

The Emergence of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine: Causes, Activities and the Formation of Identity

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Abstract

Three major areas will be examined in this paper; the first being an outline of the fundamental contributory factors to the Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in Palestine. Special reference will be made to the attitude and doctrine adopted by the Brotherhood in its approach. The second section offers a description of how the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood emerged in Palestine and examines its relationship with the Palestinian Arabs, its role in the Arab strike from 1936-39 and the war of 1948 and the establishment of its branches in Palestine. Thirdly, the writer will attempt to go some way towards clarifying the Egyptian Society's part in the creation of the identity of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood.

KEYWORDS: Middle Eastern Politics, Arab-Israeli Conflict, Islamic Movement.

Introduction

The emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan Muslimun*) presented a major challenge to Western powers and secularisation in the Muslim world. In this context, the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood was established as a response to three major situations; the fall of the Caliphate system in 1924, the colonization of the Muslim world by Western powers and the increase of westernisation in Muslim countries (Abdelnasser 1994: 33). The original objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood were related to al-Banna's premise that the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, Muslim

ummah and the Islamic *khilafah*, were essential to the establishment of an Islamic State. Al-Banna believed that all of these areas must be addressed if Islam was to be recovered and Muslim lands protected under the flag of *jihad*. These objectives must be met in order to preach the message of Islam and facilitate its spread to the entire world (Al-Banna n.d: 177).

To clarify the specific objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Banna set out goals to re-establish the Islamic *khilafah* and Islamic *ummah*, with the aim of countering disunity within Islamic *ummah* and rescuing the sovereignty of Muslim territories. According to al-Banna, the Muslim *ummah* can only achieve harmony when Islam is understood and practised as a way of life (*al-din*) rather than a creed that is relevant only to specific race, blood and geographic location (Abdelnasser 1994: 35). Therefore, this ideology was the major focus of the Muslim Brotherhood during its early stages and throughout its evolution. This has been particularly evident since the time of the call for Muslims and Arabs to unite against British and Jewish intervention on Muslim territory in Palestine.

Historically, the attention of the Muslim Brotherhood was drawn initially towards the Palestine question in 1935, when al-Banna visited Haj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem. Thereafter, the Society began activities in support of the Palestinians and was one of the organisations responsible for demonstrations in Egypt against the Jewish presence in Palestine, as confirmed by El-Awaisi (El-Awaisi 1998: 25-26). Further supporters for the reclamation of the Holy Lands were represented by *al-Hizb al-Watani* (the National Party), *Jami'iyat al-Shubban al-Muslimin* (the Young Men's Muslim Association), and *Jam'iyat al-Hidaya al-Islamiyya* (the Society of Islamic Guidance). There were also religious scholars such as Rashid Rida and Sheikh al-Azhar, Mustafa al-Maraghi. However, the government of Egypt during the 1930s determined its attitude towards the Palestine question on the basis of its seeking independence from British and Egyptian politics. These were derived from three major elements, the Palace, the Wafd Party and the British (Gomaa 1977: 31-32).

Subsequently, the Muslim Brotherhood played an important role throughout the significant events of the Palestinian struggle against Jewish and British mandate in Palestine. These include the Palestinian Arab strike from 1936-39 and the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. As the Society's policy was to

spread its influence in Arab countries, branches of the Muslim Brotherhood were also established in Palestine and their identity became synonymous with the struggle to liberate Palestine and establish an Islamic state.

The Society also gained support from Palestinians and membership increased dramatically as a result. However, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood faced a diverse variety of problems during the annexation of the West Bank under the Jordanian regime and the Gaza Strip under the Egyptian government. These difficulties included strained relations with well known nationalist groups; in particular the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Throughout the Israeli occupation in Palestine, the influence of nationalist groups was on the increase and the PLO gained the direct support of the Egyptian regime. The Muslim Brotherhood at that time was fairly weak and ineffectual as far as political activity was concerned, however, the mid-seventies saw a growth of Islamic Movements in occupied territories and the Muslim Brotherhood continued as the largest of these, both in number and influence.

During the eruption of the Palestinian *Intifada* in 1987, the Muslim Brotherhood became one of the major contenders among Islamic Movements in occupied territories and remained an influential political force. Students, social organizations and even Society members were responsible for the establishment of the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS). This group was considered to be an offshoot of the Society occupied territories.

Throughout this discussion, several attempts have been made by the present writer to explore the significant political aims, role and achievements of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood during its contribution in Palestine. Therefore, this article attempts to examine the following the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine in the early 1930s, through to the Palestinian Arab strike from 1936-39 and the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

Fundamental Factors in the Involvement of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine

Four fundamental factors may be set out in response to the question; Arab-Islamic unity, Islamic *Jihad*, the special status of Palestine and the political attitude towards Jews. The first factor is the concept of Islamic-Arab unity. From the perspective of the Muslim Brotherhood, this term may be defined as *ummah*, whereby all Muslims have a special relationship with each other and there is no distinction made between them, whether racial, cultural, hierarchical or geographic (Al-Banna n.d: 19-24). Moreover, Islam itself is also a fatherland and a nationality, with a doctrine and worship that propounds equality (Husaini 1956: 73). Hence, in this context of Arab-Islamic unity, the Muslim Brotherhood invited all Arab countries to help Palestine and to consider this call as an Arab duty and responsibility. This sense of unity had been strengthened by a common struggle against British imperialism; a crisis that had brought the Palestinian Arab and the Egyptian Arab together in a bid to resolve the 'one national problem' (Al-Banna n.d: 263).

The second factor is the concept of Islamic *jihad*, which the Muslim Brotherhood believed to be part of its religious duty and doctrine that should be implemented in defence of Islam and Muslim lands. *Jihad* is the fourth element among the ten oaths of allegiance (*bay'ah*) and also the first of twenty principles of understanding (*al-fahm*); this being the first element of the oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) in Muslim Brotherhood doctrine.¹ Moreover, the concept of Islamic *jihad* as interpreted by the Muslim Brotherhood, is defined as an individual obligation (*fard 'ayn*) for all Muslims rather than a collective one (*fard kifayah*) (Al-Banna n.d: 361).

The Muslim Brotherhood asserts Palestine to be an Islamic Holy Place, represented by the event of the Prophet's journey; *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj* (the nocturnal journey and ascension to heaven). All Muslims recognise the region as the third Holy Place in Islam and al-Banna reiterates that Palestine is an

¹ There are ten elements of the Muslim Brotherhood's oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*), its following to al-Banna declaration: "There are ten elements of our *bay'ah*, memorize them: Understanding, Sincerity, Action, Jihad, Sacrifice, Obedience, Steadfastness, Concentration, Brotherhood, and Mutual Trust. See Al-Banna, Hasan, n.d. *Majmu'at al-Rasa'il al-Imam al-Syahid Hasan al-Banna*, n.p: Dar al-Yusuf. p. 356.

Islamic territory due to its association with the Prophet and the fact that it is the home of al-Aqsa Mosque (Al-Banna n.d: 150).

I were considers this element to be a crucial factor, as the emergence of Jewish people in the Middle East caused consternation amongst the Arab population. The Muslim Brotherhood considered the plan for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to be a direct threat to the Islamic world; Egypt being in particular danger from a Zionist expansion. El-Awaisi asserted that such an increase within the Arab nations, may result in the Zionists perceiving Egypt as a specific target for occupation, as the birth place of Moses was sited there and the region could be claimed as a Jewish Holy land (El-Awaisi 1998: 16).

It may be said that the implementation of the Muslim Brotherhood's approach towards the Palestinian question during the early period of its involvement, was derived mainly from consideration of these factors. The Society's performance throughout both the Palestinian Arab strike between 1936-1939 and the first Arab-Israeli war of 1947 and the establishment and expansion of branches in Palestine are all identifiable as having been influenced by the preceding considerations. The ultimate outcome of the Society's trend towards expansion was the presence and subsequent development of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In addition, attention to these factors may aid in the countering of arguments raised by leftist Egyptian historians; the bases of which were founded on their claim that the presence of the Brotherhood in Palestine was directly linked to its plan to exploit the prevailing political situation. It was suggested that the real motive for the involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine derived from its strategy to gain support from the people and leaders of Egypt (Brynjar 1999: 239). Gershoni maintained this view, asserting that the prime concern of the Society was its expansion and popularity throughout Palestine and the Arab countries (Gershoni 1986: 381-390).

The Involvement of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian Question

The involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine was officially initiated in 1948, when military troops were sent by the Society's leaders to support the Palestinian Arabs in the first Arab-Israeli war. However, prior to this period, the Brotherhood conducted what may be termed as 'pre-relations' with Palestine during the Arab strike of 1936-39.

The Early Participation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine

Historically, an unofficial link between the Muslim Brotherhood and Palestine was witnessed as early as 1931. A year before the Society became recognised, Al-Banna himself had corresponded with Haj Amin al-Husayni; the Mufti of Jerusalem, emphasising his sense of Islamic unity and maintaining his desire to aid in the upholding of the proper elements of Islam in Palestine (El-Awaisi 1998: 28).

On the occasion of the General Islamic Conference (December 1931), large numbers of Muslim Political leaders and Islamic scholars convened to represent Muslim awareness of the Palestine question. For a second time, al-Banna sent a message to al-Husayni; greeting the delegates and presenting the Society's own proposal for the defence of Palestine and indeed all Holy places. His premise was that such support and protection was an issue and obligation for all Muslims. According to El-Awaisi, the proposal was delineated as follows (El-Awaisi 1998: 29):

1. The Conference should deal with the question of land and the potential for Jews to purchase areas in Palestine under their claim to right of ownership.
2. The Conference should create an Islamic fund or company that could purchase land should it be offered for sale.
3. Committees should be set up to discuss the establishment of an association for the defence of worldwide Holy places.
4. Palestine University could benefit from being run along the lines of Aligarh College in India, which offers a combination of modern subjects and religious studies.
5. Completion of the building of the Hijaz Railway.
6. The Establishment of an Islamic information centre.

Al-Husayni replied to al-Banna's letter on the 24th January 1932, declaring that the conference committee intended to pay great attention to the Society's proposal. Consequently, the resolutions passed by conference included the proposals to establish a University of Jerusalem, to form an Islamic committee to defend the Holy places in Palestine and to transfer the Hijaz Railway Company to an Islamic one (El-Awaisi 1998: 30).

The participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian question continued in 1933 in the form of a weekly magazine; *Jaridat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, which highlighted the sense of Arab-Islamic unity, by publishing various articles on Palestine and reminding Muslims of the significance of the Holy Place in Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque (El-Awaisi 1998: 30-31).

As pointed out by Gershoni, the Muslim Brotherhood's earlier attempts to solve the problem of Palestine were ideological. (Gershoni 1986: 368) This is validated in light of the Society's methodology of promoting the issue of Palestine i.e. through the aforementioned weekly publication and the message of al-Banna entitled '*Ila ayy shay' nad'u al-nas'* (To What Do We Summon The People), sent out between April and August 1934. This formulated an Islamic solution to the problem of Palestine and as such was oriented towards the Arab and Islamic world.

On the 6th August 1935, the General Guidance Council of Muslim Brotherhood (*Maktab al-Irshad al-'Amm al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) sent two of its leaders, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'ati and Muhammad As'ad al-Hakim on special missions to Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. In Palestine, both of them met al-Husayni who was the leader of the Supreme Muslim Council at that time and only a short time after this, were official relations between the two organizations established (Gershoni 1986: 369-370).

In accordance with this discussion, the researcher considers the aforementioned factors to represent the earliest achievement of the Muslim Brotherhood in their 'pre-participation' within the issue of the Palestinian question. The 1930s witnessed the increase of Jewish settlement and British influence in Palestine; however, there was simultaneous rapid growth in both number and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In this context, Mitchell stated:

“From these modest beginnings, which did not especially distinguish it from the many religious societies which thrived in the capital, the society of the Muslim Brothers grew, by the outbreak of the second world war, into one of the most important political contestants on the Egyptian scene. Its membership became so diversified as to be virtually representative of every group in Egyptian society.” (Mitchell 1993: 12).

In addition, the inter-personal relations between both leaders al-Banna and al-Husayni, greatly benefited the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood and introduced it to the concept of international relations. Al-Banna himself was an inspired and charismatic leader, who promoted an idealistic mode of thought that motivated Society members to participate seriously in the quest to resolve the Palestinian issue.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinian Arab Strike 1936-39

Subsequent to the establishment of relations between the Brotherhood and the Palestinians, 1936 saw the outbreak of the Palestinian Arab strike, which opposed both the British mandate (1917-1948) and the influx of Jewish immigrants. It was led initially by notable Palestinian families and Islamic leaders, such as Haj Amin al-Husayni and his family and Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his movement (Johnson 1984). The eruption of this crisis was a direct response towards the British attitude regarding Jewish immigrants; the people of Palestine viewing the granting of permission for thousands of Jews to settle in this Islamic Holy land as a gross injustice.²

In this context, Basheer M. Nafi defined the situation as ‘the Arabization of the Palestinian Question’. The boycott began at state level and then filtered through to embrace a national arena that included Egypt, Syria and Iraq, where a series of anti British and Jewish demonstrations took place.³

² In fact, the British have granted permits for 1,800 Jewish immigrants in Palestine in 1936, see Nafi, Basheer M, 1998. *Arabism, Islamism and the Palestine Question, 1908-1941: A Political History*, Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited. pp. 249.

³ See Nafi’s discussion on the beginning, events and situations of Arab-Islamic strikes on the issue of Palestine in Nafi, Basheer M, 1998. *Arabism, Islamism and the Palestine Question, 1908-1941: A Political History*, Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited. pp. 191-310.

During the Palestinian strike in 1936, the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt carried out propaganda and support activities on behalf the Palestinians. There were a number of factors that dictated and signified its involvement and according to El-Awaisi these were (El-Awaisi 1998: 32).

1. The rapid development of Palestinian strikes spread to all parts of the country and effectively caused concern to the British and the Jews.
2. The formation of the Higher Arab Committee (HAC) on the 24th April 1936 led by Haj Amin al-Husayni.
3. The involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood led by students from the University al-Azhar and various schools with whom al-Banna had enjoyed close relations since his move to Cairo.
4. The extension of the Muslim Brotherhood's influence via the establishment of many branches in Arab countries.

The Muslim Brotherhood directed its activities towards political campaigns and propaganda by:

1. The establishment of the Society's Committee and its activities in mobilizing support for Palestinians at state level through its local branches in Egypt.
2. Cementing relations with other organizations.

The General Central Committee for Palestine's Aid (GCCP) or *al-Lajna al-Markaziyya al-'Amma li al-Musa'adat Filastin* was formed in May 1936 and headed by Hasan al-Banna. Its establishment was decided upon during a special meeting in Cairo that was attended by large numbers of Society members. This meeting also proposed the strategy for organising and administering aid for the Palestinian Arabs.

The GCCP's activities concentrated on mobilizing support from within Egyptian society. Members included lecturers, students and teachers who were also involved in branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian University and the high schools of Cairo. The activities of the GCCP were evident from its propaganda in support of Palestine, displayed in the press, pamphlets, speeches, mosques, schools and Committee's programmes. Donations were collected for Palestine and transferred directly to HAC and protest petitions were distributed by way of telegrams and letters to the High Commissioner for Palestine, the British Foreign Office, the British

Government, and the League of Nations. As asserted by Gershoni, dozens of petitions were sent to those bodies and organizations during the activities of the GCCP (Gershoni 1986: 372-377).

Gershoni further stated that the effort to help Palestinians in Egypt was supported wholeheartedly by the Muslim Brotherhood, as indeed many of its members had their roots in Egyptian society. He also maintained that members hailed predominantly from the professional strata such as; students, university lecturers, teachers, postal clerks, government officials, bank clerks and engineers (Gershoni 1986: 375). This factor may have contributed to the rapid increase of Muslim Brotherhood fund-raising at the onset of its campaigns.

Meanwhile, the various branches of the Society continued to play an important role in support of the Palestinian strike. For instance, all branches in Egypt were formed as sub-committees for the GCCP (El-Awaisi 1998: 37). Their activities included the sending of their own protest letters, the prescribing of a special prayer (*qunut*) for Palestinians and some members initiated the collection of 'wheat alms' (*zakat al-qamh*) for Palestinian victims (Brynjar 1999: 238). Lia asserted that by this point there were 150 Egyptian branches of the Society and an official Brotherhood survey reported this figure to have risen to 216 by June 1937. (Brynjar 1998: 150).

The GCCP's campaign for the Palestinians continued through 1936 and became more intensive in 1938 when the strike transformed into guerrilla warfare. Small groups of Muslim Brethren also took part in armed attacks against Jewish installations in Palestine (Mayer 1980: 101). That particular episode was considered to have been inflamed by the British plan of July 1937, which proposed to divide the country into two states; the Jewish state and the Palestinian state. In addition, this period of history also witnessed an eruption of awareness within Egyptian politics, which resulted in the formation of the Young Egypt Party and the Wafd Party. This became an Egyptian national issue at that time (Brynjar 1999: 237).

Throughout the outbreak of the Palestinian strike, the Society's committee was forming ties with the other organizations, both inside and outside Egypt:

1. The Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) in Egypt.
2. The Higher Arab Committee (HAC) in Palestine.

The link with the Young Men's Muslim Association (YMMA) or *Jami'iyat al-Shubban al-Muslimin* began in May 1936, when the GCCP took part in forming the Supreme Committee for Relieving Palestinian Victims (SCRCP) or *al-Lajna al-'Ulya li-Ighathat Mankubi Filastin*. The Muslim Brotherhood at that time was represented by Hasan al-Banna and Hamid Abd Rahman. The formation of this Committee was attended by all leaders of Islamic organizations in Egypt, by prominent political personalities and by representatives from the Syro-Palestinian bodies in Cairo (Brynjar 1998: 236).

The Muslim Brotherhood's relationship with YMMA during the Palestinian Arab strike in 1936 may be defined in terms of its political policy to encourage co-operation and to seek support from the Egyptian peoples. The society was successful in gaining a political trust among the Committee's leaders, when a meeting of the SCRCP upheld the considering of the Society's local committees (GCCP) as branches of the Supreme Committee (SCRCP). Gershoni pointed out that all SCRCP activities were administered in co-operation with the GCCP in Cairo. These included the collecting of funds and material aid for Palestinians, demonstrations, the boycotting of Egyptian Jews and the sending of petitions, protests and letters to the British authorities in Cairo, Jerusalem, and London (Gershoni 1986: 379-380).

The Muslim Brotherhood participated in most SCRCP activities; attending and addressing meetings, together with representatives of other Islamic organizations. It was also instrumental in the formation of the Supreme Committee for Palestine's Piaster or *al-Lajna al-'Ulya li-Qirsh Filastin*, the purpose of which was to collect funds and transfer them to Palestinians (Al-Banna n.d: 151).

As previously mentioned, relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinian leader had been established before the outbreak of the strike. This strengthened over time and was evident in the close links between leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and the HAC; Hasan al-Banna and Haj Amin al-Husayni. Both organisations began a mutual cooperation and the HAC followed the Society's lead in the collection of funds while the Society published the HAC's version of events in Palestine in its organ press (Gershoni 1986: 377).

During 1937 and 1938, the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood were focused on political campaigns and propaganda efforts; special emphasis being placed on the issues in Palestine that were addressed by way of increasingly intensified propaganda, demonstrations and conferences.

For instance, the Society's weekly religious magazine *al-Nadhir* was published in order to highlight the negative and damaging attitude of the British government to Islam and the issue of Palestine. The founding of *al-Nadhir* was to promote amongst the Egyptian population, an understanding of the comprehensive aspects of Islam and to relate this to the Palestine issue. Throughout the campaign, *al-Nadhir* played an important role in mobilising Egyptian concern for Palestine, whilst emphasising its criticism not only of Britain and the Jewish people, but also of the Egyptian government.

Indeed criticism of the British and the Jews featured predominantly in its series of publications and this approach echoed the voice of the Society who perceived these two elements as being solely responsible for the current crisis in Palestine. The Society was very wary of the political tactics which it believed to be preparing to divide the Arab-Islamic world in general and Palestinian Arabs in particular (El-Awaisi 1998: 50).

The Egyptian government at that time had taken a self-determining stance and was unable to provide any support for Palestine. It was condemned by *al-Nadhir* for failing as a neighbouring and Islamic country in its duty to help Palestinian Arabs (El-Awaisi 1998: 56). This lack of concern was perceived by the Brotherhood to be a reflection of Egypt's desire to be free and also as a consequence of its treaty with the British in 1936 (El-Awaisi 1998: 59).

Meanwhile, the Egyptian Jews gained some influence both in the government and within society in general. The Muslim Brotherhood also criticized this situation, as it led to Egyptian financing of Zionist organizations in Palestine (Brynjar 1998: 244). Consequently, anti-Semitic sentiment increased and most Egyptian people joined in the boycotting of Jewish interests in their country.

The Muslim Brotherhood also launched a series of demonstrations in various cities and villages. These were attended by most of the Society's branches and members. El-Awaisi stated:

“The demonstration was the first physical confrontation between the Muslim Brothers and the government over the question of Palestine...”
(El-Awaisi 1998: 76).

These modes of protest were effective in achieving the moral support of the Egyptian peoples when sympathy for the Palestinians was running high. Subsequently, various demonstrators and members were arrested, including Hasan al-Banna. The Muslim Brotherhood took the initiative to organize two conferences that proposed to discuss the problems of Palestine. The leaders of nearly all Arab-Islamic countries attended these and there was a gradual swing towards harmonisation with the Egyptian government as the latter began to indicate support for Palestine (El-Awaisi 1998: 83).

It may be said that the Society’s activities in the latter period of the strike (1938-1939) reflected the characteristics of a political organization, despite the movement not being officially labelled as such. This claim may be verified by the obvious increase in political awareness at the time and the influence of the Brotherhood on the Egyptian political scene: the government, parliament and the Palace all eventually submitting to the necessity for serious consideration of the problems in Palestine.

The final year of the Palestinian Arab strike also witnessed the growth in influence of radical Society followers, who displayed overt opposition to the seeming apathy of the Egyptian government. Their presence did however cause some conflict and tension among the moderate ranks of the Brotherhood. Nevertheless, subsequent to the Society’s Fifth General Conference (*al-Mu’tamar al-khamis*) in 1938, a consensus regarding its ideological doctrine was reached. This presented Islam as a way of life and defined the creed under three essential principles (Al-Banna n.d: 119-121).

1. The principle that Islam must be viewed as a comprehensive system, which embodied all aspects of life.
2. The principle that the formulation of Islam must be based on its two primary sources, the revelation of the Qur’an and the traditions of the Prophet.
3. The principle that Islam should be applicable to all times and to all places.

Theoretically, the Fifth Conference had given the Brotherhood a fundamental framework and scope from which to draw appropriate and effective strategies of action, whilst outlining the correct attitude in facing both the internal and external issues of Muslim *ummah*. According to Mitchell, the Fifth Conference also looked to the future and prepared for the third stage of struggle, within which the activities and involvement of the Society would be more widespread (Mitchell 1993: 15). Consequently, the Fifth Conference effected a rather rapid development on the membership and influence of the society. The years between 1939 and 1945 witnessed its gain in popularity among both Students and society in general. This advance appears to echo the assertion of al-Banna in the Fifth Conference that the scope of the movement could be defined as: a Salafiyya message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic society, a cultural-educational union, an economic company and a social ideal (Al-Banna n.d: 122-123).

The influence of the Society continued its rapid growth during the outbreak of the Second World War and it is feasible that the instability of British political performance in Egypt at this time was a contributory factor. According to Mayer, by the end of 1945 there were 1,000 branches of the Society in Egypt, with membership estimated at 'between 100,000 and 500,000' (Mayer 1982: 102).

However, *jihād* had to be put on hold in 1946, but this interval afforded time and opportunity for the Society to make paramilitary preparations for a return to the Palestinian mission once the war had ended.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948

The Society's promise for *jihād* was not forgotten and 1946 heralded the establishment of the first organised offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. The HAMAS historian Khaled Hroub confirms that the first official branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine was established in Gaza after the end of the Second World War and led by Haj Zafer al-Shawwa (Hroub 2000: 15). During the period between 1943 and 1944, Bayan Nuwaihid al-Hout claims that the Palestinian religious organization *Jam'iyyat al-Makarim* was formed in Jerusalem (Al-Hut 1986: 502). This group was considered to be an unofficial body, yet nevertheless it operated within the organisational framework of the Muslim Brotherhood. Sources indicate that by 1947, large

numbers of Society branches had sprung up and the outbreak of war in 1948 further increased the position of the movement among the Palestinian Arabs.

Interestingly at this point, there were indications that the doctrine of Islamic *jihad* and unity (as propounded by the Society) was to achieve fruition. International relations were formed between the Brotherhood and other groups; all concerned being united in the cause of one international issue. There was positive interaction between various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood that existed outside Palestine, such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria and other Arab volunteers. This unity of purpose offers some corroboration of the Brotherhood's success in its bid to achieve a unified Islamic nation.

On the eve of war, the mother organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt played an important role in the paramilitary training of the Palestinian Arabs. The Society's retired army officer, Mahmud Labib was appointed to assist in the military training of Palestinian civil groups, however, the whole project collapsed when the British asked him to leave Palestine (Mitchell 1993: 56). This operational setback was likely to have been pivotal to the outcome that the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood entered the war barely trained and ill equipped.

Western historians frequently highlight the involvement of the Society in the 1948 war as a failed performance. Thomas Mayer, a prominent authority on the Arab Israeli war, maintains this criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. He theorises that despite the positive publicity of the Society's *jihad* in Palestine, its activities during the war could only be described as weak and ineffectual and the organisation was such that it was unable to structure an effective front in fighting the Zionist Army. Mayer states: "...it must be concluded that the Ikhwan's actual ability to organise volunteering units was rather poor, and that the administrative apparatus built for this purpose was fairly inefficient." (Mayer 1982: 108)

Although this criticism has some foundation; as a non-governmental organization, it would have been almost impossible for the Society to prepare a well-organised model military battalion complete with equipment. However, the Society is surely deserving of recognition for its efforts, as no other organisation or political group had engaged in such activity.

Mayer's study may be considered offensive in the light of the scathing undertones in his following statement:

“...it is still remarkable that such a radical religious Society which regarded the war in Palestine as a sacred *jihād* could not recruit more Holy Warriors for the defence of that Islamic cause.” (Mayer 1982: 109-110)

It may be argued that the Society successfully transferred its volunteers to Palestine during the outbreak of war in 1948; despite their small numbers, volunteers were gathered from other Arab countries such as Jordan and Syria. In fact, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was not alone in its involvement in the war to defend its homeland, but had the help and co-operation of other Society branches. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood sent three battalions of volunteers (Abu-Amr 1994: 2). The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood also sent forces for *jihād* in Palestine. In March 1948, Hasan al-Banna asserted that the Muslim Brotherhood had 1,500 volunteers inside Palestine (Mayer 1982: 108).

According to Mitchell, before the arrival of the volunteers from the Arab League, the Society's volunteers successfully occupied a Zionist position in Negev in their attempts to take some of the Jewish settlements (Mitchell 1993: 57). It may be said that the Society's *jihād* in Palestine ought to be regarded as a support mechanism for the Palestinian Arabs rather than a principal military force.

Indeed, Mayer's study ignored some of the achievements and contributions of the Society in Palestine; despite the fact that in other aspects his article presented rather detailed information about the Muslim Brotherhood's involvement.

The Expansion of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine

From the inception of the Society's first branch in October 1945 until the Partition resolution in November 1947, the members and branches of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood developed and expanded rapidly in number. According to Mayer, by 1947, there were twenty-five branches of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, with membership estimated at between 12,000 and 20,000 (Mayer 1982: 103).

The Society had established several branches in numerous towns in Palestine in 1946, including Jerusalem, Nablus, Tulkarm, Haifa, and Jaffa. By the end of 1949, other branches were established in the towns and villages of the West Bank, including Jenin, Qalqiliya, Anabta, Dura, Surif, Sur Bahir, Tubas, Kufr Burqa and Jericho and numbers of refugee camps including Aqabat Jabr, near Jericho and al-Arrub, near Bethlehem (Cohen 1982: 145). However, unlike the Muslim Brotherhood branches in Syria and Jordan that were administered separately, the Society's branches in Palestine retained some dependence on the mother organisation in Egypt. This was primarily due to the branches in Palestine being organised under the administration of the Muslim Brotherhood headquarters in Cairo (Al-Hut 1986: 503).

It may be said that the identity of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood had been created in parallel with its growth among the Palestinian people, although the mother group in Cairo did offer constant guidance regarding the tactical development of branches in Palestine. Abd Mu'iz Abd Sattar, who acted as Cairo Headquarters representative, frequently attended and supervised the Society programme in the initial stages of its development.

The Society's branches did attract members from diverse corners of the community, but many were from among Islamic leaders and religious and educational institutions. The most prominent leaders at that time were Jamal al-Husayni and Haj Amin al-Husayni. The use of the Mufti's name helped the Society to spread its influence in Palestine.

In 1946, the Society's constitution, namely *al-Qanun al-Asasi li Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi Filastin* (the Constitution Law of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine) was created and this was followed by the stipulation of the Society's objective regarding Palestine. El-Awaisi elaborates on this:

“The Constitution of the Muslim Brothers in Palestine stipulated that among their objectives were: transmitting Islamic manners and moral behaviour, spreading Qur’anic values, attempting to achieve a high standard of living, combating poverty and illiteracy, leading a modern way of life within the framework of Islam, and safeguarding the rights of Muslims.”(El-Awaisi 1998: 156)

In October 1947, the Society of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood held a conference in Haifa, which reviewed and discussed the situation in Palestine and the Society’s responsibility towards the problem. The conference adopted twelve resolutions,⁴ summarised thus by Ishak Musa Husaini :

“The political situation in Palestine was reviewed and some of the resolutions adopted were: to hold the government of Palestine responsible for the disturbed political status; to support the Arab League and the demands of Egypt concerning the evacuation and unity of the Nile Valley; to bring the Palestine case before the Security Council; to support the projects which would prevent the purchase of land by Zionists; non-recognition of the non-indigenous Jews; propagation of the branches of the Brethren; greetings to the Director-General in Egypt; and thanks to the Brethren in the Arab countries.”(Husaini 1956: 81)

These resolutions clarified that the major emphasis and identity of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood were different from those of the mother organization in Egypt. From this framework, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood portrayed its political programme and setting up of branch activities regarding the issue of Palestine; the latter being a major element on its political agenda.

⁴ See fully text of the Muslim Brotherhood Haifa’s resolutions in Al-Hut, Bayan Nuwaihid, 1986. *Al-Qiyadat wa al-Mu’assasat al-Siyasiyya fi Filastin: 1917-1945*, Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya. p. 794.

Conclusion

To conclude this paper, I would like to reiterate two major aspects. Firstly, the four fundamental factors – Arab-Islamic unity, Islamic *jihad*, the special status of Palestine, and the political attitude towards Jews – were all instrumental to the involvement of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine and influenced its actions from the beginning of the 1930s until the end of the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. Arab-Islamic unity was successfully implemented by the Society in its propaganda programmes and support systems through the Palestinian Arab strike 1936-39.

Furthermore, it gathered various Islamic organizations in Egypt (including YMMA and others) to mobilise support for the Palestinians. The positive element of Islamic *jihad* was also highly publicised by the Society, in particular by its leader Hasan al-Banna, in inviting and encouraging contributions and aid from Arab and Muslim countries. The engagement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine was the highlight of its history of *jihad*. Bayan Nuwaid al-Hut points out:

“...the concern of the Brotherhood with the liberation of Palestine was sincere and based on deep religious conviction.”(Al-Hut 1986: 504)⁵

The status of Palestine and the political attitude towards Jews heightened political awareness among Muslim *ummah*. These factors contributed to the emphasising of the Society’s responsibility in Palestine. The Society successfully maintained an effective propaganda campaign in Egypt and although it failed to present a well-organised military front in the 1948 war, the Society deserves recognition for the implementation of its promise on *jihad* in Palestine.

Secondly, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood played an important role in creating the identity of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, the branches of which were administered and guided by representatives of the mother movement at the headquarters in Cairo. Despite this, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood maintained its own independent political agenda i.e. to defend its

⁵ This translation has been taken from Hroub, Khaled, 2000. *HAMAS: Political Thought and Practice*, Washington D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies. p. 14.



مجلة علوم إنسانية WWW.ULUM.NL السنة السابعة: العدد 44: شتاء 2010 - Issue 44, Year 7th, Jan.

homeland following the Society's resolutions at the Haifa Conference. There is no doubt that the Haifa resolutions established the ideological and theoretical approach of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood towards the Palestine question. On the other hand, the Society offered an alternative approach that adopted Islam as a way to liberate Palestine. The Society became regarded as a major contender against the Nationalist group after the end of the 1948 war.

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