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What explains the resilience of Muslim Brotherhood movements? An analysis of Hamas' organizing strategies

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to define a comprehensive organizational approach to explain the resilience of Muslim Brotherhood movements such as Hamas. Scholarship highlights the importance of ideological and religious identity, personalistic loyalty, informal interaction, and the provision of social services for the popularity of these movements. This article examines, in turn, how these mobilizing elements are constructed and translated into organizational practices within three organizing bodies of action: first, the *Da^{c}wa* Apparatus, which crystallizes a professional centralized hierarchy that runs all activities. Second, the Families of the *Da^{c}wa*, which educate and train activists internally. Third, the Family of the Mosque which represents the instance through which these qualified activists externally mobilize the public in their local communities. Grasping the interaction between internal and external forms of organized mobilization is vital to understand Hamas's cohesion, resilience in the face of repression and continuous public outreach in a highly volatile environment.

KEYWORDS Hamas organization; resilience; leadership; learning; localized mobilization

Introduction

Muslim Brotherhood movements (MBMs) have shown in recent times not only a remarkable ability to reconstitute themselves after periods of repression but also to leverage these organizational 'comebacks' into subsequent electoral victories. Hamas, in particular, has weathered a highly volatile environment for over three decades now, during which it managed to win elections, ascend to office, and claim the leadership of the Palestinian 'resistance.' Scholarship concurs that the mobilizing traits of MBMs such as Hamas can explain their high degree of cohesion, continuity and public outreach in adverse circumstances, yet disagrees as to which of these elements are more relevant. So far, researchers have proposed religious and ideological identity, personalistic loyalty, informal interaction with the public, and the provision of social services

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as keys to MBMs' success. Instead of focusing on any one of these mobilizing factors, this article will explore the organizing element that links them, taking Hamas as a case study. The 'organizing element' conceptualizes the way Hamas builds and organizes itself through its centralized hierarchy and sub-ordinate structures, shedding new light on the question of mobilizing factors by approaching them through their translation into organizational practices.

The literature on MBM mobilization can be broadly divided into two camps. The first centres on *internal mobilization*, i.e., it emphasizes the role of religious-ideological encouragement of members through educational programmes and training as well as the patriarchal practices of leaders to explain movements' *cohesion* and *continuity* (al-Anani, 2016; Mitchell, 1993; Vidino, 2020). The second focusses on the *external mobilization* of Islamic social institutions (ISIs) – such as clinics and charities – to explain their *public outreach* (e.g., Clark, 2004; Gunning, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Roy, 2011; Wickham, 2002; Wiktorowicz, 2001). These forms of mobilization have traditionally been approached independently from each other, leading to different overall assessments of MBMs. Internal mobilization studies attest to the importance of religion and ideology in their success, while external mobilization studies generally rule out that any significant religious, ideological or political gains are made through the provision of services to the community. The premise is that religion and ideology play a larger role within the groups' internal domain of influence as opposed to the national public sphere, where they are subject to state repression.

This study attempts to bridge the two traditions of inquiry, combining internal and external forms of mobilization into a framework of organizing practices within which mobilizing traits – whether material or 'ideal' in nature – are embedded. To this end, it leverages the organizing element to (1) explain MBMs' cohesion and continuity – thus problematizing the centrality given to religion, ideology and personalistic loyalty in this regard – and (2) in order to uncover the political element of social services provision in the public sphere.

The paper draws on a unique dataset, collected in Gaza between 2004 and 2005 and between 2012 and 2013. It encompasses Hamas's organized *Da^{c}wa* Apparatus (DA) structure and its two subordinate structures – the Families of the *Da^{c}wa* (FoDs) and the Family of the Mosque (FoM). The DA corresponds to Hamas's professional centralized hierarchy, which runs all sub-ordinate structures and branches and their activities. The FoDs educate and train activists *internally* along a system of different stages that qualifies them for functional positions in the movement. Finally, the FoM is responsible for co-ordinating activist work to *externally* mobilize citizens in their own local communities.

The data were collected from a variety of sources, including interviews with Hamas founders and activists,[1] the participant observation of FoDs and FoM groups, field notes, and official documents monitoring and evaluating activists' education and training. A key feature of the data is the inclusion of several distinct organizational and institutional features such as the hierarchy of

command, progression processes in stages, dynamics of upward mobility, relations of authority and socialization processes. Through the insights of organization theory, I will conceptualize and explain how and to what extent Hamas has been an active agent of its own resilience, despite high levels of political repression, and how it was able to reconstitute itself after periods of crackdown.

In the following sections, I begin by presenting the outlines of Hamas's organization before theorizing for its structures. Following this, I introduce Hamas's three organizational structures: the FoDs, the DA and the FoM. I then offer a critical analysis of the mobilizing traits by highlighting the organizing element. Before concluding, I link internal and external processes of mobilization to propose a new understanding of Hamas's organizational strength.

Taking over the Muslim Brotherhood: Towards organizational strength

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) was founded on 14 December 1987 as the political and military wing of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (PMB) in the context of the First Intifada (1987–93). In ensuing years, Hamas incrementally subsumed the parent organization's institutional infrastructure (Baconi, 2018, p. 21) for two reasons. First, Hamas's active participation in the intifada made the then unpopular Muslim Brotherhood a significant organization in the Palestinian political public sphere (Hroub, 2000, pp. 36–41). Before 1987, the PMB was largely limited to the private realm of socioreligious activities. The second factor relates to an organizational dilemma. The continuity of the nascent organization was on the edge of collapse after Israel 'arrested all Hamas leaders: the first, second, and third leadership ranks in 1989' (al-Shami, personal interview, 2012) – in response to Hamas's kidnapping and killing of Israeli soldiers (Roy, 2011, p. 29). As a result, Mousa Abu Marzook, who had a PhD in construction management, took control of Hamas in 1991 and 1992 (al-Shami, personal interview, 2012; see also Roy, 2011, p. 254 [note 49]). Empirical evidence shows that Abu Marzook, who was elected as the first leader of Hamas Political Bureau (1992–96), combined the socio-religious legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood with a modern perspective on management and organization. A Hamas leader who witnessed the restructuring emphasized that the aim was to build a 'strong organization' to enhance Hamas's 'continuity and efficiency on a modern basis' (al-Shami, personal interview, 2012).

Since the implementation of these organizational strategies, Hamas survived two massive repressive crackdowns by the Palestinian Authority (PA) during the Oslo peace process between 1995 and 2000 and after 2007 in the West Bank. Hamas won the local and legislative elections between 2004 and 2006 and has managed to attain a leading position in the polls on numerous occasions since (the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Poll no. 70, 2018; no. 56, 2015; no. 46, 2012; no. 26. 2007).

Theorizing organization strength

From the standpoint of organization strength theory, Hamas's resilience cannot simply be interpreted as a function of the external conditions they faced; instead, we need to know how the organization's agency was capable of navigating environmental constraints and influence their performance (Bizzarro et al., 2018; Tavits, 2012). Put differently, internal dynamics are the key to understand Hamas's strength. For the purpose of this study, organizational strength is empirically and conceptually operationalized into three attributes: Centralized professional hierarchy (the DA), the learning system for members (the FoDs), and localized organs for mobilizing the public (the FoM) (Figure 1).

Firstly, Hamas's strong centralized hierarchy is based on professional personnel, electoral legitimacy, and geographical representation. Well-educated and trained personnel make more competent administrators in terms of election campaigns, improving the organization's resistance to political repression, for instance, by hampering infiltration. Internal electoral legitimacy endorses the group's stability and commitment to organizing its affairs (Taylor, 2010, pp. 6–7), while making the organization a more closely integrated entity due to the vested interests of the staff in its survival (Tavits, 2012, p. 86). The rotation of power controls leadership selection, limits the tenure of rulers and streamlines decision-making through institutionalized procedures (Finer, 2002, p. 14). Prioritizing the 'system, not the man,' (Taylor, 2010, p. 7) helps Hamas cope with environmental challenges and fosters rational accountability for its actions (Tavits, 2012, p. 84). Furthermore, the extension and representation of the hierarchy enable the group to facilitate, run and evaluate the work of its branches and the execution of national activities. This in turn reduces the arbitrariness of social interactions with the public, which proceed along planned actions through specialized organs in specific localities.

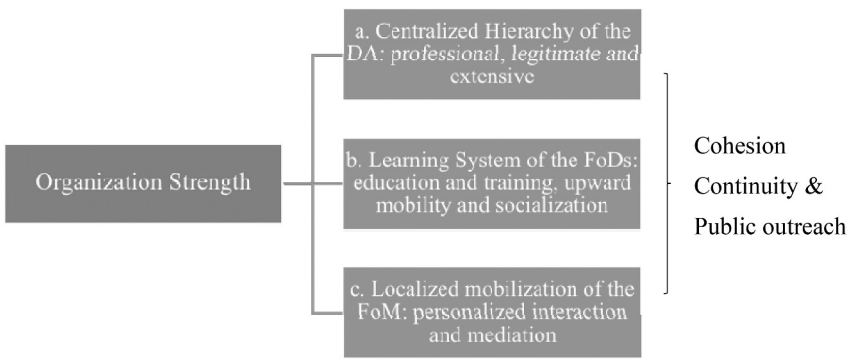

Figure 1. Organizational strength for internal and external mobilization.

Secondly, education and training serve Hamas's hierarchy as well as subordinate structures of qualified cadre. To this end, not only is a large membership a factor in organization strength (Tavits, 2012, p. 85) but also the competence of members to efficiently plan and collectively execute programmes and activities. Collective learning synchronizes individual goals with the organization's strategies (Argyris & Schön, 1996, pp. 6–8), generates satisfactory socialization among members within the official confines of the group (al-Anani, 2016, p. 84) and extends itself into the private life of the members' daily interaction. Private socialization in particular instils a sense of friendship and solidarity. This means that motives, whether religious or ideological, are organized within social practices that evolve into tradition or social routines which in turn enhance members' loyalty and signal deeper levels of identification and commitment to the group.

Along these lines, the commitment of members in the face of repression is not constrained by an individualistic rational approach of calculations of benefits and losses (Oberschall, 1994, p. 79), but through complex collective incentives within the context of constructed social meanings and values. Argyris and Schön (1978, p. 288) stipulate that the strength of a learning system is made apparent not by shaping 'the choice of endangering one's life and becoming a moral hero', but rather, by informing a vision of 'the world for which one would be dying'. This type of learning is not a sudden lesson but instead occurs through slow processes of progression in stages that distinguish Hamas – as an MBM – not only from business organizations (broadly examined in organization theory) but also from other Islamic and secular movements.

Finally, the institutional factor of organizational strength is not limited to how the group organizes its hierarchy and the substructure of its learning system, but also in how it mobilizes the public in local communities. The literature on organizational strength equates local organs with successful mobilization as something more than 'financial resources for electoral success' (Tavits, 2012, p. 90). Localized mobilization serves Hamas in terms of personalized interaction, information, visibility, persuasion, and understanding local preferences. To this end, Hamas channels all of its members in a given area within the organized body of the FoM in the task of mobilizing their local communities. To do this, the FoM builds on the traditions of the Palestinian social order that prioritizes personal interactions and communications in the form of neighbourliness, kinship and friendship. In such traditional contexts, Hamas's local cadres behave as average citizens in their own local communities, bringing the poor and the rich together to transcend class and social status. This helps elicit information about local preferences and needs and offers an early warning of any potential discontent or sources of opposition (Bizzarro et al., 2018, p. 279). This intelligence is especially important in providing easily reachable contacts that can be activated in times of electoral campaigns.

The families of the Da^{c}wa: The 'school' of Hamas

'*ʾUsar al-Da^{c}wa*' (the FoDs) are the incubators of Hamas's internal mobilization. Their main objective is to educate and train Hamas activists. The framework of the FoDs is derived from the 'family system' first conceived by Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the MB in Egypt in 1928. To Al-Banna (2006, p. 534), Each FoD consists of four to five members who work, socialize and support each other as a group:

> Islam is keen on the composition of the families of its people to guide them to the ideals and to strengthen their ties and raise the level of their brotherhood from that of talk and theories to the level of acts and practices. Make sure my brother is a sound building block that is reliable in this construction: Islam.

Al-Banna's concept of the 'family' implies a sense of togetherness, affection, understanding and solidarity that strengthens the unity of members to work as a group and perform common objectives. Here, al-Banna's distinction between 'talk and theories' and 'acts and practices' imply that the work of the families does not merely lie in ideological and religious narratives but on how they are translated into organizational and social practices. Additionally, the making of the Muslim brother as a 'sound building block' of the MB construction prioritizes the rule of institutional collectivity over personalistic ascendancy. MB scholar Ali Abdul-Halim Mahmud (1990, pp. 130–151) stipulates that the ultimate aim of the FoDs is to train organizational elites of *naqīb* activists who would then be sent to work in different branches around Egypt.

This description of the role of the FoDs is consistent with Hamas's own conception but differs in one crucial organizational factor. Hamas's current FoDs are not exclusively aimed at fostering *naqīb* activists, although all Hamas members – including its leaders – are supposed to have passed through this process. Hamas has, instead, three FoDs that aim to prepare four different ranks of activists: *nasīr* (the supporter), *ʾakh* (Muslim brother), *naqīb* and *raqīb*. Each rank reflects a certain role within Hamas (Figure 2).

The family of the supporter is Hamas's first stage in turning the supporter into a full member. This pre-membership stage is based on curriculum as well as organizational learning that takes between six months and a year. As well as learning parts of Quran and Hadith, my interviewees highlighted two further important books; *The Islamic Call: A Religious Duty as a Human being* by Amin Sadeq (1990) and *What Does my Belonging to Islam Mean?* by Fathi Yakan (1988). Both books highlight the importance of organizational learning and an understanding of the centrality of the group's agency if Muslim brothers are to achieve their goals.

The integration of supporters into Hamas's activities is limited at this stage, pointing to a gradual bottom-up strategy (Jameel, personal interview, 2013). Their commitment, therefore, is not as yet expected to be unwavering. The specific role a given supporter will play within the organization has at this

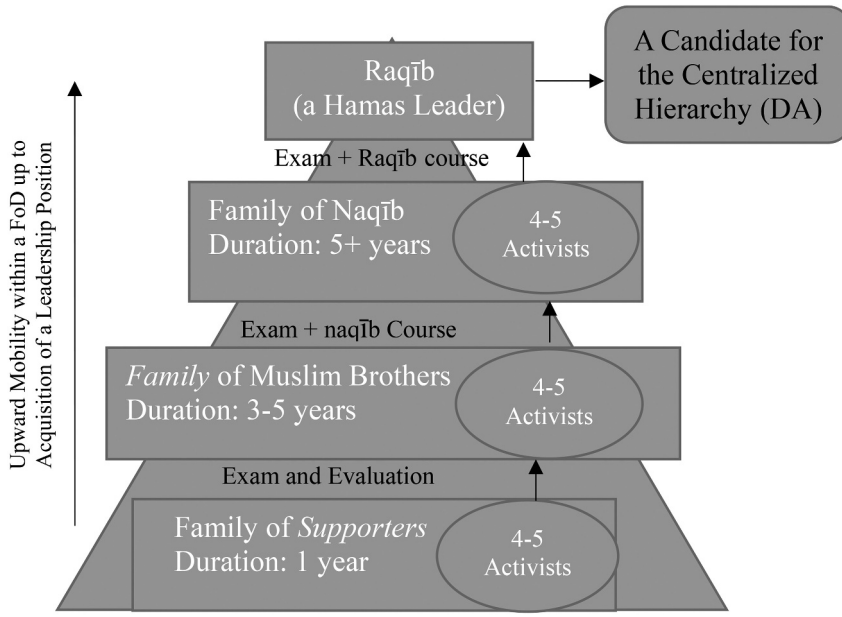

Figure 2. Ranking of Hamas's FoDs and members.

point not been determined and will depend on the evaluation by the amir (head) of the group as well as written and oral exams based on curricula. Successful candidates swear a '*bayᶜa*' or '*mubāyaᶜa*' (oath or pledge) together in front of a Hamas leader, a raqīb in the local region:

> I pledge allegiance before Allah and you, that I will listen and obey in hardship and in ease, in the good and in the bad, and pledge not to dispute the rule of those in authority – and Allah is witness to my words.

The oath is not sworn in relation to the local leader himself, who is merely a witness, but the institution as a whole – 'those in authority.' Once the oath has been sworn, the supporters become Muslim brothers and progress, as a group, into the second stage of the learning system: the Family of the Brother.

The objective of the Family of the Brother is to educate and train the middle-rank level of *naqīb*. Leadership formation starts at this stage, and the new brother may be authorized to lead a family of supporters. Traversing the learning system at this stage becomes more of a challenge. This is visible in the amount of time – three years – that is required to fulfil the obligations and in the weekly evaluation that the Education Committee, the branch of Hamas responsible for the learning system, demands from the head of the group. More parts and excerpts from the Quran and Hadith are added but simple memorization and repetition is no longer sufficient. At this stage, the brothers

must also engage with the semantics and interpretation of the required parts. Meanwhile, MB teachings – mainly based on al-Banna's letters – are now added to the curriculum as part of a process that help differentiate the activities of Hamas from those of other Islamic and secular groups. The Education Committee itself writes the exams and the final evaluation – based on a weekly evaluation by the amir. In doing so, Hamas accords more importance to institutional as opposed to personalistic rule, thereby reducing the bonds of personal dependence between the group's members and the amir of the group.

Successful brothers do not automatically proceed to the next stage but become eligible as candidates for further training in the naqīb course. This course takes two to three months and consists of organizational learning and lectures about the role of the naqīb. Knowledge of how to execute various activities becomes a determining factor in this course, as the naqīb rank is responsible for implementing all of Hamas's activities. Successful candidates move to the Family of the Naqīb.

The Family of the Naqīb is the final and the most complicated stage in Hamas's learning system. It often lasts up to five years but can take even longer. The objective is to prepare the most highly qualified leader – a raqīb. This is a sensitive position in terms of both leadership and security, given the knowledge that the raqīb will have about Hamas's strategies and internal structures. This stage is the most difficult to pass, and some find it impossible to do so. Knowledge of sophisticated curricula, full commitment and the ability to implement activities are all requirements at this level of leadership formation.

The naqīb activists manage, for instance, the Ṣundūq al-Takāful (or Solidarity Fund), that is, they are responsible for collecting the 2.5 per cent dues from members' monthly incomes for the movement (al-Masri, personal interview, 2012). Al-Banna (2006, p. 543) has emphasized the strategic importance of this fund to support the movement's activities. These donations are counterbalanced by aid distributed by the DA, which donates money to brothers who do not have work and helps them find jobs (al-Masri, personal interview, 2012). Each naqīb is also responsible for managing one or more Family of Brothers.

A Hamas leader – an experienced raqīb – I interviewed stated the ten conditions that qualify a naqīb for a raqīb position: he must (1) possess good knowledge of Quran and its *aḥkām*,[2] (2) be able to manage people, (3) be charismatic, (4) demonstrate total commitment to the movement and its teachings, (5) take part in social and political activism, (6) pay monthly dues (2.5 per cent of earnings), (7) pray regularly in the mosque, especially at dawn,[3] (8) never be reprimanded by the movement, (9) be creative and offer solutions for any problems that might present themselves, and (10) honour his parents (Issa, personal interview, 2013). However, these attributes alone do not guarantee promotion to the level of raqīb, although they do act as a qualification for the final stage in the pathway to becoming one. The

nominees compete for promotion, as positions at this level only become available if the organization requires additional personnel due to growth, death or the imprisonment of other leaders (Ali, personal interview, 2013).

A raqīb is a qualified leader who has passed the learning system and therefore occupies the highest position in Hamas. The position can only be held by those above 26 years of age (Khaled, personal interview, 2012), which indicates that maturity is a key requirement. A Hamas raqīb (Nori, personal interview, 2013) described his role to me:

> To summarize the role of the raqīb, he is a local leader who is active and effective in his local community. He shares the good and the bad times with the people. He tries to support people and to defend their causes and educate the youth. He must be brave in confronting the [Israeli] occupation. He should be an example for others. For instance, al-Rantisi [former head of Hamas in Gaza, assassinated by Israel in 2004] was always in the front lines to confront the occupation. Abu-Aiman Taha [prominent leader in Gaza] was always the first to criticize the [Palestinian] Authority and to break the wall of fear and was the first to pay the price for it. By doing this, the leader can influence the people and lead them. The raqīb aims to make religion part of the public culture. In this way, he helps the Islamic movement from a political standpoint. This ideology should be followed or accompanied by actions on the ground. This is the example that Hamas tries to show.

Thus, the position of raqīb is not only one through which a member achieves prestige. It also represents a commitment to Hamas's causes and principles. Given all these necessary characteristics, one can understand how much is expected of a raqīb in terms of his indefatigable commitment to Hamas regardless of an extremely repressive context. To this end, Hamas elects the personnel for its centralized hierarchy only from the rank of the raqīb.

The Da^{c}wa apparatus

'*Jihāz al-Da^{c}wa*' (the DA) is the centralized hierarchy that administers and manages all Hamas activities. 'Da^{c}wa' does not refer to its literal meaning as missionary or religious teaching but is an umbrella term that encompasses every aspect of Hamas. 'Hamas is the Da^{c}wa Apparatus,' said a Hamas leader in Gaza (Nori, personal interview, 2013). The DA's centralized hierarchy consists of two elected bodies: the shura (legislative) councils and the administrative offices. These bodies manage, evaluate and implement programmes through twelve branches: ISIs, the Education Committee, the Islamic Bloc, the Labour Bloc, Professional Unions, Sport Committees, Social Committees, Reconciliation Committees, the Security Apparatus, the Military Wing, Scouts and the Department of Popular Mobilization (Eid, personal interview, 2013; see also Hroub, 2006, p. 121). In this paper I distinguish between the DA's centralized hierarchy and its subordinate structures of the FoDs and the

FoM on the one hand, and its branches on the other, with emphasis on the former. In the following section, which centres on external mobilization, I will focus on one of its branches by looking at the ISIs in relation to public outreach when discussing the FoM (Figure 3).

Figure 3 shows the centralized hierarchy's electoral and the decision-making processes which in turn guides geographical extension and relationships of authority. Elections, which take place every four years, are divided into four departments: Gaza, the West Bank, prisons (Hamas members in the Israeli jails) and the outside (Hamas members in the diaspora). The Gaza department, as Figure 3 shows, is divided into six larger regions including the Middle Governorate, which in turn is divided into five smaller constituencies such as Bureij, which is then sub-divided into the areas controlled by each main mosque, such as al-Iman Mosque area, which include a number of smaller mosques under each leadership.

The elections are a bottom-up process. In the first stage, voting starts from the mosque area which elects its General Assembly from the raqīb-rank. The General Assemblies then convene to choose the Shura Councils for the small

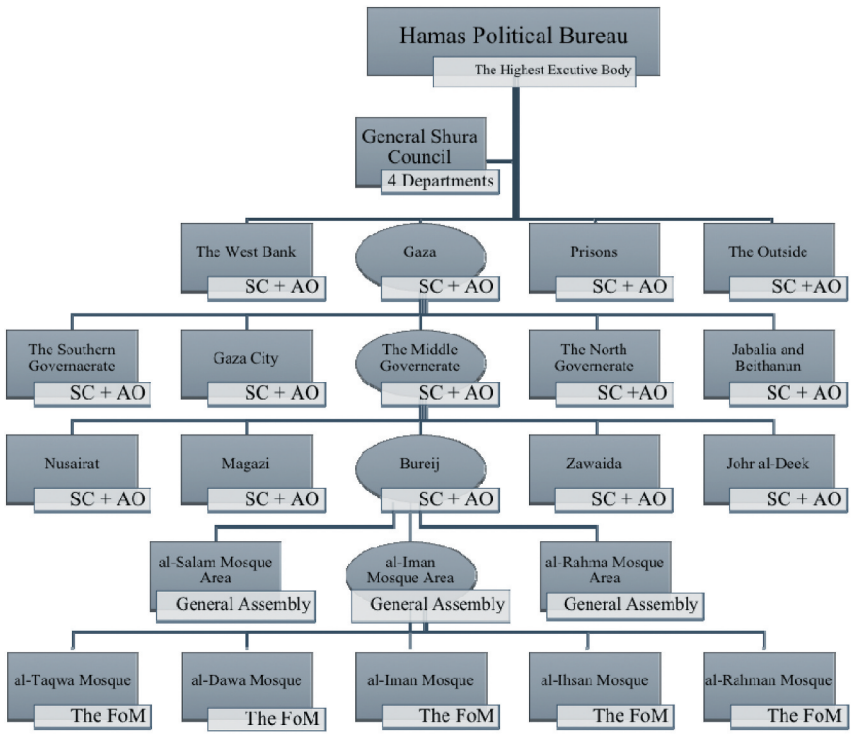

Figure 3. Centralized hierarchy structure of the DA: SC (Shura Council); AO (Administrative Office); FoM (Family of the Mosque).

regions such as Bureij. After that, the General Assemblies are dissolved and the losers become 'reserve personnel' in case of illness, death or imprisonment (Majed, personal interview, 2013). Each elected smaller region Shura council chooses an administrative body from its members, and each administrative body chooses members for the Shura council of the larger region, the Middle Governorate. Then, each of the Shura Councils governing the larger regions choose an administrative body for its region. In the third stage, each large region shura council elects departmental members for the shura council of the department, in this case Gaza. In the final stage, the shura council of each department elects the members of its share of the General Shura Council to the entire movement and the Hamas Political Bureau, the highest executive body – currently led by Ismail Haniyeh.

The basic idea in preparation for the elections is to provide an equal distribution of candidates in each region. By doing this, all regions are equally represented and unified under one institution. The shura councils legislate general strategies and policies and monitor the administrative bodies. Each shura council monitors the administrative office it elects, and the administrative bodies, in turn, make up the executive bodies that make decisions relating to political and social activism; 'they are the elite of the shura councils' (Khaled, personal interview, 2012). One example of how Hamas limits the margin of power of each member in the centralized hierarchy is by making sure that no one can occupy positions in two separate administrative bodies at the same time. If a member of one administrative office is elected to a higher position in a different office, the leader resigns from the previous position and is automatically replaced from the pool of members from the lower office.

Meanwhile, all decision-making is top-down. The subdivisions are hierarchical – which means that higher ranks monitor lower ones but not vice-versa. The system is based on the decision of a qualified majority (50 + 1), and all members are bound to follow the decision. This is also known as the '*ijmāᶜ* [consensus] rule' (Dukhan, personal interview, 2013). An example was Hamas's internal vote on the reconciliation agreement between Meshal and President Mahmud Abbas in Cairo in 2013. Both leaders agreed to form a national unity government led by Abbas. The agreement was not implemented because the majority of the general shura council voted against the decision.

The Family of the Mosque

While the FoDs and the DA show how Hamas's approach internal mobilization, '*Usrat al-Masjid*' (the FoM) explains Hamas's approach to external mobilization. Hamas organizes its qualified members to work together in institutionalized groups, to execute action at local levels and to mobilize the public. The FoM concentrates the activists and organizes them in what

the movement considers as 'mosque districts' which represents an area that incorporates the communities and neighbourhoods around it. The mosque district is geographically the smallest unit of Hamas's administrative extension (see the bottom line in Figure 3). At this level, the objective is to expand and maintain influence and interaction with the people in any given area. All Hamas's activities – such as the provision of social services via the ISIs and direct social engagement such as home visits – are conducted or mediated by the FoM. To emphasize its central role for external mobilization, a former FoM amir said that 'it [the FoM] is the DA [i.e., Hamas] in the local community' (Issa, personal interview, 2012) – which means that at the local level, the FoM implements socio-religious and political programs designed by the DA. The FoM is financed through a monthly budget from the DA and through the members' monthly dues (2.5% of their income) which collected and then put to use by the FoM (Saleh, personal interview, 2013).

In contrast to the FoDs, founded by Hasan al-Banna, I was unable to find any reference to the FoM either in al-Banna's letters or in MB scholarship. That does not mean that the FoM is not present more broadly in MBMs' socio-political practice. Indeed, a Hamas activist went so far as to state that 'the FoM is an invention and innovation of Hamas' (Othman, personal interview, 2013). Another activist suggested that the key role of the FoM emerged in the late 1980s, particularly in the context of the First Intifada (1987–1993), when the mosque became the starting point for Hamas's socio-political activism (al-Shami, personal interview, 2013), mainly in the form of popular protests against the Israeli occupation. The FoM emerged in the context of institutionalization during the intifada, when Hamas aimed, according to Sara Roy, to 'localize and institutionalize [itself] as a political actor and solidify its position within Palestinian society' (Roy, 2011, p. 78). What is the organizational framework and what are the socio-political functions of the FoM?

Interviewing and examining the activities of the amirs and some of the activists of four FoMs in three different areas in Gaza unveiled similar hierarchies, activities and objectives. Vertically, each FoM elects its amir and a board of members, and the amir manages and evaluates the work of the FoM. Each board of members is horizontally representative. Key measures taken to facilitate the FoM's work within the local community include the breakdown of the area in the vicinity of the mosque into small neighbourhoods or sub-areas, each of which is led by a member of this sub-area. For example, the local area surrounding one of the mosques examined is divided into nine smaller segments (Saleh, personal interview, 2013). Additionally, to facilitate its institutional outcomes, the FoM divides its work into various committees covering social, *daʿawiyya*, cultural, sporting and media aspects. Each committee includes a representative activist from each of the nine segments who is familiar with the needs of the local community in which she or he grew up (Amjad, personal interview, 2013).

This local aspect offers the FoM a degree of independence, allowing it to decide on activities that are particularly relevant for each specific area or sub-area. My participant observation of FoM activities revealed that this interaction does not include direct political and ideological engagement in order to be as inclusive as possible for different constituencies. Based on this notion, Roy concludes that Hamas's inclusive social support structure underpins policies of civic empowerment and '[does] not discriminate according to constituencies' ideological vision or social class' (p. 170). Hamas is able to neutralize 'ideological' and 'political' undercurrents of the FoM since the mobilization of the people is not expected to lead to automatic membership, which is based on a longer process of education and training via the learning system of the FoDs. However, the existence of a political element or function became obvious in the local and the legislative elections between 2004 and 2006, when the FoM visited local people to urge them to elect Hamas.

To explain the MBMs' public outreach as well as electoral victories, scholarship on external mobilization places emphasis on the ISIs but concludes that they did not have a clear-cut political agenda nor were they dominated by MB or Hamas leaders and activists (Clark, 2004, p. 36; Roy, 2011, p. 174). Attending these institutions does not therefore imply mobilization. One reasonable interpretation is that due to the repressive context, the political element is embedded within the services, which 'indirectly' benefit MBMs (Clark, 2004, p. 154). Diane Singerman (1995, p. 151) adds that given the absence of conventional political avenues in the public sphere, Islamic movements tend to utilize informal networks in order to mobilize supporters.

However, it has so far remained unclear how Hamas is able to maintain informal networks within the grassroots through the provision of these services, and how it manages to capitalize on the services and translate them, for instance, into electoral gains. Here, I argue that the FoM mediates between the formality of the institutions and the informality of interactions with local communities. Both entities – the ISIs and the FoM – are separate institutions in Hamas's socio-political division of labour, but complement each other's work to explain the movement's overall public outreach.

The mediating FoM connects the receivers of these services with activists in the respective area. This explains the political role these services assume, even though political factors are not directly expressed in the tasks of the respective ISIs. During election, Hamas capitalizes on its long-term local interaction. This is what distinguishes Hamas's mobilization potential from other movements, such as Fatah and left-wing parties, which have civil society institutions (Jensen, 2009, p. 142) but lack Hamas's sustainable interactions with local communities, resulting in poorer electoral performance. To understand Hamas's previous electoral victories and future electoral campaigns, we need to look at long-term working programmes of the FoM.

In the four FoMs examined, interviewees stressed the centrality of the social committee. One FoM leader stated that 'it is the mother committee' (Saleh, personal interview, 2012). My interviewees also said that the difference in importance of the committees from mosque to mosque depend on the attitude and the wishes of the young people in the mosque's area. This means that 'some committees are formed based on the needs of the youth to facilitate their recruitment and integration into the movement' (Saleh, Personal interview, 2012). For the purpose of analysing the informal networks and social services and how they are leveraged into votes in times of elections, the social committees are the organs responsible for this operation.

The social committee (SC) conducts a survey and registers people in the mosque's area through its agents in order to compile a civil record of the population. This record is continuously updated with information on births, deaths, marriages, divorces, health status, economic level and political preferences. Based on the social record, the SC provides social assistance through ISIs. It recommends social services for those in need and mediates between the poor and the DA's branches, such as the ISIs. The SC conducts social visits for the sick and needy and also attends funerals and weddings. A head of SC said that he conducted an average of three social visits per week in 2011 (Othman, personal interview, 2013).

The political element of Hamas is to be found precisely within these informal networks and ties – kinship, friendship, acquaintances, neighbourliness and brotherhood – regardless of the presence or absence of state repression. When I asked a member of the PFLP – a Palestinian left-wing party – why he supported Hamas in the local elections, he told me that Hamas's institutions were the only ones that thought of him when he broke his leg and had no money to feed his children. The mechanism behind such an intervention proceeded roughly as follows: information about the man's health was reported by the SC in the area, which recommended donations by the ISIs. This case exemplifies how Hamas has successfully established an intricate structure of socio-political engagement which operates as an endless process of highly intimate public relations – socially, economically, religiously, culturally and (in its main purpose) politically. The result is local communities that have been in a way *socialized* in favour of Hamas.

Analysis

Religion and ideology

Khalid Khalafallh (2004, p. 17–18, 188–189) notes that the strength of the National Islamic Front – the MB of Sudan – is the way it frames religion, allowing it to be the primary motivation for encouraging mobilization. Hamas members I interviewed also stress the religious motivation to join Hamas. The curricula of

Hamas's learning system highlight the significant role of religious as well as ideological teachings. However, religion may be a source of encouragement, but it is not the determining factor of Hamas membership, nor is it the lever behind upward mobility towards the middle-rank naqīb or a leadership-rank raqīb. Although religion and ideology can inspire mobilization and organization, they cannot alone explain its complex dynamics. If it could, other Islamic movements such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which shares the same religion and similar ideology would reach similar mobilizing outcomes.

Islam – like any other religion or political ideology that aims to create a community – does not have a ready-made mechanism of socio-political and ideological intervention. Instead, mobilizing actions are decided by the strategic choices of Hamas's agency, which borrows from western as well as MB teachings and experiences. Accordingly, the distinction between MBMs and other Islamic or non-Islamic movements resides less in matters of ideology or motivational strategies than it does in the organizational practices within which ideology and motivation are embedded and incorporated. Hamas converts religious and ideological power into a distinctive form of social organization, thereby catalysing the motivations, needs and goals of its members through their interaction with other members within their FoDs. Motivation and common goals transform into mobilization processes through which members raise their capabilities as they go through the stages of education and training the movement provides. This framework of institutionalized and organized interaction is more relevant to the resilience of Hamas than other ideal drivers that motivate the recruitment of its members.

A distant example that shows surprisingly similar traits can be used to illustrate the more general character of this assessment. In her study of intentional communities in the U.S. in the nineteenth century, Rosabeth Kanter (1972, p. 136) argues that religion was an important factor for the continuity of certain successful communities but 'the difference between the successful and unsuccessful communes was much broader than religion alone.' Kanter discusses other elements and social practices that were useful in building commitment, such as charismatic leadership. Kanter's key conclusion that 'the conjunction of *social forms* with religious systems give religious groups an edge in terms of organizing their communities for maximum viability' (Kanter, 1972, p. 136–137, *emphasis mine*), strongly correlates with my findings. Kanter concludes her study by pointing out that the generational dilemma that emerged among intentional communities was the major reason for their extinction (pp. 145–148).

The generational approach might also prove true in the case of Hamas as it is still a comparatively young movement. Nonetheless, upward mobility inside Hamas has so far been able to overcome generational dilemmas due to its stage-based approach to mobilization, through which members remain closely integrated into the leadership, a process that is also constantly

renewed through the mechanisms of alternation of power that exists within the movement. The only Palestinian organization that has changed its leaders during their lifetimes is Hamas, when it elected Khaled Meshal in 1996 to replace Mousa Abu Marzook, and when it elected Ismail Haniyeh in 2018 to replace Meshal. Leaders inside the DA's institutions first went through education and training and were then elected based on their activities and credentials rather than by age. This has provided Hamas with a higher degree of resilience than the aforementioned intentional communities, which eventually became extinct.

Religion and ideology can provide members with answers to questions about their identity as individuals, help them achieve self-esteem and a better social status, and ultimately shape their perception of society and themselves (al-Anani, 2016, pp. 8–9; Mitchell, 1993, p. 200). Nevertheless, in the case of Hamas, it is their embeddedness in collective mechanisms of education and training that explain the organization's resilience, unity and longevity. The more individuals become convinced of the mechanisms of advancement in place, the more the loyalty to the group will be reinforced. This in turn dynamically reshapes the identity of each member, who becomes a steppingstone for a collective identity – a 'sounding building block' of the MB's 'construction,' in al-Banna's terms. This is why prominent Hamas scholar Khaled Hroub praises the movement's 'unity and integrity' compared to other Palestinian organizations (Hroub, 2006, p. 119).

On the other hand, situations of deep religious and ideological controversy have also undermined Hamas's cohesion in the recent past, leading the organization to step up its education and training activities in response. After Hamas won elections and formed a government in Gaza and the West Bank in 2006, the Islamic movement accepted a secular basic law. This led some members from the ranks of the Muslim brother and the naqīb to split from the organization forming the extremist group Jaljalat which joined al-Qaeda in 2008 and eventually sworn allegiance to ISIS in 2013. The ensuing challenge to Hamas rule resulted in bloody confrontations. Two major leaders of Jaljalat I interviewed in Gaza stressed that Hamas's leaders had 'deviated' from their religious and ideological teachings by accepting 'democracy' and a 'secular system.' They argued that Hamas had no intention of applying shariah law to the state or society. Achieving power based on a secular system had, according to this view, jeopardized Hamas's Islamic and ideological purity as well as its commitment to armed resistance against Israel. The salafi-jihadist group hence classified Hamas leaders as 'non-Muslim' and considered the removal of Hamas from power as a legitimate objective.

According to the data collected on this issue, Hamas reacted to these events by establishing the Education Committee as a branch charged with monitoring the learning system and the mechanisms of upward mobility in the organization. One positive takeaway from the split was the fact that there had been no

defection from the rank of raqīb. Hamas reacted by requalifying some activists from the ranks of the Muslim brother and the naqīb. The fundamental insight was that its learning system had been a more reliable source of cohesion than the religious values and ideological positions shared by its members.

Rational approach to the upward mobility and relations of authority

Hamas and other MBMs are examined as non-rational groups which are based on the 'listen and obey syndrome' as a simple act of 'obedience' (al-Anani, 2016, p. 115; Vidino, 2020, p. 19). The term 'rational' here refers to forms of loyalty among members on one hand, and between members and those above them in the leadership ladder on the other. Here I follow Max Weber (1978, p. 229) who differentiates between personalistic rule that invites personal loyalty and the rational approach that invites loyalty for the imagined entity of the state.

What distinguishes Hamas's loyalty structure, in turn, is that its processes of succession are channelled to generate loyalism to the imagined entity of *the group*. William Roth (2016, pp. 3–9) defines succession planning as identifying and developing new leaders to replace the old ones when their achievements are reduced, they leave, or they die. Hence, planning for the leadership succession runs parallel to the development of the leadership skills of members who share a vital and essential goal, which is to get the right skills in the right place at the right time, especially in the case of a sudden absence of leaders. Hamas's early political leaders – including its spiritual leader, Shaykh Ahmed Yassin, his successor ᶜAbd al-ᶜAziz al-Rantisi and the founder of its military wing, Salah Shehadeh – died or were assassinated during the Second Intifada (2000–-05), but Hamas as an institution survived and grew organizationally and in terms of popularity, winning local and legislative elections between 2004 and 2006. This indicates that the sources of authority within the organization cannot be reduced to inherited personal, patriarchal or generational factors.

Both the FoDs' upward mobility scheme and the DA's internal elections problematize personalistic loyalty as static behaviour. All members can mobilize and become leaders, and can be elected to the centralized hierarchy. The structure of loyalty is therefore dynamic, just as power relations among members are not static. Unlike other Palestinian movements such as Fatah, which are based on personal loyalty and traditional patriarchal tradition, the allegiance of Hamas members is towards the (impersonal) group. The resulting flexibility contributes to the movement's continuous ability to react to new challenges, as was the case of the 2016–17 elections. Hamas's electorate chose a new leadership to face the challenge of regional isolation after the overthrow of the MB government in Egypt in 2013 and changed its founding 1988 Charter to cope with the decline of the MB's influence and role in the region. In other moves that showed its flexibility and ability to react to crises, Hamas's new leadership

restored its relations with Iran and Hezbollah in order to secure their financial and military support.

Micro-level of social defensive routines

Richard Mitchell (1993, p. 1) frames the MB as a 'society,' indicating a collective whose internal structure is stable, bounded and socially patterned. Socialization takes place, Mitchell explains, in the way the MB distributes and divides the FoDs into clusters: the *ᶜashīra* (clan) includes four families, five clans form a *raḥṭ* (section), and five sections form a *katība* (battalion) (p. 197). The MB then gathers the latter in a *Lailat katība* (battalion night) to increase integration and socialization among the activists. Khalil al-Anani (2016, p. 87) adds that this socialization process also takes the form of trips and outdoor courses.

While socialization within the formal environment of the movement is significant in highlighting the group's collectivity, this article considers that the satisfactory socialization which develops on the margin of institutions among the four members of a single FoD is of crucial importance. Based on my participant observation of Hamas FoD activists, it became clear that they develop close friendships outside Hamas. This socialization within the private dimension of members' lives instils feelings of mutual attachment, loyalty and social solidarity. Within this framework, the movement becomes an integral part of the daily life of its members, one that transcends mere political and material interests.

The FoDs tie individuals' secondary affiliations to Hamas itself, serving the function of bringing members more fully into the fold of the organization. This in turn strengthens loyalty and commitment while discouraging departures from the movement. Under this framework, the usually sharp distinction between informal social life and active support for the organization becomes blurred, allowing Hamas to take advantage of group affiliations, resources and connections that ostensibly lie outside the organization's framework. Thus, the brand of member loyalty and commitment that Hamas engenders must not be confused with simple acts of obedience, corresponding rather to a desire for political or moral reform, religion, friendship, playing socially significant roles and achieving social status.

Informality, invisibility and the political element

The studies on ISIs draw their analysis from 'mobilizing structures,' of social movement theory that basically emphasizes the role of formal and centralized social organizations. Formalization and centralization are considered part of a stage of evolution, discipline (Blumer, 1939, p. 203), stability and rapid decision-making (Morris, 1984, p. 285) that is necessary for the group's collective empowerment, popularity and continuity (McCarthy & Zald, 1977,

pp. 1212–1241). Meanwhile, other forms of informal or decentralized Islamic activism are given comparatively little attention. Against this background, in his study on the MB of Jordan, Quintan Wiktorowicz aims to combine formal and informal forms of mobilization, arguing that it was not only the ISIs, as formal organizations, that could explain Islamic collective empowerment, but also the informal networks (Wiktorowicz, 2001, p. 111). However, Wiktorowicz did not examine the relationship between the two spheres and how it is sustained. My contribution to this debate has been to argue that Hamas organizes this relationship through the FoM which occupies an intermediary zone in which both forms of mobilization overlap.

The FoM is embedded into the inner workings of local socio-political activism. This is not an accident; the rejection of formal mobilizing organizations and the use of 'social invisibility' are a product of a pragmatic assessment regarding the tactical efficiency of apolitical action by the ISIs. Accordingly, equating Hamas's mobilization potential with formal organizations such as the ISIs or, conversely, just with informal networks, is to downplay the many forms of socio-political and religious activism it utilizes. This means consigning these forms of activism to shadows of informal and non-activist action instead of seeing them in the form of areas of intervention that aim to reinforce the movement's presence within the local community and to mobilize it for the organization's socio-political goals. In my interviews with Hamas activists, ministers and political leaders – supposed to be part of the FoM of their area – I was able to assert that *all* interviewees were associated with the local mosque where they resided or worked and that all used this channel to keep continuous contact with the public. This concurs with John Voll's reference to the importance of personalized contact for the Islamic movement to emphasize 'the ideal of a community' (Voll, 1994, p. 12).

The 'invisibility' of the organization does not indicate its informality. It is indeed quite possible for highly centralized organization such as the FoM (and the DA) to be invisible and therefore to have the necessary stability to achieve its aims while being in a highly volatile environment. This is a characteristic shared among the MBMs: they build a centralized but invisible organization. As Al-Banna (2006, p. 216) put it: '*sirriyyat at-tanzīm wa ᶜalāniyyat al-daᶜwa*' (secrecy of the organization and open propagation of daᶜwa). This *formal invisibility* can combine both a centralized institutional hierarchy and a decentralized informal network.

Indeed, the FoM functionalizes the socio-political norms of local communities on a micro-level, turning them into interlinked modes of customary behaviour. The result is the production of a broad mobilization framework that gradually alters localized relational processes, and in doing so transcends the established institutionalized order of formal organizations, which is precisely what has made it so successful.

Linking internal and external mobilization

Internal and external forms of mobilization are mutually complementary. They keep Hamas activists integrated in the continuous and dynamic process of socio-political and ideological activism. Hamas members are, in this sense, the simultaneous subjects of both forms of mobilization. Internally, they are involved in a continuous process of training and of incrementally mobilizing their collective experience. They lead lower ranks of training groups in the framework of the FoDs, and at the same time they themselves are led by higher ranks of preparation groups (except for the raqīb, who have passed all the educational stages). Externally, all Hamas members take an active role in their local communities in the framework of the FoM and/or in one of the twelve branches of Hamas, such as the ISIs.

Within this framework, the fate of the individual member is not only decided through theories of learning and training but through learning by doing, by executing activities and mobilizing the public. Thus, Hamas's resilience is subject to an inseparable correlation between the *ex-ante* resources of learning and the *ex-post* effects of localized mobilization. To put it differently, the member's acquisition of resources of political power do not immediately coincide with an increase of their power, as gains are grounded on internal education and training, but the capacity to translate learning lies in the external forms of mobilization through the FoM and the movement's branches. As such, the movement's members are not instrumentally linked to an authoritative group that discourages extra-group ties. Instead, they are active in their own communities, further reinforcing Hamas's popular potential. To this end, Hamas's actors are able to take on different roles within and outside of the FoDs, accumulating credentials that help them improve their reputation within their local community and increase social credentials necessary for their upward mobility within the movement.

Hamas picked its candidates for the parliamentary elections between 2004 and 2006 precisely from these activists. Jeroen Gunning's empirical findings show that the local candidates Hamas selected for the legislative elections were chosen primarily due to their social credentials (Gunning, 2008, p. 167). Hamas's subsequent victory shows it correctly assessed the prestige of their candidates. The Palestinian legislative elections are divided equally on the basis of a joint system that accepts both individual constituencies (66 seats) and proportionate lists (66 seats). In terms of the latter, Hamas gained 44 per cent of the seats – 29 out of 66. However, in the individual constituencies, Hamas won an impressive 70 per cent of the seats – 45 out of 66. In total Hamas won 74 out of the 132 seats, a qualifying majority that enabled Hamas to form a government in March 2006.

Candidates' social credentials continue to distinguish Hamas from its major rival in Palestine, the Fatah movement. I closely observed the local and

legislative elections between 2004 and 2006, and Hamas was certainly well organized enough – both internally and externally – to compete. Hamas was reacting then to structural political opportunities that emerged when the PA opened the political system to electoral democracy after the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004. Despite engaging in a sizable and well-financed campaign, Fatah's relationships with the local people were sporadic and lacked long-term continuity. In contrast, Hamas's campaign was essentially based on sustainable interactions with people in their local settings. Commenting on the massive efforts and the visits that Fatah activists paid to local people during the electoral campaign, a local Hamas electoral campaign leader in al-Bureij told me: 'We have been doing that [i.e., visiting locals] for several years' (Anas, personal interview, 2005).

In 2012, when potential legislative elections were planned for 2013, I observed stronger engagement from Hamas compared to Fatah activists, who lacked organization. The main difference was that Hamas had in the FoMs an organized body which was prepared to be put into motion for such events. The DA ordered all the FoMs to encourage members and supporters to register for the elections and to conduct a survey on all the potential votes of those involved. This will probably be the case in future elections in Palestine as well. While the risk of Hamas losing to Fatah in Gaza is a real one, the organizational strength of the former when compared to Fatah's weakness in this regard is likely to favour Hamas, whose fortunes will be based on the dynamics of localized mobilization.

Conclusion

Hamas's organizational strength, i.e., its professional centralized hierarchy, its learning system based on education and training and the organized body of its local mobilization, explain the movement's resilience and popularity in a highly volatile environment. Hamas mobilizes, educates and trains members to occupy functional positions within its internal hierarchy and its branches. These qualified members are in turn channelled to mobilize the public in their local communities. These findings strongly suggest that the organizing element is more important to distinguish Hamas from other secular or religious movements than religious or ideological identity, personalistic rule or the clientelism of social services.

The movement's centralized hierarchy, in turn, retains flexibility by renewing its leadership through internal electoral processes every four years. This institutional trend downplays the importance of the person, favouring instead the system over the individual. For the learning system, rational constraints on members stem largely from the processes of upward mobility within the group's ranks, showing that Hamas favours individuals who are qualified and committed. For local mobilization, institutional features enhance the probability that activists will engage in responsible public activities, provide public

outreach and help to ensure successful political outcomes such as votes in times of elections. In brief, organizational strength is vital to the long-term strategies of continuity and resilience in times of repression as much as it is for short-term objectives in times of functioning electoral democracy.

The findings of this article suggest two avenues of further research. First, although this article provides an in-depth empirical analysis of a single case, organizational analyses of similar structures of other MBMs are still relatively uncharted waters in academia. Second, the organizational strength of Hamas has proved effective in times of repression as much as in times of electoral democracy, but has not been tested over a longer process of democratization – Palestinian electoral democracy was repressed before it had the chance to evolve. Accordingly, a comparative study with the Tunisian al-Nahda, a Muslim Brotherhood movement, poses an important avenue of research. When the movement gained office and saw that the Tunisian democratic transition moved towards consolidation, al-Nahda abandoned MB traditions of education and training and transformed itself into a conventional political party. Its later decline in popularity and electoral support may reflect precisely the consequent loss of organizational strength.

Notes

1. Names of the interviewed activists have been replaced by pseudonyms at their request.
2. *Aḥkām* refers to certain rhythmical ways of reading the Quran and it also refers to the seven ways in which the Quran was read at the time of Prophet Mohammed.
3. The dawn prayer is the first of the five prayers that Muslims practice daily.

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