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The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the singular largest and most enduring of Islamist organizations, has been center stage of burgeoning debates on the rise and fall of movements propagating “Islam is the solution.” It certainly bared an important role in the wave of protests, reforms and revolutions shaking the Middle East, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring. Perhaps more importantly, it became the litmus test of the Islamic-imagined governing projects to the extent it vied for power and led majority- or coalition-governments. Indeed, the evolution of the MB since its foundation in 1928 speaks to crucial theoretical and empirical dilemmas regarding key themes – nation-state, pluralism, democracy, gender, pan-Islamism and/or radicalism –that are typically associated with Islamism. Its position in the post-Arab uprisings is particularly interesting to the extent it connects the Islamist project to an ever-changing context of power shifts, ideological rifts, citizenry moods, and changing geo-strategic alliances.

The Muslim Brotherhood: The Arab Spring and its Future Face provides a timely probe into the twists and turns of the MB’s social, political and international endeavor across the Middle East and other countries where it has taken root. The analysis casts the net wide to capture both the evolution of the movement since its creation to the post-Arab Spring; the features of its localized national iterations diffused across the Middle East; and the range of topics that occupy the organization. To cite the author, the book investigates “the Muslim Brotherhood in both its historical and contemporary context to account for its evolving nature and its new place in the wake of Arab Spring” (p. 3). A good part of the analysis delves into the MB’s saga of historical struggles, oppression, alliances and internal schisms including its striking endurance through unlikely coalitions, ideological rebooting and organizational reshuffling. The shifting tide of the MB’s fortunes after the Arab-uprisings, seemingly the central focus of the monograph, further displays how the organization used the new opportunities to marshal protests, compete for elections and offer an Islamic governing alternative. These same opportunities, as the analysis suggests, also confronted the movement with demands of groups from different walks of life—secularists, nationalists, leftists, and stancher Islamists. Transition opportunities also exposed existing tensions within the organization regarding its vision of regime change—post-authoritarian arrangements, power-sharing structures, reformed economy, plural society and role of religion. The Epilogue sums up the main lines of enquiry which corroborates various stages of the development of the MB—oppression and persistence; killing of the spirit of revolution; fictions and facades; global limits; narrow options and future face.

The historical and contemporary dimensions of the MB’s development are further investigated in the context of its national iterations—the mother organization in Egypt, Hamas in Palestine, the MB wing in Jordan, Ennahda in Tunisia, and the Islah Party in Yemen— each the subject of separate chapters. In addition, the book includes an introductory chapter on “Roots and ideas” which traces the founding concepts of its main leaders, mainly Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. The last chapter focuses on the transnational dimension of the MB, as an ideational and logistic network. Each chapter brings in idiosyncratic topics that inform the MB’s strategies in the particular national, ideological and socio-political context in which they unfold. The first chapter on “Roots and ideas,” for example, summarizes the thinking of Al-Banna as a responsive hue to the ideas of nationalism, revolution and anti-imperialism characterizing his age. The more radical ideology proposed by Qutb is similarly placed in the context of political and ideological currents of his time. The defeat of Arabs in the 1967 Six-Day War arguably provided a crucial juncture for the proliferation of jihadi ideals in the ’70s and ’80s. Indeed, Mustafa Mashour, the

Supreme Guide of the MB in the '80s, defended jihad as a tool to liberate those “subject to oppression or control by Allah’s enemies” (p. 29). The enduring tension between those gravitating towards the jihadist message and those embracing a more gradualist approach within the organization emerges as an enduring feature of the MB’s project.

While the wide scope of analysis provides a cursory look into the moving agenda of Islamism, it falls short of outlining the exact spectrum of propagated ideologies, when and why they gained steam across the organization, and how they informed political choices across different moments of change, revolution and reform. The reader will certainly benefit from the broad-brush account of the evolving ideologies, rifts and strategies within local wings of the MB before and after the Arab uprisings. Yet, given the wide academic attention and mushrooming research in the field, the informed reader will look for theoretically-informed questions, systematic if not new empirical data and generalizable answers as to the leading factors, major pillars and provisos of the Islamist project. These specificities one looks for in a new analysis are more often than not lost into generalities of description across various time periods, places, and topics. In the case of Egypt for example, the analysis shows that the MB was seemingly drawn into protests against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak by its more liberal-minded youth, and proved successful in mobilizing its reservoir of supporters throughout, but showed weakness and eventually failed to steer a successful governing project, and even more so a pluralist mode of governance when given the chance. Explanatory factors for this experience of failed governance include interchangeably the conservative profile of the MB president, the lack of organizational cohesion, the lack of MB’s governing experience, resistance to change from different structures of ancient regime, an over-mobilized populace, and/or continuous oppression instigated by a powerful military (and sometimes their Western allies). At the end, however, the reader misses a systematic analysis of the determinants of the MB’s failure of governance, be it an imaginary vision or a concrete experience, beyond the maxim that “everything matters.”

In other cases, too, the failure of Hamas to deliver a pluralist mode of governance, popular disappointment at ministers’ representing the Islamic block in Jordan, and capture of the revolutionary ideals by Islah in Yemen often fall into descriptions of changing calculations and frequent convenient “marriages.” This type of descriptive analysis tends to miss a specific thread of argument, particularly on oft-discussed dilemmas regarding the features of the Islamization project when the MB enjoys enough power to change the rules of the game. There is only one exception among the MB’s branches—Ennahda in Tunisia—which escaped the general path of MB’s disappointing record of governance, and that seemingly because they gave up asserting Islam as a comprehensive solution to contemporary maladies while seeking alliances outside of the Islamist block. What does this particular experience tell us about the general project of Islamism—is it a viable governing project and under what conditions? Altogether, the monograph’s separate spatiotemporal accounts of the MB’s project fail to tap into the potential gains of comparison between its branches and across specific questions related to the organization: Why the various experiences of the MB’s exercise of power show a similar aversion to plurality? Why the MB seemingly collaborates with its adversaries when it comes to grab power, but not when it comes to practice power? How does the organization cope with the “red-line” ideals and jihadi advocates within their structures? Does the rise of even stauncher jihadists make it a more viable Islamist-oriented project? Are the Western responses to the movement somehow disproportional given the documented links to jihadism, exclusionary mode of governance and anti-Western rhetoric it frequently displays across place and time?

The description of the twists and turns of the MB’s national iterations also sometimes embraces a certain apologetic tone regarding the ideals, potentials and future of the Islamist

project. As criticized in one section for example: “Opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood ... would point to [its] ambitions as dangerous ... to constructed orders and projections of nation and state” (p. 165). Or, “For nearly 90 years, the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliate branches ... have undertaken a comprehensive attempt to translate the philosophy of its leadership into a series of ... activities in service of their societies (p. 188).” One can find useful and service-oriented activities along the evolution of the MB, but radical ideals nourished within the leadership as well as the MB’s route to and handling of power can hardly qualify it as a movement serving its societies. From day one, the MB has embraced and served at most specific sections of its complex societies, or only those sections that embrace its vision. Certainly the author suggests that “in government ... the brotherhood ... have paid less respect for democracy and ... human rights norms than they should have” (p. 194), but often times this is seen as an accidental output of the complex circumstances of regime change rather than an expected extension of MB’s own exclusive vision and templates, some of which are clearly evidenced in the analysis.

Altogether, the general reader will benefit from having a wide-span examination of different time periods, national cases and specific themes related to MB in a single monograph. Certainly, there is a lot to learn from inductive studies that seek to bring in and possibly generate new hypothesis from the description of such a significant and enduring Islamist movement. Yet, this is also a phenomenon that has long been analyzed and theorized in the burgeoning research on political Islam, radicalized movements, regime change and Middle-East area studies more specifically. The knowledgeable researcher familiar with this expansive body of literature will miss the conceptual if not theoretical discussion of the phenomena, an explicit comparison between cases and themes of investigation, updated data relevant to the focus of the analysis and/or general theoretical and practical implications on the future of Islamism. In the final count, the author suggests that the potential of the movement to impact the political space remains tied to the “intrinsic attachment of Islam and the shelter this provides” (p. 197), as broad and fuzzy as such links might sound.

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