

Article Review of *Islamic Mobilization: Social Movement Theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood*

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Abstract

The social movement theory (SMT) has been used as an explanatory mechanism for understanding the rise and spread of the ideas and principles of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Egypt since 1930. The origin country Egypt which is the birthplace of MB had undergone a radical change politically, economically and socially. These changes made it possible for the rapid growth of conservative and religious groups such as MB. The organisational structure and the ideological evolution, and also the recruitment method of MB are analyzed in the following pages.

Key words: The Muslim Brotherhood; Social movement theory; Theories of political Islam; The model of political opportunity structure

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INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, the author will provide a review of the article mentioned above. The article is 24 pages in length and has been published in *The Sociological Quarterly*, Volume 42, Number 4, by 'The Midwest Sociological Society' in 2005. The essential idea of the article is the interaction between the ideational component of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the group's

organisational activities. The author, Ziad Munson, has used a couple of defining theories for the explanation of the dramatic growth of the MB during 1930-1955, these being:

- Theories of political Islam
- The concept of political opportunity structure

Empirically, he has taken advantage of the data of the US State Department files from the period 1932–1954. The article review is divided into the following parts:

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) reached its height of popularity at the beginning of the 1930s. According to the data from Richard Mitchell's 1969 book, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, used by Munson, the organization's membership began to grow dramatically in this time. For example, it had five branch offices by 1930, 15 by 1932, and 300 by 1938. While exact membership numbers are unknown, the 300 branches probably jointly represented between 50,000 and 150,000 members (Munson, 2001, p. 488). The interpretation of this dramatic growth was the Arab strike in Palestine. The MB used the incendiary issues in Palestine as its political rhetoric, which it succeeded in bringing to receptive audiences. In 1941, the MB entered the election for parliament. Participating in the democratic process meant a new policy direction from the MB. It changed the organization from a social movement into an active political party. In addition, the rules of the game changed after the Second World War. The British colonial power and the Egyptian state after the end of the War turned their eyes on the MB and its activity. In 1948, the organization was officially dissolved and many of its members imprisoned. The organisation retaliated by assassinating Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi, the man responsible for

ordering the MB's dissolution. Al-Banna, the founder and leader of the organisation was, in turn, murdered two months later by the Egyptian police.

2. THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IDEOLOGY

The MB's ideology has been debated in detail. The core principle of its ideology at this time consisted of the following elements:

- Rebirth of the people's consciousness towards the occupying force of the United Kingdom
- Highlighting the dangers of poverty
- Denouncing the Westernization of Egyptian society

The MB policy towards the assumed decline in Islamic morality worked through two channels:

First, they believed Egyptians' individual morality was in crisis and facing challenges from modern values. In order to resolve this crisis, the re-establishment (reinstallation) of Islamic values was imperative. They could reach this aim through Dawa (prophesizing).

Second, they worked on the state institutions, and tried to re-establish them on an Islamic basis.

3. THE EXPLANATION FOR POLITICAL ISLAM

1. Social change and anomie: The MB saw itself as offering a reaffirmation of traditional beliefs and an outlet for the frustration of anomic social conditions brought on by rapid population expansion and urbanization – according to Table 1 in the article (p. 491), Egypt experienced lower urbanisation during 1927-1947.

2. Strains model: tensions emerged between the modern world and the traditional world. Table 2 shows that the most of the organization's supporters came from the most Westernized and modernized citizens, such as students, doctors, and engineers.

3. Relative deprivation: Table 3 in the article (p. 493), shows that economic production was increasing faster than the rate of population growth.

4. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE (POS)

1. Political opportunity as an explanation for a social movement: POS focuses on the relationship between a social movement and its environment, especially its political environment.

2. All forms of social movement activity depend on the political arena.

3. There are four key dimensions to the political opportunity structure:

- a. Declining state repression
- b. Increasing political access
- c. Division among elites
- d. Influential allies

Munson has another three dimensions for POS in the MB's case:

- a. The role of the United Kingdom in Egyptian life – controlling Egyptians' lives
- b. The delegitimization of the Wafed party
- c. The ideological conflict over the creation of Israel

5. THE IDEA AT WORK IN THE MB

1. Organization resources: the branch system formed the basic structure of the MB.

2. Its federated system.

3. It consisted of a three-tier membership structure:

- a. Assistant – first-level members
- b. Related – as a second level members have to demonstrate knowledge of society.
- c. Active – devotes their life to the organisation.

4. This could mean different things for different people – e.g. fighting for the poor in a deprived area, or as a voice for democracy within an educated urban one.

5. The organisational structure and the ideology of the movement are intertwined.

6. ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY

There is a clear connection between the MB's activity and its beliefs. This relation was considered the best way of attracting new members. Another feature of its expansion was its role in the building of mosques, sports clubs, and schools.

CONCLUSION

The author of the article has concluded that the MB has been able to adapt to the different environments which faced the Egyptian society during the British mandate. The MB has suggested itself to the Egyptian society as a platform where the conservative and religious values praised.

REFERENCE

Munson, Z. (2005). Islamic Mobilization: Social movement theory and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. *The Sociological Quarterly*.