Representation Grounds for the Muslim Brotherhood

with Focus on Muslim Brotherhood in Syria

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The candidate, Mohamad Obeid, confirms that the work submitted is his own, that appropriate credit has been given where the work of others has been used/referenced, and that the work has not been submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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Examination Committee:
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between religion and politics is a controversial issue. It is one of the most difficult issues in many regions of the world. The social impact resulting from politicized religious movements is complicated, especially in countries where religion plays a pivotal role in formulating politics, such as in Syria and some other Middle Eastern countries.

One of the issues of great sensitivity in some societies, especially those with active religious movements and parties, is religious and/or political representation. Each religious group claims to have a profound social depth. These claims are supported by large segments of people. Rival groups, however, may have different opinions. Some politico-religious organizations claim that they are the only representatives of certain groups of people and thus, claim legitimacy on the ground of such representation. This applies to the Muslim Brothers in Syria (SMB), who claim representation of certain segments of the Syrian society, mainly the Sunni Muslims. This thesis attempts to research the issue of the representation of the Muslim Brotherhood with the focus on Syria.
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INTRODUCTION

Since its foundation in 1928 in Egypt, as well as after its expansion to Syria in the 1940s, the Muslim Brotherhood has played a prominent role within the Syrian society. Despite the similarity of the intellectual origins of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and Egypt, the political context in each country shaped, in its own way, the nature of its development and interaction with the authorities and local communities. Different circumstances led to some differences in the roles and challenges that each group faced. The Muslim Brotherhood, including the SMB, tried to promote its popularity within the targeted segment of the Syrian society; the Sunni Muslims. The SMB has sparked deep debates within the society between its supporters and opponents. However, a large part of the Syrian society kept itself away from these discussions, mainly due to political sensitivity, fear of the security forces, and possible punishment. Not only the SMB seeks to attract the Sunni Muslims, but also the ruling party in Syria, the Ba’ath Party.¹ Special efforts were made by the Ba’ath Party to attract, control and manage the Sunni Muslims, because of their large numbers.² Sunni Muslims form about three quarters of the total population of Syria.³

Historically, the SMB played an important role in the struggles against the Syrian government, claiming defending the rights of Sunni Muslims, in order to further promote its popularity in some Syrian regions. Thus, its political representation becomes a reality on ground. In addition, the SMB provided social and humanitarian services to the poor and needy in the areas where they have influence in. This is to enhanced their image among the people and in attempt to make their political representation more acceptable. Moreover, the political situation in Syria plays a major role in shaping an acceptable ground to market the SMB’s representation claims, especially after the ongoing war since 2011, as well as the economic and social crisis that the country is suffering from. The question here is why did the SMB suddenly care about representation, and how did they justify this, internationally, nationally, from religious and secular perspectives?

The SMB’s representation of the Sunnis is a controversial matter. The SMB can be a viable alternative in a democratic Syria among others, provided that it could create coalitions with others. This task, though looks easy, is complicated in term of the SMB. The group has been criticized by scholars for being a holistic, all or nothing, in the absence of evidence that it could exist within a democratic society.

The SMB claims that its popularity allows it to represent a significant segment of the Syrian people - the Sunni Muslims. The group’s technique focuses on spreading its call across the major cities of Syria. It claims that its call meets certain criteria that make it acceptable by many segments of the Syrian people. Similarly, some other Islamic groups and movements also claim the representation of the Sunni Muslims, such as the Sufi current represented mainly by “Sheikh Ahmed Kaftaroo”, and the Salafis. In order to counter accusations of not being more representative or unrepresentative of Syrian Sunnis, the SMB has emphasized its long history of activism in Syria.

This thesis explores the grounds or basis for the SMB’s representation claims during different historical stages, starting from the mid-1940s until the date of writing this thesis in 2023. In this regard, the thesis attempts to give answers to the following research question:

What are the grounds for the SMB to claim representation, and why does the SMB care about its representation, and what justifications are given to promote its representation internationally, nationally, and from religious and secular perspectives?

Researching the representation of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood requires combined contemporary social research and historical one. Accordingly, this thesis uses the triangulation of approaches that could include historical arguments, combined with contemporary analyses. In other words, applying modern political tools to historical ideas, that is when the Muslim Brotherhood uses old texts to support their modern call, in order to achieve political gains whenever possible.

The thesis analyzes different grounds for representation that vary from Islamic religious grounds to social and educational ones. The factors that affect representation of the SMB are mostly internal, but at times they include external elements as well. The internal or domestic

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4 Pierret, “The Syrian Ba’ath Party and Sunni Islam”
factors are those that arise within the group and affect its structure and its way of leading. The external factors include surrounding changes, both social and political, that leave an impact on the group.

As for the religious grounds of representation, the thesis analyzes some Islamic texts that the Muslim Brotherhood depends on to promote its call and to strengthen its position among Sunni Muslims. These sources include verses of The Holy Quran, the version of “Hafs’ narration on the authority of Asim,” and the Hadiths, especially those contained in major Hadith sources; “Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslem and Sunan Al-Tirmithi.”

Regarding the terminology, the thesis follows neutral expressions. The events that have taken place in Syria since 2011 are called by some, for example, the Syrian “revolution” (thawra), while others call it “crisis” (azma) or “conspiracy” (mua’mara). Therefore, the thesis uses the term “Syrian uprisal” (Al Intifada Al Souria) as a neutral expression. Some also call the president of Syria and his government as “regime”6 (nizam), while others insist that the legitimacy is derived from the United Nations’ recognition. The thesis uses the term “Syria,” the “Syrian government” or the “Syrian president” as impartial expressions, without any controversial political dimensions.

Some call the Muslim Brotherhood “brothers” (Ikhawn),7 and define it as a “movement” (Haraka), while others call it “current” (Tayyar) or a “group” (Jama’a). Acronym “SMB” is used to include all these designations.

Some use the term “Muslim Brotherhood” (Al Ikhwan Al Muslimin), and some use “Muslim Brothers”8 (Al Ikhwan Al Muslimin). Both are used in this thesis and have the same meaning. With regard to the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, many names are given to its head or supreme leader. The thesis uses the term “General Guide” (Al Murshed Ala’m) to refer to the supreme leader, who leads the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and worldwide. Local leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in each country are also given different names and titles. This thesis uses the term “General Comptroller” (Al Murakeb Ala’m) to refer to the country’s or branch’s leaders.

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Chapter 1.

Historical Background

1.1 The Muslim Brotherhood’s Foundation in Egypt in 1928

The “Muslim Brotherhood” is one of the most known Islamic movements. It is influential and widespread in many Arab and Muslim countries. It was founded in March 1928 in the Egyptian city of Ismailia by Sheikh Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949). This happened four years after the annulation of the Ottoman Caliphate, and during the British occupation of Egypt.9

The Muslim Brotherhood’s ultimate goal is to conduct social, political, and economic reforms from the Islamic perspective. In the words of A. Y. Özdemir, who expresses the Brotherhood’s tenets: “The reformed Muslim man would raise a good Muslim family. Enough Muslim families, in turn, would give rise to an Islamic society. If society was sufficiently Islamic, then it was only natural that the government would become Islamic as well.”10 Reform begins with the formation of a Muslim individual, then a Muslim family, then a Muslim community and finally an Islamic government. The Muslim Brotherhood promotes slogans close to the dreams of many Muslims and gives them hope for a better tomorrow. The Muslim Brotherhood’s main slogan, “Islam is the solution,” (al-Islam huwa al-hal) means that all problems, no matter what, can be solved by following Islam. This slogan became a hallmark of the Muslim Brotherhood. It was used for the first time by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1987, where Professor Adel Hussein was the first to coin when the Labor and Liberal parties ran together with the Brotherhood for the People’s Assembly elections that year. Thereafter it was used in all subsequent elections.11

However, the Muslim Brotherhood does not specify the nature, methods, or practical mechanisms for presenting Islam as the solution for every problem.12 This does not necessarily mean that Islam is not a solution, or has no solutions, but it raises a question about what

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10 Aje Carlbom, Islamic Activism in a Multicultural Context, Ideological Continuity or Change? (Malmö: Malmö University, 2017), 19.
mechanisms should be followed to reach such a solution. Moreover, does this assumption mean that the same solution is applicable on day-to-day matters, like economy, engineering, health care, etc., as well as religious and spiritual issues? The Muslim Brotherhood see that one intention of Islamic law is having people deal with each other in a just way. This is also vague, without having practical ways of implementation. It gives, however, the Muslim Brotherhood more flexibility, and allows them to apply more solutions in ecumenical sense, allowing them to claim support of a larger number of people. In addition to the slogan, the Muslim Brotherhood has a famous motto; “God is our goal, the Quran is our constitution, jihad is our way, and death for the sake of God is our ultimate wish.” This motto by itself carries significant ideological and political connotations.

Since its establishment and until 2023, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt has been led by eight “General Guides” - all of them Egyptians. A General Guide should be elected by the Muslim Brothers’ Shura Council, which is the highest legislation board within the Muslim Brotherhood organization.

The Muslim Brotherhood has gone through several stages since its establishment. In all stages, it occupied a special place in the political events in Egypt from the beginning until the assassination of its founder and General Guide, Hassan al-Banna, in 1949. Thereafter, the stage of unrest and troubles began, and continues until now.

1.2 The Establishment of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood

The SMB was officially established in Syria in the 1940s, by Sheikh Dr. Mustafa al-Sibai (1915-1964), who occupied the position of the first “General Comptroller” in Syria and Lebanon. During his study in Egypt, Mustafa al-Sibai met Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna was a religious and political figure with great influence. He is considered one of the most prominent Islamic thinkers of the twentieth century. He played

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14 Ali Daasan Alhakish, American Foreign Policy Towards the Movements of Political Islam in the Arab World (Amman: Middle East University, 2012), 50.
a major role in establishing and developing political Islam. After completing his university education, al-Banna’s goal was to develop Islamic way of thinking, especially among the young people eager for new Islamic thinking different from traditional stereotypical thinking. Al-Sibai was greatly influenced by the thoughts of al-Banna and started transferring the Muslim Brotherhood’s experience and ideas to Syria. He thus established the SMB.19

The establishment of the SMB was officially announced in 1945, when it was registered by the Syrian Ministry of Interior.20 After the official registration, several conferences of religious-political nature were held in major cities and towns, such as the conference at Yabroud, a town near Damascus, in September 1946. This conference was considered as the official public launch of the SMB. Similar gatherings and conferences were extended thereafter to the countryside around Damascus, in some major towns of the capital’s suburb, such as (Barzeh, Daraya, al-Tal, Menin, Zamalka and al-Nabk) as well as cities such as Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor and the coastal cities like Latakia, Al-Haffah and Baniyas.21

The initial meetings were organized by well-known figures from Damascus, Homs and Hama. The meetings were headed by the first General Comptroller Dr. Mustafa al-Sibai from Homs, a graduate of Al-Azhar, and Sheikhs Mahmoud al-Shaqfa (1898-1979) and Muhammad al-Hamid (1910-1969) from Hama, as well as Omar Bahaa al-Amiri (1916-1992). Al-Amiri was a graduate of the Sorbonne University who descended from a highly respected family in Aleppo, where his father was a member of the Ottoman Parliament.22 This trio; an Al-Azhar’s graduate, a traditional sheikh, and a French university graduate, reflects how the SMB wanted to be perceived and how it carefully structured its image in Syria. It was planning right from the beginning to become a widely spread movement. This mixture of middle and high-class figures contradicts Joshua Teitelbaum’s assumptions that the Muslim Brotherhood attracts only low-class members.23 This conclusion might be true when it comes to social class affiliation in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The case is different in Syria, where the labor class followed different leftist ideologies, like the Baa’th Party - the fierce enemy of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Syria, the SMB’s support base was initially concentrated among the urban

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21 Rasas, “A reading of the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria”.
23 Teitelbaum, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 77.
middle class. The Brotherhood's appeal to the middle class was due in part to its focus on social justice and its commitment to providing social services to the poor.\textsuperscript{24}

After independence from French rule in 1946, Syria witnessed a short period of democratic life, when the SMB flourished. This short democratic period was followed by a period of political unrest and coups initiated by Hosni al-Zaim on 30 March 1949, followed by a series of military coups. Right from the first military coup until this date, the SMB faced a lot of difficulties and challenges. Some of these challenges almost ended any public presence of the SMB, especially during and after the “Hama Events” (\textit{Ahdath Hama}) in 1978-1982, when the city of Hama, the center of the SMB, was attacked by the Syrian Army.

Since its establishment in Syria in the 1940s, the position of the General Comptroller of the SMB was occupied 13 times.\textsuperscript{25} Some General Comptrollers occupied the same position several times:

1. Mustafa al-Sibai (1945 - 1964), the first General Comptroller of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and Lebanon.
6. Munir Ghadban (1985, for six months)
7. Muhammad Adeeb Al-Jajji (1985, for six months)
11. Muhammad Riyad Al-Shaqfa (2010 - 2014)

In fact, understanding the political landscape in Syria during the 1940s is important to delve into the issue of the SMB’s representation and the arguments that had been launched since then regarding this controversial issue. The political circumstances in Syria were always tougher if

\textsuperscript{24} Raymond W. Baker, Voice of the Muslim Brotherhood: Da'wa, Discourse, and Political Activism in Syria (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 92.

compared to Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt enjoyed a relatively softer political environment, while the SMB operated always under pressure and political prosecution.26

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Chapter 2.

The Internal Grounds for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s Representation

Representation is the action or fact of one person’s standing for another so as to have the rights and obligations of the person represented.\(^{27}\) Representing a group of people means, in theory, representing their interests, feelings and opinions. Representation aims to ensure that the voice, needs and desires of this group are heard and represented in social and political processes, as well as decision-making. Accordingly, when the SMB claims the representation of the Sunni Muslims, the largest population group in Syria, it becomes its obligation to pursue the interests of this group.

The Muslim Brotherhood's representation is based on its claims of being able to mobilize and organize its members and supporters around its religious, political and social goals. The group has historically been successful in promoting its extensive network of social services and flashy political slogans. Additionally, the Muslim Brotherhood has been able to appeal to a wide range of individuals and groups by framing its message in a way that is inclusive and responsive to local concerns of people. The SMB has positioned itself as an oppressed party demanding its rights using democratic ways. It was keen to show itself being helping people and advocating for the implementation of Islamic law, as an attractive goal for many Syrians.

The Muslim Brotherhood has also been able to use its extensive media and communications network to spread its message trying to build a network of supporters among its followers and beyond. This has included the use of social media platforms, as well as traditional media outlets such as newspapers, television, and radio. One of the modern ways that the SMB has taken good care of is social media, to promote itself by creating and maintaining official Facebook and Twitter accounts. These accounts provide a platform for the SMB to share news, statements, and opinions with a wider audience than the traditional ways can reach. Through social media, the SMB also allows supporters to engage with the group and share their own perspectives on current events and urgent political issues. The SMB has several official social media accounts, including:

\(^{27}\) Merriam-Webster Dictionary,
- Facebook: an official Facebook page Ikhwan Syria that provides updates on SMB’s activities and events, as well as its political positions on various issues. The page has 157000 followers and often shares multimedia content, such as images and videos.

- Twitter: official Twitter account @IkhwanSyriaEn that shares news, statements, and opinions on current events in Syria and beyond. The SMB’s Twitter account has 5591 followers.

In addition to social media accounts, the SMB, through its members, has also contributed to many forums and discussions to engaging with its followers and spreading its message. These forums allow supporters to discuss a wide range of topics related to the group’s activities, as well as to connect with other like-minded individuals. Another way that the SMB has used social media is by creating and sharing multimedia content. This is to take part in initiatives such as raising the Syrian revolution’s profile on social media and setting up charities which provide aid to the refugees. These materials were used to highlight the group’s activities, showcase its successes, and inspire support among its followers.

By leveraging these online platforms, the SMB aims to connect with supporters, spread its message, and engage with the broader public in new and innovative ways. Indeed, part of the SMB’s representation is based on its claimed ability to build broad-based support through religious, political, social and media tools. However, the SMB’s representation grounds depend on various well established and influential factors, some of which are assumed divine cause, and others are based on using the need of people. These representation grounds are mainly the following:

2.1 Religious Grounds of Representation

The relationship between Islam and politics has always been a dialectical one. It turns into an exploitative relationship at times, when seeking to achieve individual interests of people. It is indeed a conciliatory relationship when it leads to justice and prosperity, and not exploited by politicians to achieve own agendas. Politics, in fact, is an integral part of Islam. Imam Al-

31 @ Ikhwan Syria.
Ghazali in his known philosophical way says: “Religion is the root, and politics is the guard, and what has no root is destroyed, and what has no guard is lost”.  

The Holy Quran contains many verses that encourage Muslims to engage in politics and social justice. The Muslim Brotherhood in general, including the SMB, use this perspective to interpret these verses as a mandate to Muslims’ leaders or representatives. The Muslim Brotherhood applies this to themselves in order to preserve the right of representation in case other Muslims are incapable of doing so. They work according to the instructions of these verses and assume representation to lead other unqualified Muslims (Al-Awam), in accordance with their understanding. Here are a few examples:

1. "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah (i.e., the Quran), and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah's favor on you, for you were enemies one to another but He joined your hearts together, so that, by His Grace, you became brethren (in Islamic Faith), and you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, Allah makes His Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.,) clear to you, that you may be guided." This verse encourages Muslims to unite and work together for the greater good. The Muslim Brotherhood interprets the rope mentioned in the verse as Islam and that God calls Muslims to unite on this rope and not to disperse or divide. Muslims must abide by this rope and work to achieve unity and solidarity for the sake of public interest of the Islamic nation (Al-Umma). Hence, the Muslim Brotherhood believes that this verse refers to their role in achieving this goal, and that it is like a “mandate” from God to the “the qualified” to represent Muslims and lead them towards unity and cohesion.

However, this understanding is not a consensus of all Muslims. Some consider that the verse refers in general to the necessity of adhering to Islam and preserving unity and cohesion is a duty of all Muslims without preferences, not only the Muslim Brotherhood. The verses do not assign any specific role to a particular group in achieving this goal.

33 Imam al-Ghazali, *Al-Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Beirut: Dar Al Ma’refa, 2008), 189. Specifically in the second volume, in the chapter on consideration of the provisions of acts of worship, in the section related to the virtue of asceticism and piety. Here Imam al-Ghazali talks about asceticism in this world and concern for the hereafter. This saying has been used a lot in speeches and articles that talk about the role of religion and politics in building societies and maintaining security and stability.


2. "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of people to prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do". This verse emphasizes the importance of justice and impartiality, even in the face of adversity. The Muslim Brotherhood promotes this verse to be a call for Muslims to uphold justice and stand up against oppression. The Muslim Brotherhood interprets this verse to mean that Muslims must always strive for justice, even if it goes against their own personal biases or emotions.

The Muslim Brotherhood, benefiting from their historical background and the injustice they had been subject to, see themselves as advocates of justice and defenders of the oppressed. They believe that this verse supports their claim of representation, and their mission and efforts to promote justice and equality in society. They view themselves as a force for positive change in their communities. The Muslim Brotherhood believes that by promoting justice and equality, they follow the guidance of the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims from different backgrounds may have different interpretations of this verse and its implications. Therefore, while the Muslim Brotherhood may interpret this verse as a call to take action to fulfill their own mission and goals, and thus enforce their claim of representation, others may interpret it differently. There may be different opinions on what constitutes justice and what actions are required to uphold it in the society. The Muslim Brotherhood justification of their right of representation, more than anybody else, is their well-established organization and administration structure that make them more qualified that any other group.

3. "And those who, when tyranny strikes them, they defend themselves. And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation, his reward is with Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers." This verse also encourages Muslims to stand up against oppression and defend themselves and others who face injustice. The Muslim Brotherhood understands this verse to mean that it is permissible and even obligatory for Muslims to defend themselves against oppression and tyranny. They interpret this verse as a call to resist and fight against unjust rulers and systems, especially when they are violating the rights of Muslims or committing other atrocities.

37 *Holy Quran*, Surah Al Ma’idah, 5:8, 108.
38 Aje Carlbon, *Islamic Activism in a Multicultural Context*, 20.
The Muslim Brotherhood believes that this verse supports their efforts against tyranny and their resistance to oppression, whether it is perpetrated by individuals or by rulers and governments. They view themselves as defenders of the oppressed and believe that it is their duty to fight against social and political injustice. They believe that they are the group who fights against tyranny, so they are the ones meant in this verse. To offer some relief to opponents by advocating forgiveness and pardoning wrongdoers as the verse states.\(^{42}\)

4. "And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire, and you would not have other than Allah any protectors; then you would not be helped."\(^{43}\) This verse warns against aligning oneself with unjust or oppressive individuals or groups. It means that Muslims should not support or align themselves with those who are committing wrong or injustice. They believe that aligning oneself with oppressors can lead to punishment from Allah, and that Muslims should distance themselves from such individuals or groups.

Accordingly, the Muslim Brotherhood members promote themselves as the voice who stood against oppression, calling for justice. They interpret this verse as a warning against aligning with oppressive regimes, corrupt governments, or any individuals or groups who are committing injustice. They believe that they are working towards the betterment of the Muslim community and their efforts are aligned with the teachings of Islam.\(^{44}\) Therefore, they promote themselves as the group who applies the teachings of Quran, and the honest guardians for it, so they deserve the title of representation.

In general, the Muslim Brotherhood use certain verses from the Quran to promote their calls for social justice, political reform, and unity among Muslims. This claim is promoted to qualify them to be the representatives of Muslims from similar backgrounds, mainly the Sunni Muslims, or what is commonly known as the “Islamic Nation” (Al-Ummah). However, the interpretations of Quranic verses can vary among different groups and individuals. Not all Muslims agree with the way in which the Muslim Brotherhood uses these verses to promote its agenda. Nawaf Obaid, a fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and a senior fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies\(^{45}\) says that the claim of the Muslim Brotherhood of


\(^{43}\) Holy Quran, Surah Hud, 11:113, 234.


being representing the interest of Muslims has failed. He concludes that the SMB couldn’t break out of the traditional circles of support and gain it from other sectors of the population.\textsuperscript{46}

The Salafis, who are classified as a fundamentalist Islamic movement, argue that their approach to Islam is based on the return to the practices and beliefs of the early Muslim community (\textit{Al Salaf}). They claim that they use the Quran and Hadith to support their call, so they are the true representative of Muslims. The Salafi groups criticize the Muslim Brotherhood for being soft, and for manipulating the texts to promote their own political and social agendas. The Salafis accuse the Muslim Brotherhood of making compromise after compromise, diluting the purity of the Islamic components of its message.\textsuperscript{47}

The Sufis, who are a traditional rival of the Muslim Brotherhood, use the Quran and other Islamic texts to support their spiritual practices and beliefs. Their interpretation of these texts can vary widely. Some Sufis emphasize that the use of metaphorical or mystical interpretations of Quranic verses is necessary, while others focus more on the literal, grammatical or lingual aspects of the text.\textsuperscript{48} Many Sufi Muslims express their frustration of how Islam is represented and how the image of Islam has been kidnapped by what they view as extremists. They want to form an alternative image.\textsuperscript{49} They believe that other Islamic groups failed to represent true Islam, while for example, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani movement has been unusually successful in communicating its message to politicians and the media, as well as within the Muslim community.\textsuperscript{50}

As a reply to the Salafis and the Sufis claims of representation, the Muslim Brotherhood insist that they are the most organized Islamic group that is more qualified to carry out a political or social project.\textsuperscript{51} Other Islamic rival groups, including the Salafis and the Sufis, are more ideological or spiritual movements that lack sufficient organization.

\textsuperscript{46} Obaid, \textit{The Muslim Brotherhood: A Failure in Political Evolution}, 42.
\textsuperscript{47} Obaid, \textit{The Muslim Brotherhood: A Failure in Political Evolution}, 37.
In addition to Quran, the Sunna is the second most important source in Islam. “Sunna” is the Arabic term for the prophet Muhammad's way of life and legal precedent. The Muslim Brotherhood, including the SMB, often use the Sunna to promote their political and social agendas. Here are few examples, according to which the Muslim Brotherhood use the Sunna to justify their right of representation of the Muslims;

1. The Muslim Brotherhood often cites the Prophet's teachings and actions that emphasize the importance of social justice and treating people with fairness and compassion. For example, they use the Prophet's Hadith: "The merciful are shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you." They highlight the Prophet's emphasis on caring for the poor and needy. They thus claim that they follow his actions of giving to charity and helping those in need, and this is the image they want to promote.

The Muslim Brotherhood use this Hadith to support their claim of representing the Muslims. This Hadith is well-known emphasizing the importance of mercy and compassion in Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood has often invoked this Hadith to argue that their political agenda and actions are rooted in Islamic principles of justice and compassion. However, the Muslim Brotherhood's interpretation of this Hadith and its application suite their political and social ideology. Some critics argue that the Muslim Brotherhood’s use of this Hadith is selective and they never offered a detailed and coherent vision of the Islamic order they sought to create.

2. The Muslim Brotherhood call for political reform and criticize the governments for its lack of transparency and accountability. As thus, they have repeated the Prophet's teachings on good governance, such as his Hadith: "The best of rulers are those whom the people love and who love the people." They claim that they follow the Prophet's actions of seeking the opinions of his companions and listening to their feedback, by establishing a similar mechanism: “the Shura Council”. The Shura Council of the Muslim Brotherhood is their way of practicing democracy. The Shura Council represents the body that supervises and directs the movement.

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53 Sunan Tirmithi, (Beirut: Dar Algharb Al Islami, 1996), 1924.
56 Sahih Muslem, (Cairo: Isa Alababi Alhalabi, 1995), 1855.
Imam al-Banna says: “We are an international school; its curriculum is the Quran; its general management is the General Shura Council.”

This saying is derived from a Hadith that emphasizes the importance of good governance and leadership in Islam. The full Hadith says: “The best of rulers are those whom the people love and who love the people, who pray for them and for whom the people pray for. The worst of rulers are those whom the people hate and who hate the people, who curse them and whom the people curse.” The Muslim Brotherhood argues that this Hadith emphasizes the importance of accountability and responsibility in Islamic way of governance, and that the understanding of Islamic principle of accountability and transparency are the keys to good governance. This confirms that rulers must be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people, and that rulers’ legitimacy comes from the support and love of the people they serve. The Muslim Brotherhood promotes this saying as reflecting the broader Islamic principles of justice, where God prohibits injustice to both Himself and humankind.

The group calls to apply Islamic governance that includes political power, social and economic justice. The ruler is meant to serve the people and promote their well-being. The Muslim Brotherhood assumes that they are good at this, and therefore the best to represent Muslims.

Those who do not agree with the politics of the Muslim Brotherhood see that these idealistic slogans hide political ambitions and their democratic claims are not credible.

3. The Muslim Brotherhood promote the importance of unity and solidarity among Muslims. They give special attention to the Prophet's teachings on the importance of brotherhood, such as in his Hadith: "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever." The Muslim Brotherhood uses this Hadith to promote their vision of a united Islamic community. They want to be seen as taking the lead to encourage Muslims to work together to achieve social and political goals. This approach has been criticized by, for example,
the political scientist Bassam Tibi who said that Islamism is a political ideology that is distinct from Islam and its teachings.\textsuperscript{64}

The Muslim Brotherhood use this Hadith to promote the importance of collective action and mutual support to achieve the welfare and best interests of the Muslim community. They want to convince people of the viability of their political role and that their representation is based on the principle of serving the community and promoting its well-organized social life.\textsuperscript{65}

However, this saying is subject to different interpretations and debates, in the light of the absence of clear evidence that suggests that leadership should be given to a specific group, without consensus of people, even if it was the most organized.

In general, the Muslim Brotherhood use the Sunna to promote their call for social justice, political reform, and unity among Muslims to justify their claim for representation.\textsuperscript{66}

\subsection*{2.2 The Political Grounds of Representation}

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) has a complex political history, with periods of both engagement and opposition to the Syrian government.

From the date of its establishment in the 1940s until the 1960s, the SMB was an active participant in the Syrian politics. The SMB participated in the political and democratic life of Syria at that time. During this period, Syria experienced a significant shift towards democracy, with the establishment of a multi-party system and the adoption of a new constitution in 1950. The SMB was a prominent participant in this period of political change. The group had quickly emerged as a major force in Syrian politics. The SMB wanted to promote a new version of Islamic democracy. However, the democratic credentials of the SMB have been a subject of much debate, with some questioning whether its internal structure is truly democratic.\textsuperscript{67}

In the early years of the Syrian independence, the SMB was able to achieve significant electoral success. The SMB’s political wing, the Islamic Socialist Front, won 10 seats in the 1947 parliamentary elections, making it the second-largest party in Syria.\textsuperscript{68} The SMB also

\textsuperscript{64} Obaid, The Muslim Brotherhood: A Failure in Political Evolution, 10.
\textsuperscript{65} Darrag and Brooke, “Politics or piety?”
\textsuperscript{68} Muslim Brotherhood’s website,
contributed in a committee to draft Syria's first post-independence constitution in 1950, which established a parliamentary system and protected individual rights and freedoms. The committee included representatives from various political parties and groups, as well as independent experts. The committee proposed a new constitution which was widely accepted. The new constitution established a parliamentary system with a president as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of government. The 1950 constitution assured individual rights and freedoms for all Syrians, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion.

The SMB's participation in drafting the new constitution has been promoted as a significant achievement and a testament to its political influence. However, the new constitution did not lead to stability in Syria. The country continued to face political turmoil and instability in the following years. In the 1950 constitution, the SMB advocated for the inclusion of Islamic principles, and wanted to show it as protecting the rights of all citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic background. This momentum of political participation was captured by the SMB to support its claim of representation among a wide range of Syrians.

However, the SMB's political presence began to wane in the 1960s, following a series of military coups that ultimately led to the establishment of the Ba'ath party rule. The group was outlawed in 1964, and many of its members were forced to flee the country. Despite these challenges, the SMB's promoted its contribution to Syrian political and democratic life during the period from 1945 to 1963 as significant.

As of 1963, when the Ba'ath Party took over power in Syria, the SMB was forced to operate from underground. Nevertheless, the group continued to promote itself being an important player in Syrian politics. However, its political activities became more covered due to the government's security measures. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the SMB was involved in various opposition movements against the Ba’ath Party and the Syrian government. The SMB advocated for greater political freedoms, democracy, and an end to the one-party rule of Syria.


71 Conduit, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 2.
72 Conduit, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 32.
73 R. Hinnebusch, “Syria: From authoritarian upgrading to revolution?” University of St Andrews, Article in International Affairs, January 2012, 95.
The SMB’s claim of representation during this period was largely based on its alleged ability to achieve the dream of a political system that preserves human freedom and dignity. The group relied on covert methods to communicate with its members and coordinate its political activities. The SMB’s efforts to promote political and democratic reform were met with significant resistance from the Syrian government, which viewed the SMB as a threat to its authority. The government responded with increased repression and even more crackdowns on political side, including the Hama events in 1982, which caused the death of tens of thousands of people, many of them were members or supporters of the SMB.

Despite the SMB’s huge efforts to remain visible, the group’s political influence became very limited during this period, due to the government's tight security control over political life in Syria. The SMB’s underground situation and the government's repression of political activities made it difficult for the SMB to have any significant impact on the Syrian politics.

Anyway, the SMB’s contribution to political and democratic life in Syria during the period from 1963 to 1982 was supported by its advocacy for political reform. In 1982, after the Syrian government launched a military campaign against the SMB, aiming to suppress an uprising against the government by the SMB in the city of Hama. The Syrian government accused the SMB, especially the rightest wing led by Marwan Hadid, of carrying out terrorist attacks and seeking to overthrow the government. Facing the tyranny was the vehicle that the SMB adopted in promoting its representation of the oppressed Syrians during that period.

Relationship between Islam and politics is a matter of exploitation, when Islamic texts are used to achieve personal political goals. Some politicians use Quran and Sunna in order to legitimize their actions. They use clerics or what is called “sultan sheikhs” to issue customized interpretations, “fatwas”, which serve certain political ambitions. This exploitative relationship was the reason for the doubtful disposition of many Muslims towards political Islam. "Sultan sheikhs" are Islamic scholars who were traditionally appointed and supported by rulers, or what was commonly named as “sultan” in the past. While some Muslims may view these scholars with suspicion, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to why this is the case, as there are many factors that contribute to this perception, including:

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74 Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, 52.
76 Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 258.
- Some Muslims view "sultan sheikhs" with suspicion because they believe that their teachings and rulings are influenced by their political allegiances or financial interests, rather than a genuine commitment to Islamic teachings.

- As the "sultan sheikhs" are often appointed and supported by rulers, some Muslims view them as lacking independence and autonomy, which can lead to doubts about the validity of their “fatwas” and interpretations of Islamic commandments.

- Throughout Islamic history, there were instances when rulers used "sultan sheikhs" to justify oppressive policies and actions, such as wars or harsh punishments.

These abuses have contributed to a general mistrust of "sultan sheikhs". In this regard, the SMB wanted to turn this situation to its advantage by opposing "sultan sheikhs". The "sultan sheikhs" were criticized by the SMB of being too closely aligned with the government and not representing the interests of Muslims.78

Not all Muslims view "sultan sheikhs" with suspicion. Many "sultan sheikhs" were appointed or supported by rulers, but yet made significant contributions to Islamic scholarship and education system. The Kaftaro Sufi group, for example, used its relationship with the Syrian government to build many remarkable educational institutions in Damascus and some other cities in Syria.79 Ultimately, the SMB took a hard position against "sultan sheikhs," including the Kaftaro Sufi group, to claim representation of those who share same ideas.

After 1982, the SMB played an important role in the opposition to President Hafez al-Assad, both within Syria and outside. This was considered by the Syrian government as a crime of high treason. The Syrian president signed in 1980 a Law (number 49) that targeted the SMB. Under this Law, membership in the SMB was made illegal; anyone found to be a member of the organization would be sentenced to death.80 The Law also includes confiscation of the property of anyone found to be supporting the SMB.

Law 49 was part of a wider crackdown on the SMB, which culminated during the Hama events of 1982. Then thousands of people, many of them civilians, were killed in an effort to suppress the movement. The Syrian government continued to use Law 49 to target the activities of the

SMB. In recent years, Law 49 was used to arrest and prosecute individuals accused of supporting the SMB, including journalists and human rights activists.\(^\text{81}\)

The SMB, for its part, condemned Law 49 as a tool of repression and called for its repeal. Many members of the SMB were executed or imprisoned. The organization’s leadership was forced to operate from exile. In fact, the SMB wanted to use Law 49 to increase sympathy of Syrians with its cause. They showed the Law as unjust towards a part of the Syrian people, in order to enhance their image.

After 1982, the SMB continued its political activities, secretly within Syria, and openly on the international stage. Some of the political activities of the SMB in exile included:

- Establishing a presence in Europe. In order to remain visible and to continue claiming representation of Syrians, the SMB established its presence in several European countries, including Germany, France, and the UK. The SMB established mosques and community organizations, and used its presence in Europe to advocate for the rights of Syrians and to raise awareness about the situation over there.\(^\text{82}\)

- Forming alliances with other opposition groups, both within Syria and outside the country. The organization played an important role in the formation of the Syrian National Council (SNC) in 2011,\(^\text{83}\) which was the main opposition platform during the early years of the Syrian uprisal. The SMB was the most powerful group within the SNC, and it was determined to control it. The SMB didn’t want to share power with other groups, and it used its influence to marginalize its rivals.\(^\text{84}\)

- In its statements, the SMB has been a vocal advocate for democracy and human rights in Syria.\(^\text{85}\) The democracy and human rights that the SMB has promoted is not necessarily the same that is practiced in the West. The SMB’s understanding of these concepts is different from that of the democratic countries. The SMB’s vision of

\(^{81}\) Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, 158.
democracy is based on Islamic law, that is through the Shura Council, which does not necessarily guarantee equal rights for everybody.86

After the Syrian uprising in 2011, the SMB had a unique opportunity to re-emerge and promote itself as a significant political force.87 The group became active in organizing and mobilizing opposition to the government of President Bashar al-Assad. It played a prominent role in the Syrian opposition movement. Despite its opposition to the Syrian government, the SMB faced challenges in establishing a united front with other opposition groups. The group was accused of seeking its own narrow interests. Many Syrian activists criticized the SMB’s lack of cooperation with other opposition groups, and its insistence to occupy most important positions within the opposition’s various platforms. Critics described it as a complex and double-faced organization.88

The SMB’s religious ideology has often been a barrier to its participation in a democratic political system. Away from religious restrictions, and in an effort to overcome this obstacle, the SMB founded the Waad Party in 2013. Waad is a political party that aims to present a more secular and inclusive face of the SMB. The Waad Party's founding declaration states that the party is "committed to the principles of democracy, pluralism, and tolerance" and that it "stands for the unity of all Syrians, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, or sect."89 The party’s platform also includes a commitment to social justice, economic development, and human rights. In order to attract non-Muslims, the Waad Party has made efforts to join Christian members as well as individual from different ethnic backgrounds. The party has also sought to distance itself from the SMB’s more radical individuals, emphasizing its commitment to peaceful activism and non-violence.

The Syrian opposition’s relationship with SMB has always been complex. The SMB wanted to lead without a compromise, which limited its ability to engage with other opposition groups.90 As a sort of compromise, the SMB was willing to accept a transitional government that includes other opposition groups, but under condition that it controls the key ministries,

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86 Hinnebusch, *Syria: From Rebirth to Collapse*, 220.
87 Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, 222.
90 Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, 16.
such as defence and interior.\textsuperscript{91} The SMB's insistence on presenting itself as the only legitimate representer through leading the opposition with very little compromise limited its ability to build a broad coalition against the Syrian government. Initially, the Syrian opposition was a diverse group of individuals and organizations, lacking any type of harmony, apart from being united by their common desire to bring down the al-Assad government. The Syrian opposition followed different lines. As the conflict of interests between the SMB and other opposition groups progressed, tensions arose between various factions, including those aligned with the SMB.\textsuperscript{92}

The SMB’s long experience and history allowed it to be heavily involved in the Syrian opposition since 2011. The SMB took advantage of the momentum and continued to promote its representation. However, its conservative Islamist ideology became a source of tension with other factions of the opposition who follow more secular or moderate Islamic ideologies. There have also been accusations of violating human rights by the SMB-affiliated armed groups.\textsuperscript{93}

In recent years, other opposition factions gained more prominence. The SMB’s conflict with other opposition groups became more complex. The inability of the Syrian opposition to achieve any significant political successes reflected negatively on the SMB, and thus on its claims of representation. The Syrian opposition faced numerous challenges over the years, including the lack of unity, fragmentation, and the rise of extremist groups. In fact, extremism that arose in some parts of Syria is part of many complications. It might be the main reason of the continuous internal fights.\textsuperscript{94} Additionally, the opposition has been facing a well-armed and well-funded army that has been willing to use extreme force to maintain its grip on power. Actually, the Syrian conflict has been influenced by regional and international geopolitical interests, with various countries supporting different factions for their own strategic purposes.\textsuperscript{95}

In response to accusations that the SMB was the reason for the failure of the Syrian revolution, the SMB has argued that it played a key role in mobilizing the Syrian people and that it was only the brutality of al-Assad that prevented the revolution from succeeding. The SMB has referred the reasons of the failure to external factors, such as heavy interference of different countries that seek to achieve their own agendas.

\textsuperscript{91} Hinnebusch, Syria: From Rebirth to Collapse, 222.
\textsuperscript{92} Conduit, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 185.
\textsuperscript{93} Conduit, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 210.
\textsuperscript{94} Lefèvre, “Islamism within a civil war”, 9.
\textsuperscript{95} Conduit, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 184.
2.3 Social Grounds of Representation

The SMB has also promoted its representation based on social activities. It linked certain groups of people who are in need for help to its social programs through supplying aid and services. Many Syrians suffer from poverty and unemployment, and the SMB is one of few organizations that supply aid and provide social services to the poor and needy. The intention of the SMB is to gain a wide popularity base in some parts of Syria, especially in the North-West, where the opposition is in control. The SMB has also a strong and effective organizational structure that includes thousands of supporters in various parts of the country. This organization’s structure and administrative system are not available for any other opposition group in Syria. This position ultimately allows the SMB to use its network to offer social services in many areas in Syria, such as in the below examples.

2.3.1 Relief and Social Support

An important element of the SMB’s representation is based on social grounds, being able to provide social services and mobilize support whenever needed. The SMB recalls its history and competency in running schools, hospitals, and charities, in order to build a bright image amongst those who have benefited from these services. Additionally, the SMB has advocated for Islamic values and principles, such as justice and equality, which resonate with many Syrians. The SMB wanted also to capitalize on popular discontent with the Syrian government, particularly the political oppression and economic inequality. The SMB’s intention is to present itself as an alternative to the ruling government, with promises of democratic and advanced Syria.

The SMB, however, has faced opposition from many Syrians, particularly those who identify themselves as seculars or who belong to minority religious groups, such as Christians and Alawites. These groups view the SMB as a threat to their way of life, or as a sectarian organization that does not represent their interests. The SMB has attempted to address these concerns by emphasizing its commitment to inclusivity, tolerance, and respect for diversity. It has asserted that its vision for Syria embraces all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation or beliefs.

96 Conduit, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria*, 206
Nevertheless, the social work of the SMB has been used to enhance the SMB’s popularity. The SMB wanted those who rely on its support to consider it as their representative. The SMB has been involved in funding and managing several non-governmental organizations in Syria, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare, and humanitarian relief. These NGOs include:

- The Islamic Relief Worldwide. This UK-based charity has been active in Syria since the early 1990s. Many Syrians may have received aid from this organization. However, there is no concrete evidence of direct funding from the Muslim Brotherhood, or the SMB to this organization. The organization provides humanitarian aid and development assistance to Syrians affected by conflict and poverty.97

- The Orient for Human Relief. The organization is a Syrian NGO that was established in Turkey in 2013 by Syrian activists, who have good relations with the SMB. The organization provides humanitarian aid, including food and medical assistance, to Syrians affected by the conflict. The organization operates in several parts of Syria and focuses on providing aid to vulnerable communities, including women and children.98

Some of the relief works that the SMB has been involved in, and which helps it intentions to promote itself as a representative of the Syrian people include:

- Distribution of aid. The SMB has been active in distributing food, clothes and other basic needs to those affected by the conflict, particularly in the areas under control of the opposition. The SMB also worked to establish local councils and provide public services in the areas where the Syrian government had lost control. This included providing aid to refugees, displaced persons, and those living in besieged areas.99

- Healthcare. The SMB played a significant role in establishing medical clinics, field hospitals in the areas under the opposition control, providing medical supplies and training medical teams. These clinics provide medical care and treatment to those who have been injured or displaced by the conflict.100

Sheltering. The SMB has been involved in providing shelters and housing to the displace Syrians. The SMB has reportedly established a network of safe houses and communal shelters for Syrians in need, particularly in the areas under the opposition control. The SMB has also provided financial assistance to those who have been unable to find a shelter in the overcrowded refugee camps in the neighboring countries.

- Advocacy. The SMB has been active in advocating for the rights of Syrians affected by the conflict. This has included raising awareness about the humanitarian crisis in Syria and advocating for international support to address the crisis, requesting urgent aid and relief items.\(^{101}\)

There have been allegations that the SMB used money to enhance its representation grounds in Syria,\(^{102}\) by empowering pro-Ikhwan figures.\(^{103}\) However, it is difficult to verify the accuracy of these allegations as there is limited information available about the sources of funding of the SMB, as well as other opposition groups in Syria.

It is well-known that the Syrian opposition, including the SMB, received financial and military support from foreign governments and non-state actors during the Syrian uprisal. Some of this support was provided openly, while other was provided covertly, or through back channels. There have been reports that some of this foreign support was channeled through the Syrian National Council (SNC), and later through the Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC). SNC and SOC are the main Syrian opposition platforms. As an intentional tactic by the SMB, to marginalize other groups of the opposition, the SNC was led, to a great extent, by members of the SMB, while those groups who do not share same views with the SMB have been marginalized.\(^{104}\) As thus, it is possible that some of the funds received by the Syrian National Council were used to empower the SMB's image and representation.

One of the reasons why the SMB has been involved in establishing various charities in Europe, is to create a support platform that links Syrians abroad and inside. This platform is planned to function as a carrier of the SMB representation at the same time. These charities and NGOs


\(^{103}\)Lund, “Muslim Brotherhood in a New Syria”.

were established mainly in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Sweden, where there are significant Syrian communities. In the countries of the Syrian diaspora, the SMB has established mosques, community centers, and cultural associations, which serve as hubs for Syrian refugees and immigrants. This is to help them, and ultimately, try to mobilize their efforts, to become supporters of the SMB’s representation.

The SMB, for example, has established several foundations in Switzerland, which are involved in various social, cultural, and religious activities. One of the Muslim Brotherhood's main foundations in Switzerland is the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland (ICCS), founded in 1999. The ICCS promotes the Muslim Brotherhood's representation in Switzerland and enhance its image. It is involved in various activities, including social, cultural, and educational programs. The ICCS also operates several mosques and Islamic centers in Switzerland.

Another Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated foundation in Switzerland is the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Switzerland (FIOS), which was established in 1989. FIOS is involved in promoting Islamic values and education, from Muslim Brotherhood perspective. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood has established several other foundations in Switzerland, such as the Islamic Society of Switzerland, which operates several mosques and Islamic centers across the country. These foundations are involved in various social and charitable activities, including providing aid to Syrians. Through the charitable work in Europe for many years, the SMB wants to enhance its image and introduce itself as a representative of certain smegmas of the Muslim community.

### 2.3.2 Education

One of the main activities of the SMB is its involvement in education. Education was used by the SMB as a platform to address a large number of audiences, allowing it to spread its ideology and attract a wide base of followers. The SMB established several schools and educational institutions across Syria that provide Islamic education to Syrian children and youths. These

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institutions aim to promote the organization's version of Islam and to counter the influence of secularism and Westernization upon the Syrian society. The SMB wants to deliver a precise content of Islam, and not merely use Islam as a tool to reach certain benefits. This is what makes this issue problematic, and raise a question whether the SMB wants to use Islam for politics, or use politics for Islam? The SMB has struggled to reconcile its commitment to Islamic law with its participation in the political process. The SMB's leadership has argued that Islamic law is the only legitimate source of political authority, but it has also recognized the need to compromise with other political groups in order to achieve its goals. The SMB played an important role in establishing the Faculty of Islamic Legislation Sharia at Damascus University in the 1950s. The Sharia faculty offered courses in Islamic law, theology, and Arabic literature. It was seen by the SMB as an alternative to the secular faculties that were prevalent at that time. Dr. Mustafa Alsibai, the first SMB’s Comptroller in Syria, played a vital role in the establishment of the Faculty of Sharia.

In the early 20th century, Syria was under Ottoman rule and its legal system was based on the Ottoman legal tradition. Alsibai believed that the legal system needed to be reformed and modernized, and that Islamic law needed to be studied and explained in a way that was relevant to modern society. The Faculty of Sharia at Damascus University became a center for the study of Islamic law and jurisprudence, and a platform for proposals of modernization of the legal system. Alsibai served as the first dean of the faculty of Sharia, and helped to develop its curriculum and academic programs. The SMB leaders (Sheikhs or Ulama, which refers to religious and educated persons), played an important role also in guiding and planning the SMB’s programs and plans, unlike their counterparts in Egypt.

In his book This is Islam, Alsibai outlined his vision for a modern institution of Islamic studies. He proposed the establishment of a modern curriculum that would include not only traditional Islamic subjects but also modern subjects such as mathematics, natural sciences, and history. He also called for the incorporation of European legal and intellectual traditions.

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108 Lefèvre, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Role in Syria".
112 Teitelbaum, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 213.
113 Mustafa Alsibai, This is Islam (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2010).
into an Islamic curriculum.\textsuperscript{114} Alsibai's vision for a modern institution of Islamic studies was influenced by his exposure to the European legal and intellectual traditions during his travels to Europe. He believed that the Islamic law and jurisprudence could be studied and interpreted using modern methods. The establishment of the Faculty of Sharia at Damascus University was a significant milestone in the development of Islamic studies and Islamic law in the Arab world. It provided a platform for the study and interpretation of Islamic law, based on contemporary legal and intellectual practices, more relevant to the social and cultural context of the time. Through the Faculty of Sharia, the SMB tried to form a strong base of followers that supports its representation. This would not be possible without the presence of the Faculty of Sharia at Damascus University.

In addition to its educational activities in Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood established several educational institutions in other Arab countries, particularly in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Muslim Brotherhood played a major role in developing the educational system of the Islamic University of Madinah, the University of King Abdulaziz, the University of Umm Al-Qura and others.\textsuperscript{115}

Historically, the SMB had a great experience in establishing and running Islamic educational institutes. Many Islamic schools have been established in Syria by the SMB, which aim to teach Islamic law and other legal sciences, and to promote Islamic faith values among male and female students. Integrating females in the SMB’s educational plans was a revolutionary step at the beginning, which the SMB promoted to gain respect and popularity. Over years, these schools and institutes were considered the main source for teaching Islam in Syria. In this way, the SMB wanted to secure a prominent role in the Syrian society. There were no real competitors in the field of religious education for the SMB, except for the Abu al-Nour Institute, which was founded by the Sufi leader, Sheikh Ahmed Kaftaro. Abu al-Nour Institute is considered one of the most important centers of Islamic education in Syria and the Middle East, attracting thousands of students from Syria and abroad.\textsuperscript{116}

In Europe, after the SMB members went to exile in the early 1980s, the SMB and its affiliated organizations continued to engage in educational activities. The organization established a

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Hurricane Man}, Odabasham.
number of Islamic schools and educational centers that provide religious and cultural education to Muslim children and youths. These schools and centers operate under different names and affiliations. Many are funded and staffed by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, including the SMB, or affiliated organizations. In addition to these schools and centers, the SMB has also been involved in organizing cultural and educational events, such as lectures, conferences, and seminars, promoting its version of Islam. These events are either open to public or targeting specific audience.

The educational activities of the SMB have been used to promote its representation grounds and popularity among Muslim communities. Here are few ways according to which the movement’s educational activities have been run:

- Promoting Islamic values and beliefs. The SMB’s educational activities have focused on promoting its understanding of Islam, emphasizing the importance of Islamic values such as social justice, charity, and community service. This has supported the movement’s claims of being a respected voice inside Muslim communities.

- Providing religious and cultural education. The SMB’s educational institutions and schools have provided religious and cultural education to Muslim children and youths, in order to instill a sense of pride about Islamic heritage and identity. This has also been used to build a sense of community’s unity and belonging.

- Offering alternatives to the state-run institutions. The SMB’s educational activities have often marketed as an alternative to state-run institutions. By offering high-quality educational programs and services, the movement wants to promote itself, particularly among those who are dissatisfied with the state-run educational system.

In general, the SMB’s ideology has always been closely linked to education. The SMB believes that education is the key to unlocking the ambitions of the Syrian people and allowing them to achieve their full potential. At the same time the SMB wants to deliver its message to a wide spectrum of people that the education platforms secure. The SMB’s ideology emphasizes the importance of education and the need for educated individuals, in order to be able to contribute to the society’s progress and to the community’s welfare. The SMB’s educational activities have been used enhance its representation and popularity. The Muslim

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118 Conduit, The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, 211.
brotherhood see education as a tool for socialization and instilling certain values in the followers’ minds in order to create a base of shared identity and common goal. All these efforts were marketed to pour in the basket of the movement’s representation.119

2.3.3 Health Care

After 2011, the health sector in Syria deteriorated dramatically due to the ongoing war. It led to the destruction of many hospitals and medical facilities, and the displacement of millions of Syrians.120 According to a report of World Health Organization’s (WHO) that was issued in 2020, the health system in Syria has been greatly affected by the conflict, which has caused deterioration of health services and lack of medicines, medical supplies and medical personnel.121 The Report indicates that the death rate among civilians, especially children, in Syria has increased dramatically due to the lack of necessary health care, and the spread of infectious diseases, due to poor hygiene. In addition, the use of chemical weapons and cluster bombs in the war in Syria has polluted the environment and caused the spread of chronic diseases such as cancer.122 In general, the health system in Syria suffers an acute shortage of doctors, nurses, and basic medical supplies, which requires great efforts to rebuild.

This situation has offered a unique opportunity for an organized and well-funded group such as the SMB to fill in the gap. Accordingly, the SMB has provided many health services to Syrians who were suffering, especially in the areas beyond the control of the Syrian government. Their efforts focused on providing basic care to patients, supplying medicines and medical examinations, not complicated supplies. Difficult cases are referred to the nearby hospitals in Turkey. The SMB has established several hospitals and health centers in the opposition-held areas. These hospitals have played a major role in providing basic needs of people. In addition, the SMB distributed medicines and medical supplies to people in the besieged areas. It launched awareness campaigns to inform people about infectious diseases and ways to prevent them.

121 “Health care in Syria before and during the crisis”.
With these steps, the SMB wanted to enhance its popularity. The SMB claims that it runs and/or supports many health centers in some areas in the west-northern Syria, including:

1- Imam Hasan Al Banna Hospital. It is located in Idlib Governorate and is considered one of the largest hospitals supported by the SMB. It includes several departments for children, women, eyes, teeth, surgery and internal medicine. According to a report by Al-Monitor, the hospital was opened in 2016 in the town of Atmeh, in Idlib province, and is run by the Syrian Islamic Council. The hospital has a capacity of 250 beds and provides medical services to civilians and military personnel and provide surgeries, treatment of chronic diseases, and emergency care.123

2- Bilal Bin Rabah Hospital. A medical center located in the city of Aleppo, and provides health care to the poor and needy. It is specialized in chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.124

3- The Mental Health Center in Idlib. It is the only center in the Northern region that provides specialized mental health care. It provides treatment and psychological support for people with mental illnesses.125

There are many other hospitals and health centers that are run or supported by the SMB. In fact, the health services offered a chance to the SMB to portray itself as a representative of these people.

Chapter 3.

The International Grounds for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood’s Representation

The SMB wanted to propose itself as an Islamic moderate partner to influential countries, particularly the regional and international powers that are involved in the Syrian conflict.\(^\text{126}\) The SMB has been working to promote its political and social agendas through various external means, including lobbying, media campaigns, and fundraising.\(^\text{127}\)

One of the things that the SMB’s wanted to promote internationally is its strong connections with other fellow Muslim Brotherhood groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia. These connections have enabled the SMB to access resources, expertise, and political support of already existed well-established network. This has helped to enhance the SMB’s position and influence in regional and international political arenas.

The SMB’s relationship with Turkey, is another resource that the SMB used to propose itself to the international community as a key player. Turkey has provided a safe playground for opposition groups, including those affiliated with the SMB.\(^\text{128}\) This has given the SMB access to important resources and support to maintain its position as a major political player in Syria.

Moreover, the SMB has worked to build external support through media campaigns and public relations. The Muslim Brotherhood has used social media platforms and other online channels to promote its message and agenda on international scale. It has established relationships with foreign journalists, bloggers,\(^\text{129}\) influencers and anybody who can help to amplify the SMB’s voice and increase its visibility. The SMB wanted to be acceptable internationally, in order to strengthen its representation grounds among Syrians. By doing so, gaining an international recognition would be reflected on the national representation, and vice versa the national


representation would make international players obligated to recognize the SMB as an important player in Syrian matters.

3.1 The International Grounds for Representation in the Middle East

The SMB has received political support from several countries in the Middle East over the years, particularly those that oppose the actions taken by the Syrian government against the upraised Syrians. The SMB enjoyed excellent political support from Saudi Arabia in the past, mainly in the 1960s. This support has been used to enhance the SMB’s image both inside and outside Syria, considering the symbolic weight of the Saudi Arabia in the Arab and Muslim world.

One of the key countries that has provided political support to the SMB is Qatar. The Qatari government has been a strong supporter to the Syrian opposition. It has provided financial and material support to various opposition groups, including the SMB. Qatari officials have regularly met the SMB leaders and have expressed support for the group’s political activities. In fact, Qatar is the only country that allowed the Syrian opposition to take over the Syrian embassy in Doha in March 2013. This move was a part of the wider diplomatic effort by Qatar and other countries in the region to isolate the Syrian government and provide support to the opposition. At that time, the Syrian Embassy in Doha had been closed for several months. Thereafter, the Qatari government gave the opposition a permission to take over the premises and operate the embassy.

The opposition’s takeover of the embassy was seen as a symbolic victory to the Syrian opposition and its supporters. The move was widely publicized. The opposition’s three stars flag was flowing over the embassy building. The takeover gave the opposition access to the embassy’s documents, which were probably used to support and strengthen the opposition’s cause. In fact, Qatar has been always a key player in the international effort to isolate the Syrian government after 2011.

While there is no evidence to suggest that the SMB had direct control over the Syrian Embassy in Qatar, those who had been appointed to run the embassy enjoyed good relations with the SMB. The event of taking over the embassy by itself was seen as a support for the opposition by the international community.

The Qatari government has been a supporter of the Syrian National Coalition (SOC). This included many members of the SMB. The SOC was considered, then, as the main opposition representative. The SOC was established in Qatar in November 2012, when Qatar provided the necessary logistic support to assemble hundreds of opposition's figures and leaders in one place. The SMB’s involvement in the opposition and its leadership role in the SNC and SOC, as well as other opposition platforms, has helped to increase its visibility, and thus was promoted to enhance its image and representation.

Other countries in the region, including Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, have also provided significant support to the Syrian opposition and have played an important role in the ongoing conflict. Even in the absence of evidences of direct support to the SMB, the movement’s control of the opposition platforms suggests that it would end up in the SMB’s favor, and can be added to its representative balance.

The political support that the SMB received from these and other countries in the Middle East has been effectively used to enhance its popularity and legitimacy internationally, and consequently within Syria. The support has also helped the SMB to continue its political and social activities.

### 3.2 The International Grounds for Representation in Europe

Following the failed uprising against the Syrian government in the 1970s and 1980s, many members of the group were forced to flee the country. Many of them sought refuge in Europe, particularly in countries like France, Germany, the Netherland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In their new homes, members of the Muslim Brotherhood established new networks and local communities, in order to continue their programs. They founded new platforms, such as the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) in the UK, which became an important platform.

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134 Sacha Ismail, “What is the Muslim Association of Britain?” Workers Liberty,
for the SMB’s activities. They also established links with other Muslim organizations and with sympathetic individuals and groups in Europe.

In addition to establishing new associations, members of the SMB were actively engaged in politics in Syria from their host countries. They lobbied politicians and policymakers on issues related to Syria and the Middle East. They also organized demonstrations and protests to raise awareness concerning the plight of the Syrian refugees that badly affected Europe in 2015. Over time, the SMB’s presence in Europe grew stronger and more influential, especially after so many of its members or sympathizers became European citizens and received voting rights. The group was able to recover and maintain its organizational structure, and to continue its political and social activities, despite being in exile. However, the SMB’s presence in Europe and its ability to maintain a strong organizational structure is important for the SMB to raise the voice and claim representation.

The SMB claimed, for example, to having received political support in the United Kingdom in various forms over the years. Such claim has not been confirmed by the UK government or by any third party. One of the SMB’s ways to claim representation, is by spreading news about its strong relations with western governments. The SMB has a significant presence in the UK, particularly in London, where many of its members and leaders reside. The Muslim Brotherhood in general, including the SMB, have established links with other Muslim organizations in the country, such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). Such alliances were used to raise the group’s profile and enhanced its image and popularity.

In 2015, the UK government classified the military wing of the Syrian opposition, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), as a terrorist organization. This includes the military groups that are supported by or affiliated with the SMB. However, the political wing of the SMB has not been affected as such. Its members continued to engage in political activities and lobbying efforts.

In 2016, the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (SOC), where the SMB is strongly represented, was invited to attend the London Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region. This conference was hosted by the UK government.\(^{139}\) The SMB, through the SOC, used its participation in this conference to show itself to the Syrians as participating in an international conference as their representative. Actually, there is no evidence that suggests that the SMB contribution in the UK conference has increased its support in the UK, but rather, it this contribution was spread in the Middle East, and was promoted by some pro-SMB news channels, to create an impression of support.

Another example of the presence of the SMB in Europe is its existence in Germany since the 1970s. Then, the former General Comptroller of the SMB, Issam al-Attar, took refuge in Germany. The extent of the SMB’s representation and influence within the Syrian community in Germany is not well documented. However, there have been reports about the SMB’s involvement in various political and social activities within the community. One of the most notable examples of the SMB’s presence in Germany was its participation in the Syrian opposition conference held in Berlin in 2011.\(^{140}\) The conference was organized by the Syrian Expatriate Organization (SEO) and was attended by a variety of opposition groups and figures, including many members of the SMB. The SMB’s participation in the conference demonstrated its relatively large number in Germany, and was projected as a reflection of its growing visibility and influence within the Syrian opposition. Another platform that the SMB controls is the Islamic Center Aachen (IZA), one of the most influential Islamic centers in Germany.\(^{141}\)

In sum, the SMB’s representation in Europe is diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the group’s efforts to promote itself through a broad-based network that extends beyond Syria’s borders. The international presence of the SMB is specifically important to limit the international community’s open opposition to the movement on the one hand, and increasing the chances of claiming representation the Syrians on the other hand.


3.3 The International Grounds for Representation in the United States and Canada

The US is an important player in the Syrian conflict and internationally. Its evaluation of the SMB has significant implications on the group's representation and influence. Robert Ford, the US Ambassador to Syria told the opposition in Istanbul that the SNC must subject itself to an independent committee, i.e., it should not be dominated by the SMB. The reason was that the SMB torpedoed the opposition plans and deviated it from the founding statement established in Doha in November 2012. The SMB used its influence in Turkey, Qatar and Egypt, and Al-Jazeera, the Qatari owned satellite channel, to polish its image to maintain dominance. However, the US still questions the SMB’s democratic intentions. Accordingly, the SMB wants to project its actions in a way that convince the US and international players that it follows democratic ways to justify its representation. Until now, the SMB has not been successful neither in the US, nor in most countries of international influence. The major problem is the SMB’s merge between Islam and politics, which makes it difficult for the SMB to make any significant compromises.

Canada is a diverse community that welcomes people from all over the world, including those who have been displaced due to conflicts in their home countries. Individuals in Canada are free to practice their religion and participate in peaceful political activities, as long as they remain under the umbrella of the Canadian law. As thus, many of the SMB’s skilled and educated members took advantage of the “Canada's skilled immigration program” which is designed to attract highly skilled professionals. The program evaluates candidates based on their education, work experience, language proficiency and other factors to determine if they are eligible to immigrate as skilled labor. Immigration to Canada is based on merit profile and is not influenced by an individual's political or religious belief or affiliation.

Since a number of the SMB’s members hold high credentials in various fields, their selection in the Canada's skilled immigration program is rather easy. On the other hand, as a result of the political harassment of the SMB by the Syrian government, and the difficulty of obtaining travel documents, the SMB’s members found what they miss in Canada, which grants its citizenship within a relatively short period of time. The Canada option is an excellent

alternative for those who face difficulties in obtaining travel documents. In Canada, the SMB members worked hard to organize themselves within the Syrian immigrant community, whose number increased dramatically after 2011. To present itself to the Canadian government as a representative for the Syrians, the SMB organized seminars, lectures and offered social services to the Syrian refugees, including helping them to organize themselves. This opportunity gave the SMB an opportunity to portray itself as a representative in Canada, and consequently this representation extends to the homeland, Syria.\footnote{Stewart Bell, “Muslim Brotherhood has a ‘Significant Presence’ in Canada”, \textit{National Post}, \url{https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/muslim-brotherhood-has-a-significant-presence-in-canada-says-study-urging-probe-into-the-group}, accessed April 15, 2023.}
CONCLUSIONS

The SMB's efforts to convince international organizations, the general populace, and potentially the rest of the opposition that it represents a major part of Syrians are motivated by a number of factors. The SMB, based on its long history of activism in Syria and its deep roots within Syrian society, believes that it is the only legitimate representative of Syrian Sunni Muslims. It argues, depending on its commitment to Islamic values, that it is the only Syrian group that has a clear and consistent vision for a state in Syria, where Islamic law can be implemented. The SMB claims that it is the only Syrian group that has the experience to implement this vision. This is particularly important to continue its claims of representation and to gain recognition. This approach of the SMB is likely to continue in the future.

The SMB believes that Islam is not only a religion to practice and worship, but rather a comprehensive system that regulates the life of Muslims in political, social, economic and legal aspects. The SMB's belief in the comprehensive nature of Islam has a number of implications on its work within the Syrian opposition. It makes it difficult for the SMB to work with other opposition groups, especially those who do not share the same vision of an Islamic state. It makes it also difficult for the SMB to compromise its political principles, or to address the concerns of secular and non-Muslim Syrians.

From an Islamic point of view, the Quran is the central religious text of Islam, and it is believed by Muslims to be the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, the Sunna is the collection of sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, that is considered to be authoritative source of Islamic law. The SMB uses the Quran and the Sunna as a base on which its representation is built. The SMB uses Islamic texts to promote a sense of unity and shared purpose with the Sunni Muslims, in order to claim that it is their representative.

The SMB provides social and charitable assistance to the needy to improve living conditions. The social and charitable work is used by the SMB to gain support in many ways. The charitable activities provide basic needs to many Syrians, who have been suffering from the effects of the ongoing long war. This assistance has been projected by the SMB to build a bright image, and make it more likely that people will not object its representation. The social activities are portrayed also to promote an image care and compassion, countering the negative stereotypes that are often associated with Islamist groups.
The SMB has a strong presence in the field of religious education. It has established mosques, schools, and other institutions to promote Islamic teachings and values. The SMB's educational programs have been used to attract Syrians who strive to join such programs. The SMB's use of Islamic religious education is a powerful tool to promote and enhance its image.

The Muslim Brotherhood adopts the principle of discussion and voting between the members of its Shura Council as the way to take internal decisions. The SMB wants to show that its internal democracy complies with other known democratic ways, to build a bridge of trust with those who concerns about the group’s democratic intentions. This internal SMB democracy is portrayed to suggest that the SMB, is willing to engage with others who have different viewpoints. The SMB, through its internal elections wants to reflect a bright image in practicing its political Islam, which is liquified as a good base for representation.

The Muslim Brotherhood does not hide its ambition to restore the concept of the nation (Al Umma), bypassing local nationalities and hand-made geographical boarders. This ambition adds additional challenges to the SMB’s relations with other opposition groups. The concept of (Al Umma) shifts the focus from Syria, and raises concerns about the willingness to engage in dialogue, compromise, and prioritize the shared goal of a democratic and inclusive Syria.

The SMB has been accused of being authoritarian. It defended itself against claims of authoritarianism by arguing that it focuses on achieving an Islamic state in Syria as a priority. The group has argued that its methods are justified in the context of the war in Syria. In an interview with Al Jazeera English on January 12, 2023, the SMB Spokesperson, Zuhair Salem, said: “In times of war, certain measures must be taken to ensure the safety and security of our people. These measures may seem harsh to some, but they are necessary to achieve our ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic state in Syria.” This justification raises ethical concerns and bears some resemblance to Niccolò Machiavelli’s concept of “the ends justify the means.”

The SMB has faced significant opposition and persecution from the Syrian government. Many of its members have been killed, imprisoned or exiled, and the organization was banned at various times throughout its history. The SMB has skillfully used this history of oppression to create sympathy and to remain present in political, social and religious spheres.

The SMB has been criticized of promoting sectarian divisions in Syria. Critics claim that the SMB seeks to represent only Sunni Muslims, and that it has a little interest in working with
other religious or ethnic groups, and for lack of transparency and accountability.\textsuperscript{145} The SMB has defended itself against accusations of sectarianism by emphasizing its commitment to representing all Syrians, regardless of their religious affiliation. The group has argued that its vision for Syria is one of an inclusive and just society that respects the rights of all citizens. In an interview with Al Arabiya on March 15, 2023, the SMB Spokesman Zuhair Salem said: “We believe that an Islamic state should be one that represents all Syrians, regardless of their religious affiliation. We are committed to protecting the rights of all citizens, and we will work to build a society that is based on unity, justice, and equality.”

Finally, the SMB has promoted itself as a representative of the Syrian Sunni Muslims, who despite being the largest ethnic group in Syria, but yet they feel themselves marginalized. The SMB has promoted its history of providing social, educational and religious services to Syrians as its ground of representation. While the SMB has made big efforts to represent the Syrian Sunni community, its ability to translate this representation into a viable governing structure has been constrained. The SMB's journey towards achieving a formal governing role is likely to be a long and challenging one, though the SMB's efforts have, so far, unable to flower into a viable governmental structure.\textsuperscript{146}


\textsuperscript{146} Obaid, \textit{The Muslim Brotherhood: A Failure in Political Evolution}, 1.
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