

Hamas Transformation

Hamas Transformation:

Opportunities and Challenges

By

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ABBREVIATIONS

PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PCC	Palestinian Central Council
PNC	Palestinian National Council
MB	Muslim Brotherhood Society
Hamas	Islamic Resistance Movement
Fatah	Palestine National Resistance Movement
PIJ	Palestinian Islamic Jihad
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WYIA	Women's Young Islamic Association

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to examine the political development and transformation made by Hamas from a resistance movement into a political authority in the Gaza Strip, as a result of Hamas' victory in the Palestinian national elections of 2006. From a political science and conflict transformation perspective, the study will focus on the political opportunities and the process of environmental and structural change that led the resistance movement to evolve from an underground militant group to a force in conventional politics (Dudouet, 2009). Within the field of international relations, the purpose of this study is to inform policies on control or engage in dialogue with resistance/liberation movements. This study is an analysis of Hamas' formation, development, political and strategic transformation, and of the organisational structure shifts required by the transition. The book also examines the factors, circumstances, and changes that influenced the political development that Hamas undertook from its inception until it became a political authority in 2007. This includes examining Hamas' influence and its impact on social and political life in the Gaza Strip from 2000 to 2015.

I chose this focus for my book due to the number of significant challenges and changes that had taken place in Gaza, and in Palestinian society, during the specific period under study. This period is a very important one for the purposes of academic research and political affairs, because it included a number of extremely critical and dramatic political developments and changes in the Palestinian arena. The period was characterised by the failure of the peace process between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel, and the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising or Intifada. It was also marked by the emergence of Hamas as a major military force and political power, capable of influencing Palestinian national affairs; this power decisively challenges the dominance of the Palestinian Liberation Organisations (PLO) over Palestinian social and politics affairs at all levels. It became clear that Hamas would lead and control Gaza in the very near future. Hamas would

transform the structure of Gaza to become yet more conservative and traditional. This period of study witnessed the military defeat of PA forces by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and the division of the Palestinian house into two political entities in 2007 – the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. More importantly, it witnessed the rise and fall of the Arab Spring, when Hamas believed that it would achieve its political goals after regime changes in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya.

Consequently, it is important to study Hamas both as a phenomenon and as a major political player. I believe that this study might add to a greater understanding of Islamic groups and of Hamas in particular, groups that may yet again transform the political structure of Palestinian society and challenge any future Middle East peace process. I intend to prove that Hamas is still a pragmatic movement looking to sustain its presence in the political arena, and to achieve its political programme. This book will prove that Hamas seeks to lead and represent the Palestinian society and its institutions by political and military means as well, and it will demonstrate that Hamas may one day become a full player in the Middle East in regard to the future of the Gaza Strip after the failure of the Arab Spring. The book also provides an account of the gradual changes in Hamas' policies, despite the fact of internal, national, international, and financial challenges.

To study Hamas' development from a resistance organisation into a political governing authority in the Gaza Strip, I will divide its political development into three distinct phases. The first phase refers to Hamas' connection to the early history of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Palestine after 1948. The political developments were as follows:

1. **Social and religious morality phase (1948-1982):** During this phase the MB took the critical steps required before Hamas' emergence in the Gaza Strip. The MB maintained its presence to mobilise the grass-roots level of Palestinian society, by returning to the religious thoughts and social morality of Islam. The MB revived its ideology by mobilising the grass roots in accordance with its social agenda (a process known as 'Daw'a'). These actions were initially designed to bring about social and religious change based on the movement's peaceful social ideology during the Egyptian rule of the Gaza Strip until 1966. The MB also used its peaceful social agenda to expand the movement's social and educational network in the Gaza Strip under rule by Israeli occupying authorities after 1967 (Tamimi, 2007:39-45).

In order to build their ranks, the MB invested initially in a peaceful agenda, before becoming involved explicitly in politics or resistance activity. The MB was not involved in any military action against Israeli troops until late 1983. Nonetheless, the MB presented a threat to the hegemony of the PLO, because of the PLO's policy of compromise towards Israel. Despite the expansion of the MB, the national forces of the PLO grew stronger in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, after its military operations in Lebanon and elsewhere (Cobban, 1984: 135-136). Before it was fully recognised by the international community as a political player, however, the PLO faced the challenges of an international boycott, the siege of the Israeli alliance and strikes by Israeli forces, and its destruction and expulsion from Lebanon in 1982.

The majority of the Palestinian and Arab populations praised the PLO for the two months of fighting after Israeli forces destroyed its military, social, and political infrastructure in Lebanon (Cobban, 1984: 135-136). This contributed to internal division amongst the ranks of the MB in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, which increased when the Islamic Jihad movement was celebrated by the younger generation of the MB for its violent resistance and for several attacks on Israeli targets. Islamic Jihad emerged from within the MB, but disputed the MB's ideology; its leaders were members of the MB who rejected the movement's non-violent approach (Tamimi, 2007:39-41).

2. **Military Resistance Phase (1983-2004).** The MB had to consider the use of military action against Israeli forces in response to hard-line voices within the movement. Using the military ideology of liberating Palestine, Islamic Jihad recruited a number of its members from the MB. During this phase, the MB had to restructure itself to become the local wing of Hamas on the eve of the first uprising on 8 December 1987 (Abu Amr, 1994: 63). Hamas built on the MB's record of social and educational services at the grass roots level in the Gaza Strip. The MB initially sought social change before any political or resistance agenda. As a result, Hamas operated as a social movement for more than two decades before its official announcement as a resistance movement. Consequently, first and foremost, Hamas was seen as a movement of social development, assisting the poor, and delivering religious and educational services to citizens in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In spite of Hamas' popular expansion and influence in the Palestinian political arena during the first uprising (1987-1993), the peace process between Israel and PLO in 1993 - that led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 - presented a challenge to Hamas. Hamas had to declare its explicit support for a Palestinian state within the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, without recognising Israel. It proposed a long-term truce without giving up its violent resistance strategy and tactics. This phase represented a political change for Hamas as a resistance movement, despite its intensive and deadly suicide bombing from 1995, which harmed the peace process and challenged the relationship between Israel and the PLO (Mishael & Sele, 2000: 66-67). Nonetheless, since this time, there has been no tangible progress in the peace process between the PLO and Israel. During the second uprising, Hamas evolved into a strong and important movement that represented a real threat to the hegemony of the PLO.

3. **Governing Authority phase (2005-2015):** During this stage, Hamas demonstrated its political flexibility and revealed how the movement was evolving by participating in municipal and legislative elections for the first time, during the Oslo peace process of 2005-6. Hamas' strategic decision to become an official and acceptable future political player came about as a result of the death of the historical Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in 2004, the resulting weakness of the PA, the deep division within the Fatah movement, and Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Its political victory in the elections led the movement from resistance to governance in 2006, without having to fully compromise its ideologies and thoughts. This includes Hamas' opportunities and challenges during and after the Arab Spring. This represents the third phase of Hamas' political development towards its 'mixed strategy' of governance between international boycott, siege, Palestinian division, and the Arab Spring.

During this phase, Hamas supported PLO's negotiations with Israel, aimed at reaching a political settlement based on a two-state solution, in accordance with the national reconciliation document between the various PLO factions and Hamas in the summer of 2006. This represented Hamas' implicit recognition of Israel, but Hamas would not exclude the terminology of resistance, and insisted on the inclusion of this in the document. The military takeover of Gaza by Hamas and its defeat of PLO forces in June

2007 strengthened Hamas' governing authority in spite of the international boycott and Israel's coercive policies. However Hamas' takeover complicated the process of moderating the movement politically and hindered its full transition to a governing authority (Schanzer, 2008: 151). However, The Arab spring also posed another challenge to Hamas after the failure of political Islam in those countries where the Arab Spring occurred. Hamas' chief concern was not to exit as a loser from the Palestinian political scene, and it sought always to project itself as a strong force, by any means required. Hamas is worried about its future in the Palestinian division after the rapid changes in the Middle East and North Africa, as the Arab Spring failed to improve Hamas as a key political player in the region. These changes in the region united different social and youth forces to end the division in Palestine between Hamas and Fatah. The setbacks of the Arab Spring and the deposition of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has deepened Hamas' governance crisis in the Gaza Strip. Hamas today is between the hammer of a severe financial crisis and the regional crisis that may affect its political future in Palestine. It is essential therefore that Hamas find a better space to manoeuvre within the political system, rather than being excluded from it.

There have been many liberation/resistance movements that, like the PLO, chose political and military options during conflict and power-sharing processes until they were able to convert their military structures into conventional politics. Conventional politics incorporates non-violence, electoral political participation, social movement, and civil society organisations. Although Hamas' political ideology differed from the PLO's, the recent trajectory of Hamas' transition has faced similar challenges and experiences to those of the PLO. The PLO's military strategy and political thought evolved in three distinct phases as follows:

1. **Total Liberation phase (1964–1968):** The PLO was established in order to liberate all of historical Palestine that was occupied by Israel in 1948. PLO strategy relied on an 'all-or-nothing' policy, using military means to achieve the 'total liberation of Palestine' (Darweish and Rigby, 1995). The PLO did not attempt to use any diplomacy in its political speeches addressing its policies towards Israel, as it did not believe in politics or diplomacy given Israel's status as the aggressor state. The different factions of the PLO were solely focused on military means and on erasing Israel from the global map.

2. **Secular Democratic State phase:** (1969–1973): During this phase, the PLO resolved to be accepted as a political player in the international arena, without compromising its ultimate goal of liberating historical Palestine. The PLO wanted to maintain its popular support in order to not lose members from its ranks, nor the support of Palestinians in the diaspora and the occupied territories. The PLO adopted diplomatic and military tactics as part of a ‘mixed strategy’, and indicated its acceptance of the existence of *Israel*. However, Israel and the USA rejected the PLO’s offer and maintained their view of the PLO as a ‘terrorist organisation’ (Mohamad, 1997: Vol 4 No. 2). The political development of the PLO at this stage pleased neither the USA nor Israel, because it had not given up the military resistance option, nor had it accepted Israel’s existence as a legitimate state recognised by the United Nations.

3. **“Mini-state” Governing Authority phase** (1974–1994). The PLO adapted yet again by renouncing violence and explicitly accepting the two-state solution, believing diplomacy to be a strategy and tactic of state building. By accepting the conditions of the USA, a key superpower and international player, the PLO indeed became an official political player as the recognised governing authority in the occupied Palestinian territories. The PLO agreed to the two-state solution as a policy, which meant sharing historical Palestine with Israel. It shifted officially from a resistance movement into a governing authority whose legitimate coercive force was used to fight other resistance groups that might spoil the peace process, based on the Oslo agreement of 13 September 1993. This stage characterised the PLO’s efforts of state building (Dayton and Louis Kriesberg, 2009).

This political development of the PLO was fiercely opposed by other national secular factions; by those represented within the PLO, and those not represented. It was also challenged by Hamas and by the Islamic Jihad movement. This also led to discrepancies within the national movement, and to fragmentation abroad. However, by the summer of 2000, the PLO’s peaceful transition policies had been undermined by the failure of the peace process between Israel and the PLO. This led to the outbreak of the second uprising, which witnessed the powerful re-emergence of Islamic forces, and of Hamas in particular. The PA became only one of a number of military factions; it began losing its political legitimacy and its coercive

force due to the state of anarchy and the absence of *peace process*. This became an ideal opportunity for Hamas to expand its social, military, and political network at the expense of the PA and the PLO (Natil, 2012: 169-170).

Hamas began to pose a significant threat to the PLO and the PA as it expanded its social and welfare activities to respond to the needs of thousands of people, whilst due to the state of anarchy in its territories and its weakened institutions, the PA was unable to deliver satisfactory services to its citizens. Hamas demonstrated that it had the capacity to deliver services, and moreover, that it had the capacity to deliver a better model of social and educational provision through sympathetic leadership and professional staff who were aware of the needs of their society. Hamas demonstrated its capacity to become an alternative authority to the PLO and the PA.

The challenge posed by Hamas to the hegemony of the PLO was consolidated by Hamas' sweeping victory in the municipal and legislative elections of 2005–2006, elections that were both fair and transparent. Hamas offered its electoral programme of reform and change, which proved more popular than the various programmes of the PLO factions. Hamas' political victory over the PLO was greatly facilitated by its social network, which served as its political platform. Its social candidates for the legislative elections were famous faces and leaders from amongst Hamas' social activists. The elections strengthened Hamas' political development to become an acceptable player on the political stage. Hamas' victory in the elections had already enabled the movement to enter a new phase of political development based on its resistance and governance strategy.

In fact, Hamas' victory simultaneously turned the tables on Israel, the USA, the PA, and some Arab countries of Egypt and Jordan in particular. It also put pressure on Hamas to demonstrate its capacity to run PA institutions, which were entirely dependent on foreign aid. Had Hamas been able to do this, its rival, the secular Fatah movement, the international community, and the majority of the Palestinian people would have thought it a miracle. However, Hamas resolved to govern as a resistance movement, in a strategy that appeared adventurous to many. The movement's 'mixed strategy' was immediately challenged by the international community, led by the USA and Israel, who exploited humanitarian aid as a 'carrot and stick' strategy, and it was also challenged by inter-factional rejections. In line with its manifesto, Hamas refused to compromise any part of its political ideology and its mission of liberating all historical Palestine, for the sake of corrupt and politicised western funding, or 'aid', as the movement described it in its literature.

Scope of Study

This study considers the existing literature emphasising a narrow, classical definition of Hamas as a resistance/liberation group according to its ideological goals and structure, the geopolitical environment, and the organisational transformation of the movement from armed struggle to democratic politics (Dudouet, 2009). As a liberation/resistance movement, Hamas has an organisational hierarchy and a leadership structure; it exploits violence for political ends, has a degree of geographical area control, and is independent from the official authority control. Hamas also challenged the Palestinian authority's monopoly over legitimate coercive force.

However, resistance/liberation movements as non-state actors became active on the international arena. For instance, after the outbreak of the second uprising in 2000, Hamas, as an unofficial authority, threatened the Palestinian official authority and its monopoly of legitimate coercive power (Schanzer, 2008: 49-63). Non-state groups and resistance movements have become significant actors in world politics, as following the end of the cold war and indeed the 'war on terror'; states are no longer exclusive players on the international scene.

During this period, many scholars have published work on contemporary liberation/resistance movements, and Hamas has been studied from two different but traditional disciplinary perspectives: 'Islamist' and 'terrorist', and from the perspective of a social organisation advocating an Islamic state based on Sharia law (Gunning, 2007: Introduction). As a result, a large amount of literature on Hamas has been published in the last few years. These publications appeared as a result of Hamas' political victory, and more recently its military takeover of the Gaza Strip, when Hamas defeated the PA's forces and overturned their long years of political hegemony. However, there is little literature that covers Hamas' political transition from militarism to governance. In a recent book by Paul McGeough: *Kill Khalid: The Failed Mossad Assassination of Khalid Mishal and the Rise of Hamas* (2009), McGeough provides a biography of Khalid Mishal, as well as a history of Hamas. The book ends prior to the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2009. A book was written by Jonathon Schanzer called *Hamas vs. Fatah: the struggle for Palestine* (2008). Schanzer did not tackle the concept of governance of Hamas and the movement's political development from resistance to governance after its electoral victory. Schanzer only addressed the contemporary story of fragmentation in Palestine between Hamas and

Fatah. He also provided a fresh account of the Palestinian internal battle to control the Palestinian identity over the past two decades.

The most important work written on Hamas is by Azzam Tamimi: *Hamas Unwritten Chapters* (2007). However, he did not address the challenges of Hamas' governing concepts and the political development of the movement from resistance to governance after its electoral victory. There is further literature published in this context on Hamas, such as Gunning (2007), who describes new aspects of Hamas' democratic approach to selecting its leaders, and examines Hamas' victory in the elections of 2006. Hroub's book, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide* (2006), provides detailed information on Hamas' goals and tactics. The book by Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement* (2010), was also written from different perspectives and depended mainly on hundreds of interviews over a number of years. It presented analysis of a number of developments due to Hamas' victory and subsequent events until 2009. It highlighted analytically the activities of Hamas' social, political, and military activities. However, I will further present details about Hamas' differences, the challenges facing the Palestinian reconciliation, and the impact of the Palestinian Youth movement on Hamas and Fatah. There have been no studies of the different phases of Hamas' political development process that emphasise the move from military resistance into governance, neither have existing publications discussed in detail Hamas' 'mixed strategy' of resistance and governance.

More importantly, Sara Roy's book, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (2011), seeks to study mainly on the social sector of the Islamic or the Islamist movement in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This study seeks to challenge the conventional frame of references that defines Hamas only as a terrorist organisation. It is also presented from the political economic perspective. The crux and the scope of the study is the social sector. The book tackled a number of social and political developments in the Gaza Strip due to Hamas' victory in 2006, its violent takeover in 2007, and the Israeli war in 2008. In other words, Sara focuses on the book mainly on the social services as an important source of influence that Hamas had with the public. The core of this book attempts to fill in this gap by examining four lines as follows:

- The social and economic sector
- Interrelationships between the social and political sectors
- Critical internal process of change within Hamas over the last 15 years

- The characteristics of a future Islamic society and body politics in Palestine

It seems this work by Sara is complementary to her books, *Failing peace: Gaza and the Palestinian conflict* and *The political Economy of De-development*. These two books were written from a political economic perspective.

I will bring different views about the different phases of Hamas' political development process that emphasise the move from military resistance into governance, as existing publications have not discussed in detail Hamas' 'mixed strategy' of resistance and governance before and after the Arab Spring. This book presents the political changes made by Hamas from a peace studies' perspective, which includes the structural changes that took place within Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip as a result of Hamas' transition into political authority. This transition occurred despite the military takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas in 2007, and the Israeli military operations in 2009, 2012, and 2014. This book also examines the new dimensions and phases of Hamas' political development after its challenges of victory in the elections, Palestinian division, and the setbacks of the Arab Spring. The author will present different views about the experiences of Hamas in governance, and its challenges, practices, and theories after the military takeover, Palestinian division and the setbacks of the Arab Spring. Finally, this text provides an in-depth illustration of Hamas' mixed strategy and tactics between governance and resistance.

I have also relied on a variety of primary and secondary sources for my research. I reviewed the most up-to-date literature and publications on Hamas that emerged in response to the dramatic events in Palestinian politics after Hamas' political victory in the elections. During my field work (2005–2008) I reviewed Hamas' literature, including its statements, watched the development of Hamas' media network (Al Aqsa TV, Alqsa Radio, *Palestine newspaper*, *Risala newspaper*, and logged on to a number of its websites. I also conducted a number of interviews. To enrich the study, I will draw on my own experience of living through the events of the last two decades, as well as my personal observations and interaction as a civil society activist who was born in the Gaza Strip and has lived most of his life there. During this time I observed the most significant events in Gaza: the elections, Hamas' government, and the takeover of Gaza. Rather than relying solely on secondary literature or texts, my account will reflect my socio-cultural background as a Palestinian citizen born in the Gaza Strip and brought up amidst its complex culture, closely

watching the events of the first uprising that marked the birth of Hamas in 1987, and its rapid and wide growth.

I observed first-hand the impact of Hamas on Palestinian society, and witnessed the effect of its image as a provider of social welfare services, and as a religious movement advocating a better society based on Islamic morality. As noted earlier, its emergence presented a serious challenge and threat to the dominance of Palestinian politics by the secular PLO. During the seven years of the first uprising, Hamas infuriated the secular factions of the PLO with its fiery religious rhetoric, political slogans and statements, its marches of masked-men, its rapid recruitment, and the mass communication campaigns carried out at mosques. I also witnessed the advent of the Palestinian Authority and its measures to crackdown on Hamas after the movement rejected the Oslo agreement, and the efforts made by the PA to hinder Hamas' progress in implementing its programmes.

More importantly, I witnessed and experienced bitterly the failure of the peace process that was supposed to lead to an independent Palestinian state and the impact of the failure on the outbreak and events of the second uprising. This uprising strengthened those Palestinian militant factions that rejected any resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and subsequent actions by these militant groups resulted in the collapse of PA institutions. The PA could not respond rapidly to the social and economic demands and needs of the desperate residents of the Palestinian territories; it was dramatically weakened by Israeli activity, as well as by the deteriorating economic situation.

Before taking over the Strip, Hamas, on the other hand, proved that it could deliver a model of social service managed by the professional. Hamas, however, was also never subjected to the same level of public scrutiny as the PA, because the movement had no official standing before governing the Strip. Hamas was never accountable in terms of running a government institution, nor was it required to demonstrate its responsibility and transparency to the public. Its quality of performance and delivery was never scrutinised. It was characterised by a collective approach to leadership that was able to deliver a good number of successive leaders. It was clear too that the targeting of its leaders by Israel for assassination or arrest actually encouraged rather than deterred gifted candidates from proposing themselves for leadership. The Palestinian national and secular movement, on the other hand, could not deliver that quality of leadership, because for more than thirty years it had been controlled by the man who personified it, Yasser Arafat. Consequently, the PLO was severely shaken by the death of Yasser Arafat.

I also witnessed Hamas' victory in the Palestinian elections, and the subsequent military confrontation between Fatah and Hamas in the streets of Gaza. Hamas used its military weapons against the PA to govern the Gaza Strip by force in the summer of 2007, which led to the isolation of Hamas in Gaza by the international community, despite the later conflicts in 2009-2014, such as Israel's war on the Gaza Strip.

Book structure

The book is organised into nine chapters. Following this chapter, the next chapter explores the development of the Gaza Strip's social structure, which contributed to the expansion of the ideology of the MBs and sowed the seeds for Hamas' future emergence. Chapter three assesses the birth or restructure of Hamas from the 'womb' of the MB. Chapter four examines the growth of Hamas' social welfare services into a threat to the official state welfare system of the Palestinian Authority. Chapter five explores the external leadership role played by Hamas abroad in terms of survival and expansion in spite of discrepancies and a rift within the internal leadership of Hamas. Chapter six debates the political development of Hamas as a result of the movement's running of the Palestinian Authority following its electoral victory. Chapter seven covers Hamas' military takeover of the Gaza Strip by defeating the official Palestinian Authority forces, which thus divided Palestinian society. Chapter eight covers how Hamas' governance was affected by the setbacks of the Arab Spring and the failure of the Palestinian reconciliation (2011-2015). Chapter nine concludes the essential remarks of the book, summarising Hamas' gradual political transition from resistance to governance, its challenges, and its impact on the social and political life of the Gaza Strip (2000-15).

CHAPTER TWO

THE WAY TO HAMAS: REVIVAL OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN GAZA STRIP (1967-1980)

Introduction

This chapter also examines the growth and expansion of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood society (MB) in Palestine, and its resistance against the Zionist project. This chapter will present a historical overview of the socio-economic and political history of Gaza, so that the reader can understand the historical context from which Hamas emerged as a religious and political movement in the 1980s. It also highlights the socio-economic and political changes that occurred after the establishment of Israel, along with its policy of expelling thousands of Palestinians from their homes and properties to become refugees. Subsequently, it also covers Egyptian administration over the Gaza Strip, which filled in the political and legal vacuum after the establishment of Israel in parts of historical Palestine. The chapter then moves on to review the military policies and regulations imposed by the Israeli occupation on the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which adversely affected the lives of the Gaza population, and divided the society into rich and poor, weak and powerful.

This chapter also traces the growth of the secular nationalist movement, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), its resistance against the MB inside and outside the occupied Palestinian territories, and the challenges it faced when it increasingly adopted a moderate position in relation to its future and goals, culminating in the acceptance of a two-state solution, which created 'space' for resistance movements, including the MB.

However, this chapter provides a brief historical overview of MB that participated in resisting the Zionist movement before the

establishment of Israel. The Zionist movement used the suffering of Jews in Europe to intensify their immigration to Palestine during the Second World War. In 1939, the Jewish population numbered over 445,000 out of a total population of about 1.5 million; almost 30% of the total population in comparison to less than 10% twenty years earlier. Similarly, by 1939, Jewish land holdings had risen fourfold to represent almost 1.5 million dunums out of a total area of 26 million dunums (Sherbok and El Alami, 2002: 28). Zionists also intensified diplomatic efforts to convince superpowers such as the USA and the Soviet Union of their project in Palestine. The Arab Palestinians received little support from Egypt, and from its political and religious groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood Society – the MB. The MB was the only Egyptian religious and political group that had expanded its work beyond Egyptian borders into Palestine by the early 1940s. The MB aimed to recruit Palestinian youths against the Zionist project and the British mandate in Palestine (Tamimi, 2007: 3). The MB's expansion into Palestine came during a very crucial and difficult period when the Zionist project already presented a dangerous threat to Arab Palestinian identity.

Muslim Brotherhood Society (MB)

The MB was established in March 1928 by the Islamic cleric Hassan al-Banna in the city of Ismailia in Egypt. The MB grew and expanded through Ismailia, which was a route for Gazans on their way to the Egyptian capital Cairo, and to other major cities. The MB called for a return to the traditional teachings and morals of Islam before it entered politics. Its project was an endeavour to change the Ummha "nation", beginning with the individual, moving to the family, and culminating finally with society as a whole. The MB described itself as a political and social revolutionary movement that rejected Western influence (Tamimi, 2007: 3-6).

The MB called for a return to original Islam, and dedicated itself to creating a global Islamic movement whose members would cooperate with each other throughout the world on the basis of a shared religious world view: the spread of Islam. The MB's political and social theories were developed to actively pursue the establishment of a Muslim regime that would serve as the basis for re-establishing the Caliphate. The Caliphate is the rule of all

Muslims. It called for a constitution based on the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*, as well as the precedents set forth by the first four 'rightly-guided' Caliphs' (Militant Islam Monitoring: 2006,). The Quran and Sunnah are the religious teaching for Muslims.

The MB viewed secular Egyptian culture as immoral, decadent, and atheistic, maintaining that "Islam hooah al-hal" (Islam is the solution to all Egypt and mankind's ills). By 1938, the MB's leader, Al-Banna, called on King Farouk of Egypt to dissolve Egypt's political parties, as they were corrupt and were dividing the country. The MB's tactics then began to change. From working within the system, they began advocating armed revolutionary struggle to achieve change. The MB established guerilla training camps in the Mukatam Hills overlooking Cairo, as well as in parts of southern Egypt, with members of the Egyptian officer corps (some affiliated with Nasser's Free Officers' Movement) providing training as early as 1940 (Military Review, July -August 2003).

Influenced by the spread of the group in Egypt in the 1940s, 17 Palestinian scholars from Gaza's most *notable* families who used to dominate trade with Egypt established a branch of the MB in the 1940s. In the Gaza Strip, the MB was founded with the same rigid structure as its Egyptian 'mother', with centralised decision-making by spiritual leaders reflecting its ideological background as a force for political Islam. The MB's Gaza group succeeded in attracting a number of Muslim scholars and Imams, encouraging the Gazan community to hold Islam as a major focus for their daily lives. The MB also called for the adoption of *Islam* in accordance with its charter that states that: "Jihad is the only way to achieve these goals" (Militant Islam Monitoring: 2006, June 16). The MB established its main office in the Al Remal quarter of central Gaza City, which was visited by the founder and spiritual leader of the movement, Hassan Al Banna, in 1947 (Milton, 1996: 40). The MB rejected the UN partition resolution 181 on 29 November 1947 (the division of historical Palestine into two states: the Jewish state of Israel, and the Arab state of Palestine). The MB rejected the partition plan on religious grounds rather than political ones. The MB's members and branches increased and expanded, as recorded by Kalid Mshael, Hamas' political office:

The Muslim Brotherhood movement started in the 1940s. Its first sections (central or organisational unit) were founded in 1945, in Haifa, Yafa, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Hebron. When the 1948 war erupted, the number of Muslim Brotherhood sections exceeded twenty. Later, geography imposed

a new reality for the Muslim Brotherhood. Members who were in Gaza became closer to Egypt and those who were in the West Bank became closer to Jordan. This movement participated in the 1948 war. (*Al Hayat*, 2003).

Several thousand members of the MB participated in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. This increased the organisation's stature and recruiting ability, cementing further its relationship with the Egyptian Army (Militant Islam Monitoring: 2006). However, the MB and fighters from different parts of the Arab world could not prevent the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. Moreover, they could not prevent the expulsion of indigenous people from their homes and lands, making them refugees in surrounding countries, or seeing them displaced within what was left of Palestine. Neither Palestinians nor the Arab states could accept that 'Palestine', along with its people, had vanished as a geopolitical entity from the map of the Middle East after the establishment of Israel in 1948. They also could not accept the continuing refugee problem as a result of the war and the establishment of Israel.

The Palestinian Catastrophe (Nakba): 1948

The creation of Israel restructured the map of the Middle East following the forced expulsion by Israel of more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and land. They then became refugees in different places: the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip. Israel declared its own Jewish state, which included 78% of historical Palestine, leaving the remaining 22% divided between two separated geographical entities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Israeli government rejected United Nations Resolution 149, which allowed Palestinians the right to return to their former homes, as noted by David McDowell:

The Israeli leadership had already decided against allowing any back, and on 16 June 1948, the Israeli Cabinet adopted this position formally. In the words of Moshe Sharett, Israeli Foreign Minister: "They will not return. That is our policy. They are not returning "(McDowall, 1995:27).

In addition to the Israeli expulsion of Palestinian refugees, Israel prevented political and geographical connections between the two parts: the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The West Bank was

annexed on 13 December 1948 to become part of Transjordan, and the inhabitants of the West Bank were granted Jordanian citizenship (Brand, 1988: 22-25). The population of the Gaza Strip was governed by an Egyptian military administration. The Gazan population, however, now included some 220,000-250,000 refugees who had been driven from their homes and had fled to the Gaza Strip, thus tripling the population (Roy, 1995).

The indigenous population of the Gaza Strip was estimated at only some 60–80,000 people before the war (Hilal, 1992: 33-74). The indigenous population of *notable* families (Ayan) became a minority, although they still controlled trade, agricultural lands, and local resources. Some Ayan families also competed amongst themselves for social prestige and power. For example, families such as Al Shawwa, who had their original roots in Gaza with considerable economic and political power, and Abu Shaban, who had a strong religious background, competed over the management of the Al Sharia system, hiring teachers and preachers for Islamic schools and mosques. In addition, the Aqa and Al Faraa families had for a long time competed over the running of the municipal council of Khanounis city and its suburbs (Edwards, 1996: 36). These economic and socio-political rivalries were further intensified with the impact of the influx of refugees and the Egyptian Administration in the Gaza Strip, which started in 1949 (Astal, 2004: 30).

Egyptian Administration: 1949-1966

The legal and political vacuum in the Gaza Strip was filled by Egyptians who established three authorities: executive, judicial, and legislative, each headed by a military council, which administered the daily affairs of the enlarged Gazan population. Egypt treated the Gaza Strip as a military zone administrated by a military governor who had the power to appoint and dismiss mayors of any municipalities such as Gaza, Dire Balah, Khanounis, and Rafah (Astal, 2004: 30). The system was similar to that of the Ottomans and the British.

The creation of the state of Israel separated the MB in the West Bank, now annexed to Jordan, from the organisation in the Gaza Strip, which was aligned with the group in Egypt (Tamimi, 2007: 5). The MB in the Gaza Strip found fertile ground in which to disseminate its political and social revolutionary theories among

the refugees who were living through an extreme humanitarian crisis. The MB tried to recruit refugees to its social moral principles and to the political revolutionary ideology of 'Islamising' society, despite Egyptian military control over the Gaza Strip. The MB advocated Islamic religious thought and principles as a basis for social change, by reaching hearts and minds via Qur'anic and Hadith verses, and involving people in social events, religious ceremonies, and sports activities at local venues in the various refugee camps (Gunning, 2007: 27).

Thus, as a result of the changes created by the political and economic environment, the MB easily maintained its close relationship with the community. This greatly assisted the MB in gaining a foothold within Gaza's social and political scene, and particularly in gaining a hold over the young male refugees who had lost their land in Palestine. Young refugees promised loyalty to Islam, rather than to the regimes that had failed to prevent the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Young refugees were further encouraged by what was preached in mosques and taught in schools, and they were loyal to the MB.

With the growing influence of the MB on the refugees, the Egyptian administration imposed new measures and restrictions on the movement's eleven branches in the Gaza Strip, and its sub-branches in local refugee camps. These measures were taken after the Egyptian regime was accused of assassinating the MB's spiritual leader, Hassan Al Banna, in Cairo in 1949. Al Banna had represented a genuine challenge to the secular regime, when the popularity of the MB surged after the Israeli-Arab war. In late 1949, to avoid restrictions in Gaza, the MB reorganised its group within a centre for religious education called the 'Unification Association' (Mishael & Sele, 2000: 17). This enabled the MB to continue operating in Gaza. However, the failed assassination attempt of President Jamal Abed Nasser in Alexandria on 26 October 1954 by members of the MB resulted in the movement being banned, with 18,000 of its members being arrested (Milton, 1996:47).

The new Egyptian policy placed the MB's estimated 1,000 members under direct threat of arrest or, at the very least, under the threat of questioning. The expansion of the MB, its recruitment of new young male recruits, and its preaching to existing members were all at risk (Idwan, 1991:21). The MB had no other option but to operate secretly and to go underground. This new political

environment made communication and the exchange of information between the MB in Cairo and its members in Gaza very problematic. Under these new conditions, the MB decided to "renounce resistance". This led some Palestinian activists like Khalel Al Wazir and Riad Zanoun, who had received military training at MB bases in Gaza, to join Yasser Arafat in setting up the Palestine National Liberation Movement, Fatah, in the late 1950s (Gunning, 2007: 28).

The political significance of the MB both in Egypt and Gaza was further weakened when Gamal Abdul Nasser came to power in Egypt, and with the emerging popularity of his secular Arab nationalism. The new Egyptian regime also supported and encouraged the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964 (Mohamad, 1997). The MB's political significance in the Gaza Strip declined to the extent that the group virtually disappeared, only to re-emerge after the Israeli Occupation of the Gaza Strip in 1967 (Al Astal, 2004:30).

Israeli Occupation: 1967-1986

On 7 June 1967, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, became territory under Israeli Occupation. The Israeli military administration exercised control over the population by its military power, but allowed Palestinians to exercise their religious rights (Beinen and Hajjar: 2001). In effect, power was in the hands of the military governor who controlled Palestinian local institutions. The military governor was responsible for appointing and dismissing the mayors and heads of councils. In the Gaza Strip, the governor appointed four mayors in the main cities, eight heads for rural councils and three heads for local committees in three refugee camps in the Gaza Strip (Mukhimer, 2005).

The mayors and heads appointed by the military governor were all from notable families; this policy of Israeli Occupation maintained a divided Palestinian society between the landowning *notable* families, peasants, and refugees. However, from 1969, the Israeli Occupation authority allowed Palestinian workers to work in Israel. The Palestinian national resistance movement opposed this decision and attempted to prevent Palestinian workers from joining the Israeli labour force (Beinen and Hajjar: 2001). It was during this period that the influence of the secular Palestinian

national resistance organisations began to grow amongst young Palestinians.

Growth of the National Movement

In 1969, the PLO was restructured to become an umbrella for some ten Palestinian nationalist groups, headed by the Fatah National Movement under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, who remained in this position for about 36 years (Mohamad, 1997). The PLO did not include any Islamist factions, largely because of the determining role played in its creation by the Egyptian regime that had a long history of opposition to the MB. This was despite the fact that, as noted above, a number of the founders of the Fatah movement, such as Arafat's deputies, Kalil Wazeer and Riad Zanon, had received training at MB camps in the Gaza Strip (Hart, 1984: 33).

Unlike the MB, the secular nationalists of the PLO had been able to recruit and strengthen the organisation amongst the Palestinian diaspora in an approach that was denied to the MB. As a consequence, during the first decade of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, political Islam, as represented by the MB, ceased to play a significant role. During this period, the MB's actions were limited to re-establishing their bases of support in an attempt to regain some of the ground they had lost to the national movement (Tamimi 2007: 5). They were very cautious and did not take part in any activities that might anger the Israeli authorities. They would meet and pray in the mosques rather than engage openly in public. They had neither power nor finance, and were dependent on private donations. They were not in a position to challenge the dominance of the secular PLO, which had succeeded in attracting the support and commitment of the younger generation of refugees in the Gaza Strip (Milton 1996:94).

In the late 1960s, secular groups began to launch raids against the Israeli occupation; their aim was to liberate Palestine without any kind of Islamist agenda, despite the fact that Palestinian society was Muslim by nature, social structure, cultural roots, and practices. The MB was not able to offer the people of Gaza an alternative to the Fedayeen 'national fighters' philosophy, the only concern of which was to crush Israelis in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Their dream was to return to the homes that had