion, the biggest problem lies in the sharp division of the Egyptian society into three groups:

- those who accept the situation and the role the army plays in the changes that have no pre-

23 Muhammad Mansour, Rough justice: 21 girls sentenced to 11 years for peaceful protests, “Egypt Independent”, 28.11.2013, <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/rough-justice-21-girls-sentenced> [06.12.2013]

24 Marta Urzędowska, Siła Sióstr Muzułmanek, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 31 grudnia 2012–1 stycznia 2013, s. 8.

25 E. W. Saida, Orientalizm, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2005, s. 476.

26 Tamże.

dictable outcome – perhaps to preserve the authority and power of the army, as in their opinion there is no alternative;

- those who definitely want the political democratization of the country and the abolishment of military dictatorship;
- and finally those who fervently support the Islamic ideals created by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists.

All three groups consist of Muslims and they do not question the Islamic foundations of the Egyptian society. The dispute revolves around the understanding of Islam. On the one hand, as a cultural and civilisational project, heritage and values, which include contributions by the Copts and other religious minorities living in Egypt, and on the other hand, as the regulation and the only source of rights for all citizens, which is heading towards a religious state. The debate, which takes place not only in Egypt but throughout the Muslim world bears the hallmarks of an intra-civilisation clash which was long noted by Piotr Kłodkowski and Jerzy Zdanowski.