

# Artur Malantowicz

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## "Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria", Raphaël Lefèvre, London 2013 : [recenzja]

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Obama and his administration, Lynch strives to present their efforts as genuine, honest and selfless. The approach, he argues, which tried to combine liberal ideals with pragmatic interest became an object of unfair criticism from all the sides, from American neocons to the Arab activists. Unfortunately, his close ties with Obama's administration visibly influence Lynch's attitude towards the current US government policies and deprive him of the capability of critical appraisal. Subsequently, the author concludes that the old status quo in the Middle East has been shattered for good and that the new realities will demand new methods.

I cannot restrain myself from taking advantage of my privileged position and using the most recent events in Egypt, to show how groundless were Lynch's hopes for the definitive change of the old status quo and his belief in the radical change of the US policy toward the Middle East. The removal of president Mohamed Morsi from power by the army in a regular coup d'état and the establishment of an interim government, met with applause from a large part of Egyptian society and rage of the Muslim Brotherhood, which proves that neither the society nor its political culture changed after the Arab uprisings. And clearly they did not become more democratic. Instead, President Obama's restrained reaction to this coup shows that the principles of the US policy towards the Middle East are still subordinated to their interests in that region.

*The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* by Marc Lynch has two different faces. The good and very interesting descriptive part contrasts with a rather shallow analysis and sometimes with simply naive conclusions. At certain points the book also seems to be an uncritical attempt to defend the dull policy of president Obama and his administration towards the Middle East.

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**(rev.) Raphaël Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, Hurst & Company, London 2013, pp. 288**

"Hafiz died and Hama didn't. Bashar will die and Hama won't". This quote from a Syrian rebel chanting anti-Assad slogans could as well sum up the masterpiece written by a young scholar Raphaël Lefèvre, thanks to whom the significance of Hama is yet once again brought to light. Inquisitively researched, thoroughly analyzed and timely published, *Ashes of Hama* is not only a critical guidebook to the history of the Syrian Muslim Brothers – long missing from the academic literature – but also a great explanatory key to events currently unfolding in Syria. Lefèvre provides readers with a unique account of the development of the Islamist movement in Syria with the landmark of the Hama massacre still present in the public consciousness. All of this is backed by endless hours of interviews with the Muslim Brotherhood activists, independent Islamists, members of the Ba'ath regime, experts, and analysts.

Throughout his book Lefèvre methodically explores the history and legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, starting from its intellectual roots in the Ottoman and colonial times and finishing with the recent events of the civil war. As such, it is a valuable contribution to the debate on the Syrian political scene, both for the Academia and the general public, since many commentators agree that very little is known about the contemporary Syrian *Ikhwan* and its internal politics.

*Ashes of Hama* proves wrong all those claiming that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is merely a branch of its bigger and better known sister from Cairo. Early leaders of the Syrian *Ikhwan*, such as Mustapha al-Sibai and Mohammed al-Hamid, were in fact influenced intellectually by Hassan al-Banna as a result of their studies in Al-Azhar University in Cairo, but, as Lefèvre puts it, “the birth of Syria’s *Ikhwan* in 1946 was very much the product of the country’s particular socio-religious and political landscape”. Based on the network of Islamic societies created throughout 1930s and 1940s and inspired by the moderate Salafiyya movement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria was from the very onset an administratively and financially independent organisation.

Lefèvre presents the record of the *Ikhwan*’s early moderation and attempt to combine political Islam with democracy, which was the first experiment of this kind in the Middle East. He also presents the process of radicalisation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in effect of its socioeconomic, political and ideological opposition to the Ba’ath party which took over and eventually monopolized Syrian political scene after 1963. Mutual distrust and rivalry between the two main political forces have also become the background for a rising wave of sectarianism which altered the social fabric of Syria in the 1970s and 1980s, and maintains its significance up to this day.

The progressing radicalisation of the *Ikhwan*, the leadership crisis and the struggle between different wings of the organisation (Damascus, Aleppo, Hama) eventually gave way to the rise of violent and radical jihadist movement within the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in the form of its offshoot – the Fighting Vanguard. As Lefèvre further explains, it ultimately led to a military confrontation between the Islamists and the Ba’ath party, which came at the end of the 1970s. Its culmination in February 1982, when pro-regime forces killed 25,000 to 40,000 civilians in the city of Hama, has thereafter become a symbol of the regime’s bloody crackdown on opposition and a factor successfully limiting any discontent among Syrian society. It also forced into exile the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, which, after years of internal crisis, has eventually restructured and recovered its coherence and now is about to return to the political scene in Syria.

Several notions raised by Lefèvre deserve special attention. One of them is the birth of jihadist movement in Syria, formed in opposition to the Ba’athist regime. Created by Marwan Hadid in the early 1970s, the Fighting Vanguard soon turned into a well functioning terrorist organisation targeting Ba’ath state officials. When faced with severe regime oppression, militant Islamists would eventually leave abroad, principally to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet presence, but also to Iraq. In consequence, jihad became globalized and many members of the Fighting Vanguard rose to prominence in

other terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda, eg. Abu Musa'ab al-Suri, who was the main ideologist of al-Qaeda in the early 2000s. In the midst of the current civil war, some of them are now coming back to Syria to fight the Assad regime once again.

Consequently, by exploring the relatively unknown history of the *Ikhwan* and its uneasy relations with the Ba'ath party, full of rivalry and mutual animosities, *Ashes of Hama* contributes to our understanding of the contemporary Syria. After reading it, the Ba'athist claims of the current war being the "final act of Syria's long struggle between Islamism and secular pan-Arabism" receive essential context and are more comprehensible. Likewise, the book's narrative helps to recognize the internal complexity and diversity of the *Ikhwan* with its radical and moderate factions.

Simultaneously, the author shows in a clear manner that the Muslim Brotherhood is in fact only a part of a broader Islamist movement among the Syrian opposition, yet it attracts most of the Western attention. Furthermore, Lefèvre raises important questions which should be of concern for the leadership of the contemporary *Ikhwan* in Syria, particularly how can they re-establish their support networks after a long time in exile, especially in the rural areas, and what role could they possibly play in post-Assad Syria?

One might wish to see a few aspects of the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood more deeply explored in Raphaël Lefèvre's work, principally its socio-economic and political agenda, which remains vague, as well as its relations and attitude towards the jihadist groups currently fighting in Syria. It would surely help in building a coherent and complex image of the Syrian *Ikhwan* among the Western audience. Despite these few minor oversights, *Ashes of Hama* is a valuable, well researched and very timely volume which enhances our knowledge about the issues essential for understanding the past, the present and the future of Syria.

### **Natalia Daško**

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**(rev.) Nonie Darwish, *Okrucieństwo w majestacie prawa. Prześladowanie kobiet w świecie islamu* [Cruel and Usual Punishment: The Terrifying Global Implications of Islamic Law, Nashville 2008], KEFAS Publishing House, Warszawa 2011, pp. 352**

In the democratic countries of the West, one of the fundamental principles of the state political model is the separation of the activity of religious organizations from the state bodies. However, the principle of the separation of the church and the state is alien to the states from the circle of Islamic culture, where all law derives from the teachings of the prophet Muhammad.

Sharia, that is the essence of the Muslim law, encompasses all the aspects of human life, such as politics, economy, banking, trade, concluding contracts, marriages, divorces,