

**Women in Islamic Movements:
A Case Study of *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Egypt**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “*Women in Islamic Movements: A Case Study of Ikhwan al-Muslimun in Egypt*” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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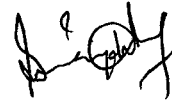
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Abbreviation List

AHDR	Arab Human Development Report
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EFU	Egyptian Feminist Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIS	<i>Front Islamique du Salut</i> (Islamic Salvation Front)
FLN	<i>Front de Liberation Nationale</i> (National Liberation Front)
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HAMAS	<i>Harkat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiyyah</i> (Islamic Resistance Force)
IAF	Islamic Action Front
ICF	Islamic Charter Front
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MPDC	<i>Mouvement Populaire Démocratique et Constitutionnel</i> (People's Democratic and Constitutional Movement)
NIF	National Islamic Front
NPA	National People's Assembly
NWRSC	New Woman Research and Study Center
PJD	Party for Justice and Development
PLC	Palestinian legislative Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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Chapter I

Introduction

Women and Islamic Activism: A General Overview

The rise of women's Islamic activism is a phenomenon that deserves close attention and academic investigation. Women are attracted in large numbers towards Islamic movements despite the fact that their approach towards women is considered negative. A linkage between women's association with Islamic movements and common perception about their approach to be established by an enquiry of their literature, organizational capacity to absorb women and their internal debates over women's status in Islamic movements and parties is necessary to get the answers on various research questions of the subject. This subject has particularly become an important one in Arab region because of the changing socio-political scenario of the Arab countries where Islamic movements are becoming the new and vocal forces. To accommodate the popular votes of both men and women, Islamic movements and parties are extensively evolving and moderating their ideologies by debating and re-evaluating the *Sharia* principles. The changing situation of the states and the movements are having a great impact on women. The significantly increasing women's participation in Islamic movements around the Arab and Islamic world has inspired to undertake this research proposal. Reasons for this attraction of Muslim women towards the Islamic movements are interesting and the very special interest of women in all movements is about the space they found in those movements which is supportive to their religious and cultural beliefs.

The emergence of Islamic movements and their moderating ideologies regarding women are described by Dr. Isobel Coleman that at first glance, the continued strength of Islamist movements across the West Asia does not seem to bode well for women's rights in the region. Islamists' conservative, traditionalist values and narrow reading of religious texts often translate into policies that seek to limit women's public role, enshrine their legal inferiority and enforce gender segregation. Indeed, Islamists groups in various countries have taken a hard stand against reforming family laws in ways more favorable for women, resisted women's suffrage, and smeared local women's groups as puppets of an illegitimate Western agenda. But something strange is happening on the way to the

Islamic movements that are making their presence felt in a new modernized way with the synthesis of culture and religion (Coleman 2008).

Apart from Islamic activism, just in general terms also, women in the Arab world are making news in all walks of life. Women are in news for all good and bad reasons. From Morocco to Iraq, Arab women are more active in public life, more assertive and more visible than they were a few decades ago. This increased visibility, assertion, and activity is caused by significant change of women's profile in the region. In Egyptian universities, women constitute 60% of total enrolment, in Iraq 34%, in Kuwait 68%, in Qatar 73% and 56% in Saudi Arabia the most conservative Arab country. Women make 20% of total Arab labour force. Of the sixteen countries in West Asia and North Africa, ten have signed, and nine have ratified, the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which signifies that women's status has been recognised as major indicator of development in the region. Enrollment statistics will further tell that more girls are joining schools and universities than they were doing some decades back. On the political front, some Arab countries had long ago recognized the political rights of women, for example, Syria recognized universal suffrage in 1949, Lebanon in 1952, Egypt in 1956, and Tunisia in 1957 (Ottaway 2004).

In recent years, women's representation in Iraqi parliament reached 25.5% with the 2005 elections, in Jordan representation rose from 1.3% in 1997 to 5.5% in 2006, while in Morocco it jumped from 0.6% in 1997 to 10.8% in 2006. In some GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, striking changes in the political representation of women have recently taken place. In the United Arab Emirates, nine women acceded to parliament after the 2006 elections, comprising 22.5% of seats. Kuwaiti women gained massive political ground in 2005 when they attained comprehensive political rights, though they failed to win any seat in parliamentary elections in 2007. Bahraini women managed to obtain one out of 40 seats in the 2007 elections. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) report appreciates Arab countries' performance on education and employment front with regard to women. Young women's literacy rates are also currently quite high and, on average, most Arab countries are very near to achieving gender

equality in youth literacy rates. Primary education is nearly universal in most countries and the gender gap in primary and secondary enrolment has disappeared in many countries (United Nations Organization 2007 and UN 2004). The following two tables show the rise of Arab women in economic, social and political arenas.

Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio

Gross Enrolment Ratio (%) ^a				Women as a Share of University Enrollment (%)	Public Education as a Share of Total Government Expenditure (%)	Percent of People Ages 15 and Older in Labor Force ^b		Women as Percent of Labor Force ^b	Total Fertility Rate ^c	
Primary		Secondary				Female	Male			
Female	Male	Female	Male							
91	100	62	71	—	—	20	73	20	3.3	MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
107	116	73	68	—	16	—	—	—	2.8	Algeria
103	103	105	98	60	12	19	65	17	2.6	Bahrain
96	103	83	88	—	15	20	74	21	3.5	Egypt
85	88	75	81	47	18	11	75	12	2.0	Iran
91	111	29	47	34	—	17	75	18	5.4	Iraq
101	101	89	86	51	20	22	76	21	3.7	Jordan
95	93	57	55	68	14	43	83	25	4.0	Kuwait
97	101	79	72	52	8	27	76	28	2.4	Lebanon
117	115	—	—	48	—	23	78	21	3.7	Libya
88	101	35	44	44	25	30	79	28	2.7	Morocco
71	74	67	69	58	16	16	79	14	4.1	Oman
109	107	86	80	47	—	10	67	13	5.7	Palestine ^d
104	105	92	86	73	—	35	92	13	3.5	Qatar
—	—	—	—	56	23	15	80	11	5.7	Saudi Arabia
105	113	41	46	—	14	21	83	20	3.8	Syria
115	120	80	76	48	20	24	73	24	2.1	Tunisia
96	105	48	67	41	15	26	72	27	2.5	Turkey
99	99	80	71	—	20	31	92	12	3.0	United Arab Emirates
61	96	25	69	21	22	29	82	27	7.0	Yemen

SOURCES: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy Statistics" (www.uis.unesco.org, accessed March 11, 2003); United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002*; UN Statistics Division, *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics* (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/w2000/table5d.htm>, accessed Aug. 23, 2003); F. Roudi-Fahmi, "Women's Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa" (2003); and C. Haub, *2003 World Population Data Sheet*.

[Source: Fahmi and Moghadam (2003)]

Table 2: Women's Representation in Arab Legislatures, 2005

Country	Lower/Single House				Upper House				
	Election Year	Total No. of Seats	No. of Women	% Women	Last Elections	Total	No. of Women	% Women	IPU Rank (1)
Algeria	2002	389*	24	6.2	2003	144*	4	2.8	105
Bahrain	2002	40*	0	0	2002	40***	6	15	126
Comoros	2004	33	1	3.0					119
Djibouti	2003	65*	7	10.8					78
Egypt (2)	2000	454	11	2.9	2001	264**	18	6.8	120
Iraq	2005	275	87	31.6					15
Jordan	2003	110*	6	5.5	2003	55***	7	12.7	109
Kuwait	2003	65*	0	0					126
Lebanon	2000	128*	3	2.3					122
Libya	1997	760**							
Mauritania	2001	81*	3	3.7	2002	56**	3	5.4	117
Morocco	2002	325*	35	10.8	2003	270**	3	1.1	78
Oman	2003	38*	2	2.4	2001	58***	9	15.5	121
Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)	1996	85*	5	5.9					
Qatar	2002	35***	0	0					
Saudi Arabia	2001	120***	0	0					126
Somalia									
Sudan (3)	2000	360	35	9.7					85
Syria	2003	250*	30	12.0					71
Tunisia	2004	182*	21	22.8					27
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	1996	40***	0	0					126
Yemen	2003	301*	1	0.3					126

Notes:

(1) Ranked by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower/single house in 183 countries.

(2) 444 members elected, 10 appointed by the head of state.

(3) 270 directly elected, 35 representatives of women, 26 representatives of university graduates and 29 representatives of trade unions.

* Members are elected through direct elections.

** Members are elected through indirect elections.

*** Members are appointed by the head of state.

Sources: Compiled from information available on the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) web site, 'Women in National Parliaments', <<http://www.ipu.org>>, for all countries except Iraq, Oman and Qatar, which were compiled from information available on the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union (AIPU) web site, <<http://www.arab-ipu.org/>>. Information on the OPT available on the Palestinian Legislative Council web site, <<http://www.pal-plc.org>>.

[Source: Saabbagh (2005)]

Political participation of Arab women is still at very low figures, in fact the lowest participation compare to other countries of the world. No doubt that this situation is improving day by day but the process is extremely slow. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has given above brief and important information about the women in National Parliaments of different countries including the Arab countries. This situation highlights the minimum achievements Arab women can gain so far in political sphere.

Scholars have come up with very informative and productive writings by giving the general overview of the status of Arab women to draw the attention of readers towards the activism of Muslim women taking place in Arab countries. Keddie and Baron (1993) have drawn a brief history of West Asian women by showing that gender boundaries in West Asia have been neither fixed nor immutable. Changes in family patterns, religious rituals, socio-economic necessity, myth and ideology and also women's attitudes, have expanded or shrunk women's roles and behaviour through the ages. Keddie (2007) also gave the idea of why hostile or apologetic responses are completely inadequate to the diversity and richness of the lives of West Asian women, and she provided a unique overview of their past and rapidly changing present. Information about the interaction of a changing Islam with political, cultural, and socioeconomic developments is also given. In doing so, she shows that, like other major religions, Islam incorporated ideas and practices of male superiority but also provoked challenges to them. Keddie breaks with notions of West Asian women as faceless victims, and assesses their involvement in the rise of modern nationalist, socialist, and Islamist movements. Equally important was to know about the general perceptions regarding West Asian women and the actual realities which are often unacknowledged in public which are shown by Afshar (1993). In her work, she has also pointed out the struggles women have been undertaking in order to better their status and position in their societies.

Taking this brief background into account make it easier to understand how nationalists and Islamists have responded to the impact of social change on gender in Islam and thus have been engaged in formulating a reconstituted tradition. Haddad draws on Arab history and scholarship to demonstrate the central (and yet conflicting) role that women

have experienced in modern Arab history at the hands of Arab nationalists and Islamists alike. “For both the nationalist and the Islamist ideologies, women are a crucial component for the preservation of the nation. Both, however, have placed increasing contradictory demands on women” (Haddad 1998: 21).

With these substantial changes in women’s profile of the Arab states, Islamic Movements like other secular and nationalist parties are forced to review their attitude towards women in order to attract more women within their ranks. Arab women are not only voters, they are also enjoying enormous influence over Arab Public Sphere through their participation in Arab media, television and entertainment industry. They are influencing opinions and making alternative opinions as well. Islamic movements have carefully chosen to shift from their traditional patriarchal approach towards women. Unlike secular women’s activism, Islamic movements have their support base in people of remote areas, rural women and lower strata of the society. Islamic movements in the Arab countries like Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Party for Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, Hezbollah in Lebanon, National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudan, Hamas in Palestine, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan etc, have shown greater interests in accommodating Arab women in their organizational structure and support base.

Islamist women are increasingly involved in political processes and many of them wish to build a full-fledged Islamic Movement for women’s rights. Works by Abdel-Latif and Ottaway (2007) argue that women’s participation in Islamic movements reflects a growing trend towards women’s activism in the Arab world. Through interviews and conversations with women belonging to Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic movements across numerous Arab nations, the authors found an energetic debate among women activists on their new found role as political actors. Although this dissertation is going to discuss briefly about Islamic women’s activism in different Islamic movements of Arab countries, the main focus as a case study is however, on Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt.

As discussed above, there is recognition by academicians that women in Islamic world are attracted towards Islamic movements in order to fulfil their political and social aspirations. From Turkey to Indonesia to Morocco to Palestine, more and more women from all classes are joining public life through Islamic movements. This phenomenon contradicts the earlier perception that Islam is opposed to women and it restricts women's freer movement within society. Certain Islamic practices like veil, family institution, political and social rights, were held responsible for backwardness of Muslim women in Islamic societies. But now Islamic movements have successfully created a counter discourse claiming that modern and Western understanding of human life has inflicted great damage on Islam and Islamic values in the Arab Islamic world. They have created their own explanations on how Muslim women can prosper and progress within an Islamic framework and that the Western framework can not guarantee better life for Muslim women. The outcome of this counter discourse is the attraction of Muslim women towards Islamic movements in the region. But that the counter discourse is the only reason behind this success story of Islamic movements is highly suspected. There are other reasons which have contributed in rise and acceptance of women's agenda by the Islamic movements in the region. This study is an effort to identify all aspects of this success story.

Secularist and Islamist Discourses

The polarization between the Islamic discourse and the secular discourse concerning the women's question is very much clear. Outstanding works of scholars have shaped these discourses which are effective in the present Arab Islamic societies. The development of the intellectual and ideological foundations of the early struggles for women's rights are often attributed to male modernist reformers like Mohammad Abduh, Jamaluddin Afghani and the most prominent among them, Qasim Amin. Amin's famous work on women (1899) started from the premise that the liberation of women was an essential prerequisite for the liberation of Egyptian society from foreign domination and he used arguments based on Islam to call for an improvement in the status of women. In doing so,

he promoted a debate on women in Egypt. Amin (1900) defended his position against the severe criticism he faced on his previous work. He took his ideas further and relied less on arguments based on the *Quran* and Sayings of the Prophet, and in the new work he more openly espoused a Western model of development. Although published more than a century ago, these two books continue to be a source of controversy and debate in the Arab world and remain key works for understanding the Arab feminist movement.

Egyptian feminist movement in the first half of the 20th century both advanced the nationalist cause as well worked within the parameters of Islam. Badran (1996) offered an innovative reinterpretation of modern Egyptian history by demonstrating the gendered nature of nationalist, Islamic, and imperialist discourses. The book shows how Egyptian women, attentive to the implications of gender, played vital roles, both as movement activists and everyday pioneers, in the construction of citizenship and the institutions of a modern state and civil society. Authors like Talhami (1996) examined the deliberate intensification of Islamic identity and its ramifications for Muslim women.

On the other hand, Islamic literature puts a new emphasis on the role of women; an effort is made to channel some of women's energies into public, religious and charitable activity directed towards the common good. Hence the Islamic movements incorporate into their ideology a combination of religious commitment, moral indignation, and political participation (Haddad and Esposito 1998: 19).

The Egyptian Islamic modernist thinker and educator Mohammad Abduh was the first influential Arab Muslim to argue that Islam was gender egalitarian, and that the unequal treatment of women came from later corruptions of Islam. He was the first important Islamic modernist, and he laid the groundwork in evolving methodologies used to reinterpret Islam to harmonize with the modern world on gender and other matters. In the twentieth century, some Muslim women adopted an explicit feminist identity and did not see this as contrary to Islamic identity. They said that greater gender equality is more truly Islamic than are the views of religious conservatives. (Keddie 2007: 69-70)

Hasan al-Banna's preaching shaped the minds of both men and women in a big way. Al-Banna (1958) addressed the women both in liberal and traditional ways. On the one hand, he opened the grounds for women and called them to fulfil their social duties and on the other hand, he stuck to the ideas of women as housekeepers. A revolutionary manifesto for Islamic activists was laid down by Sayyid Qutb (1964). When it comes to women Qutb has very harsh views regarding Western women and he called the Muslim women back to Islam to preserve their status as a respected one. The study of Qutb's views on women is important not only because of his privileged place in modern Islamic thought, but more importantly to reveal the glaring dichotomy of his views which appear progressive in the political and religious fields but ultra-conservative and even regressive regarding the status of women, revealing a paradox within the general framework of his thought.

Muslim women's activities and their struggles for spreading the ideal Islamic messages of Muslim Brotherhood organization are sketched out by the famous woman Islamist of Muslim Brotherhood, Zainab al-Ghazali. She gives an account of the Nasser era, the toughest time the members of the movement, both men and women faced. It is basically an autobiographical work of her days spent in Nasser's jail in Egypt. Al-Ghazali (1972), sketched Nasser as the Pharaoh of Egypt who treated *Ikhwan* very harshly and almost tried to vanish out the Muslim Brotherhood with his tyranny but the movement survived with its message to much extent and both *Akhawat* and *Ikhwan* played major role in this period.

Reinterpretation of major Islamic sources to shape the Islamic discourses was no doubt a noteworthy aspect in Islamic movements and their debates. More important was the work of female writers who provided women friendly interpretations. Among them, Wadud (1999) provides an interpretive reading of woman, a reading which validates the female voice in the *Quran* and brings it out of the shadows. Muslim progressives have long argued that it is not the religion but patriarchal interpretation of the *Quran* that have kept women oppressed. Others like Fatima Mernissi become a living example of modern

Islamic female voice. For many, the way to reform is the re-examination and reinterpretation of religious texts.

A new perspective to the debate about women and Islam by exploring its historical roots, tracing the developments in Islamic discourses on women and gender from the ancient world to the present has been added by Ahmed (1992). Concentrating on the treatment of women in Islam, the author examines the patrilineal traditions in the West Asia that preceded Islam and discusses objectively the ways in which Islam both improved and curtailed the freedoms of women in its earliest days. Much of the blame for the most constrictive interpretations of Islam is placed on the Abbasid dynasty, which ruled from the mid-eighth century onwards and interpreted Islam in a legalistic and rigid manner designed to serve state interests, thereby sacrificing much of the ethical and normative thrust of the religion as practised in the days of Mohammed. Her work opens up a new space for contemporary Muslim women to rethink the teachings of Islam in a more open way.

The gender discourse of contemporary Egyptian Islamists has been explored by Marcotte (2005). How the gender discourse of a number of important Egyptian Islamists, al-Banna, Qutb, al-Ghazali, al-Qaradawi and Ezzat provide illustrations of the modern developments are explained by her. The modern elements incorporated in today's Islamic discourses on gender issues, none of which are merely traditional discourses, are equally important to understand the Islamist discourse.

Over the past few decades, the Islamic discourse on the woman's question showed significant signs of development, revision and regeneration, unlike the secularist discourse. Ezzat (2000) cited the writings of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali and Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi as examples of the development of the Islamist discourse on gender and on the rights of women. Ezzat calls for a new discourse that reconciles the secular and Islamist discourses and bridges the gap between Islamic Shari'a law and modern social science in order to enhance the status of women.

Egyptian Women from Secularism to Islamism

Egypt has a long tradition of having movements for freedom, nationalism, feminism and Islamism which is now a new facilitator of women's activism in Egyptian society under the auspices of Muslim Brotherhood. History of the Egyptian women's movement is characterized by a variety of competing and some times overlapping discourses, including secular oriented and religious voices. However during the past decades, both the state and women's activists had to take into account increasing fundamentalist activism, discourses and demands (Al-Ali 2006). Egyptian jurist Qasim Amin, the author of the 1899 pioneering book *Tahrir al-Mara* (Women's Liberation), is often described as the father of the Egyptian feminist movement. Less known, however, are the women who preceded Amin in their feminist critique of their societies. The women's press in Egypt started voicing such concerns since its very first issues in 1892. Egyptian, Turkish, Iranian, Syrian and Lebanese women and men had been reading European magazines even a decade earlier, and they were discussing their relevance to their own region. However, in the modern period, the first phase of the feminist movement in Egypt is considered to have taken place during 1923-1939. The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was founded by the former leader of the women's committee in Wafd party, Hoda Sharawi (Badran 1996). The rise of feminism was however stunted in Egypt by its remaining elitist nature and class bias. Its limited appeal was not fairly representative of the situation of most of the women in Egypt.

The new phase in the Egyptian women's movement was characterized by a more radical approach. The voices of a younger and more radical generation of Egyptian women influenced by the rise of student and labour movements began to be heard and they were not content with status quo of EFU. It was felt that EFU's tactics were outdated and needed updating. Finally in 1942, the Egyptian Feminist Party was founded which was headed by Fatma Neamat Rashed. The Party called for complete equality between women and men in education, employment, political representation and rights. It also called for the right to paid leave for working women. Bint El-Nil (Daughter of the Nile) was another feminist association created in 1948. Their primary purpose was to claim full political rights for women. It aimed to concentrate on introducing women's participation

in the decision making processes. It also promoted literacy programs, campaigned to improve health services among poor, and aimed to enhance mother's rights and child care. Doria Shafik was the leader of the movement and she reflected the liberal ideology of the modern feminists whose activism openly challenged the state (Keddie 2007: 88-95). In 1952, the army seized power in Egypt and deposed the king. The ruling Revolution Command Council issued a declaration demanding the dissolution of all political parties. As a result all independent women's movements were banned. The regime's political parties replaced women's organizations. During this period, the feminist movement reverted to charity associations. Significant equal rights were however granted to women during this period not only in the areas of education and work but also by the 1956 Constitution that gave women the right to vote and run for election for the first time.

The decline of the Nasserist regime signified another era in the feminist movement in Egypt. In 1972, the publication of the book *Women and Sex* by Nawal el-Sadawi was symbolic of the re-emergence and radicalization of the movement. The book demanded "unified criteria for 'honour' for both women and men, and denounced social practices which used religion to justify women's oppression". The book caused a strong backlash within Egyptian society especially due to the rising religious fundamentalism within the state. During the 1980s, however, new feminist groups were formed. The New Woman Group was formed in Cairo and was mainly concerned with studying the feminist history of the country in order to determine a new program which would start off from where the previous one had stopped. Another organization was the Committee for the Defense of Women and Family Rights, which was formed in 1985. This Committee was established to support the campaign for the amendment of the Person Status Code (NWRSC 1998). Today, there are many different feminist groups within Egypt. Some of the movements are affiliated with the state in some way. There are women's committees of political parties such as the Progressive Women's Union attached to the Women's Secretariat of the Labour Party. There are many independent feminist associations such as the New Woman Research Centre and Bint El-Ard (Daughter of the Land) Association. Although the organizations have different goals in general, they all strive for the improvement of

women's position in Egypt by improving literacy, democratic and human rights, increasing women's participation in political life and women's health.

With this background of Egyptian women's social and political engagement, Muslim Brotherhood stood against Marxist-feminist and liberal feminist discourses. Muslim Brotherhood and its thinkers openly opposed notions of freedom of women in Western terms. In spite of Egypt's long secular tradition, Egyptian women are attracted to Islamic organizations. Contemporary Islamic activist women are not only the subjects of controversy but are also very active in the process of public debate. Through engagement in politics and education, Islamist women break away from the confinement of the interior space and develop personal strategies of education and profession. Islamism is serving as the legitimization of their public participation both in practice and ideology (Gole 2000: 98). Thus Islamic movements are enabling Muslim women to participate in public life to organize meetings, to publish articles, to establish associations and to abandon the private domestic sphere and its traditionally defined roles. The Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) always attracted religious sections of the society. Positioning itself as anti-Western, the Brotherhood enjoyed support from religious leaders who were criticizing feminist discourses of Western outlook. This helped Muslim Brotherhood to gain support from men and actively sought to increase its female membership, thus the first female wing of Muslim Brotherhood (*Akhawaat al-Muslimaat*) was formed in 1937 (Talhami 2001).

How Muslim Brotherhood thinks of women and their role in family, society and politics, is the main subject of inquiry of this dissertation. What are the various reasons appealing Muslim women to enter the Islamic movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood? What have been the predominant views of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding women and to what extent they are successful to empower women from all walks of life to make dignified choices in practical terms?, How women activists themselves, like Zainab al-Ghazali, Jihan Halfawi, Makarim al-Deiry etc. influenced the gender dynamics within the movement, are subsequent question of this inquiry. To go through these questions, a

background of Muslim Brotherhood's responses to the question of women becomes necessary.

For Muslim Brotherhood, the status of women is not merely a matter of religion and tradition. Muslim Brotherhood's response emerged in order to develop Islam as an alternative political and social ideology which can resolve all conflicts and contradictions of Egyptian and Muslim countries. In fact, this politico-religious Islamic ideology articulates a quite modern construct of gender equality and the importance of gender awareness. It is essential to delve into the role of women themselves in these Islamic societies to bring a change in the status of women. Muslim Brotherhood dealt with this important discourse of the society in a way which is becoming widely popular among the Egyptian masses.

The Islamic group argues that Islam's general rules have never aimed at subjugating women, but that those principles have sometimes been distorted by social and cultural norms that have weakened the actual teachings of Islam and persist despite the spread of Islam. The official document of Muslim Brotherhood (2007A) states: "women make up half of society and they are responsible for the nurturing, guidance and reformation of the subsequent generations of men and women. The general rule therefore is equality between men and women". It allows women rights to vote, be elected, to occupy public and governmental posts, and work in general. But how far, the leading Islamic movement of the Arab world is successful in bringing all these stands in practice is a question mark. Still the women are raising their voices and appealing for the right to run for office as members of the movement's council, to resolve the internal problems of the organization, to play a more important role and participate in political life so that they can be elected to the general leadership.

After stating the Brotherhood's vision in 2007 on "complete equality" between men and women while preserving their different social roles, the Muslim Brotherhood however is still lacking women in their organizational structure. Abdel Latif (2008) points out: "Women activists advocating for an Islamic political system through the Brotherhood

believe that Islam brought justice to women. Their lack of equal rights presently, they insist, has to do more with the cultural, political and social realities in which their movement function than with the movement itself". But how far is this argument correct, especially when we come across the agitation and unrest of the women activists of the organization on their subordinate status? There is a huge gap between the role performed by Muslim Brotherhood's young men and the one carried out by young women in the organisation. Here comes the question that why women get a kind of freedom initially when they join the Islamic movement but, after a certain point of time, they are limited to their old spaces and roles. Generally, the argument of Muslim Brotherhood for not giving women an active role to play after a certain limit is based upon security reasons, the socio-political conditions of the state and the harassment women face from the government and society, if they move forward. But in reality a conservative or patriarchal culture in the Brotherhood coupled with an oppressive socio-political context are the reasons why women in the Brotherhood fail to acquire adequate representation reflective of their contribution to the movement's political struggle.

Hafiz (2003) focuses on the Islamic women's movement in Cairo to investigate the impact of their activism on women's self-empowerment. The author argues that Islamic women's activism cannot be adequately understood in terms of liberal feminist discourse. Rather, she proposed an approach that relies on these women's perspectives as a guiding factor in assessing the impact of their activism. Islamic women activists are pursuing their self-enhancement through perfecting their religious practice in order to arrive at a Muslim notion of the ideal woman. Their empowerment is engendered as they perfect themselves through religious discipline. The study concludes that the applicability of the notions of "empowerment" and "agency" as understood in Western liberal paradigms need to be re-evaluated with regard to Islamic women activists.

Today, there exist an increasing number of Islamic activist women who have managed to gain voice within the mainstream Islamic discourse and who criticize and challenge the misinterpretations of Islam. The younger generation of Islamist women have been more outspoken and confrontational about the way they view women's role in an Islamic state.

A new gender discourse that argues for equality within an Islamic framework is getting acceptance in Egyptian society as it is initiated by female Islamic activists as well pro-women moderate male Islamic activists. But without the democratization and modernization of Islam's legal vision and a healthy democratic change in the country's political space, Muslim women's quest for equality with justice will not succeed. According to many of the Egyptian women and the Islamic activists, it is a matter of time and they will definitely gain their actual rights if they work steadily and slowly. As the centuries old beliefs and behaviours may take a long time to change but they strongly believe that it will change.

Abdel-Latif (2008) gives a brief but very important account on the views of women of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding their status, role and position. According to her, the issue of the position of women in the Muslim Brotherhood is at the centre of a lively debate. She has drawn a very brief sketch of the past and present stands of Muslim Brotherhood on women's issues, marked out the absence of women from the structure of the organization, and documented the evolution of the new trends which are coming up from the young women of the movement.

Personalities like Zeinab al-Ghazali and other important women activists not only had an influence on the Muslim Brotherhood but also actively participated in organisational activities; still women's contributions did not get proper response from the movement. This research aims to study various aspects of women joining the Muslim Brotherhood, participating in the activities of the organization, problems which are faced by these women by the organization's own conservative culture coupled with an oppressive socio-political environment and the stand of Muslim Brotherhood towards empowering women in all walks of life.

Women participated in large numbers in the Muslim Brotherhood but there is no specific study on this phenomenon. Most of the studies are either on the Muslim Brotherhood in general or on the general topic of Islam and women, except a few articles, which specifically discusses the gender aspect in the organization. There is a need to study the

issue in detail because the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has been gaining political influence and social power across the society. In the process of consolidating their influence in Egypt, they need the support of women through asserting the importance of Islamic values and institutions on the one hand and providing a modern agenda on the other hand. This new dynamics of the increasing interest of women in Muslim Brotherhood's activities and the organization's own response to women's quest for participation and leadership provide ample scope for research.

From Hasan al-Banna to Mohammed al-Badie, there are various ups and downs in the movement's view towards women's activism. Present views on the role of Muslim women in an Islamic society and the stand of Muslim Brotherhood regarding women's rights to vote, to be elected, to occupy public and governmental posts, and to work in general are again been hotly debated within the movement and outside it. Muslim Brotherhood's most revered Islamic ideologue and scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi is equally respected by other organizations, governments and people of the region for his pro-women interpretation of Islam. His bold commentary on many Islamic issues has some times created controversies. However, Qaradawi has helped all Islamic organizations across the world to become more flexible for women. The shift between two eras of Muslim Brotherhood, the old traditional one and the new progressive one is quite intelligible. The shift didn't happen overnight; it evolved through long internal debates, external pressures and socio-economic changes in the Arab world. The Muslim Brotherhood leadership, intellectuals, writers and women activists were and are still divided on various issues of Muslim women' role in society and politics. The changes outside of the organization, forced the Muslim Brotherhood to review its approach towards women and it officially released its official document in 2007 stating the equality of men and women in public life.

Research Design

Among the most discussed issues in the Arab world are of women's status and affairs. A new understanding of the linkage between Islamic movements and Muslim women is

focused in this study, as the role of women in important Islamic movements are not studied much. Women's activism in various Islamic movements of Arab countries and also in Muslim Brotherhood has not been given much importance. There is a need to generate new studies on this aspect. This dissertation '**Women in Islamic Movements: A Case Study of *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Egypt**' aims to study development of women's role within Islamic movements in the region in general and in Muslim Brotherhood specifically. Covering major trends and shifts in Muslim Brotherhood, the study will evaluate Brotherhood's approach towards women. The study revolves around three main questions;

- What have been the predominant views of the Muslim Brotherhood regarding women and to what extent they have been successful in empowering women from all walks of life to make dignified choices in practical terms?
- What are the factors that lead Muslim women to enter the Islamic movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood?
- How women activists themselves, like Zainab al-Ghazali, Jihan Halfawi, Makarim al-Deiry etc., influence the gender dynamics within the movement?

The study proceeds with the hypothesis that Muslim women are joining the Muslim Brotherhood in large numbers to take active social role and to gain recognition within Egyptian society. The notion that the women joining an Islamic movement do so for the Islamic cause or to establish an Islamic state may not be fully true. The second hypothesis is that lack of internal debates on women's position in the Muslim Brotherhood hampers women's active participation. The future of women in Muslim Brotherhood and also the future of Muslim Brotherhood largely depend on its organizational and intellectual capacity to give women greater space and say within organization. Any effort to thwart women's voice in the organization will restrict Muslim Brotherhood's political prospects in Egypt and will limit its popularity among increased literate and vocal Egyptian women.

The study is divided in five chapters with references at the end. After drawing the research design in the present first chapter, it is introducing the subject of women and their activism and then giving a brief outline of the debates on women question in the Arab region and concluding by the gradual shift of Muslim women from secularism to Islamism. The second chapter on 'Women in the Islamic Movements and Parties in Arab Countries' has dealt with women agenda of different Islamic movements on the region. The chapter has taken Sudan, Palestine, and Jordan where influences of Muslim Brotherhood are direct. It also discusses Algeria, Morocco and Lebanon. This account provides a full picture of Islamic movements in these countries with regard to their women agenda. Third chapter on '*Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Egypt: History, Ideology and Organization' has discussed the history of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with its various ups and downs and women affiliation with it, as well as the evolving ideology of Muslim Brotherhood and their hierarchal organizational structure. Fourth chapter 'Women and *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*: Issues and Prospects' is exclusively on *Akhawaat al-Muslimaat*, the women section of Muslim Brotherhood from the very first time of organising and founding women in Muslim Brotherhood to the analysis of recent women leaders and their engagement in the organization. Particularly the issues of women in this chapter became important to delve because women leaders of Muslim Brotherhood are now more active in public life than they were in post world war period. Women politics of Muslim Brotherhood is now more sophisticated and veiled sometimes in order to avoid any direct clash with state. Women upsurge in Muslim Brotherhood has pressed upon reforms of organizational structure of Muslim Brotherhood to accommodate Muslim Sisters in leadership ranks. Policy documents of Muslim Brotherhood in recent years have tried to address women concerns. This full chapter has delved into various issues of Islamist women. It has checked different sources Muslim Brotherhood on women policy like al-Banna's founding thoughts, 1994, 2004, and 2007 policy documents of the Muslim Brotherhood. These documents have gradually taken upon key issues like women in presidential role, the inclusion of women in the organization's Shura Council, women's role in family and politics. Among external factors which shaped Muslim Brotherhood's women policy are socio-economic pressures in Egypt, pressure from Muslim Sisters within the organization and state's ruthless repression of Muslim Brotherhood and its

crackdown on the organization for last seven decades. Future of women in Muslim Brotherhood very much depends upon future of Muslim Brotherhood. It also examines the prospects of Muslim women's role in the changing scenario of the political sphere in Egypt. The nature of women's participation in the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood has also been taken up in this chapter. The last chapter is drawing conclusions of the whole study by proving the hypotheses positively or negatively and highlighting the outcomes of this research.

It is impossible to know for certain what future developments are beneficial for women in general. Yet the formation of women's groups in Islamic movements may at least empower women by training them and bringing active women cadres in the movements. An increasingly strong sense of awareness of extremely important roles played by women will create opportunities for less well to do women to express and organize themselves for their mutual benefit. But there will remain grave risks that women in Islamic movements will continue to be disadvantaged as long as women are seen to be exceptions to the male norm; they will be defined as 'different'. Women will continue to be singled out for special efforts in development geared towards their particular needs. No doubt, greater efforts at organizing women will increase their confidence level to be ready to face every hindrance. At the same time, the patriarchal nature of organizations they associate with is an important stumbling block. This study tries to understand the opportunities women gain and the constraints they face while engaging themselves in Islamic movements like the Muslim Brotherhood.

Chapter II

Women in the Islamic Movements and Parties of Arab countries

Women in the Islamic Movements and Parties of Arab Countries

Among various identities, Islamism has become the most popular identification models in the Arab world. Islamic Activism is rooted in the symbolism, language and cultural history of Muslim society and as a result has successfully resonated with increasingly disillusioned population suffering from political exclusion, economic deprivation and a sense of growing impotence at the expense of outside powers and a faceless process of Globalization (Wictorowicz 2004: 25). Islamic movements are the mass movements of the twenty first century. They are well embedded in the social fabric, understand the importance of good organization, and are thus able to mobilize considerable constituencies. Their ideology prescribes a simple solution to the persistent crisis of contemporary Arab societies i.e. return to the true spirit of Islam. Indeed "Islam is the solution" (*Al-Islam Hual Hall*) has been the long time slogan of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. Like all successful movements, Islamists have been able to distil a long, complex philosophical tradition into simple slogans that have quickly supplanted the Pan-Arabism and Socialism that dominated the region until 1970s. As a result, Islamists have become the popular force within their own societies and were able to represent as the only viable opposition force to exist in the undemocratic regimes (Hamzawy 2005).

Some of the movements have deep roots dating back to the beginnings of the twentieth century like the parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, was established in 1928 and spread its branches in other neighbouring countries. Thus most of the Islamic movements emerged in the Arab countries are some how the offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1980s and 1990s, similar movements began to emerge in other countries like Party for Justice and Development (PJD) of Morocco, in 1997, National Islamic Front (NIF) of Sudan in 1989, HAMAS of Palestine in 1987, Hezbollah in Lebanon in 1982, Islamic Action Front (IAF) of Jordan in 1992, and Islamic Salvation Front/ *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) of Algeria in 1989. By the late twentieth century, they were clearly important political players in many different Arab states.

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Islamic movements incorporate many young men and women, rural migrants, and people from all classes, even former nationalists and communists (Keddie 2007: 160). As Islamic movements make the transition to mainstream political parties, they are increasingly recognizing the need to appeal to Muslim women as voters and supporters. Earlier, Islamists allowed women's participation to very nominal level just for spreading their message at grass root levels, now they tend to seek more active participation of women for political as well as symbolical reasons. Islamic movements are not only debating on women's active participation but are also trying to develop some sort of mechanism in the organizational structure of the movements in such a way that women can be adjusted comfortably in organizational structures.

Many of the early radical and fundamentalist Islamic movements are gradually turning into more moderate ones. The AHDR 2005 notes that in the last five decades, the internal dynamics of these movements, their relationship to mainstream society and their position on vital societal issues like on human rights, good governance and democracy have undergone significant progressive changes (UNDP 2006). As a result, Islamic movements in reality are in many cases championing women's empowerment. With the help of Islamic movements, Muslim women find themselves able to redefine their status and role in public life.

Contemporary Islamist women are not only the subjects of controversy but are also seen as very active participants in the process of public debate....Similarly through engagement in politics and education, Islamist women break away from the confinement of the interior space and develop personal strategies of education and professional life. Islamic politics enables Muslim women to participate in public life, to organize meetings, to publish articles, to establish associations, to abandon the private domestic sphere and its traditionally defined roles. Islamism serves as the legitimization of their public participation both in practice and ideology (Gole 2000: 98).

New Islamic discourses on gender are being hotly debated among both Islamist men and women. Women Islamic activists often have a very different and more woman friendly interpretations of Islam than do their male counterparts, even if they belong to the same party. Islamic groups sometimes empower women from traditional families, providing

them with a way to meet and act together in the public sphere, to attend schools and universities, and to work even if their bodies are covered. With the spread of Islamic ideologies, many defenders of women's rights have reinterpreted the *Quran* and original Islam as being gender egalitarian and some times even secularists find it prudent to use Islamic arguments (White 2003: 36). Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi is one best example for it. Today many Muslim women understand the changing gender roles in the society and they are reacting to it by actively participating to bring such a change in a more positive and women friendly direction.

Women activists in Islamic movements have started their participation from building up social networks to spreading the Islamic message in the society and gradually they started understanding their own status according to Islam in a modern way. Then they moved on further by realizing the key role they are playing by participating in the Islamic movements. They are also becoming vocal on socio-political issues of their concern. This has impacted on their way of action within the organization and enabled them to create a subtle balance between politics and family. To undertake socio-political issues is not easy in a patriarchal society. Despite traditional and practical hurdles, women's large participation in public issues has attracted appraisal from academics and researchers. Abdel Latif and Ottaway (2007) point out how Islamic activist women are redefining their roles and ideas by being a part of active public life:

Women activists have made important inroads in Islamic movements by creating strong women's branches and pushing for broader political participation and representation in the upper echelons of the entire movements. Although women in these movements deny that they are embracing a Western style feminist agenda and remain instead quite concerned with the preservation of Islamic values, most display dissatisfaction at being relegated to the women's branches of their respective movements. They want to be seen as potential leaders, not just as dedicated organizational foot soldiers, and in many countries they are pushing the leadership of their movements for change. To some extent, the women's demand for greater recognition of the importance of their role in the service of the Islamic cause is also translating into activism in the cause of women's rights and equality more generally, just as it has with women activists in other political movements else where in the world.

The rise of women's activism in Islamic movements has not only strengthened the position of those Islamic movements that have chosen to participate in the legal political processes in their countries but it has also unleashed great debate on the status, role and rights of Muslim women within an Islamic framework. At a time when Arab women's position and their status was subordinate to men, Islamic movements appear as a ray of hope for them from where they can gain their public roles as well as understand their true status in the Islamic framework by reconstructing their view. Islamist women found Islamic movements as a safe forum where they will not be alienated in their society, and will be considered more religious and pious. Sometimes, they are also seen as anti West which itself forms an important value in Arab streets. However Islamic Movements are not the panacea of their long time marginalization and backwardness in public life. They could not achieve all the desired results in consolidating their position equal to Islamist men in Islamic movements. Most often, they are victims of highly patriarchal culture of their societies.

While Islamic movements embrace women's participation as an Islamic value, they generally do not include women in their organizational structure as they do with Islamist men because on the one hand they accept the belief in gender equality but on the other they reject the belief in equality in all spheres and advocate for separate spheres. Women had to work hard, argue and counter argue with their male counterpart to get more access in the organization. These tendencies mostly stem not from Islamic teachings, but from socially engrained norms. So, in a way, it can be said that Islamists provide both opportunities and challenges for women's participation in Islamic movements. This chapter deals with Muslim women's activism in major Islamic movements in Arab countries and their role in shaping the Islamic movements for which some important movements of the Arab world have been selected for this study and brief accounts of women's activism in such movements are presented here. The table below shows some of the major Islamic movements in the Arab world.

Table 3: Islamic Movements and Women

Islamic Movement	Establishment	Country	Women's Front
Muslim Brotherhood (<i>Ikhwan al-Muslimun</i>)	1928 (<i>Ikhwan</i>) 1937 (<i>Akhawaat</i>)	Egypt	Muslim Sisters (<i>Al-Akhawat al-Muslimaat</i>)
Hezbollah (<i>Hizb Allah</i>)	1982	Lebanon	Women's Organization (<i>Al-Hayaat al-Nisaiyyah</i>)
Hamas (<i>Harkat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyyah</i>)	1987	Palestine	Hamas Women
National Islamic Front (<i>al-Jabhah al-Islamiyah al-Qawmiyah</i>)	1989	Sudan	(Women) Leaders of Renaissance (<i>Raidat al-Nahda</i>)
Islamic Salvation Front (<i>Jabhah al-Islāmiyah lil-Inqādht</i>)	1989	Algeria	-----
Islamic Action Front (<i>Jabhat al-'Amal al-Islami</i>)	1992	Jordan	Women's Group
Party for Justice and Development (<i>Hizb al-Adalah wa al-Tanmia</i>)	1997	Morocco	Women's Section

National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudan

Always close to Egyptian politics, Sudan has had a Muslim Brotherhood presence since 1949. Sudan has a long and deep history with the Muslim Brotherhood compared to many other countries. By April 1949, the first branch of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood organization emerged. An offshoot of the Sudanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Charter Front grew during the 1960s, with Islamic scholar

Hasan al-Turabi becoming its Secretary General in 1964. The Islamic Charter Front (ICF) was renamed several times and recently it is being called the National Islamic Front (NIF). Turabi has been the prime architect of the NIF as a modern Islamist party. He worked within the Institutions of the government, which led to a prominent position of his organization in the country. NIF supported women's right to vote and ran women candidates. This Islamic movement, which later on changed to an Islamic political party named National Islamic Front (NIF), mainly came into existence due to the socio-economic, political as well as religio-cultural situations of Sudanese state during the post independence period.

Sudan was and is one of the poorest countries in the Arab world and it is heavily depended on an agrarian economy. For most of its post-independence history, the military has been in power directly or indirectly. Strong, class-interested, religious and sectarian parties had also dominated when military weakened. Military government could not control the civil war between the north and the south which broke out in 1955. A civilian coalition with the help of segments of the military, overthrew the General Nimeiri's military regime which had been in power since 1969, the overthrow in 1985 is popularly known as *intifada* (uprising). That civilian government dominated by the Ansar sect (followers of Mahdi) under the leadership of Sadiq al-Mahdi, head of the *Ummah* Party, established an Islamic Government, which lead in installing a NIF (National Islamic Front) Government in 1989. In their attempt to gain power, the NIF supporters have projected a modern Islamic image which suggests something forward looking. The NIF's attempt to look modern or be modern has meant reference to processes that would generally consider secular; however this modern outlook was carved out of the Islamic understanding of Muslim Brotherhood of which Hasan Turabi was a great admirer. Emergence of Islamic Banking, Islamic science, education etc. appealed educated sections of Sudanese society. Dr. Hasan al-Turabi, the founder of the NIF and Saddiq al-Mahdi, Prime Minister and heir of the Mahdi Mohammed Ahmed of the *Ummah* Party, are western educated. Al-Turabi received his law training at Sorbonne (France) and Saddiq in Economics at Oxford, and they are world-travelled and are known for their academic and philosophical sophistication (Hale 1997).

At a time when Sudan's economic crisis was deepening and consequent demographic changes were creating social problems, the Islamic movement NIF was able to occupy front stage. Women were in the forefront of Sudanese life for long and Islamists were successful in placing them in the 1980s among the most visible and active women in Sudan. Gender dynamics in Sudan have enabled the NIF to come to power and thereby helping it to sustain its power. Women were organized in schools, nurseries, mosques, and in the medical clinics where women staff are predominantly recruited. In line with the economic self reliance and anti-Western vision of the NIF, women were also urged to relearn traditional crafts and domestic skills, so that the family could become an important productive unit again for reducing dependence on imports. NIF took a shift from Arab patriarchal approach towards a 'purer Islam that would liberate women'. Such an ideology of NIF gained wide popularity among Sudanese women (Lowrie 1993: 47).

Re-imagining Muslim women as public servant as well as vanguard of the Islamic movement required a great deal of reinterpretation of traditional Islamic understanding and reconfiguration of identity politics. They need to move away from patriarchal gender discourse of family and religion and also to project Islam as liberator of women and oppressed sections of the society. The NIF fulfilled this high need of re-imagination of Islam in which it reconstructed Islamic ideology of gender and separated Islamic identity from that of Arab identity. These distinctions clearly marked the difference between the patriarchal religious views as Arab society and the progressive view within the framework of Islam. In this way, women can be convinced that Islam that was taught to them in the past via Arab culture or convention or custom, is not the same as the Islam that will take them forward. Al-Turabi himself speaks of the liberation of women:

In the Islamic movement....women have played a more important role of late than men. They came with a vengeance because they had been deprived and so when we allowed them in the movement, more women voted us (NIF) than men because we were the ones who gave them more recognition and a message and place in the society. They were definitely more active in our election campaigns than men. Most of our social work and charitable work was done by women. They are now even in the popular defence forces.....it is natural now in Sudan..... of

course, I don't claim that women have achieved parity....in business.... There is a question whether women will ever be present in equal numbers in all domains of public life In the universities, they join all faculties. Sometimes, they do it deliberately to prove a point. Most of them won't practice engineering when they leave school... (Lowrie 1993).

Women's activism under military and NIF regimes extended wider and deeper in the society and it marked a change in women's role in Sudanese society. Relatively liberal attitudes towards women by NIF supported the emerging trend. Earlier women's activism was dominated by secular Sudanese feminists and it was replaced by NIF with an Islamic framework. Secular feminists activities remained confined to elite class of the society and their influence gradually decreased. Women received a great deal of praise and attention for the work of socializing the young with Islamic values. With this much involvement of women in the NIF, the movement was able to counter the blame that the NIF would send women back into the homes. The NIF has not only supported women's active social, economic and political role, but it has also brought the women in the male-dominated spheres. For example, the election of Suad al-Fatih al-Badawi to the People's Parliament was an important event. She was one of the two Islamist women elected to the house. NIF's consistent efforts on the women's front helped modern gender Islamic ideology to be accepted by many of secular rivals of Hasan Turabi. He frequently professed that there was no bar to women anywhere and there would be no complex about women being present anywhere (Lowrie 1993).

Although the progressive steps taken by the NIF in moderating the gender Islamic ideology and then mobilizing women were quite impressive, specially when one note the strong voices coming for proper status and role women should have in the society from the women's group in the NIF headed by Wisal Mahdi (Hasan al-Turabi's wife), but how much of the activity is only allowed by the men and by the state or prescribed by the state version of 'Gender Activism'? Despite Al-Turabi's claim that women entered the political arena "with a vengeance because they had been deprived", most of the activism did not emerge through the agitation of women themselves. Moreover, there has not yet emerged strong feminist Islamic voices that might challenge those government policies that curtail the free activities of women.

Party for Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco

Over past couple of years, Morocco is experiencing some what limited liberalization process that has witnessed a moderate, non-revolutionary, Islamic party, Party for Justice and Development (PJD) also known as *Hizb al-Adalah wa al-Tanmia* in Arabic. It has also come into the political process of the country and gained seats in the successive parliamentary elections. As long as Islamists do not challenge the King's authority, Morocco would accept some Islamist political activity. The PJD has accepted such a bargain and the relationship between PJD and the palace, though at times confrontational yet overall been mutually beneficial. Since Islamists are popular, the ruling regime seeks to repress or contain them. Although PJD is legal and enjoys parliamentary representation, the Government constantly attempts to limit its political participation. However, the PJD has attracted a great deal of attention both inside Morocco and around the world. Some have hailed the PJD as a model, moderate, Islamic party that plays by the political rules and one that would bring democracy to Morocco and eradicate corruption, increase employment opportunities, and provide better social services to the public. Others reject it as a thinly veiled effort to institute *Sharia* law, embark upon a strict moralization campaign, and roll back decades of progress for women. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between.

Officially founded in 1997 by Abdelkarim al-Khatib, the PJD was a merger between the People's Democratic and Constitutional Movement (MPDC) and the clandestine Islamic movement, Islamic Youth (*Chabiba Islamiyyah*). This alliance energized the MPDC and brought the Islamic Youth under the mantle of the political system. Parties based solely on religion are banned in Morocco, but PJD considers itself a party that adopts teachings of Islam to work towards a more modern, democratic, and prosperous Morocco (www.pjd.ma (official website of PJD)). The PJD has worked tirelessly to strengthen its support among its base (newly urbanized university students and middle class intellectuals) and expand its reach into more rural areas and among women. As the PJD adapts to political realities, its platform has evolved from ideological symbolic calls for

greater integration of Islamic values to pragmatic calls for development and unemployment alleviation. The PJD has sought to integrate women into the party in increasing numbers as they seek to attract new voters, vie for local and national seats, and project an image of a modern, moderate Islamic party (Sadiqi 2006).

The Party for Justice and Development has offered women a number of opportunities, including the creation of a PJD women's committee, an emphasis on voting as an Islamic obligation and the seating of the greatest number of women in the parliament of any political party. Despite greater female participation as members and leaders within the movement, challenges to greater integration are abound. The creation of separate women's section limits if not marginalize women's participation and isolate 'women's issues' to women only to consider and address. Some policies of the PJD have been felt as antithetical to gender progress, including the rejection of projects to integrate women into development, and the failure to challenge inequalities in the private sphere. Some Moroccans fear that the PJD is "hiding their real ideas" about gender, while encouraging participation to legitimize the movements and disarm those who criticize them as being against women's rights (Marisol 2007). However, be it tokenism or symbolism, women's activism in Morocco is growing as Sadiqi (2006) writes, "over the past decade, the number of Moroccan women taking an active role in Islamist associations or political parties increased dramatically".

Until the PJD first competed in the 1997 elections, the Islamic movements generally did not seek to participate in the political system. Since 1997, PJD has showed its strength at the ballot box, increasing its seats from 14 to 42 to 46 in a 10 years span. The Party mandates that 15% of all internal seats to be held by women. In the last two elections, the PJD has beaten all other parties to seat the largest number of women (6 in 2002, tied with 6 in 2007) (Rapp 2008).

Reforms in the Family Law (*Mudawwana*) became a very problematic issue between the Islamists and other reformers. While many *ulama* and Islamists, strong among the urban masses and university campuses, opposed the plan, many female Islamic activists favored

family law reforms and, however, all groups now use Islamic language. According to Bruce Maddy-Weitzman:

Like Allal al-Fasi, the new generation of reformers seeks to reconcile Islam with the modern world, and to show that the very notion of progress in fact derives from the principles of Islam. However..... the plan's formulators and supporters were more interested in seeking religious legitimization for their essentially modern, secular project than in genuinely engaging Islamic sources in a real dialogue. Sociologist Fatima Mernissi is an exception in this regard. However, her radical reformulation of Islamic texts to promote democracy and women's rights has not resonated widely (Maddy-Weitzman 2005: 401).

Among the PJD female activists, there are many mixed views regarding their vision and action. Some feel that female PJD candidates must challenge existing stereotypes of a socially conservative constituency as the women activists are becoming pretty representative of Moroccan society. Yet some of them don't accept that women should hold any position of responsibilities. Like all political parties, PJD women join the movement for many different reasons. For many, the opportunity is what the PJD leader Sadeddine Othmani has deemed "to restore a Muslim society that has been seduced from the right path" is a goal of primary importance (MEMRI 2007). Whatever the religious, social, economic or political motivation for women's participation in the PJD, electoral figures and personal testimonials illustrate the many opportunities the PJD has offered women. Although the women's section is flourishing in the PJD, the strategy of setting up parallel gendered tracks within the party (which at least five other political parties have also done) may be detrimental to Morocco's longer term goals of gender integration. Bassima Haqqaoui, a PJD Member of Parliament, affirms that women should, just as men, engage in all debates that affect society, not just issues that affect them as women (Rapp 2008). Thus PJD's construction of a separate women's movement puts PJD's commitment to engaging women in debates relating to all issues (not just women's issues) at risk. Clark and Schwedler (2003) argue that "the introduction of separate, 'parallel' women's sectors reflects the efforts of party leaders to ghettoize women's activities rather than envision meaningful gender equality within the party". Thus it is true that other parties have also adopted similar initiatives, but until women are integrated into the more mainstream discourses, these discussions will continue at the margins.

Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan

The experience of the Islamic women activists in Jordan is considered relatively new as it did not really become visible until the last decade of the 20th century. Initially there was more symbolic rather than effective participation and activism in the charitable, social, medical, and educational networks established by Islamic movements in Jordan. During 1950s to 1970s, secular, leftist, nationalist and liberal tendencies were dominating women's activism in Jordan. They established women's unions and actively joined political parties. Their influence gradually decreased and it became limited to the upper class of the society which gave a reason for criticism by Islamists. Islamic women activists managed to reach out women in the more under privileged and some times shattered classes in cities, villages and refugee camps. With this activism of Islamic women, veil became symbol of pro-women activism for beneficiaries of services of Islamic movements.

When Jordan gained its independence in 1946, Islamic movements began to form under relatively liberal policies of the founder of the state King Hussein. The Muslim Brotherhood was established in Jordan in 1948, a year full of critical and determining political and social issues in the modern history of Jordan. The creation of the state of Israel and the 1948 War resulted in the union of the two banks of the river in the years 1949 and 1950. Hence it created new political and socio-economic realities, which in turn allowed certain political reforms to crystallize into a new constitution for Jordan in 1952. The 1967 War that resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (of the Jordanian river) imposed a new reality that affected all walks of life, political, social and economic. A resurgence of Islamic movements took place throughout the 1970s, in parallel to the decline of the secular, nationalist and leftist movements after the 1973 War with Israel, the economic boom attributed to the oil industry and the martial law imposed throughout most of the Arab world. In 1988, Jordan faced stifling economic hardship that resulted in high unemployment and severe poverty. Historically, one can clearly trace the rise and emergence of Islamic women activists in public life in Jordan along with the democratic

transformation which followed the severe economic crisis in Jordan in 1989. The 1990s witnessed a characteristic change in the way society looked at the women as traditional alliances began to crumble due to national, regional and international developments. The state began to take initiatives to integrate women into national strategies; Islamic parties began forming women's committees; and society began to move towards a more sensitive consideration and understanding of women's rights. Thus, a new era began to emerge in the history of Jordanian women.

As far as the Islamic movements in Jordan are concerned, this trend has been initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The MB emerged in Jordan as a natural offshoot and product of the ideology of the MB's parent organization in Egypt, which considers itself to be a global, transnational movement. Establishing the movement in Jordan is credited to Sheikh Abdel Latif Abu Koura. After a period of discussion inside the MB and several prominent Islamic independents, a decision was made to establish the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the Islamic political party. The party was founded on 8th October 1992 under Party Law No. 32, which was legislated that same year. Thus IAF also known as *Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami* (Arabic) grew out of Jordan's MB. The two overlap in membership and outlook but are not synonymous. In fact the relationship between the two has changed a lot by the time.

The party's organizational structure is composed of a Founding Committee, a General Assembly, a Public Symposium, the Shura Council and the Executive Office. The Shura Council consists of 120 members, who represent all the districts and areas in the country and who are elected by proportional representation; the Executive Office consists of 17 members, including the party's Secretary General. Meanwhile the party's general assembly is open to every male and female Jordanian citizen over 18 years of age (Hanieh 2008).

Women and women's issues in the discourse of the IAF are still in a stage that can best be described as under debate and negotiation. According to Taraki (2002), efforts are underway to redefine the role of women in the context of the movement and the party as

this issue is considered to be the one most open to debate and most open to experimentation and examination. However there is a vast disparity between this discourse and reality due to the existence of a very conservative current, which has placed strict restriction on the participation of women in the party or movement. Yet there are other moderates within the party who constantly try to improve the civil and political rights of the women within the party and outside it. It seems that the movement's discourse tends towards generalizations to a large degree and has very different views from uprightly the extreme conservative to moderate liberal.

It appears that progress has been made on the level of establishing and streaming the theoretical approach of the IAF. In 2005, the Islamic movement published a reform document entitled "The Vision of the Islamic Movement for Reform in Jordan" (IAF 2005) that reaffirmed the equality of men and women in the way that they are both honoured in God's eyes, as they are considered brothers and sisters in the creation, and as the masculine and feminine in Islam are not factors to be used to discriminate and differentiate; rather the criteria for supremacy is piety and good work. They both are given the same duties and missions and are judged in equal terms of accountability, reward and punishment. They are partners in both shouldering responsibility and carrying out the duties of the nation in cooperating and empowering each other. It shows the evolving ideology of the movement regarding gender and gender issues.

The IAF boasts of a large female membership and a substantial number of women in leadership positions compared to others. According to the party leadership women constitutes approximately 10% of the total membership. A women's sector, headed by a committee of 10 women, represents women within the party and recruits new female members (Clark 2004). It is interesting to note that despite the difficulties Islamic women activists encountered in the IAF during the party's fledging stages; they have maintained their presence in the party's Shura Council and in the General Assembly in which, today, women represent 10% of the membership. Women active in the IAF maintain that the success of women breaking into the ranks of party's Shura Council has improved, beginning with one woman, then two, then six and now reaching at 9 in the 120 member

council (Hanieh 2008: 96). On the other hand, the absence of women in party's executive office show that women are still lagging behind due to one or the other reason. In 2003, the IAF leadership broke with the prevailing tradition within the society in general and party particular, by nominating Hayat Musimi, a Shura Council member of the party since 1994, as one of its 30 candidates in June 2003 Parliamentary elections. She also won from the Zarqa municipality but not under direct competition, rather on the basis of some kind of women quota. Later on, in the 2007 elections again, the party nominated two more women but none of them won.

Thus, Islamic women activists are slowly but steadily progressing in the ranks of IAF. They have managed, in a very short period of time, to establish an active women's movement that has penetrated all sectors of the political arena and Jordanian civil society. Islamist women in IAF are so active that the IAF members began to significantly review and reconsider their position with regard to women, their rights and their participation. Perhaps this is because women have become an integral part of the movement's ideological vision and a significant factor in terms of their activism and practical works. To attest to these facts, it is important to note that the IAF got 70% of the women's vote in 2003 Parliamentary elections. But this is not enough for the women's true empowerment. As observed by Clark and Schwedeler (2003), so long as ideological contention over women's role continues to exist within the IAF, the party's leaders will avoid creating a firm policy that could provoke further divisions among the rank and file. Instead the leadership will continue to balance ideology with pragmatism, evaluating women's participation on a case by case basis and advancing women only when strategically useful and beneficial.

HAMAS in Palestine

Hamas denotes Arabic abbreviation of *Harkat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic Resistance Movement). As an Arabic word it also means enthusiasm or zeal. The organization was established in 1987 during the first Palestinian uprising known as *Intifada*, with the goal of regaining the Palestinian lands from Israeli occupation. Hamas

is viewed as a terrorist organization in most of the Western countries, but it is well known for social services like providing access to health, jobs and income to the poorest segments of the communities from which they drew support from. Anti-Hamas liberals hold, such a view they tend to support anti Hamas initiatives of the West and Israel. Moreover, anti-Hamas factions also claim that Islamic movements like Hamas are uniquely oppressive to women, sticking to rigid ideologies which prescribe for them a subordinate role. Many of these arguments do not represent the full picture of Hamas's view on women and gender issues. There is larger recognition now that women's presence in Hamas proves that Hamas' women agenda for women has certain appeal among the Palestinian community (Wing and Kassim 2008).

In Palestine, Islamic activists have grown in importance since 1980s. They also have great support from Palestinian women as throughout the recent Palestinian history, women have enormously supported all the resistance groups against Israel. Women are attracted towards Hamas in great numbers firstly because it has become a powerful party in state politics through which women can actually work, and secondly, because Hamas, like other Islamic groups elsewhere, has created a network of schools and clinics that helped many women a lot (Peteet 1992: 59).

As the work of Birzeit University professor Islah Jad (2005) demonstrated, the Islamist women's movement has played a major role in transforming Hamas' ideology about women, placing their demands at the centre of internal debates, and mobilizing women within Hamas and in society at large to play greater political and economic roles. Islamic activist women have challenged Western feminist discourses that they deemed irrelevant to their circumstances and needs. They have contended with contradictions in Islamist thinking about the role of women that mirrored the unresolved contradictions that had long plagued the declining secular nationalist movement. At the same time, these Islamic activist women engaged positively with many of the arguments made by secular feminists, incorporating them into an ever-changing Islamic nationalist discourse. Islamic activist women in Hamas have emerged as an important factor in Palestinian political life.

Jamila Shanti, one of the Hamas' elected female members of the Palestinian Legislative Council said: "there are traditions that say that a woman should take a secondary role and that she should be at the back, but that is not Islam. Hamas will scrap many of these traditions and women can be seen going out and participating" (Johnson 2006). Thus, the work of Islamic activist women, especially within Hamas, deserves to be recognized and engaged with. For many of women Islamic activists, Hamas is attractive because they offer the hope of alternative forms of social organization that put the human being and the community, rather than the market and consumer at the centre of life. Hamas' changing views on a long term truce with Israel, on forms of resistance, and the role of women in society are examples of how an Islamic movement like any other social movement responds to the real circumstances of the society of which Hamas is also a part. Hamas strives to construct a moral society based on family, so its gender ideology and religious ideology cannot be separated. Thus in order to gain better insight into the neglected gender ideology of Hamas the texts generated by the movement as well as the nature of their mobilization of women can give a clearer picture of the reality.

As mentioned above, Hamas' beliefs regarding the role of women is constantly transforming. This transformation of ideology is not caused only by unstable socio-economic conditions of Palestine but also by Hamas' interaction with feminist, nationalist, as well other Islamist women within Hamas. The adaptability of the group is demonstrated in various forms: one, the movement recognized the importance of women as a mobilizing force (as a result, it encouraged the education of women), second, Hamas provided career and public sphere opportunities not generally accessible to women. Another important thing is that the veil or the *hijab* has become the ultimate symbol of Hamas' evolving gender ideology, as Islamic dress has assumed new meanings like it now signifies a woman as an active political member who is modern and highly educated (Jad 2005).

In recent years, Hamas has successfully challenged political hegemony of al-Fatah by defeating it in the Parliamentary election. But the victory is not just because of Hamas' Islamic agenda, it has also managed social engineering in which Palestinian women came

to support Hamas politics. In this process, Hamas has moderated its positions on women to appeal to more secular Palestinians and female voters. As far as the political participation of Palestinian women is concerned, Hamas nominated 13 female candidates in the 2006 elections. The 2006 Palestinian national elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip resulted in the largest increase ever of women members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). After the ballots were tallied, six women from Hamas, eight from Fatah, and three from democratic political parties became members of the PLC. All of the six Hamas women elected to parliament vowed to fight for women's rights. Some, like MP Huda Naeem, are trying to put forward more progressive interpretations of Islam and disentangle oppressive cultural traditions from the religion. Many have speculated on the reasons for the substantial increase in women candidates, especially in Hamas. Here it becomes important to realize that Hamas is not simply a political or military organization. Hamas members are extensively involved in grassroots initiatives concerning the economy, education, culture, and health care. It has also attracted the support of women by offering assistance programs for widows, day care, kindergartens and pre-schools, in addition to parlours and women only gyms (Retting (2008)).

Pollsters now say that the secret to Hamas' victory in Palestinian elections was support from women, who voted in record numbers. Another reason was Hamas' army of women campaigners (veiled university students) knocking on doors and promising housewives a better future. Hamas activated female supporters in unprecedented numbers. It staged rallies for women, and also reached them through mosques and female preachers, particularly in rural areas. "Hamas had the most organized campaign targeting women", said pollster Nader Said of the West Bank's Bir Zeit University. Thousands of volunteers, including female university students, were sent door-to-door to deliver Hamas' message that Islam protects women, that it offers them equal partnership with men, on the job and at home. While short on details, Hamas campaigners also promised free education for girls (el-Deeb 2006).

The question arises here is whether female Islamic activists in Hamas are empowered on a personal level or through proper institutionalized structure of the movement? Secondly, whether the personal empowerment female Islamic activists' gains translate into empowerment of women in their society or they only gain power at the expense of other women by adhering to and strengthening patriarchal norms and institutions? In other words, do the Islamic activist women actually work towards empowering women? As far as empowerment of the female activists in Hamas on a personal level is concerned, it is true to much extent that the movement played role in bringing them in public sphere but the female activists on their personal level grow in the movement by different ways. Another thing to note is that Hamas include women because they want them to become more involved in public life, but as soon as they move ahead, they face restrictions after certain limit and are confined to specific realms of the society. Beyond that, only a few women with much influence gain positions. Hamas still have the ideology of maintaining the separation of gender which naturally turns them to empower women in gender segregated spaces and the Islamic activist women support it. This some times is disempowering women in some circles and thus it is noted that even the well positioned women also are not able to improve their status within and outside of the organization. But assumptions that Islamic political activism inherently disempowers women collectively is unfounded. Many of the policies that female Islamic activists pursued with regards to women can be seen as affecting structural change which can be empowering to women.

Hezbollah in Lebanon

In recent years, Islam has come to play a significant role in people's lives in Lebanon. Muslims in Lebanon are becoming highly politicized and the political character of Islam is a relatively new phenomenon in Lebanon. In the past, one's identity was defined by one's nationality, but today it is often defined by one's religion. And one's religious affiliation has come to define one's political affiliation. Hezbollah, a Lebanese Islamic political and paramilitary organization, is one perfect example of it. Hezbollah was established in 1982 in Lebanon and it is a Shiite Islamic movement. Not only the Islamic

movement is highly getting politicized but its social development aspect is also quite interesting. In other words it can be said that the Islamic movements are now having the political as well social basis in their respective states and what Amr Hamzawy (2005) pointed out is true that “moderate Islamists are well rooted in the social and cultural fabric of Arab countries”. Islamic movements contribute to social welfare primarily by direct provision of services, such as health care, education, financial as well as involvement in the community development and social networks, most of which are established in local, non-governmental mosques. Hezbollah filled the vacuum created by the absence of the state in Southern Lebanon to construct the infrastructure for social development. During the 1980s, Hezbollah began gradually to address social problems faced by the Shia community. The movement then developed plans to offer medical care, hospitals, electricity, and water supply. It also paved roads, built housing, managed sewage systems, set up gas stations, operated schools, nurseries and sports centres. What makes all these activities particularly ‘Islamic’ is the combination of an alternative to both the state and the private sector, the religious convictions of many activists, Islamic based funding and finally, the provision of affordable social services. It is widely agreed that such Islamic community activities often outdo their secular counterparts. Basically, Hezbollah has become a moderate Islamic social movement, which has active political branches.

In keeping with Lebanon’s generally secular culture, Hezbollah recognizes and promotes women’s rights some what more strongly than other groups. One member of the Hezbollah political council, speaking to an Online Journal correspondent in July 2006, claimed that “Hezbollah differs from many Islamic groups in our treatment of women. We believe women have the ability like men to participate in all parts of life”. The Online Journal correspondent writes:

From it’s founding in the 1980s, Hezbollah women have headed education, medical and social service organizations. Most recently Hezbollah nominated several women to run in the Lebanese elections. It named Wafa Hotiet as a Chief of al-Noor Radio....., and promoted 37 years old Rema Fakhry to its highest ruling body, the Hezbollah Political Council. Part of Fakhry’s duties include

interpreting Islamic Feminism in *Sharia* law for the committee for political analysis (Schuh 2006).

Not only is that Hezbollah's social support networks are run by women but most of its grassroots works in terms of education, welfare system, fund raising etc. are either run by women completely or largely. So the role of women extends far beyond their roles as wives and mothers, raising children and instilling in them the culture of resistance.

Apart from these activities, women activists in Hezbollah are organizing programs to teach women about their rights. Hezbollah women's organization *al-Hayaat al-Nisaiyya*, organizes courses at its branch offices to teach women their legal rights under the Lebanese Constitution and in Islam. In private conversations and in their teachings, Hezbollah's women recognize that women's rights are often violated but also stress that Islam is in no way the cause of the injustices inflicted upon women in its name. Rather the prevalent cultural norms are the main culprits behind women's inferior status. Women's organization of the movement is changing rapidly; it started off as part of the movement's charity arm, engaging in social and community service out reach, but evolved a great deal since then. As women gained more experience in the movement, they began asking more complex and challenging questions and putting pressure on the leadership to change some practices. This does not mean that Hezbollah women are highly critical of their organization, although these women feel that they are not fully included, yet they maintain their stand like what Um Mahdi, Head of the Women's Branch of the Organization for Supporting the Resistance (the financial arm of Hezbollah), said that "we don't have the eternal complex of having to be equal with men. We seek justice not equality" (Abdel-Latif 2007).

Hezbollah has been devoting serious attention to the role women can play in expanding its social and political base because the social and cultural pressure is increasing on the movement to include women in the mainstream activities of the movement. One of the women Hezbollah nominated was Ghazwa Farahat, who was selected as a member of the social unit of al-Ghobeiry municipality in Southern Beirut on Hezbollah's ticket. She was the first female candidate the movement nominated on its electoral list in 2006. Indeed,

the party fought hard to convince Farahat's family of her nomination. According to Abdel-Latif (2007):

If any thing Farahat's story reflects is how the Islamic movement has frequently proven more progressive in its stand on the role of women in society than the society it operates within. That Hezbollah stood by its nomination and overcame social and cultural pressures, suggests that the movement has been playing serious attention to the role women can play in expanding its social and political base.

In sum, women in the Arab world have begun to demand greater authority for themselves in the society and interestingly it is Muslim women, involved in Islamic movements like Hezbollah, who are raising their voices more efficiently than other secular or liberal groups. They are successful to some extent in slowly evolving their role and getting their voices and views more and more weightage within the movement and also outside of it.

Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria

Human rights situation in general and women's situation in particular are worst in Algeria. Both secular and Islamic activists suffered in the anarchic climate of the country. As far as gender activism is concerned in Algeria, one can at least mark out the secular activist women, whereas the Islamic activist women are almost invisible in Algeria. The past history of the country made the current situation so bad. Algeria won independence from France in 1962 and became a revolutionary Arab-Islamic socialist republic led by National Liberation Front/ *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN), the only legal political party. The FLN suppressed Islamic activism, setting the stage for the fundamentalist backlash. In 1989, a new constitution, establishing a multi-party democracy, was approved by referendum. The Islamic Salvation Front/ *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) emerged as the largest and influential opposition movement, appealing strongly to the urban poor and the unemployed. Sheik Abbas Madani, a moderate Islamist is the leader of FIS, however the spiritual leader Madani, reportedly has little influence over the armed fractions of the FIS. Second to Sheik Madani is Ali Benhadj, known for his fiery, militant and radical notions. This dual leadership and the lack of clear doctrine allowed for the variable interpretation and pluralistic nature of the FIS as a political party. The more

moderate Madani represented a conservative faction within the party intent on using the democratic system to implement its Islamic code. Benhadj, with wider grassroots supports, drew the younger population intent on the immediate imposition of Islamic law. The FIS is a loose network of autonomous local units. The followers are generally young, urban, poor people, driven by the belief that they have little to lose in fighting the government. The FIS received financial backing from Saudi Arabia until the Algerian party began vocally supporting Iran on different issues.

In April 1990, FIS supporters demonstrated in Algiers, demanding the dissolution of the National People's Assembly (NPA) and the introduction of *Sharia*, the Islamic religious code of law. General elections were held in December 1991 and the FIS won 188 seats in Assembly, while the FLN only 15. President Benjedid declared the elections void and a military junta assumed control. The FIS was banned since then, initiating Algeria's second bloody civil war in 40 years as bitter fighting broke out between Islamic fundamentalists and military authorities. The FIS charges the secular government with negotiating with former colonial powers to strip the resources of the country and attacking the ideological, historical, social and cultural integrity of its people.

Women's organizations and actions in Algeria grew from 1981 onwards, the same period when the Islamic movement also grew. In April 1989 a demonstration of 100,000 women favouring Islamism came up (Lazreg 1994: 104-110). After the government permitted opposition parties and elections, the Islamic party FIS grew rapidly, largely as an expression of opposition to a government that had done little to meet Algeria's major economic and other problems. When the virtual civil war was launched by one faction of the Islamic party after national elections were cancelled in 1991, women were attacked, raped, killed, taken away without consent in "temporary marriages" and forced to dress and behave in most conservative way. High gender conservatism in the Islamic activists was partly due to a reaction against the denigration of Arab Islamic culture by the French colonialists. Not only many male and female activists resist the conservative stands of Islamic activists and many local and international women's and human groups work to protect women against discriminations, such problems remain (Lazreg 1994: 106).

As far as women's role, status and participation in the Islamic movement FIS is concerned, it is almost nil. Unlike the other Islamic movements of the Arab countries which have vibrant women's participation, FIS is in this situation probably because of various factors. Firstly, it is banned; secondly, women's status in general is worst and hundreds of violent deaths of women both Islamic and secular occur due to different reasons; thirdly, the pragmatic, social Islamic activism is lacking in the FIS in Algeria instead militant and violent form of activism prevails, which strongly moves women away from the public spheres. The interplay between society's spatial arrangements and the status of women reveals much about the ideological underpinnings of the Algerian state. However, the FIS has reversed stereotypical value judgments about women's spaces, it has accorded women two things: first, it has assigned a higher status to the feminine knowledge associated with the home and child rearing, to the extent that the Islamists have raised even the value of women's home life above the status of women working in sexually segregated work places, second, they have found room for women's study groups monitored within FIS controlled mosques. Islamist women can therefore argue that space segregation works to women's advantage by allowing them to develop networks and power independently of men. Yet, Algeria is the place where women be veiled or unveiled are targeted for abuse and even assassination no matter what they do.

The human rights of ordinary Algerians, and in particular Algerian women, are under siege. Crimes against human dignity occur everyday, with women being the targets of much of the violence. Since the socio-political situation of Algeria is extremely destabilized, there is no such kind of opportunities for women to join the Islamic activism. To some extent, secular women are in little-better position to at least keep their voice in the society, indeed there are vibrant secular feminists' activities running in Algeria. But the Islamists keep away the Muslim female from the social space, seeing it as a threat to men's spaces. Thus on the one hand, one can note that there is no female participation in FIS and on the other hand, Algerian feminists at least play some kind of role in searching for an alternative for the stabilization of the situation in Algeria.

Chapter III

***Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Egypt: History, Ideology and Organization**

***Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Egypt: History, Ideology and Organization**

Hasan al-Banna founded *Jamaat al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimun* (Muslim Brotherhood) in 1928. The Brotherhood traversed through more than one political experience that the country has undergone since the move from the monarchy to the republican model. The Muslim Brotherhood has been a politico-religious movement accommodating distinctive Islamic ideology and it was established at the time of the royal regime in a semi-liberal era. It clashed with the government during the time of President Nasser, adapted to the regime of President Sadat, and tended to fluctuate in its relationship with President Mubarak; however, the relationship was based on partial elimination, just like the state during the age of President Nasser. Moreover, it has been outlawed for most of its history; since 1954 until the present time. The Muslim Brotherhood has continued to be both a witness and a party in the political and cultural dispute in Egypt and the Arab countries throughout different historical periods. This dispute was about issues of identity and cultural belonging and the relationship between the religion and politics.

The Muslim Brotherhood had a flexible political and intellectual reference that gave it a comprehensive conception of Islam. This conception allowed members of the Muslim Brotherhood to be politicians if they wanted, callers for good behavior if they wished, preachers on the pulpits, parliamentary members, Sufis, or revolutionists. Moreover, some of its leaders were conservatives like Hasan Al-Hudaybi, or radical strugglers like Sayyid Qutb (Abed-Kotob 1995).

The Muslim Brotherhood has experienced many stages in its history and each stage was marked by tribulation more than victory. This chapter looks into the reality of the Muslim Brotherhood at the present time taking into account its history, organizational structure and evolving ideology. This is especially relevant because it is rare nowadays to find an event whether major or minor, in the Arab or Islamic world, that the Muslim Brotherhood does not figure. It is also rare for them not to be active in a syndicate, political body, or student activity. The Muslim Brotherhood even participated in the debates around issues like obscene scenes in movies and books that were considered disrespectful to religion.

Finally, the Muslim Brotherhood achieved a record in being hounded by the executive authority throughout its history.

Since Muslim Brotherhood is an Islamic movement which has its deep roots in the Egyptian society, so it naturally became a pragmatic force of the society which has mobilized people towards it in large numbers. As Ziad Munson described it in these words: "The successful mobilization of the Muslim Brotherhood was possible because of the way in which its Islamic message was tied to its organizational structure, activities, and strategies and the everyday lives of Egyptians" (Munson 2004: 487).

The Muslim Brotherhood managed to maintain its organizational existence since its establishment. More than eight decades, it has managed to exist as a religious movement as well as a political and social organization. This, on the one hand, helped it to be sufficiently strong to be distinguished from other political entities, but also made it weak and feeble in some other ways. The Movement's ideology has been literally the backbone in managing the existence of its organizational structure. Ideologically, Muslim Brotherhood believes in the Islamic *Sharia* as the key to realizing the principles of freedom and justice and it promotes the gradual Islamization of Egyptian public life. The group's goal is to establish a state ruled by the principles of *Sharia* (Abed-Kotob 1995).

Despite a constitutional ban against religious parties, the Muslim Brotherhood constitutes potentially the most significant political opposition in Egypt. It is tolerated by the state but formally remains illegal, enjoying neither the status of a legal political party nor that of a legal association. It is allowed to pursue its activities as a social movement combining religious, charitable, educational and publishing activities with a substantial political presence (Harris 1964). At frequent intervals however, the state cracks down arresting Brothers and the standard charge being 'attempting to reorganize a banned movement'. Muslim Brothers now run as independents in legislative elections. In the 2005 legislative elections, they won 88 out of 454 seats and have become the largest oppositional force to the ruling regime. The civil society in Egypt has been a crucial source through which oppositionalists, predominantly, the Muslim Brotherhood derive

the power of popular appeal. Being one of the largest and most influential Islamic organization, the Muslim Brotherhood cuts across estranged social structures such as the modern working class, the urban poor, the young and the new middle class, and particularly the student community regardless of gender (Harnisch 2009).

The Muslim Brotherhood from the time of Hasan al-Banna included women for its support in different spheres. Seeking the cooperation of women in the Movement's preaching activities, al-Banna founded a women's association of the Movement named *Akhwat al-Muslimaat* (Muslim Sisters) by 1937 (Talhami 2001).¹ The founder himself took major steps in organizing women along with the Movement. Women had a vibrant role in the history of the organization, infact they have been active participants in all the eras of the Brotherhood's history. Particularly, the charity and social work spheres were very active among women (al-Deiry 2004). But later on, when the country's political environment was creating many problems for the Movement to cope with, and following arrests of the female activists during the time of President Nasser, led the Movement's leaders to exclude the women's branch from the organization. This situation continued despite major changes in the country's as well Movement's social and political conditions.

History of the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Egypt

Egypt had a difficult encounter with Western imperialism after the British invasion and occupation in 1882 and the excessive Westernization of a section of the Egyptian society and the consequent neglect of religion. While the Egyptian people absorbed and assimilated many changes coming under the Western impact, they have also challenged others and the intensity of the challenge did not weaken with time (Bari 1995). At this time, an Islamic reform movement manifested in Egypt and it grappled with social ills, political weakness, educational stultification and the crisis of the Muslim intellectual.

¹ This is the year mentioned by Ghada Hashim Talhami (2001) and Zeinab al-Ghazali (1972), whereas Omayma Abdul Latif (2008) has mentioned the establishment of the Sister's section in 1932.

That movement featured Salafist individuals like Jamaluddin Afghani, Mohammed Abduh, Qasim Amin and Rashid Rida who provided modernist Islamic ethos.

Another movement of Islamic reform was the catalyst for 20th century Islamism in Egypt, the ideas and organization of Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood. Hasan al-Banna appeared on the Egyptian scene at a time, when owing to the presence of a large number of foreigners in almost all walks of life and the overwhelming influence of Western liberal ideas on upper class Egyptians, urban Egypt was becoming a melting pot culturally. Many Egyptians had also been greatly disturbed by Turkey's humiliating defeat in the World War I and the consequent abolition of the Caliphate and subjugation of most Arab areas by Western colonial powers. Al-Banna, therefore, unlike most of his reformist predecessors who admired the West and sought to accommodate some of its elements, challenged the West's ascendancy in all its forms. Al-Banna, in his memoirs, described the prevailing tense environment in the canal town of Ismailiyyah on account of the predominating foreign presence there. Al-Banna spent some years there as a school master where he also founded the organization *Jamat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (The Muslim Brotherhood) in 1928 along with other members. The members of this group, formally titled the Society of the Muslim Brethren are often referred to as *Ikhwan* (Brothers) (Bari 1995). Al-Banna developed a movement to promote Islamic values that he explicitly declared not to be a political party. Hasan al-Banna felt that Egyptian political and social life demanded the revival, not abandonment of Islamic principles.

To al-Banna, the nationalist secular parties and their wealthy landowner representatives were also failing Egyptian society. These parties, which had obtained partial independence in 1922, had not been able to affect a British withdrawal and, more importantly, were not benefiting the poor, peasant, and illiterate elements in the country. By providing youth development and educational programs, clinics, Muslim fellowship, and *Daawah* (missionary activity), and later a linked women's association, the Brotherhood grew rapidly. The Muslim Brotherhood's first women's division, the Muslim Sisters Group, was created in 1937 as mentioned above. Since then, women activists have been at the forefront of the social and political struggle of the Muslim

Brotherhood movement in Egypt, which seeks to establish a democratic political system in the country with an Islamic frame of reference. Al-Banna's movement was more broadly based, working explicitly towards the goal of an Islamic society. No Islamic movement has been as important as the Muslim Brotherhood in spreading Islamist ideas in the Arab world, in as much as it proposed an alternative ideology to that of the ruling groups, first in the era of liberal nationalism until 1952, and then in the age of Arab socialism. Certainly, the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s was a religious movement along with vast activity in the field of politics. In the 1950s, it was a revolutionary movement; but in the 1980s, 1990s, and the new millennium, the Movement became a political movement but it has not given up its way of *Daawah* and preaching (Hassan 2005).

In 1932, the Muslim Brotherhood headquarters moved to Cairo on al-Banna's request. In addition to handling the administration of the Movement, al-Banna gave evening lectures on the *Quran*. Over the next decade, the Movement grew rapidly, from 3 branches in 1931, it grew to 300 across Egypt in 1938. Thanks to an unorthodox ideology with mass appeal and to effective strategies for attracting new members, it had become a major political opposition group with a highly diverse membership (Mitchell: 1969).

Earlier, the Muslim Brotherhood did not have a political program on its agenda; it entered the political arena with a call for the protection of the economic rights of the Egyptians. Nevertheless, from the very inception, the Muslim Brotherhood perceived Egypt's socio-economic problems quite sharply and sensitively. The Brotherhood registered its resentment against the commercial activities of foreigners in Egypt, though in a subdued manner after its office was shifted to Cairo from Ismailiyyah. In a letter to Muslim leaders and rulers in 1936, al-Banna, while calling upon the Muslims to return to the Islamic system, specifically mentioned foreign firms, among other things, as elements destructive of Egyptian society, and demanded protection of the public from being over taxed by these companies (Bari 1995). He also called for the encouragement of indigenous economic projects, better employment opportunities for the Egyptians and improvement in their service conditions. Along with all these steps, the Arab-Jewish

conflict in Palestine consequent to intensified Jewish activities from 1936 onwards and the Brotherhood's keen public interest in support of the Palestinian cause helped in consolidating its social base as well its political overtones.

Rather than waiting for the government to implement its social program, the Muslim Brotherhood from the very beginning, moved quickly and took measures to give its program a concrete form. Indeed, it carried out many of its socio-economic programs long before al-Banna clarified his thinking on these issues. When its headquarters were shifted to Cairo in 1933, the Muslim Brotherhood was still working as a purely religious body, preaching in mosques and other public places on ways and means to become a good Muslim; its other activities had remained subdued. In December 1948, the Egyptian government released a decree ordering the dissolution of the organization. The police had discovered caches of bombs and other weapons accumulated by the secret apparatus, and though the Brothers insisted that these were for use in the Arab-Israeli War, the government suspected that the Brothers were planning a revolution; it was also keen to remove what it saw as one of the main causes of the general political unrest that had become increasingly violent, and increasingly threatening to its authority, since the end of the World War II. Moreover, because the Brotherhood had its own hospitals, factories and schools, as well as an army in the form of the secret apparatus, the government saw it as a potential parallel state, which Egyptians might come to see as more legitimate than the official one (Mitchell: 1969). According to the sources of the Brotherhood, it had established, by the time it was dissolved in 1948, two thousand branches spread throughout Egypt. Each branch supervised its own sub-branches devoted to a variety of social work. Many had established schools and training centers for small scale industries. Even though its major activities were concentrated in urban areas, special attention was also paid to the improvement of rural life and agricultural production. The Brotherhood also opened a fairly large number of medical clinics and schools for the poorer section of the society. All these activities better explain why the Egyptian masses became fond of the Muslim Brotherhood (Munson 2001).

The Muslim Brotherhood has always been considered as the largest and the most effective trend in Egyptian political life. It is the most adaptive organization in terms of using different and compound strategies according to the circumstances of each age, as it succeeded to continue in spite of the tribulations and crises it faced. For over 80 years, the Movement led a life that was full of rich variation concerning generations, thoughts, and politics. It witnessed many aspects of argument both internally and externally. Also, the movement became very widespread, especially during the period from its establishment until the breaking up of the war of Palestine in 1948. During this period, it was widespread throughout different Egyptian governorates and had a large number of members from villages and hamlets. However, it was not effective in the field of politics, in a way that contradicted its status. It was not involved in the parliament during the semi-liberal era, as it did not have a single parliamentary member before the 1952 revolution (Sadawy 2005).

As the Wafd Party and the monarchy of King Faruq became discredited due to the former's cooperation with the British in this period and the latter's constant scandalous personal behavior, the Muslim Brotherhood presented a viable alternative. It is in this context that the government outlawed the Brotherhood (Hassan 2005). While the Brotherhood was outlawed, competition to replace Hasan al-Banna became intense. Finally, in 1951, Hasan al-Hudaybi, an experienced judge known for his strong aversion to violence, was chosen as the successor of Hasan al-Banna. The Muslim Brotherhood supported the 1952 revolution, a bloodless coup by a group of military officers. The Muslim Brotherhood continued in the same fashion after the 1952 revolution. The founders of the Muslim Brotherhood maintained a peaceful stance, and they refused violence.

However, the organization developed a 'Secret Apparatus', an underground militant, armed wing popularly known as the Special Group in the 1940s. In 1954, an attempt to assassinate Nasser at the hands of one of the members of the Special Group emphasized for all political parties, even the Muslim Brotherhood itself, the independence of the

Special Group from the body of the Movement. Hasan al-Hudaybi realized that he was meant to be a mere figurehead, and that longstanding members resented his attempts to exercise authority. He spoke out against the Secret Apparatus and attempted to dissolve it, but only succeeded in alienating its members, who considered themselves fighters in a noble cause. The incident revealed, on one hand, the large variance between the Movement's secret and general work. On the other hand, it emphasized the incapability of the Movement to overcome its internal contradictions during times of crises and confrontation (al-Chobaky 2007). This was a new experience which the members of the Movement at the semi-liberal time were not used to encounter. It seemed as if the ideological alternatives of the founding phase were designed to be applied efficiently during times of political tranquility, but failed to survive during phases of confrontation. These same alternatives could ironically, have contributed in creating an atmosphere of confrontation.

The attempt on Nasser's life gave his popularity a much needed boost, and provided him with the perfect opportunity to eliminate the Brotherhood. The organization was officially dissolved, its headquarters burned, and thousands of its members arrested. The government organized spectacular trials with little regard for due process of law, while the official press accused Hudaybi and his organization of every conceivable sort of conspiracy. After this incident had taken place, six members of the Movement were executed in addition to the imprisonment of thousands of members (al-Ghazali: 1972). The Movement clashed severely with Nasser's power; thus, many of its members were imprisoned and detained, and then they isolated themselves and withdrew from participating in political life, thus the Movement was almost completely defeated at this point of time.

Throughout the rule of President Nasser, many members of the Muslim Brotherhood including both activist men and women were held in camps and jails where they were tortured. Major figures among the activist women of the Movement who were jailed were: Zeinab al-Ghazali, Hamida Qutb, Aliyya Hasan al-Hudaybi, Ghada Ammar, Amina Qutb and many others and among activist men there were almost all important

personalities of the Movement who were brutally tortured according to Zeinab al-Ghazali (1972). One of those tortured was Sayyid Qutb, a prolific writer and the author of the bestseller *Social Justice in Islam*, which set out the principles of an Islamic socialism. He became the Brotherhood's most influential thinker for a time, and in 1959 the organization's General Guide, Hasan al-Hudaybi, gave him responsibility for the Brothers detained in prisons and camps. Qutb attempted to interpret the situation in the camps in Islamic terms; these reflections, which he circulated as commentaries on passages from the *Quran*, came to encompass an analysis of the regime that meted out such barbarous treatment to its prisoners.

Outside the prisons, those Brothers who had gone underground began to reorganize. Zeinab al-Ghazali, earlier the head of the *Jamiat Sayyidaat al-Muslimaat* (Association of Muslim Women) which was started in 1936, and later joined the Muslim Brotherhood, organized charitable work to meet the basic needs of the impoverished Brothers. Along with Brotherhood leaders, she went on to play a key role in rebuilding the organization. While al-Ghazali's focus was on Islamic education, other autonomous groups of Brothers also appeared who were impatient to avenge the suppression of the Brotherhood. They found the analytical framework and political program they were looking for in Qutb's writings, which were circulated by al-Ghazali and in which his assessment of the Nasser regime and of the way in which it could be overcome, was gradually taking shape (Talhami 1996).

Other Islamists who were not imprisoned during the time of Nasser later adopted the ideas that the Egyptian governmental leadership represented anti-Islamic values and must be overthrown. But a larger group of the Brotherhood held to their original philosophy of gradual change. Nasser's successor, Anwar al-Sadat, introduced a policy of economic liberalization and to a much less extent, political liberalism. In 1971, the concentration camps were closed, and the regime began to gradually release the imprisoned Brothers. When the Brotherhood members were released from prison by President Anwar al-Sadat, they agreed to operate according to the regime's rules. During this period, the Brotherhood was unable to officially designate a new General Guide after Hudaybi's

death in 1973, thus Umar al-Tilmisani became its most prominent spokesperson and later on was selected as the Muslim Brotherhood's third General Guide. By that time, Jordanian, Syrian, Sudanese, Libyan, Iraqi, West Bank, Gazan, and other branches of the *Ikhwan* had been established, but with no great support in the heyday of more secular Arab nationalist political movements (al-Chobaky 2007).

The Movement did not carry out any political, social, or religious activities during the 1970s except for student activity within Egyptian universities. In addition, this political isolation caused the formation of an ideological cocoon around the Movement, which put it behind an intellectual cordon that prevented the Movement from having any social interaction with the community. Thus, the change that occurred in the construction of the political environment caused confusion in the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the success of the Muslim Brotherhood that presented an organized structure, and managed to satisfy both fanatic and reforming parties at the same time, while tempting Sufi and revolutionary parties to also take part in political activities. Also, some of those who called for virtuous morals and were active on the social level attached their names to the Movement. The Brotherhood's only main political demand during this period was the application of *Sharia* law; the government responded by initiating a lengthy review of all Egyptian law to determine how best to harmonize it with *Sharia*. In 1980, the Constitution was amended to state that *Sharia* is the main source of all legislation.

After the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, Hosni Mubarak succeeded him and has remained in power ever since. The Muslim Brotherhood's relations with the government are still essentially what they were under Sadat. The Brotherhood is tolerated to a degree, but is officially illegal, it is not allowed to distribute literature or assemble in public and is subject to periodic arrests (Campagna 1996).

The efforts of al-Banna were successful in uniting different ideologies to build a united political structure during the time of tranquility, as what happened from 1928 to 1948. Nevertheless, the political speech of the Muslim Brotherhood failed to deliver its message in the same efficiency especially during the phases that witnessed clashes with

the ruling authority when these reconciliatory dualities failed to maintain the unity and cohesion of the Movement. Nevertheless, the 1980s witnessed a new phase in the history of the evolution of the Movement, when it started to involve itself in parliamentary elections, and actively participated in the syndicate elections; in addition to its increasing role in student unions in Egyptian universities since the 1970s. The 1980s can be considered the most mature stage in the course of the Movement in Egypt. The followers of Hasan al-Banna cut off relations with all sorts of violence at the beginning of the 1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s, the members involved in politics and went deep into parliamentary and syndicate fields. They joined the legislative elections of 1984 and 1987, achieving satisfactory results. They also managed, on the democratic level, to control more than one syndicate in Egypt during the 1980s. With the beginning of the millennium, they returned to make their existence manifest in the lawyers' syndicate; moreover, two members won the elections in the journalists' syndicate. Throughout that time, the Muslim Brotherhood managed to control the illusion of handling the relationship between their interpretations of the holy texts and the demands of socio-political life. For the first time, the Muslim Brotherhood formed a coalition with another political party in the elections; this was what happened in 1984 when they allied with their historic rival Al-Wafd Party. In addition, in 1987, they formed the backbone of what is called the 'Islamic Coalition'; then they joined the legislative elections of 2000 and 2005 as independent candidates. In the elections of 1984, Egyptian citizens voted for seven members of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1987, about 35 members won the elections out of 60 members of parliament from the Islamic Coalition. In 2000, the Muslim Brotherhood members reached 17 then jumped to 88 in 2005 (Hamzawy and Brown 2010).

In the history of the movement from its founder till date there are 8 General Guides in the movement starting from Hasan al-Banna, first General Guide from 1928 to 1949, 2nd Hasan al-Hudaybi 1949-1972, 3rd Umar al-Tilmisani 1972-1986, 4th Mohammad Hamid Abu al-Nasr 1986-1996, 5th Mustafa Mashhur 1996-2002, 6th Mamun al-Hudaybi 2002-2004, 7th Mohammed Mahdi Akef 2004-2010, and finally the present 8th Mohammad Badie from 16th Jan 2010-till date. Throughout the period of all the General Guides

Muslim Brotherhood managed to acquire new skills due to their well-known coalition with other political parties. They emphasized the fact that their agenda is a civil political one having an Islamic reference. The Muslim Brotherhood managed to control (through democratic channels) some of the most important syndicates; they went through new experiences as a result of dealing with other organizations. Some of the members had the tendency then to formulate some moderate concepts; such as, accepting the other, in spite of the fact that they practically defeated this other, but they did so through elections and democratic channels, which is another modern phenomenon (Karr 2007).

Although it can be said that politics occupied a large area of the Muslim Brotherhood's discussion at the expense of sacred preaching, one can never say that the members began to deal with issues as completely political in nature. Most of those called the old guards and the members who joined the Movement only as a means of reform on the ethical level with no political background, still deal with the matter in a strictly religious way illustrating that they only express religion, and that whoever disagrees with them disagrees with religion. They do not, however, resort to raise arms against those who disagree with them as other *Jihadi* movements do.

Consequently, overcoming this misconception between what is religious and what is political does not necessarily mean breaking the link between Islam and politics, or that the Muslim Brotherhood has given up their Islamic reference. Conversely, this means that the interpretation of Islam is comprehended by the Muslim Brotherhood, but not made obligatory on others by it. Therefore, this sort of interpretation can be rejected by others without them being considered apostates.

Ideology of *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*

Unlike many of the militant Islamic groups today, the Muslim Brotherhood did not hold a particularly radical ideology; it did not advocate a return to the glorious age of Islam or insist on a literal reading of holy texts (Zubaida 1993); even it did not profess ideas that are anti-modern. On the whole, the organization's message conformed to the popular

understanding of religion and the prescriptions of established religious scholars who worked under the authority of the state. In terms of the ideological message itself, the beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood were important because of the way in which they were expressed in familiar Islamic idioms and widespread views in Egypt. Islam, like any major religious tradition, provides an ideological framework with a rich and comprehensive message with relevance to every aspect of an individual's life. Islam thus provided a structure for the Brotherhood's message, which was important to its acceptance by broad segments of the Egyptian population.

The basic world view of the Muslim Brotherhood was rooted in the Hanbali School of Islamic thought. It is one of four major traditions for understanding and interpreting Islamic law, and the most conservative in terms of its insistence on a literal reading of the *Quran* and other texts. The primary concerns of the Muslim Brotherhood are centered on the domination of Egypt by foreign powers, the poverty of the Egyptian people, and the declining morality they identified in both the Egyptian state and the lives of individuals throughout Egypt. The solution to these and other problems was an embrace of Islamic teachings and an understanding that all Muslims comprise a single cohesive community and must work together to resist the encroachment of corrupt Western influences (Harris 1964).

The need to rid Egypt of immoral and imperial Western domination through the adoption of an Islamic path formed the basic mantra of the Muslim Brotherhood. The organization was often as vague as possible in applying this view to specific issues or translating it into concrete policy proposals. They called for an Islamic state and held that true Islam was essentially democratic and capable of solving the problems of the modern world. In publicized letters, the group called for only some specifics, such as the strengthening of the army, increasing Egyptian ties with other Arab countries, an expansion of hospitals and clinics, the banning of usury, improvement of the working conditions of both agricultural and industrial workers, a minimum wage, and government intervention to eliminate unemployment.

The ideas of the organization were not limited to identifying and rectifying large social and political problems, however. A strong current in the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology was a tie between such larger problems and the way in which ordinary Muslims lived their daily lives. They argued that people had fallen away from Islam and that their increasingly secular lifestyles led to immorality, poverty, and domination. To turn the tide, the group advocated such state interventions as the moral censorship of television, radio, and print publishing, basic religious education in the schools, encouraging the study of Islamic history, use of the Arabic language, memorization of the *Quran*, increased supervision of government employees, and official encouragement of marriage. They also believed in strict standards for individual conduct, including rigorous exercise and abstention from alcohol, gambling, dancing, attendance at theaters and films, styles of foreign dress, prostitution, and adultery. The ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood was thus rooted in Islamic religious ideas, and it linked large-scale problems of Egypt with the process of secularization and the conduct of individual Egyptians (Bayat 1998).

The Muslim Brotherhood has been governed by a cultural ideology since the very beginning of the Movement; it put society, not authority, on top of the agenda. The Movement considered this ideology the only means to attain authority. That is, the Movement perceived the latter as part and parcel of society, and not an enemy. This sort of understanding led members to find their way in communicating with both the ruler and the ruled. It also led to overcoming the revolutionary notion that noble striving is to stand against authority through a coup regardless of the circumstances of society. The Muslim Brotherhood focused, from the very beginning, on the needs of society, not on waging war against authority even if their ultimate goal was to change it. That is to say, their political culture encouraged members to interact with society whether they were governed or those who govern. Their role in mosques and chapels went side by side with their roles in syndicates and the parliament. That is what made them more tranquil in dealing with authority. They considered reformation a slow process that can be accomplished through means of preaching. Therefore, the conflict between generations within the Movement was not dominated by hastiness or radical decrees that might end in a split between generations. It was an accumulative process in which the middle

generation made use of the experiences of the elder generations while the latter did not consider new suggestions to be negative (al-Chobaki 2007).

Generally, the Muslim Brotherhood tends to distinguish between Islam as a religion and a Divine message, which has principles that organize the way of worship and the way to control people's behaviors and dealings, and democracy which is a system for ruling, a mechanism for participation and a concept that has many positive aspects. This may be the reason that made the Muslim Brotherhood believe, on the theoretical and practical level, in the democratic means to attain power without believing in some of its values that the Muslim Brotherhood sees as contradictory to Islamic values and principles (Bayat 2007).

The first glimmers of the *Ikhwan's* ideological revisions emerged in 1994 and grew out of the younger generation's networking and response to their interlocutors' demands to clarify their positions on foundational issues. In March 1994, the Muslim Brothers issued definitive statements on women's rights and party pluralism. The former statement articulated their belief in the rights of women both as candidates for public office (except for the highest executive office) and as voters. The position paper was followed in actual practice (el-Ghobashy 2005). In a little reported incident preceding Jihan al-Halafawi's high-profile candidacy in 2000, the female doctor, Wafa Ramadan, ran for elections to the medical association board on the *Ikhwan's* slate in 1992 and was not successful (Qandil 1996).

Mindful of their departure from both their founder's and the old guard's conservative views on women, the *Ikhwan* have devoted much space in their arguments on women's citizenship rights to refuting obstinate views and reinterpreting *Quranic* injunctions that specify men's tutelage over women, especially *Quran* 4:34 (Muslim Brotherhood 2007A). Their statement argues that the verse applies to household relations only and does not extend to the workplace or public affairs. The *Ikhwan's* doctrinal reinterpretations are laced with the Brotherhood's utilitarian electoral credo. As a Muslim Brothers apologist argues, "Limiting the Muslim woman's right to participate in elections

weakens the winning chances of Islamist candidates” (Al-Wai 2001: 253). Contrast this pragmatism to the finality with which former General Guide Umar al-Tilmisani pronounced his views on women:

I do not like to talk about women. Modern people may find this shameful, or cowardly, but I want nothing to do with modern theories and the equality of men and women. I still believe that a man is a man and a woman is a woman and that’s why God created her. . . . A woman who believes that she is equal to a man is a woman who has lost her femininity, virtue and dignity (Al-Tilmisani 1985).

The revamped ideology animated further political action. The *Ikhwan*’s position paper on women was invoked by Jihan al-Halafawi as an impetus for her contestation of the 2000 parliamentary elections. Seasoned *Ikhwan* watchers were not surprised by Halafawi’s candidacy, belonging as she does to the generation of middle-aged activists changing the face of the organization. Married to one of the Muslim Brothers’ leading architects of electoral strategy, the Alexandria physician, Ibrahim al-Zafarani, Halafawi reflects the younger generation’s signature amalgam of flexible ideology and vote seeking. She took pains to point out the critical role of women voters. In her words:

The Muslim Brothers’ views about women in public life are clear, as evidenced by the March 1994 statement. This is what encouraged me to contest the elections. My decision to run was also to make use of the opportunity presented by the state’s desire to integrate women into the political process, and to clarify that Islam does not compromise women’s rights. . . . There was tremendous support for me within the group. Women are very active in the [Muslim Brothers], though perhaps not visible. Remember that women voters are responsible for the success of the seventeen *Ikhwan* members of Parliament (el-Ghobashy 2005).

Incremental ideological articulation picked up where it had left off in 1995. The released Muslim Brothers redoubled their efforts to standardize and fine-tune the group’s ideological pronouncements, restating their positions on democracy, women’s rights, and, especially, Coptic rights, diligently working to erase the conservative old comments of the group from national memory. The physicians Essam al-Iryan and Abd al-Moneim Abu al-Futuh, members of the Shura Council and Guidance Bureau, respectively, emerged as the most visible spokesmen and ideologues of the *Ikhwan*, granting

interviews and penning articles in a variety of non-*Ikhwan* media. In the pair's pronouncements, ambiguous issues became more concrete: the *Ikhwan* would respect a democratically elected communist government; democracy is not simply compatible with Shura but "part of a common human heritage"; the Muslim Brothers would unconditionally accept a Coptic president of Egypt elected in fair elections; the issue of an Islamic state was already resolved since "the Constitution already says that Egypt is an Islamic state and that Islamic *Sharia* is the basis of legislation;" the Muslim Brothers consider the Constitution and the ballot box to be the ultimate judges; women's "hijab is merely a question of identity and belonging, just as saris are for Indians"; the Muslim Brothers "engaged in military activities when the country was under occupation. This is a historical fact, but there is no room for its repetition in a country governed by its own citizens, regardless of how divergent they may be in opinions and attitudes."²

For the first time in Muslim Brotherhood's history, ideas developed by the comparatively young members of the Muslim Brothers were officially and publicly adopted by their General Guide Mohammed Mahdi Akef (2004-2010). As soon as he was elected in January 2004, Muhammad Mahdi Akef reiterated the group's desire to operate as a legal political party, and in a dramatic gesture he convened a press conference on 3 March 2004 to announce the Muslim Brothers' vision of a republican, civil government bound by law. Aside from the usual demand for applying *Sharia*, Akef's program did not depart in any meaningful sense from every demand of the Egyptian opposition over the past thirty years.

Akef's stand was intended for several audiences: the Egyptian government; opposition parties and independent intellectuals; and all important foreign parties demanding Arab reform. To American and European policymakers, Akef's step towards young members and adopting moderate policies was a riposte to government claims that Islamists constitute the most potent danger to the future of the Arab world. It also signaled an end

² The statements of Iryan and al-Futuh are selected from the following sources: "Victory in defeat," Cairo Times, 10–16 February 2000; interviews with Iryan and al-Futuh in Cairo Times, 9–22 March 2000 and 18–24 January 2001, respectively; a two-part interview with al-Futuh in al-Arabi, 28 September 2003 and 5 October 2003; Iryan, "The Reform That Needs to be Realized," *al-Dimuqratiyya* 4, 13 (2004): 111–14; al-Futuh, "The Islamic Path to Reform," al-Ahram Weekly, 5–11 February 2004.

to the entrenched tradition jealously guarded by Arab governments of claiming all knowing tutelage over their citizens and their exclusive representation abroad. To other Egyptian interlocutors, it was a message that the Muslim Brothers and they are in one camp, speak the same constitutionalist language, agree on the foundational issue of the division and rotation of political powers, and can be counted on in any future common initiatives (el-Ghobashy 2005).

Above all, Akef's moderate views were for self-preservation through self-clarification, an attempt to heal the rift between old and new generations and reestablish a coherent, revamped ideological line for the group's adherents and potential members. Muslim Brothers leaders' increasingly transparent and forthcoming imparting of information on decision-making procedures is directed in the main to potential members, a reassurance that decisions are made relying not on the seniority principle or a prison stint but the modern electoral mechanism of one man, one vote (el-Ghobashy 2005).

Despite the fact that presently the Movement has been more liberal towards democracy and respecting human rights, and the rights of women and minorities, it is still difficult to say that it has changed to the clear distinction between the political and religious domain. However, the Movement has continued to preserve this domain within a frame of general language that is usually characterized by refraining from providing details similar to what took place during the last parliamentary elections, in which the Movement used the slogan: 'Islam is the key solution'.

Organizational Structure of *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*

Ikhwan al-Muslimun was clearly not dismantled by government efforts. Its organizational structure was key to its ability to resist state attempts to eliminate it. This point is an important one, because by themselves political Islam and political opportunity structure explanations for the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood are based in part on the belief that the organization was considerably more ephemeral, rising and falling with the demographic or political winds of Egypt. The pressures of modernization or the change in

political opportunities produce groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the stories go, but grievances and organizational structure become buried when the state exerts enough repressive force. In other words, the operative determining force in each case lies outside the group itself. Evidences suggest that the organization was considerably more enduring than previously believed; its organizational structure provided a means to survive attacks by the regime (Munson 2001: 492).

The structure of the Muslim Brotherhood not only provided advantages to the group in the traditional ways described by a basic resource mobilization model, but it also provided an important avenue through which the ideas and ideology of the organization could contribute to the group's success. Probably it was because of the tie between the group's message and its federated structure. The Muslim Brotherhood, like any social movement organization, also faced the task of mobilizing the support and resources of individuals with a variety of different beliefs and levels of motivation for collective action (Munson 2001: 489). Speaking in general terms, few people in any society will share exactly the same ideological system as professed by the ideology of a particular organization, and fewer still come to a voluntary association predisposed to alter dramatically their life circumstances for the good of the group. In terms of the specific case under study, the Muslim Brotherhood was uniquely structured to tap into a diversity of social beliefs and commitment and thereby overcome this problem (Munson 2001: 503).

One of the most important ways that the Muslim Brotherhood negotiated the difficult terrain of ideas was through its three-tiered membership structure. This system allowed the organization rapidly to incorporate new members with a variety of different beliefs and degrees of commitment. Potential recruits were not asked immediately to plunge their entire lives into the ideology and activities of the organization. At the first level, members had to commit no more than their name and a small amount of money to the organization. This level created a membership pool that provided resources to the group and an audience predisposed to its ideas.

Each of the next two levels added further responsibilities, ideological as well as material to membership. This graduated process bridged the space between a new member's regular life and the life of the organization. It also acted as a screening device; members who advanced to the higher levels were relatively insulated from those who lacked the same commitment to the Society and therefore were more willing to raise doubts about its ideology or its tactics. The tiers thus maintained a degree of homogeneity in beliefs among groups of members, strengthening their ties to each other and to the organization. They also allowed the organization to benefit from the support of members with a range of commitment to the group. More theoretically, the lesson here is that the organizational structure and the ideology of a movement are intertwined in important ways.

The Muslim Brotherhood managed to retain the cohesion of their organizational structure in spite of the passing of long periods of time. They also made use of the way the founding members started the Movement through various levels and the experiences which they acquired. The Muslim Brotherhood members encompassed, in the first phases, some compound levels that allowed the Movement to attract different kinds of members (al-Chobaki 2007). Most of these members gathered on a preaching peaceful ground that calls the Movement to adhere to the teachings of Islam while some other members gathered on the ground of jihad that was built upon the members' indulgence in the 'jihad level' so as to join the 'Special Group' that was responsible for all acts of violence. Sometimes, it is amazing to see the reasons behind the continuity and steadfastness of the Muslim Brotherhood until the present time, and how the contemporary members coexist despite the difference in thoughts among the Movement's generations.

The Muslim Brotherhood has retained its organizational structure for many reasons. The most outstanding reason is the nature of the structure formed by Hasan al-Banna in 1928. This organization has lasted and remained steadfast despite the assassination of al-Banna, more than half a century ago. The death of the founder, on February 12th, 1949, did not remove either his thought, or heritage in terms of ideology, organization, politics, and structure (al-Ghazali 1972).

Hasan al-Banna, along with the members of the movement, was committed to consider the organization as religious and not just a normal political party. This concept lasted throughout the first stage of forming the movement; but in the final stages, political interest emerged without neglecting the role of *Daawah*. This new interest joined the religious aspect to form the current form of the Movement (al-Chobaki 2007).

The Muslim Brotherhood observed the structure of their organization on compound and very precise bases which contained many levels and each had its special program to teach religion and doctrine. Thus, this distinguished the Movement from other political and religious organizations. The levels of the organization are different from other parties, as the Muslim Brotherhood was keen to achieve the process of recruiting on more than one level. This was mentioned clearly by Hasan al-Banna when he wrote that it was necessary for the offices and formal authorities of the Movement to raise the members righteously and to qualify them to live in harmony with their principles. To achieve this end and purpose, joining the Movement should be on three levels according to Al-Nafisi (1989: 401–416):

- General membership: This level is the right of each Muslim who is accepted by the administration of the quarter, and shows his readiness to be a good person, and signs the acquainting form; then the new member will be called 'Assistant Brother'.
- Brotherhood membership: This level is the right of each Muslim who is accepted by the administration of the quarter, and his duties will be (in addition to the general previous duties) represented in preserving the doctrine and committing by obedience; then the member will be called 'Associate Brother'.
- Practical membership: This level is the right of each Muslim who is accepted by the administration of the quarter, his duties will be (in addition to the previous duties) represented in providing sufficient information when needed, studying the explanation of the Brothers' doctrine, regular attendance of weekly *Quranic* circles and the quarter's session, complying with speaking

classical Arabic as much as possible, educating himself concerning general social affairs and exerting efforts to memorize 40 *hadiths*; then the new member will be called 'Active Brother'.

However, there is a fourth level, that al-Banna did not intentionally place with the previous three levels; it is 'Jihad membership'. Actually, it is not a general level; rather, it is devoted only to the 'Active Brother' who proves his compliance with the previous duties to the Guidance Bureau (*Maktab al-Irshad*). The duties of the Brother in this level will be (in addition to the previous duties) represented in adhering to the *Sunnah* and night prayer, turning away from trivial and passing desires, abstaining from non-Islamic acts of worship and unauthentic dealings, financing the Guidance Bureau and the *Daawah* Fund, allocating a sum in his will to the Movement, enjoining good and forbidding evil, carrying a copy of the *Quran* to remind him of his duties towards the *Quran*, and attending the education courses of the Guidance Bureau. Then, the member will be called *Mujahid*. The variations of the levels of recruitment inside the Movement are significant. Undoubtedly, there is a huge difference between developing the Assistant Brother and the Active Brother on one side, and the *Mujahid*, on the other side. This difference already exists even if both kinds declared their loyalty to the same peaceful authority.

As the organization had various levels concerning recruitment, it also had five pillars of the group's organization:

- The General Guide (*al-Murshid al-Aam*), is the highest executive office, who is the chief executive officer and official spokesman of the group. The General Guide must be at least forty and is elected by an absolute majority of the Shura Council from candidates nominated by the Guidance Bureau.
- The Guidance Bureau (*Maktab al-Irshad*), is the sixteen-member Brothers' executive body elected by the movement's Shura Council. It is a politburo where all policy decisions passed by the Shura Council are executed. Members of the Bureau serve renewable four-year terms and must also be at

least thirty years of age.

- The Shura Council (*Majlis al-Shura*), is the group's legislative body, responsible for issuing binding resolutions and reviewing the annual report and budget. It consists of 75 to 90 members representing Brotherhood members in the 22 governorates of Egypt. The Shura Council convenes periodically every six months; members serve four-year terms and must be at least thirty years old (Al-Nafisi 1989: 401–416).
- The Administrative Bureaus (*Al-Makaatib al-Idariyyah*), are the executive bodies at the governorate level. Each bureau outlines the plan of action in its respective area and communicates with the Guidance Bureau. In each bureau, one male member is in charge of women's activities (*al-Nashaat al-Nisaaee*) and acts as liaison between the Sisters' division in each governorate and district and movement headquarters in Cairo (Abdel-Latif 2008).
- The General Assembly (*Al-Markaz Al-Aam*) is the open membership centre, where every Muslim who adhere to the constitution of Muslim Brotherhood and seek membership in the movement can come and join it. There are three stages of membership which have been discussed above and Brothers are assigned to their work according to their membership level.

This organizational structure remained essentially intact until 1992, when a provision was added for the reelection of the General Guide and terms of office were set at five years, although no term limits were specified. Yet because of the Movement's illegal status and attendant security clampdowns, it has been difficult to convene the required institutions in accordance with the bylaws.

In 1977, the second General Guide, Hasan al-Hudaybi, died, and Umar al-Tilmisani was selected as his successor. Umar al-Tilmisani reports in his reflections that, since the group could not activate regular internal election procedures, his selection as the third

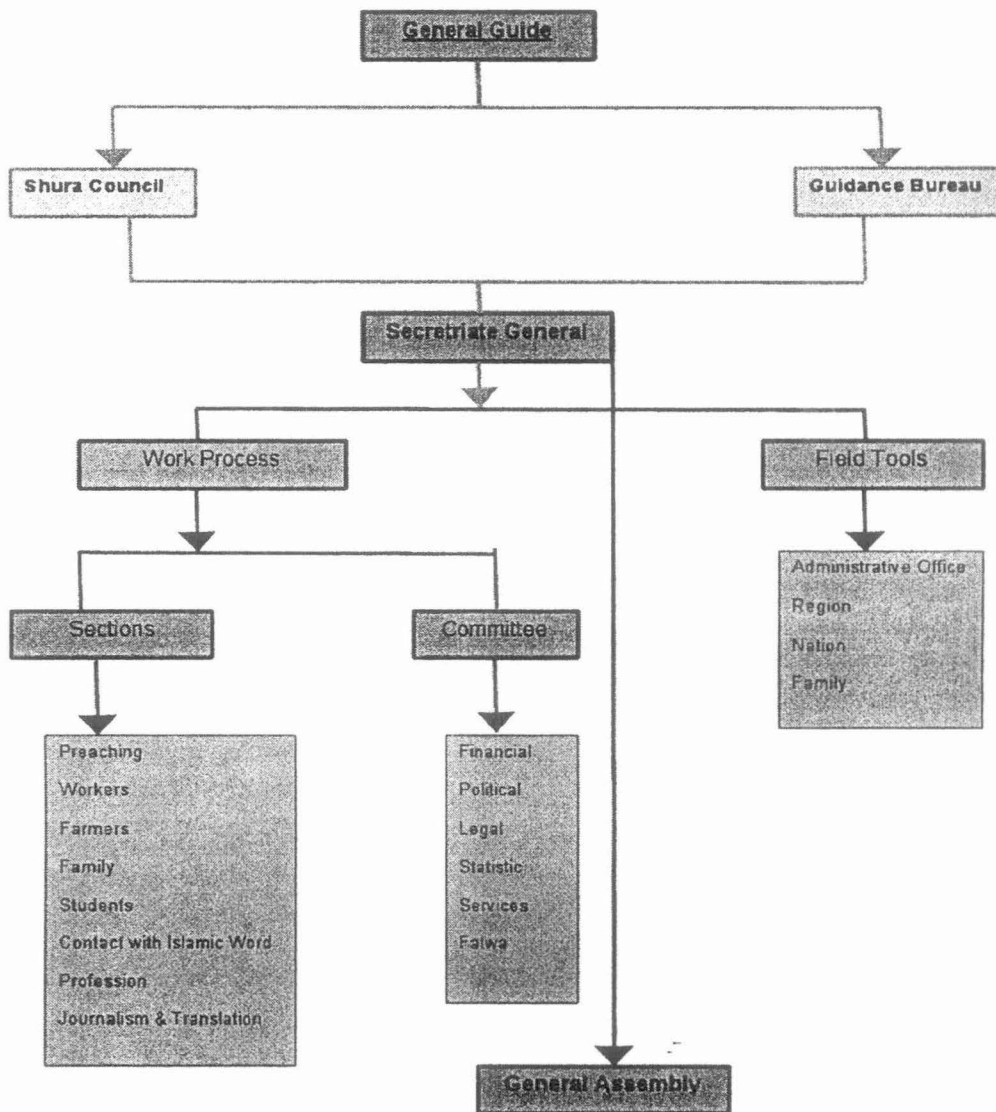
General Guide was based on his status as the senior most member of the Guidance Bureau (al-Tilmisani 1985: 212). The selection procedures of the subsequent general guides Muhammad Hamed Abu al-Nasr (1986–96), Mustafa Mashour (1996–2002), and Mamun al-Hudaybi (2002–2004), son of the second general guide, were secretive affairs that followed no clear logic of seniority or election. Instead they were shaped by the force of circumstance and internal maneuvering for power.

A significant change followed the death of al-Hudaybi at age eighty-three in January 2004 with the announcement that the next Guide would be selected by a majority vote of the Guidance Bureau. The passing of Mashour in 2002 and of al-Hudaybi in 2004, as the last of the influential old guard, is the most significant opening for the further transformation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, as the customary speculation raged over who would steer the group, Guidance Bureau members for the first time announced to the public a specific procedure for electing the coming general guide, and the circumstantial position of “official spokesman” carved out by al-Hudaybi was scrapped (Ali 2004).

Also, the posts of two deputy General Guides stipulated by the *Ikhwan*'s bylaws were filled with ‘younger’ generation Brothers, geologist Muhammad Habib and computer engineer Khayrat al-Shater. As soon as he was elected in January 2004, Muhammad Mahdi Akef reiterated the group's desire to operate as a legal political party, and in a dramatic gesture he convened a press conference on 3 March 2004 to announce the Muslim Brothers' vision of a republican, civil government bound by law. Aside from the usual demand for applying *Sharia*, Akef's program did not depart in any meaningful sense from every demand of the Egyptian opposition over the past thirty years. Immediately, Interior Minister Habib al-Adli stated that as an illegal organization the Muslim Brothers had no business floating programs and rebuked the press syndicate for offering Akef a venue (al-Chobaki 2004).

Following is the structural chart of the Muslim Brotherhood which can show the linkages between the parts of the hierarchal structure of the movement.

Table 4: Organizational Structure of the Muslim Brotherhood³



³ Original Arabic chart taken from Mohammad Auda's book *Kitab Iideologiyyatu Jamat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* (Ideology of Muslim Brotherhood) and translated and modified by the researcher.

The organization also had various levels of formation. The Guidance Bureau suggested that Brothers should determine some days every month to execute the following program:

- Day of giving advice: On this day, the Brothers advise their neighbors gently and wisely, enjoin good and forbid evil, and propagate for all that is good.
- Day of the Afterlife: On this day, they visit the graves for the purpose of taking lessons and remembering the Hereafter.
- Day of visiting: On this day, they visit Muslim patients.
- Day of acquaintance: On this day, they visit each other with the aim of keeping good relations between members.

This peaceful, social, and moral activity goes side by side with another activity, which is more intensive, and represents the three weekly activities of the Brothers:

- Night activity on the day of the lesson; it is devoted to studying the weekly Guide's lesson.
- The devotional units' activity, where they prepare themselves for endurance and self-restraint for the sake of Allah.
- Camp activity, where they keep in readiness for Jihad; as the Movement is interested in forming an Islamic army.

There is another dimension of the movement which may be considered a practical implementation of the two previous levels, or as the real product of them. This dimension is represented in the dual trend of the special and the general, which ruled the Movement since 1938, immediately after the outbreak of revolution and fighting in Palestine, until the end of Nasser's age. Clearly, this duality was crystallized in 'the general organization' and 'the Special Group' that was called by those who were outside the Movement as 'the Secret Apparatus' (al-Chobaki 2007).

Throughout a period of about eight years, the Movement managed to put the members of the Special Group aside, despite of their strictness in terms of creed, which was inconsistent with the majority of members. Keeping secrets was the method adopted by this group concerning the targets of the existing formations. Many members of the Special Group participated in the war of Palestine in 1948, which emphasized the military power of the Muslim Brotherhood. As for their activity inside the country, they bombed many places in Cairo, especially the places of Egyptian Jews.

The Movement retained its ability of possessing a structure that has various levels and setups. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Movement had two parallel bodies: a general one that embraces all members, and the Special Group that was prepared for acts of violence. It, however, turned in the 1980s into a Movement that is predominated by two visions on both levels of comprehension and structure: one cares about preaching and the other about politics. The intersection between them both took place many times which gave the impression of a Movement that is partially religious and partially political; this also led to allowing the Movement to have enough space so as to coexist with many contradictions. This coexistence was tackled successfully by some members like Umar al-Tilmisani, Mustafa Mashhur, Hamid Abu al-Nasr, and Mahmud Izzat and with others like Khayrat al-Shatir, Muhammad Habeeb, Abd al-Munim Abu al-Futouh, Essam al-Iryan, and Ali Abd al-Fattah for more than twenty five years in a manner that arouses astonishment at least because of the political mess that ruled Egypt at that time and the fact that it was full of schisms.

The case of the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrates the importance of the relationship between ideas and the structure of the group as key to overcoming the universal problem of varying degrees of commitment and beliefs. It is not simply that the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood were popular or that its structure allowed it to take advantage of available political opportunities, although both of these factors played a role. Even more crucial, however, is the fact that the three tiered, federated structure of the group brought individuals into partial and incremental contact with the ideology of the organization. Thus ideas and organizational structure are intertwined: the latter provides a basis for an

introduction to and education about the former in a way that is consonant with the everyday experiences and needs of Egyptian people (Munson 2001). However, the most criticized issue these days is the exclusion of the women's wing from the organizational structure of the Movement. This issue is being debated very hotly among both the men's and women's wings and the over-used security excuse is being overwhelmingly rejected.

Chapter IV

Women and *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*

Women and *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*

The Muslim Brotherhood, established by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, had a phenomenal growth. It became one of the most influential Islamic movements in the Arab world. Positioning itself as pan-Islamic and anti-Western, the Brotherhood attracted increasing support from men and actively sought to increase its female membership. The female wing of Muslim Brotherhood was formed in 1937 and since then Muslim women's history in the Muslim Brotherhood is one of ups and downs. The Muslim Brotherhood was on and off banned in Egypt under different regimes and it is still banned; yet it has its own importance in the social and political spheres of the country.

The gender aspect of the Brotherhood has not been studied much. It is very important to know various aspects of women's activism in the organization and also the attention paid by it towards women in order to build the organization strong, reaching out to the population and providing services. Engaging in social services, in particular, has put women in touch with the masses thus allowing them to establish grass-root networks. There is an increasing visibility of women's social and political participation and leadership in the Muslim Brotherhood for quite some time now.

How Muslim Brotherhood thinks of women and their role in family, society and politics, how Muslim women of the organization are acting as workers and supporters and are they satisfied with their ground level positions or raising voices for leadership positions are the main questions to be addressed in this chapter.

Islamic women activists are pursuing their self-enhancement through perfecting their religious practice in order to arrive at a Muslim notion of the ideal woman. Their empowerment is engendered as they perfect themselves through religious discipline. Many important women activists not only had an influence on the Muslim Brotherhood but also actively participated in organisational activities; still women's contributions did not get proper response from the movement. This chapter aims to study various aspects of women joining the Muslim Brotherhood, participating in the activities of the

organization, problems which are faced by these women by the organization's own conservative culture coupled with an oppressive socio-political environment and the stand of Muslim Brotherhood towards empowering women in all walks of life.

Akhawaat al-Muslimaat: An Evaluation

A brief historical outline of women's activism in the Muslim Brotherhood is necessary for understanding the issues and prospects of women's activism. Labibeh Ahmed was the first head of the women's auxiliary of Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1937, known as the Muslim Sisterhood (*al-Akhwat al-Muslimaat*) (Talhami 2001). Barely eight years after Hasan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization bent on Islamizing society and the state, the need for recruiting women and gaining their support became apparent. Ahmed herself was attracted to the Brotherhood because of its resources and charitable works. Although Islamic groups normally ignore gender issues, the Muslim Sisterhood was founded especially to spread religious education among women and to instruct them in the ideal ways of raising and educating Muslim children. The Muslim Sisters reinforced Islamic social norms by creating a system of home visiting for selected women who were unable to attend public meetings. The Muslim Sisterhood was formed simply as a committee made up of the wives of Muslim Brothers at Cairo. According to Talhami (2001), by 1948, fifty branches of Muslim Sisters were established throughout Egypt and the committee of each Sister's group elected a female president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer. The Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hasan al-Banna, however, remained the General Director of the Sisters and was responsible for naming a male secretary as an emissary to the female organization. Abdel-Latif (2008) quotes Sheikh Mahmoud al-Gohary as the first male member appointed for the women's section to act as a link between the women activists and the Supreme Guide. Guide lines governing the charitable projects of the Sisterhood needed the approval of the Brotherhood's main office. Muslim Sisters trained its recruits in food processing, canning, as well as sewing, the products of which were marketed by the committees of the organization. In the provinces, the committees of these women's

agencies undertook the task of improving health conditions for the poor by directing them to public health facilities and other charitable organizations.

Women's social work along the lines of Labibeh Ahmed's Sisterhood was a traditional form of charity provided by the male parent organization under its direction. During the late 1940s and 1950s, however, the Brotherhood entered a phase of deadly confrontation with the socialist regime of Nasser. This struggle ended up with the massive destruction of the Brotherhood's infrastructure and the imprisonment of its members. Remarkably what saved the organization from total demise was the determination of the Sisters in helping the movement by bringing the support for the families of the exiled Brothers and taking on the main activities of the movement in their hands albeit in a very secret and cautious way.

The president of another Islamic women's association who earlier decided to remain independent of the Brotherhood, also came further to help the Muslim Brotherhood. This was the renowned Islamic activist and political leader, Zeinab al-Ghazali, who founded in 1937, the Society of Muslim Women (*Jamiat al-Sayyidat al-Muslimaat*). Al-Banna asked her to merge her organization with Muslim Brotherhood as a Sister's section of the movement, but she and her executive committee agreed to cooperate with it but refused to merge with it. The independence of the Society of Muslim Women was appreciated later by al-Banna when the government decided to dismantle the Muslim Brotherhood in 1948 and seize all its assets because when state repression of the Muslim Brotherhood and all its branches intensified, Zeinab al-Ghazali's charitable agency became a convenient refuge for the survivors of the repression. The Society also played a crucial role as the emissary to the wives and families of the imprisoned Brothers.

Following the trials of 1954, which targeted the active members of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ghazali and other Sisters of the movement organized relief efforts to assist the suffering Islamic families (al-Ghazali 1972). This humanitarian campaign was coordinated by women in the mistaken belief that no state apparatus would victimize society's weaker elements. But in time, state repression caught up with the Women's

section of the movement and many Sisters suffered imprisonment and torture including al-Ghazali, who by then became the active member and leader of the Sister's section of the movement. Major figures among the activist women of the Movement who were jailed were: Zeinab al-Ghazali, Hamida Qutb, Aliyya Hasan al-Hudaibi, Ghada Ammar, Amina Qutb and many others (al-Ghazali 1972).

Nasser's time in office proved the most difficult period in the history of the Muslim Brotherhood. After Nasser's death in 1970, President Sadat's period was one of open Islamic activism for mainly countering the dominant Nasserist and socialist tendencies in the state. Although Sadat released the Muslim Brotherhood members from prisons, the movement remained still illegal and banned. There was hardly any debate at the time about the roles and status of women activists. The Muslim Brotherhood was still struggling to recover from the fallout of the past crisis. Women's activism, however, was suffered after 1960s as there was lack of a defined structure through which Sisters work could be managed, and therefore, women's activism kept a very low profile and consisted mainly of individual activities.

In 1982, following Sadat's assassination, Hosni Mubarak took office. The relationship between the state and the Brotherhood did not undergo any radical shift during the early years of Mubarak's rule. The Brotherhood continued to expand in universities and professional syndicates, recruiting both men and women and built relationships with segments of the population across the social spectrum mainly through charitable work. The women's division slowly began to resume its activities during the mid 1980s and helped greatly to reinforce the image of the Brothers as an active social force. The Muslim Brotherhood's entrance into the political sphere of the state was another remarkable feature of this decade in the history of the movement (Karam 1998).

The 1990s, however, witnessed the beginning of the end of state policy of toleration regarding the Muslim Brotherhood. Between 1995 and 1996, hundreds of Brothers were arrested through the years old charge of plotting to overthrow the regime. But in 2000 elections, despite security strikes against the Muslim Brotherhood candidates, they

managed to secure seventeen seats in parliament. The 2000 elections had special significance, marking the first time that the Muslim Brotherhood put forward a woman candidate, Jihan al-Halafawi. Halafawi made a very strong showing, but government machinations eventually ensured her defeat. However, her candidacy set an important precedent (Hafez 2003). The Brotherhood put forward a small number of women candidates in subsequent parliamentary and local elections, although so far none has made it into office but the strong showing of Makarem al-Deiry, the Brotherhood female candidate in 2005 parliamentary elections has its own significance. In 2005, despite government efforts, the Brotherhood secured an unprecedented 88 seats. Women played an important role as organizers, activists, and vote mobilizers in the majority of Brotherhood electoral campaigns (Abdel-Latif 2008).

In the 2007 party platform, there was an emphasis on women's rights. The Brotherhood presented a vision based on what the document described as "complete equality" between men and women, while preserving their different social roles. It also stressed the need to empower women to acquire their rights in a way that does not conflict with the basic value system of the society. The document referred to the "dominating negative social view regarding women" and the need to change it by campaigning to make the society fully aware of women's rights in all fields, not just in education (Muslim Brotherhood 2007A). Thus some new developments in the experiences of women activists in the Muslim Brotherhood such as entering into electoral political process, playing a crucial role in street demonstrations, raising funds for charity and social work and raising their voices through electronic and modern means of communication, show the new trends in the evolving role of the Sisters of Muslim Brotherhood.

The sit-ins in recent demonstrations through *Kifayah* (Enough) movement to stop President Mubarak for his next term in Egypt show how strongly Muslim Brotherhood women are emerging as a social force as half of the demonstrators were women. Thus, seeing their active mobilising mainly in colleges and universities and in common societies, the state now started accusing the women's section as the clandestine group whose activity plans are never transparent. The accusations came at a sensitive time for

the Egyptian regime as politicians gear up for the November 2010 legislative elections, and presidential elections in 2011. Some experts have suggested that the charges are linked to government efforts to weaken the movement and discourage their running in the upcoming elections, and that allegations regarding the secret women's organization have been raised purely for political purposes (Kliger 2010).

The mobilization of Muslim Sisters towards the Islamic movement is note-worthy; membership in the Muslim Sisters numbered 5,000 in 1948, a very high figure judging by the membership figures for other women's organizations at the time (Hatem 1994: 669). Still there is a large contingent of women members of the movement but because the movement is outlawed, there are no official and reliable membership figures. Recently Omayma Abdel Latif (2008) quoted that Diaa Rashwan, an observer of Islamist politics, concluded after studying the turnouts in recent elections and movement-led demonstrations that the Brotherhood has 50,000 to 60,000 registered members with a further 400,000 to 500,000 sympathizers and supporters (Rashwan 2008:13). Of the total, 25–30 percent are women. While there is a large and popular group of women within the Muslim Brotherhood, it is insulated from the other structures of the Brotherhood and plays no role in shaping policy (Abdel Latif 2008).

***Akhawaat al-Muslimaat* in Egyptian Public Sphere**

Capitalizing on human resources, the Muslim Brotherhood encouraged Muslim women to struggle side by side with men for the Islamic Call, *Daawah*. Social activism was not prohibited and women were permitted, even encouraged to be engaged in the social realm and, to a lesser extent, in the political realm, as long as their social and political activities for the Islamic cause were not undertaken at the expense of their domestic responsibilities. Al-Banna believed that “destroying the integrity of the family and threatening the happiness of home” was one of the causes of the dissolution of the Islamic state (al-Banna 1978). This new call for the social and political activism of women was, however, quite new at that time. The Islamic movement developed its own

distinctive gender discourses, a mixture of traditional, religious, conservative ideas, alongside modern ones, producing a new hybrid, neo-traditional gender discourse compatible with its restorative ideological project.

Although Hasan al-Banna encouraged both men and women of the movement to pursue education because he saw it as the most important tool in reforming society, yet he was ambivalent on the subject of secular education. On the one hand, he strongly advocated religious education, Islamic and Arabic studies; on the other hand he permitted Muslim Brothers (eventually even Muslim Sisters) to attend the secular state universities. He was likewise unclear as to the role of women in modern life; from him came no explicit statement on the extent to which they should be permitted to follow the professions and engage in public welfare service. Though Muslim Sisterhood was established when al-Banna was alive, but for a long time he was opposed to women participating in public life and in mixed company; the Muslim Sisters were segregated as a group, even in the university, and worked separately from the men's groups (Harris 1964). The following brief quotations give the fullest extant expression of al-Banna's opinions on the subject of women's place in the Muslim world:

The status of woman should be remedied in such a way to assure their progress in accordance with the teaching of Islam. The problem of women, which is the most important social problem, should not be allowed to develop unchecked and under the unguided influence of self interest [and of] eccentrics and extremists.

Self-adornment and loose conduct among women should be condemned. Women, especially teachers, students and doctors should conduct themselves in accordance with strict standards.

The position of men and women should be improved. Co-operation and equality between them should be encouraged, and the function of each should be specified accurately (al-Banna 1950).

Before the World War II, the functions of Brothers and Sisters (*Ikhwan wa Akhawaat*) were never specified accurately. After the war, however, when various leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood were questioned publicly as to the status of women, they generally replied that a woman's first responsibility was her home and family. When pushed

further, they would add that educated women made the best mothers; that it was permissible for women to be teachers of youth, especially of girls; and that it was also permissible for women to qualify as nurses and doctors particularly in paediatrics. These professions were looked upon as a logical expansion of home activities. There was a consensus among Muslim Brothers, however, that women should not engage in politics or government; in their view men alone were qualified to govern the country and administer public affairs. Brotherhood leaders were also preoccupied with the adverse effect of bringing politics into the home lest discussions on political affairs or party politics should lead to differences of opinion between a father and a mother and thereby create dissension in the family (Harris 1964).

Emergence of Muslim Sisters onto Egyptian public sphere has been shaped by a set of intellectual debates of Muslim Brotherhood, policy documents, socio-economic changes within Egyptian society which brought large number of women in educational and work premises. Also, internal debate of Muslim Brotherhood supported the process through conflicting opinions of intellectual members of Muslim Brotherhood. Continued state repression was the most important worry of the Muslim Brotherhood whose majority was not convinced to allow Muslim Sisters to face similar torture and brutality which earlier members of Muslim Sisters like Zeinab al-Ghazali and Hameeda Qutb have suffered. A brief account of some factors is presented in following pages.

Policy Documents, 1994-2007

While the general consensus of the movement has always been the discouragement of women to enter in public and political realm, the time and the changing situation of the country have changed their minds very much. The Muslim Brotherhood has been slow to nominate female candidates to public office. Despite participating in elections since 1984, the Brotherhood did not run a female candidate until 2000. Even on this occasion, the organization managed to nominate only one woman (she lost). In 2005, the movement, again ran only one woman in the parliamentary elections (she was also unsuccessful). The Brotherhood's General Guide claims that he wanted to run twenty five

women for office in the 2005 elections, but reconsidered it due to concerns for their safety and dignity. However, several female members of the organization have repeatedly stated their desire to run despite the risks. To date, Muslim Brotherhood's leadership has failed to act on their requests.

Although till now not a single woman of Muslim Brotherhood has been successful in their attempt, they have left examples for other women. That is why probably now a days more vibrant and strong voices could be heard from the Sister's section of the group. They are actively participating in mobilizing people as well preparing themselves to become good and trained cadres in the future for which they are highly hopeful.

Not many but a few important documents regarding women were released by the movement in the recent years after the Brotherhood's entry in the political scene in Egypt. An important Brotherhood document issued in 1994 addressed women's roles and rights from an Islamic perspective. It aimed to refute what it saw as misconceptions about women in Islam. But the documents contain hardly any reference to women's status or role inside the movement. It did address various issues, such as women's right to ownership, financial independence, and the incompatibility with Islam of forced marriage. One important chapter addressed women's rights in politics, stating that women have the right to participate in elections both as voters and candidates, since there is no rule in *Sharia* that prohibits this. It also stressed that women should be made aware of their rights as voters and candidates and that they should be encouraged to run in elections. Women, according to the document, can occupy all state posts except for *al-Imaama al-Kubra*, the equivalent of the caliphate. A chapter addressing the Western model of women's liberation described it as "based on a decadent philosophy that goes in contradiction with *Sharia* principles," a statement that reflects the dominant thinking among a large segment of men and women activists.

These views were reiterated in the Muslim Brotherhood Initiative for Political Reform in Egypt, issued in March 2004. While the initiative repeated the Brotherhood's line on the traditional roles for women, it pointed out that women are entitled to participate in

parliamentary elections, hold public posts (except that of head of state), and have educational opportunities. These views are repeated in the 63 pages statement of political goals put forward in 2004 by Essam al-Iryan, the Brotherhood's de facto spokesman. In his discussion of women's rights, al-Iryan utilizes several quotations from the *Quran* to substantiate his position that women are equal to men in the eyes of God and are entitled to the same legal rights (al-Iryan 2004: 45). They have the right to vote, to run for seats in the representative assembly, and to hold public office (al-Iryan 2004: 53). To further support this view, he cites a passage from the *Quran* which he interprets to mean that women were allowed to participate in selecting "the people who loose and bind". He explicitly addresses the sections of the *Quran* and *Hadith* that limit the rights of women, and argues in each case for the narrowest possible interpretation of these limits. For example, he notes that a passage in the *Hadith* states that women have weaker intellects than men. Al-Iryan interprets this to mean only that they have less capacity to testify in court on specific matters of religious law (such as the *hudud* punishments and when they should be applied).

Al-Iryan does not attempt to renounce the passages of the *Quran* and the *Hadith* that are taken negatively toward women, but he interprets them so narrowly that they have no practical application in contemporary society. He also goes to some lengths to refute several popular prejudices against women participating in public life. He addresses the common assertion that women lack relevant experience and judgment; that their child-rearing duties consume so much time that they could not hold public office effectively; and that participation in public life would compromise a woman's honour. In each case, he argues that analogous arguments can be made for excluding men from public life, and reiterates that none of these views has a sound foundation in the *Quran* ((al-Iryan 2004: 54-56).

There are, however, limits to his progressiveness. He concludes the discussion by returning to a traditional view of women. He writes that "bearing and raising children are the primary roles for women". However, he is not arguing that women should be passive and subservient. Indeed, within the confines of the home, she is "lord and queen" (Ibid:

50). He also adds an intriguing caveat. He argues that while, in principle, women enjoy the full range of rights that he describes, women's capacity to actually practice these rights is limited by "the conditions and ... traditions of society." (*dhuruf ijtim'aiyya ... wa taqalidha*) ((al-Iryan 2004: 56).

The Brotherhood's electoral platform for the 2005 parliamentary elections stressed certain points. It stressed, in particular, that women have the right to participate as voters and candidates in all parliamentary elections and that they should have the right to strike a balance between their social duties and their work in the public sphere. This ambivalence toward women's rights also appears in the Brotherhood's campaign documents from the 2005 parliamentary election. These documents stress that men and women hold the same spiritual and moral value in the eyes of God, and cite the *Quranic* passages proclaiming that God "honours all the children of Adam" and that "heaven is at the feet of the mothers." In the Muslim Brotherhood's view, women should be treated equally in criminal, civil and financial matters. They can make financial decisions without the approval of a male relative, and they may participate fully in Parliament and other elected institutions. They can be appointed to all public posts except that of Grand Imam or president of the state, as long as the post does not compromise a woman's "chastity, morality, or honour." Muslim Brotherhood also calls for improving women's education, but it stresses that these reforms should conform to prevailing social attitudes. It states that women's education should be "in accordance with the nature, role, and needs of women" (Muslim Brotherhood 2005).

In addition, as noted earlier, the General Guide claims that the Brotherhood wanted to run twenty-five female candidates in the 2005 parliamentary elections. However, he asserts that the security forces mistreated female candidates in the past. As a consequence, the husbands of these potential candidates would not allow their wives to enter the elections for fear they might be injured or insulted. The Brotherhood ultimately ran only one female candidate in the election and she was not successful.

The Muslim Brotherhood's 2007 draft party platform reiterates the organization's support for many of the women's rights mentioned earlier with their emphasis on women's rights and their vision on "complete equality" between men and women, while preserving their different social roles. It also stressed the need to empower women to acquire their rights in a way that does not conflict with the basic value system of the society. The document referred to the "dominating social negative view regarding women" and the need to change it by campaigning to make the society fully aware of women's rights in all fields, not just in education. This document, as the earlier ones, keeps its break on the issue of head of the state. Even after al-Qaradawi's approval that women can become the head of the state as it is a small part of *Ummah*, Muslim Brotherhood's stand on this issue and similar kinds of issues is unchanged. However it can be noted that a very slow process of evolution on women's issues has been taking place in the policy documents of Brotherhood from 1994-2007.

Debates within *Ikhwan al-Muslimun*

The brotherhood and its Islamic thinkers used the official tolerance of their activities and views to develop a competing Islamist-modernist discourse that sought to address the new middle class audience whose consciousness had already been shaped by a modern educational system and professional training. This new discourse succeeded in persuading a majority of middle class college women and working women to adopt the Islamic mode of dress as a visible sign of this attempted synthesis of Islam and modernity (Hatem 1988: 407-422).

While the movement's literature has recognized women as political actors, be they voters or candidates, this has yet to be translated into either actual policies adopted by the movement or a consistent vision embraced by its rank and file, perhaps because the movement is split on the issue. A group of reform-minded Brothers are in favour of giving women equal organizational status and full power-sharing rights. Most of them are mid-level cadres, almost all of whom are urbanites. On the other hand, the leadership takes a more conservative stand on the issue. They are in tune with the majority of people

in their popular base, many of whom uphold the Salafist view that women's activism should be kept to a minimum.

For example, the debate on the ban against women running for the presidency revealed a divided Brotherhood. Members of the Guidance Bureau, the movement's highest-ranking body, did not speak in one voice. While some members (Mahmoud Ezzat, Mohammed Mursi and Muhammed Habib) based their exclusion of women from the post on a "religious choice" (*Khayaan Feqhee*) and a "social reality," other senior members (Abdel-Monem abul-Futuh, Gamal Heshmat, and Essam al-Iryan) objected. They argued that the decision did not take into consideration the reality and context of contemporary Egypt and that it violated the principle of a civilian state, to which the Brotherhood has said it was committed. "It also goes against the principle of citizenship, which makes everyone equal before the law and confers the right to be nominated and elected as a head of state," said Gamal Heshmat, a former Member of Parliament (MP) for the Brotherhood. Having come under pressure, the movement's elders suggested that the draft was not final and that criticism will be taken into consideration. The split, however, was revealing; it captured the divide that is shaping the Brotherhood's vision concerning women's status and roles inside the movement (Abdel-Latif 2008).

Among the theorists of Islamic constitutionalism, al-Qaradawi offers the most extensive discussion on this topic. He observes that women "can be smarter and wiser than many men" (al-Qaradawi 1997: 169). They have the same public duties as men and they play an important role in the life of the community. Trying to exclude them from public life "is like trying to breathe with one lung or fly with one wing" (al-Qaradawi 1997: 82). Women should be allowed to vote and run for office. They should also be permitted to hold positions of authority, including the posts of judge and head of state. They have the same obligations as men to enjoin good and forbid evil, and to monitor the ruler and offer him constructive advice (al-Qaradawi 1997: 166-67). However, these rights are bounded by a traditional view of a woman's role in society. A woman's first duty is child rearing. She should embark on public life only if she has no children, or her children have grown (al-Qaradawi 1997: 173). Also, al-Qaradawi makes no effort to challenge the

discrimination against women found in the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*, which includes assigning less importance to a woman's testimony in court, and prohibiting women from leading prayer or leading the *ummah*.

Al-Qaradawi, in particular, emphasizes that women are prohibited only from serving as head of the *ummah* (the entire community of Muslims). He argues that an individual nation-state is only a small subset of the *ummah* and, therefore, the prohibition on women serving as leader of the *ummah* does not apply. Despite al-Qaradawi's opinion, the Brotherhood expressed its opposition to women holding the presidency in the 2004 reform initiative and continued this position in the 2007 draft party platform. While some Muslim Brotherhood members claimed that this position is mandated by *Sharia*, most of the leadership explained that it reflects the values that prevail in contemporary Egypt. Patriarchy is a well-entrenched norm in Egypt, particularly among the socially conservative segments of society that back the Brotherhood.

The gap between Muslim Brotherhood's rhetoric and action is particularly apparent in the organization's internal structure and operations. Despite its declarations of support for women assuming positions of leadership through society, the Brotherhood has pointedly failed to allow women to play any leadership role within the organization itself. The Brotherhood has four levels of leadership one at the governorate level (the Administrative Offices '*al-Makatib al-Idariyya*') and three at the national level (the Shura Council, the Guidance Bureau, and the General Guide), but no women serve in any of these bodies or offices. Not only that women don't serve in leadership positions in the organization, they are not even included in the general membership structure openly and technically and somehow they are as an organized entity but don't have an organizational structure.

Several women have given petitions against their marginalized position within the movement but no encouraging response from the rank and file of the movement has come till now. As the Sisters are having genuine demands regarding their position and role which are not being fulfilled, there is increasing criticism of the *status quo*. As Abdel-Latif (2008) noted, several activists have gone public with their criticism of the status

quo. A case in point is 35 year old Risha Ahmed. Ahmed, who holds a teaching position at the faculty of medicine at an Egyptian university, wrote an online open letter to the Brothers' Supreme Guide in 2007, in which she took issue with the status of women inside the movement. She questioned the way in which the movement dealt with the women's section. Ahmed wrote:

If the Sisters were undertaking difficult roles just like the Brothers, my question is why women are not treated like men inside the movement? Why are they deprived of the right to select and elect movement elders? Why have internal elections been confined to the Brothers? Women have played a crucial role in the elections and in serving the cause. This is why we have to empower women inside our movement and enable them to have their rights fully to select and elect so we can present a model to the rest of the Islamist movements. I do not demand that women should occupy top positions, but I'm only asking for their simple right to select the person who leads the *Daawah* (Adel-Latif 2008).

In conclusion, Ahmed pointed out that she had sent previous messages to the Brotherhood leadership but received no response. She then decided to post her message online as part of the self-criticism process undergone by a number of Brotherhood activists. She was not alone. Her open letter created a stir among the Brotherhood rank and file. Some have written in support, while others were unhappy on the medium she chose to talk.

The Muslim Sisters' initial demand was to allow women to occupy the positions related to the Sisters' division and activities. More ambitious demands included membership in the Shura Council as well as in the Guidance Bureau. Jihan Halafawi conveyed the Sisters' views directly to the Supreme Guide. The latter then requested a list of suggested names for positions in the Shura Council. Halafawi's demands were later supported by a proposal put forward by Dr. Ibrahim al-Zaafarani of the Alexandria chapter to include women in the Shura council. It was a sympathetic response came from Brother, al-Zaafarani, who submitted a proposal to the Supreme Guide calling for the appointment of three female activists to the Shura Council as a first step toward acknowledging the role of women in the movement. Zaafarani suggested three names: Wafaa Mashhour to represent Upper Egypt, Makarem Al-Deiry to represent Cairo, and Jihan al-Halafawi to

represent the north. He chose these specific names so as to close the door to any objection from more conservative elements on the basis of security risks. These requests have not received any response yet; however it is likely that the leadership of the movement is going to deal with these issues soon to keep their moderate view in the upcoming November 2010 elections of the state.

The Brotherhood's reluctance to support meaningful change in women's rights is also reflected in its actions in Parliament, where it won roughly 20 percent of the seats in the 2005 elections. As one might expect, the Brotherhood's parliamentary delegation defended the wearing of the *hijab*. In November 2006, the Minister of Culture (Faruq Husni) stated that he considered the *hijab* a symbol of backwardness. The Muslim Brotherhood delegation in Parliament denounced this claim. It further asserted that the *hijab* is a sign of devoutness that is required by Islam and called for Husni to either withdraw his statement or resign but he did neither (Majdi 2006).⁴

In addition, some Muslim Brotherhood members of Parliament actively resisted efforts to strengthen women's rights. In early 2008, the ruling National Democratic Party proposed legislation that called for full equality between men and women in business transactions, an increase in the minimum marriage age for women (from sixteen to eighteen), and a ban on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (Aljazeera, Jun 28, 2007). Although Muslim Brotherhood as a whole did not take a stand on this legislation, individual members of the delegation opposed these laws on the grounds that they were at odds with *Sharia* and weakened Egypt's traditional values and culture (Abu Zayd 2008). When the ban on FGM was adopted by the Parliament, the leader of the Brotherhood's parliamentary

⁴ The party's demand for Husni's resignation was framed in legalistic terms. It argued that the Constitution proclaims that Islam is the religion of the state, and that Islam requires women to wear the *hijab*. Therefore, Husni's hostility toward the *hijab* was at odds with the Constitution and should be grounds for dismissal. See Mahmud Muslim and Muna Yasin, "*Ikhwan* Demand President of the Republic Dismiss Faruq Husni." *al-Misri al-Yaum*, November 18, 2006. It should be noted that the Brotherhood's General Guide, Muhammad 'Akif, stated that the MB does not advocate the adoption of a law that requires women to wear the *hijab*. Rather, it believes that women should be encouraged to wear the *hijab* and that the government should take no action that discourages them from doing so. He also asserted that the debate over the *hijab* is a relatively minor issue and should not be allowed to distract the public's attention from more important matters such as government corruption. Majdi 'Abd al-Rasul, "Guide of the Brotherhood: The Crisis of the *Hijab* Is a Fog and the Minister of Culture has his Views." *al-Arabi al-Nasiri*, November 26, 2006.

delegation (Saad al-Katatni) voiced his opposition because “nothing in Islam forbids *Khitan* (FGM)”. Throughout the debate over FGM, the MB held that limiting and regulating FGM was desirable but that it should not be criminalized. In its view, the matter should be left to the discretion of each family (Aljazeera, Jun 28, 2007). He held this view despite the fact that Yusuf al-Qaradawi had expressed his support for a ban on FGM on the grounds that, while Islam does not directly prohibit the practice, it is contrary to the faith because of the physical and emotional damage that it causes to women (Daily News Egypt 2009).

Hindrances in the Progress of *Akhawaat al-Muslimaat*

The socio-economic developments might create pressures for moderation assuming that higher levels of education and greater exposure to the outside world lead to more moderate views among the electorate. But, this perspective cannot explain the uneven pattern of moderation in which the Brotherhood failed to adopt a more progressive stand on women’s rights. Indeed, increased industrialization and education levels almost certainly enhanced the political importance of women. As women acquired more education and economic power, they should have become a constituency that the Brotherhood would try to court through a more moderate posture on women’s rights. Instead, Muslim Brotherhood did the opposite and developed its policies in a direction that alienated this newly powerful constituency.

The global human rights consensus strongly endorses the expansion of women’s rights. If the Muslim Brotherhood were responding to this consensus, it would have moderated its stand on this issue. Instead, it has moderated a little on women’s issues and remained firm in its opposition to many demands for change. Furthermore, it justifies its steadfastness by invoking the need to protect Egyptian culture and tradition from “Western values” and the groups that promote them. This view was particularly apparent during the Muslim Brotherhood’s opposition to legislation in 2008 that broadened the rights of women, when its members of Parliament claimed that this legislation was the

product of pressure from “outside forces” that sought to “weaken Egypt and its people” (Abu-Zayd 2008).

In essence, Muslim Brotherhood’s embrace of global human rights norms has been utilitarian in character, it uses this language when it helps to protect the organization’s members, build alliances with other groups, and delegitimize the regime. But the Brotherhood sets this language aside when it conflicts with the organization’s institutional identity as a defender of traditional Egyptian values. This pattern of moderation puts the Muslim Brotherhood on a trajectory that limits its capacity to participate in a more competitive political order. The importance of women’s rights issue in the group’s current ideology renders any compromise on it very difficult and, as a consequence, will complicate the organization’s efforts to form alliances with centrist or secular groups when the political system becomes more open.

The most important hurdle in Muslim Sister’s progress has been the fear of state repression. It has become a major area of concern in this regard. From time to time, the Brotherhood has seen the repression of state in different forms and ways, from cracking down the meetings to arresting the members on false charges. Since Muslim Brotherhood has emerged as a significant political opposition group to the ruling regime after the 2005 elections by gaining 88 seats in parliament, the state is trying to use all its cards to destabilize the organization by different means. Now the state is claiming that it has discovered a clandestine female contingent within the banned Muslim Brotherhood.

Egypt’s State Security Prosecution has uncovered what it claims to be a special women’s unit within the banned Muslim Brotherhood movement. The prosecution says this group is led by the brotherhood’s deputy chairman Mahmoud Ezzat, who was arrested with 15 other Muslim Brotherhood members on February 8. According to the chargesheet, the brotherhood is wooing women into the organization to act as go-betweens and convey messages among members of the illegal organization, without being detected by the Egyptian security forces. The so-called secret sisterhood is being compared to a group led in the 1960s by Zeinab Al-Ghazali, who helped imprisoned brotherhood members communicate with their peers outside of jail (Kliger 2010).

The accusations of a subversive female contingent in the Muslim Brotherhood basically do not have any base. Different views come up on this issue particularly on the reasons of this crack down on Muslim Sisters because the accusations from government came at a sensitive time for the Egyptian regime as politicians gear up for the November 2010 legislative elections, and presidential elections in 2011. More importantly the reasons of this crack down on Muslim Sisters as suggested by some experts are that the charges are linked to government efforts to weaken the movement and discourage their running in the upcoming elections, and that allegations regarding the secret women's organization have been raised purely for political purposes (Kliger 2010).

Despite the government's efforts of showing its acts as genuine in doing so, people are condemning it as such accusations against Muslim Sister's group is nothing new. Shadi Hamid, Deputy Director of the Brookings Doha Centre told The Media Line: "It's important to note that even though the Muslim Sisters can't technically be members of the formal brotherhood organization; they still participate in its activities in a sense that the Brotherhood runs women candidates at different levels" (Kliger 2010). The levels of repression against the Muslim Brotherhood that are seen in the post-Nasser period are unprecedented. Hamid also pointed out:

Things have been getting considerably worse in the last two or three years as the government has been intensifying its crackdown on the brotherhood. It's a product of the brotherhood's growing strength since 2005, when it won 88 seats [in the legislative elections] and demonstrated it was the only real alternative to the regime and the status quo. The current crackdown and accusations against the brotherhood is a product of its growing popularity. The regime is a bit unsettled and worried because of the upcoming succession, and they're not willing to take any chances on that. They realize that the Brotherhood is the only force in the Egyptian polity that might be able to challenge that course of events (Kliger 2010).

Strong voices also emerged from the Sister's section as women are not left behind in the present scenario of Egypt which reflects in strong women's voices raised for explanations on important issues rather than waiting or depending upon their male counterparts to defend from their side. The leader of the Muslim Sisters, Jihan al-Halafawi explained the

actual situation of the movement and the cooperation given by the Sisters. She told that the women's division has developed in the same way that the Muslim Brotherhood has developed over the years and it's not secretive. The Brotherhood is engaged in politics publicly, even though it has no official recognition from the state but they have a lot of presence on the Egyptian street (Kliger 2010). At this point, the female contingent of the Muslim Brotherhood has always been supporting the movement, and then what is the new issue here in discovering any clandestine contingent of Muslim Sisters.

It was not only because of the emerging strength of the Sisters or the movement that the state might have given this argument for some other reasons also like what Dr. Gamal Soltan has mentioned: "The Muslim Brotherhood moved towards a more conservative and hard-line leadership following the December internal elections for its 16-member executive branch. One possible impetus for the recent crackdown could be the changes in the Brotherhood's leadership. It seems that the policy is not to allow the brotherhood to rest under their current leadership and to keep them under pressure" (Kliger 2010). State repression of the movement is continuous through out the history of the brotherhood. Whereas in the case of Muslim Sisters it has been changing from time to time but the fact is women's group has suffered a lot because of this hindrance as security threat has become the major problem for the women as well as the movement.

Second notable hindrance for Muslim Sisters progress is the social system of the Egyptian state. Regarding the social values and other problems hindering women in general and Muslim Sisters in particular, Dr. Manal Abul Hassan, a media professor at Cairo University and a female leader in the Muslim Brotherhood said:

The social values are the most effective. This is due to the fact that these values are inherited and deep rooted for a very long period of time. The Egyptian society is strongly curbing women's role. Its view towards girls, teens and women in general is not an integrated look at all. This view includes not allowing women to work in more than one field at the same time, although woman should, while doing its duty as a house wife, have and carry a message, and to participate in the society as a whole. On the individual level, woman should change their culture and way of thinking. Political participation doesn't necessarily mean taking part in elections or going to ballot boxes. She can raise her children on taking

responsibility and expressing their views and that she becomes, even if she is inside her house, an effective productive character who can, in a way or another, affect the society from the political viewpoint. Apart from this there are other so many obstacles, including social values, political regime, the media, individual culture, and the unclear political concepts. As far as lacking female political leaders, it is because the political regime is corrupted and can't spawn any kind of democracy. This can be proved in many incidents, the most prominent of which are 2005 People's Assembly elections and 2007 Shura Council elections that witnesses scandalous riggings (Abul Hassan 2007).

Thirdly, the noble cause that Muslim Brotherhood has placed at the centre of its identity in the defence of "traditional Egyptian values" against encroachment by the West has also become an hindrance for Muslim Sisters of the movement. This theme appears in every political document of the movement and is a common reference in interviews and speeches by Brotherhood leaders. It is a central feature of the Brotherhood's appeal to the most socially conservative segments of society, which are the core of its support. For a variety of reasons, Muslim Brotherhood has chosen to make the role of women in society the defining characteristic of "traditional values." This issue has become the symbol of the movement's broader agenda to defend Egypt's unique culture and civilization.

A focus on women's rights has also become part of the Brotherhood's continuing strategy to delegitimize the regime, while not raising the intensity of this effort to the level where the regime perceives itself as fundamentally threatened. In parliamentary debates and in the press, Muslim Brotherhood tries to portray the regime's efforts to improve women's rights as part of a broader sell out to Western values and betrayal of Egyptian traditions and civilization. Through this issue, the movement communicates to its followers and potential recruits that it is the sole defender of Egyptian tradition on the current political scene. In addition, the broad public interest in the issue of women's rights ensures that Muslim Brotherhood's positions on this topic will receive extensive media coverage and, thus, Brotherhood's distinctive identity will be communicated to a broad audience. At a time when Muslim Brotherhood is prohibited from owning media outlets and its financial resources are declining, this opportunity for free publicity on a national scale is quite valuable.

Present Scenario

Overall, the stand of Egypt's Islamists regarding women's rights is a mixed picture. On the one hand, the Islamic activists offer detailed and doctrinally grounded arguments for expanding the rights of women and granting them a prominent role in public life. However, on the other hand the political movement of the Muslim Brotherhood has opposed any practical steps to broaden the rights of women. It is clear by the movement's stand on current issues like the movement did not alter its stance on women and, in the 2007 draft party platform, reiterated its opposition to women holding the post of president. It continued to exclude women from all positions of leadership within the organization. And, its members of Parliament opposed legislative efforts to improve women's rights in 2008. Thus, in practice, there has been very little meaningful moderation of the Brotherhood's stance regarding women's rights.

When seeing the history of Muslim Brotherhood one can understand that the movement has moderated itself very much for several reasons among which survival is the biggest one. However, survival is not enough. The movement must survive in a manner that preserves its distinct identity as an opposition movement and as a potential leader of the country. It must also articulate an identity that has strong emotive and psychological appeal among its supporters and, thus, will motivate them to put up with the additional regime harassment that they receive for being associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The movement must give its supporters a noble cause to defend (and an identity derived from this noble cause) that will persuade them to endure the dangers and hardships of membership in a banned organization.

In her study of the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, Janine Clark (2006) argues that the capacity of Islamic groups to adjust their stance on a given issue is limited by the issue's relationship to *Sharia*. If the issue at hand is dealt with clearly by *Sharia*, the group is unable (or, unwilling) to alter its position regardless of political incentives or the necessities of organizational survival. If *Sharia* is unclear or silent on an issue, the group

has much greater flexibility to modify its stance in response to political opportunities or pressures. Arguably, this explanation has some utility for understanding the Muslim Brotherhood's moderation on Coptic rights; *Sharia's* instructions on these issues are open to a variety of interpretations. However, it cannot explain the Brotherhood's unwillingness to moderate regarding women's rights.

As noted earlier, there is substantial disagreement within the movement over *Sharia's* meaning in this area of gender. Some members assert that *Sharia* requires limitations on women's rights in order to protect their modesty, safety, and traditional role within the family. However, prominent thinkers whose ideas guide the movement such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Muhammad al-Ghazali have made strong arguments for broadening women's rights that draw extensively upon the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. Despite their assurances that *Sharia* supports women's rights, Muslim Brotherhood gradually, slowly and steadily taking practical steps that would strengthen and broaden their Sisters rights.

Now, more and more female members of the Muslim Brotherhood are becoming restless about the lack of representation and are seeking ways to increase their numbers in senior positions in the movement itself and, in time, to participate more in the country's politics. Primarily, these women want a formal consultative position in the Muslim Brotherhood hierarchy. Fortunately for the Sisters, some of the leading figures in this group of Brotherhood women are daughters and wives of senior Brotherhood leaders like the daughters of higher-ranking members like Khayrat al-Shater and Essam al-Irayan, for example, are active Sisters. The first of the Brotherhood's female political candidates, Jihan al-Halafawi, is the wife of Ibrahim al-Zaafarani, a senior member of the Alexandria chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Due to these connections, women are making their voices heard despite the lack of an institutionalized mechanism to consult women at the higher levels of power.

Furthermore, a growing number of men in the Brotherhood are now convinced that the current status of women inside the Muslim Brotherhood is a "weak point" that needs to be seriously addressed. The Brotherhood is routinely criticized for its position on

women's issues, especially since it presents itself as liberal with regard to politics yet is perceived as conservative when it comes to women's issues. The majority of this pro-women group occupies mid-level positions in the movement and is calling for increased women's leadership within the organization, as well as a greater number of female Muslim Brotherhood candidates in national elections (Abdel-Latif 2008).

Although some women maintain that women's roles and weight cannot be measured by the size of their representation in the movement's hierarchy, other strong voices contend that representation is an important reflection of the roles that women activists play in advancing the Brotherhood's political and social causes. While there is strong emerging dissent among Islamic women activists about their status and role within the movement and outside it, they are not willing to sacrifice the movement's unity and cohesion to obtain increased representation in the Muslim Brotherhood and among political candidates. Many of them strongly feel that it is only a matter of time before they gain these rights. They believe change is possible, albeit gradually and slowly.

Among other reasons which shaped Muslim Brotherhood's outlook of women activism is also continued state repression of Brotherhood. Executive Bureau member Dr. Osama Nasr commented "We support women's rights to elect and be elected to high ranking administrative positions, and this is the case with most participating Islamic movements in the world, particularly those which enjoy greater margins of freedom in Europe and Asia,". As Nasr says the Muslim Brotherhood is living in an exceptional repressive environment that places difficult hurdles in the way of normalizing women participation on the organizational levels. Nasr asserted that women in the Muslim Brotherhood have proven capable of many responsibilities which many men cannot undertake. He also confirmed that women are active in all the Muslim Brotherhood divisions, albeit covertly, to avoid any possible crackdown on women cadres (Nasr 2008).

Having women excluded from the internal structure and positions of power is also seen as a Brotherhood survival tactic. The existence of a women's division operating away from the gaze of the security apparatus is a guarantee of the continuity of the movement in

spite of the threat of security strikes aimed at eliminating it. And in this way the second benefit was that women will not face unnecessary security strikes. However, young generation in the sisters group are vibrant and are ready to take responsibilities provided they are given chance. Their social and charity work, their communication and mobilizing capability through modern resources give them extra importance. Strong social activities of Muslim sisters show their capability to move on if they are given chance to go ahead and organize themselves within their own branch.

There are of course capable women in Sisters section as there are men in Brotherhood. Muslim Brotherhood's over protective attitude is actually hindering the women's section to flourish in full fledged way. Although some progressive members agree that women will coup up with the security harassment as men do and they have proved it in past yet majority of others don't want to risk the weaker section. Although there are so many debates going on with in the movement but one can note Muslim Brotherhood's attitude towards women is gradually evolving from their public and social activity approval to their entry in politics and now debating on their including in main organizational body.

Given the improving advances in women's education and awareness in Muslim Brotherhood (an awareness that includes international influences and ties and new interpretations of religious and national heritages), there are considerable reasons to hope that the overall trend toward greater rights and progress will continue, though it may face temporary setbacks.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Conclusion

Among the most discussed issues in the Arab world are women's status in society and politics. Women's empowerment means different things to different people based on their beliefs, outlook and ideology. Therefore, it is important to conduct a case by case analysis of the situation. Many people hold the idea that Islam has played an important role in disempowering women in the active social spheres by clinging on to the ideology of gender segregation etc. But the very women who are following the lines of Islam in the Arab Islamic societies have a very different opinion regarding Islam and women. They have the strong belief that Islam is simple and holds women in high esteem.

This dissertation has focused on such different but significant motivating ideologies for Arab Muslim women who are emerging in Islamic movements and becoming important constituencies in public matters. For this, the feminist and Islamic discourses which emerged in the Arab societies have been discussed briefly and one come to the conclusion that the present popularity of the Islamic discourses on gender in the Arab societies is because of the presence of the two seemingly opposing and contradictory elements: modern elements that attempt to remain traditional. This synthesis of modernity and traditionalism has given a new charm and uniqueness to the Islamic discourses.

The feminist discourses and activism since the early 1900s have been contributing to an increased women's participation in the social and public arenas. In countries such as Lebanon and Egypt, the existence of a very expressive feminist movement together with an environment of relative openness has led to increased women's participation in the public arena. In the past, the prevailing cultural practices, justified by a conservative religious understanding, have led to significantly low women's social involvement. Nevertheless, the increasing modernist or reformist trend in Islamic thinking, with the openness facilitated by innovation in communications channels such as the Internet and satellite broadcasting, is bringing new potential to increased women's participation in work and other aspects of life. Thus, the participation of women in the more recent

religious reformist movements in the Arab countries can be seen as an extension of the earlier involvement of women in nationalist activities.

In the past few decades Arab women and their participation in public life have witnessed fundamental changes. The role of women has undergone major developments in varying degrees in different parts of the Arab world. There are lots of divisions between some feminists and some *ulama* (Muslim religious scholars) and obviously also among the *ulama* themselves and among the feminists themselves on the role of women in society. Among religious circles, heated debates and disagreements have been going on and they are far from being settled. The same can be found among feminists. Some feminists call for more participation based purely on secular standards that emulate other global secular movements, while others find no problem in actively seeking more participation from a religious standpoint.

There is a growing, though not conclusive, trend in the religious discourse that asserts that women's public role is not anti-Islamic. In doing this, a major reassessment of the Muslim history and traditions is being presented, sometimes by Muslim scholars, and other times by Arab feminists. To elevate the status of women in all the regions requires a process where such views are continuously communicated, discussed and exposed. This is a practice that is already happening but its impact still varies from one region to the other.

Heba Raouf Ezzat asserted that while Islam gave men and women similar rights and responsibilities, any remaining differences relate to their nature. In this regard, her discourse resembles that of al-Ghazali. He asserts that women have a role to play in both the private and the public sphere. Each woman should be given the choice between different roles at different stages of her life. The role of social institutions is to provide the opportunity for her to contribute in all spheres of life whether at home with her family, or in the political and economic arenas. Accordingly, he affirms that qualified women in a Muslim society should be allowed to public functions in the same manner that qualified men are allowed to such functions. In this way, women are entitled to

occupy the positions of heads of state or judges. This is an issue which has been the centre of heated debate in Egypt and some other countries as well over the past few years.

The rise of Islamism contributed to socio-political changes in one way or other in the Arab Islamic countries. Muslim women did not lag behind; they got enormous attention from Islamic movements in both oppressive and progressive forms. The rise of women's Islamic activism showed the deep concerns of Arab Islamic women about their identity, status and role. Women are attracted in large numbers towards the Islamic forces because they find in those movements a space where they can press to better the status of women within an Islamic framework which is very much close to their own religio-cultural ethos.

The active participation of Muslim women in Islamic movements and particularly in Muslim Brotherhood in such high numbers was because of such unsuspecting space through which they can come in public and get recognition for their work and activities in an accepted way. This was the first hypothesis of this work which is proved positively as the fourth chapter discussed it at length and showed how women are joining the Muslim Brotherhood movement in large numbers and are having the enthusiasm to progress despite the hindrances they face in the Islamic movement and outside it.

An understanding of the linkage between Islamic movements and Muslim women has been focused in this dissertation, as the role of women in important Islamic movements is not studied much earlier. This study of women in the popular Islamic movements (especially those which are making the transition to mainstream political parties) in the Arab countries like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Party for Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, Hezbollah in Lebanon, National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudan, Hamas in Palestine, Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan etc., show the key role women are playing in shaping the Islamic movements' political goals and consolidating their power and status in their respective societies. But the sour reality with almost all the Islamic movements in these societies is that woman come forward and support the organizations at the tough times but, as soon

as stability comes, they are ignored, marginalized and are not given their position appropriately.

Sudan's modern Islamic party NIF has made an *Ijtihad* (expert opinion on the basis of *Aql* (reason) and *Ray* (individual opinion) according to *Fiqh* (Islamic Law) sources) on the gender question against the prevailing religious ideology. It came to conformity with a more authentic culture and has explored the centrality of women in this process. The space which women activists in NIF have perceived as permitting greater benefits to women has emerged because of the need for female participation in both the party's program and in the national economy and this necessity has been accommodated by ideological reformation.

Unlike Egypt, where Islamists have long been banned, Jordan has experimented with Islamic activists in parliament since early 1990s. Within the time span of less than two decades, Islamic activist women of Jordan have managed to establish an active women's movement that has penetrated all sectors of the political arena and Jordanian civil society. An interesting fact regarding IAF women is that they have become the integral part of the movement and are present in the General Assembly as well the Shura Council of the organization. However, their absence from the Executive Office has raised some ambivalence of the movement towards women, yet women are strong supporters of IAF. Hayat Musimi's candidacy was a landmark for IAF women as the Jordanian society is still biased to women. She has joined the Parliament as one of 17 IAF members elected. It is important to note that IAF women are somehow, enjoying more rights than their counterparts in other movements.

An unexpected effect of religious activism in Lebanon is the overwhelming public participation of Lebanese Islamic activist women. Hezbollah women are becoming highly politicized and they are extensively working from grassroots levels to political offices. Most of Hezbollah's social work in terms of education, welfare system and fundraising etc. is either run by women completely or largely.

Similar is the condition of Hamas women who are active in all spheres of life along with men not only for the sake of empowerment but also for the cause of resisting the occupation. As far as the assumption that Islamic political activism inherently disempowers women collectively is incorrect. Many of the policies that female Islamic activists in Hamas pursued in regards to women can be seen as affecting structural change. On structural level, the work of Palestinian Islamic women can be seen in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, where they argued for a mandate which deals with Palestinian women living under occupation. Moreover, they argued for increasing scope of the Ministry's duties to include targeting women from all socio-economic backgrounds instead of only relying on elite women.

Significant change towards moderation has been noticed in all the Islamic movements discussed in this dissertation except the Algerian FIS, where Islamic activist women's participation in the party is almost invisible. Moreover, the destabilized socio-political and economic systems of the state further encouraged the discrimination of women from the social spaces, and they are generally seen as a threat to men's spaces. Although there is still an active feminist movement in Algeria to improve women's status but the invisibility of Islamic activist women in FIS is a noticeable feature of the movement.

The youngest of all Islamic movements and parties discussed in this dissertation, the PJD offers unique opportunities to Islamic activist women. Besides the religious, socio-economic and political motivation of women by ideologically reforming the traditional values of the society, the movement created a PJD women's committee and seated the greatest number of women in Parliament of any political party in Morocco. Although the women's committee is created in PJD, it is not integrated in the main organizational structure. Instead, PJD female members belong to a parallel women's section. The argument given in this regard is that Moroccan society as its Arab neighbours is patriarchal in nature and they still do not allow many things for women to do in public sphere such as mix gathering of gender. However, comparing it with other Islamic movements and parties of the region, it shows improving status of its women's section as it mandated 15-20% female representation in all sections.

While Islamic activist women in other Islamic movements are in such conditions discussed above, their counterparts in Egypt are going through some new challenges. Egypt has a long tradition of having movements for freedom, nationalism and Islamism compare to its neighbours. The state's vulnerability and corruption in the government set the stage for the emergence of a diversity of political voices; the most prominent of these are the Islamic forces like the Muslim Brotherhood. In Egypt, contradictory voices of women can be heard- secular and Islamic. Both are representing a thoroughly modern tendencies and developments. The secular feminist movement has produced some modern authors such as Nawal al-Saadawi, who received a great deal of attention in the West for her radical views of the need for a socialist transformation of society to ensure women's rights. The Islamic tendency responded to the growth of the secular consciousness in Egypt with the creation of the Muslim Sisters, the female section of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood was on and off banned in the country under different regimes and is still banned; yet it has its own importance in the social and political spheres of the country. Various aspects of women's activism in the organization and also the attention paid by the Muslim Brotherhood towards women in order to build the organization strong by reaching out to the population and providing services, made this study an interesting one. The stand of Muslim Brotherhood regarding women and their role has been changing from time to time since the establishment of the organization itself. The gender debate in contemporary Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement is not merely a religious and traditional discourse. In fact, this politico-religious Islamic ideology articulates a quite modern construct of gender equality and the importance of gender awareness. A new gender discourse that argues for equality within an Islamic framework is getting acceptance in Egyptian society as it is initiated by female Islamic activists as well pro-women moderate male Islamic activists. But without the democratization and modernization of Islam's legal vision and a healthy democratic change in the country's political space, Muslim women's quest for equality with justice will not succeed.

For the active participation of women and getting the rewards of their participation scholars and activists (both men and women) in the Muslim Brotherhood have been seriously debating on women's issues. But the debates have not come to any meaningful or successful results because of several problems like state repression, lack of women cadres for leading roles, or the movement's own unwillingness to contradict the traditions of the society. The second hypothesis of this dissertation that lack of internal debates in the Muslim Brotherhood regarding the question of women is causing disempowerment of Muslim women, has proved wrong because hot debates are going on regarding the gender issues. Actual causes which are affecting women's progress in the movement are different; one of which is the division of views between the moderates and the conservatives within the movement. Yet women as well as moderate men are moving ahead with strong and steady views and, given the improving advances in women's education and awareness in Muslim Brotherhood (an awareness that includes international influences and ties and new interpretations of religious and national heritages), there are considerable reasons to hope that the overall trend toward greater rights and progress will continue, though it may face temporary setbacks.

Muslim Brotherhood gained large popularity and clear political approval in Egypt. For example, they admitted the significance and necessity of multi-party political system under Islam. In addition, they gave woman the political right to run in elections, vote and get involved in politics, as an activation of her right to command the right and forbid the wrong. Al-Iryan underscored that as far as the Brotherhood is concerned, women's rights are settled in favor of women, i.e., a woman has all the rights except becoming the president of the state. Even on women holding the highest office of the state, there is a wide difference of opinion within the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite the clampdown and the tight policy of the government towards the movement, the Muslim Brotherhood still has their powerful existence in the Egyptian community.

In the case of Egypt, the pressure building up from below is highly supportive of women's empowerment as well as their social development. The Egyptian Islamic women would have been in worst conditions if their grassroots activities had been totally

absent. Yet grassroots activities do have limitations, both in terms of internal constraints on how much can realistically be achieved, and in relations to constraints dictated by the state. It is a mistake to leave the task of women's empowerment and social development to initiatives from below like with the Islamic movement alone. A bigger mistake is again to give it up on the state alone. Religious segment of Egyptian society look suspiciously upon the state's policies towards women as a ploy for Westernisation.

Women's presence in the Islamic movements and parties in West Asia so far has not resulted in an influential or vocal role for women in such organizations. However, their presence is neither insignificant nor unsuccessful. Women are still serving as early risers as well as role models for other women. Their entry into influential decision-making bodies started providing and will provide a learning opportunity for women as party players and reformers.

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