The Harakat al-Muqawima al-Islamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement), better known as Hamas, has elicited distinct reactions from American policy-makers and academics. In official circles, Hamas is considered a straightforward terrorist group. Despite Arab protests that Hamas is a legitimate movement of national liberation, this Palestinian group is regularly listed in the U.S. State Department’s annual report on terrorist groups. Consistent with this official view, the Bush administration imposed newly authorized sanctions against Hamas in November 2001. Such sanctions, which focus on preventing terrorist groups from engaging in various financial transactions, were promulgated in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, tragedies. The justification for including Hamas on the terrorist list centers on the actions of the military wing of Hamas, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, and its record of purposefully targeting Israeli civilians in violent attacks.

Without regard to the somewhat stale argument about “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter,” the official U.S. position is problematic for two reasons. First, by labeling Hamas a terrorist group, the government ignores most of what Hamas actually does. Hamas is a social movement with thousands of activists and hundreds of thousands (perhaps millions) of Palestinian sympathizers, and it engages in extensive political and social activities far removed from suicide bombers. Second, it is always problematic to speak of terrorist groups (or states), as opposed to groups (or states) that periodically use acts of terror for tactical political reasons. By understanding terrorism in tactical terms rather than as a genetic group attribute, rational responses become potentially more effective and less obviously politically hypocritical.

Recent academic work on Hamas has been much more sensitive to these
nuances. For example, books by Khaled Hroub (2000), Ziad Abu-Amr (1994), and Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela (2000) (two Palestinians and two Israelis) have presented a comprehensive picture of Hamas to the English-speaking world. While still recognizing the role of violence, these authors provide much more robust empirical analyses of the totality of Hamas. Indeed, instead of building a wall between Hamas’s popular work and its violence, these authors depict the dynamic and often reinforcing relationship between both facets. If there is a weakness to this emerging body of work, it is a lack of conscious theory, whether political sociology or political economy (though building empirical knowledge of Hamas obviously must precede theoretical conclusions).

This chapter attempts to build on the empirical knowledge provided by these authors, as well as my own fieldwork, by interpreting these data through social movement theory. Applying social movement theory allows us not only to understand Hamas better but also to “deorientalize” Hamas by recognizing that it shares the main features of many social movements around the world. Understanding that many—perhaps most—“terrorist” groups are far more complex social movements than typical definitions permit has significant theoretical and policy implications.

This essay is divided into three sections. The first section constitutes a brief overview of the social movement theory framework utilized in this chapter. The second section presents a short history of Hamas since its birth in 1988 in the midst of the first Palestinian Intifada (1987–1993). The third section explicitly applies social movement theory to Hamas through an examination of its political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings.

**Structure, Agency, and Framing**

Social movement theory (SMT) has emerged as a sort of middle ground approach in analyzing episodes of contentious collective actions, falling between structuralist and rational choice schools. As figure 4.1 depicts, the two variables that distinguish these analytical approaches are unit of analysis and level of volunteerism.

In general, these three analytical approaches emphasize different units of analysis. Structural theories tend to have large units of analysis, generally focusing on states and the international system to explain large episodes of collective action. Perhaps the best-known state-centered approach to explaining revolutions is Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions* (1979). Similarly, changes in the international system have also been employed to explain revolutionary violence, from dependency models to current work on the impact of globalization on collective political violence (Wallerstein 1990; Barber 1995).
In structural models, understanding large outcomes, such as social revolution, can only be accomplished by analyzing changes in large units.

Rational choice (or public choice) theory is at the other end of the unit of analysis spectrum. In general, rational choice theory denies the explanatory efficacy of units of analysis other than the individual. For rational choice theorists, structural analyses are often viewed as tautological or, perhaps more generously, as frameworks that explain nothing in their attempt to explain everything. For such theorists, states, systems, and groups do not make choices; only individuals do, and modeling individual choices in strategic relationships with other individuals is the preferred analytical approach to understanding collective action, including revolutions. The central analytical question in this school is how collective action overcomes the “free rider” problem through selective incentives and group size.²
By contrast, SMT generally focuses on groups as the proper unit of analysis in explaining collective action. While recognizing that individuals make strategic choices, social movement theorists contend that such choices are not made in a vacuum outside of the changing contexts, relations, and networks in which people actually live. Since individual decision making cannot be understood outside of a group-social context, the group is the proper unit of analysis. Similarly, social movement theorists recognize the importance of structural change in creating the conditions necessary for collective action. Indeed, such structural change is a prime component in the creation of political opportunities, one of SMT’s triad of variables. However, it is not enough to understand episodes of large collective action only through the lens of structural change. One must also understand how people act within the parameters of such change. In other words, not all similar structural changes lead to similar political outcomes; how groups take advantage of change is critical to understanding the difference in outcomes.

Differences in what is considered the proper unit of analysis in understanding large collective action reflect philosophical differences about the role of agency, or volunteerism, in explaining significant political outcomes. Structuralists generally deny that purposeful human actions account in any meaningful way for large political outcomes. As Theda Skocpol has argued, “The point is simply that no single acting group, whether a class or an ideological vanguard, deliberately shapes the complex and multiply determined conflicts that bring about revolutionary crises and outcomes. The French Revolution was not made by a rising capitalist bourgeoisie or by the Jacobins; the Russian Revolution was not made by the industrial proletariat or even by the Bolshevik party” (1994, 200). As George Lichtheim (1964) argued famously in “From Finland Station,” Lenin may have been important when one limits one’s views to the events in Russia in 1917 and immediately thereafter, but he made little difference in the larger and historically necessary trend of state-led industrialization in Russia.

Conversely, rational choice theorists understand history as the sum total of millions of strategic choices made by individuals. Such an approach is comparable to understanding a country’s total economic output as equal to the sum total of millions of individual transactions. Individual agency, or volunteerism, therefore plays a foundational role in rational choice approaches to understanding collective action (and many other phenomena). There have been only limited academic attempts to find a synthesis between the contrasting logics of decision-making in rational choice theory and structuralism (e.g., Goldstone 1994).

SMT again takes a middle road on the question of volunteerism. It argues that while structural changes outside the control of any individual provide for changing opportunity structures, they do not dictate outcomes. Similarly, SMT accepts that agency is important, but only in the social context in which
it transpires. In other words, agency is clearly restricted and must be understood as such.

Social movement theory tends to utilize three variables in its case studies (and SMT is most often applied to individual case studies, such as in this chapter). First, SMT seeks to analyze how changes in political opportunity structures impact the acceleration or deceleration of collective action. Changes in opportunity structures can come from various sources, including changes in international structures (e.g., globalization, the demise of the USSR, attention or inattention by foreign powers), regime or government change at home, domestic policy or legal changes, or changes within the group itself. The second SMT variable focuses on mobilizing structures for the group in question. Mobilizing structures vary from the formal (e.g., political parties) to the informal (e.g., informal urban networks) to the illegal (e.g., underground terrorist cells). It is through these structures that movements recruit like-minded individuals, socialize new participants, overcome the free rider problem, and mobilize contention. The third variable is “cultural framing.” Unlike the other two analytical approaches, SMT takes cultural issues seriously, but more in an ideological-tactical sense than is typically found in primordial understandings. In SMT, culture is conceptualized as multitiered. First, every society has a variety of stories, symbols, and histories that make up something of a collective cultural toolbox (Swidler 1986). Different groups privilege different sets of tools, and the various interpretations and uses of cultural tools often directly contradict one another. For example, the political meaning of Hussein’s “martyrdom” in Shi‘i Islam—its central passion play—has been bitterly contested over the centuries. Some ideologues interpreted it as a call for political quiescence in the face of unjust state power, while others (like Ayatollah Khomeini) asserted an activist interpretation that calls for confrontations with unjust authority no matter the consequences. Different tools are put together in different ways, creating a set of contrasting ideologies and sets of meanings in any given society. The American cultural toolbox can be used to create authentic ideologies as diverse as black nationalism and Christian fundamentalism.

The framing of issues occurs within the context of competing ideologies. In a sense, framing is the bumper-sticker version of how issues get interpreted within a certain ideological context. When done effectively, issue framing can be done with very few words. The U.S. debate on abortion rights can be summarized—framed—in single words that evoke intense emotions on either side: pro-choice or pro-life. In the Arab world, Islamists have similarly framed their platform with a minimum of verbiage. The most common example is the statement that “Islam is the solution” (al-Islam huwa al-hall) to virtually any problem or issue in society. By simply (or simplistically) framing issues, potential recruits need not understand the full ideology of the movement as the leading cadres do. Armed with the Cliffs Notes version of
complex ideologies, recruits can effectively do battle in a simpler Manichaeian world.

In sum, social movement theory claims a methodological middle ground between structural and rational choice models of contentious collective action. By utilizing groups as the primary unit of analysis, as well as suggesting that volunteerism is important but constrained, social movement theory provides a bridge between structuralism and rational choice. Critics might claim that in so doing, SMT ends up sacrificing theoretical rigor and clarity and ends up as a “laundry list” approach to explaining collective action. Proponents of SMT might counter that this approach actually is a synthesis of the best of structural analysis and rational choice insights, thereby providing a fuller, more robust explanation of contentious collective action.

The Social and Institutional Roots of Hamas

Islamism, including the Hamas variant, is an essentially modern phenomenon. It is strongly urban in its physical orientation; it is led by Western-educated cadres with little clerical involvement; and it is at ease using modern technology to advance its cause. This reality is far different from the popular portrayals of such groups as antimodern movements of rage led by those who are intent on turning back the historical clock to a mythical past. The recent prominence of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan has not helped matters, since it seems to fit a stereotype that is inaccurate in most cases. Islamist cadres are more often than not firmly entrenched in modern society. That is, they have modern, secular educations (often having studied in Europe or North America), live in urban areas (usually capital cities), and are young (generally in their twenties and thirties). Often their studies are in technical fields, such as engineering or medicine. They are almost never students of religious jurisprudence, and most have not studied in religious schools. In other words, leaders of the Islamist movements in the Middle East have virtually the same social profiles as those who, a generation earlier, agitated in favor of Ba’thism, Nasserism, and Arab socialism.

There should be nothing surprising in the fact that Islamist leaders have their roots in modern society. The intellectual vanguards—those who mold the ideology and provide the leadership—of most revolutionary movements, as Michael Walzer has argued, share similar, nontraditional backgrounds: “By and large, while classes differ fundamentally from one revolution to another, vanguards are sociologically similar. They are recruited from middling and professional groups. The parents of the recruits are gentlemen farmers, merchants, clerics, lawyers, petty officials. Recruitment begins at school, not in the streets, or in shops and factories, or in peasant villages” (1979, 31).

The Islamist leadership of the revolution in Iran is instructive on this point. It should be remembered that those clerics, such as Ayatollahs Khomeini
and Taleqani, who were critical to the success of the revolution had bases of support outside the traditional religious institutions and cities of learning in Iran. Khomeini, of course, had been in exile from 1964 to 1979. Taleqani and other politically active clergy (who constituted a small minority of the ulama before 1978) had built their network of hard-core supporters largely from fellow prisoners in the shah’s jails and from alienated university students. It is important to note that the most important revolutionary clerics were based in Tehran, not Qom, Mashhad, or other religious cities in Iran. Nor did they come from provincial capitals.

However, the core cadres of the revolution in Iran were not the ulama but the radical lay Islamists. The social profile of these cadres was often young (twenties and thirties), urban (mostly Tehran), and well educated (studied at secular universities in Iran or the West). Frequently, they were followers of Ali Shariati, an intellectual who blended Marxist concerns for social justice with Islamic themes of authenticity. Thus, while the traditional religious stratum gained much of the credit for the revolution in Iran, the lay Islamists— who are characterized by the same profile described by Walzer above and very much a product of modern society—were the activists, the organization builders, and the bridge to whole strata of society not enamored of clerical politics. The fact that this sociological group splintered after the revolution does not alter the fact of its earlier centrality.

Other examples of the essentially modernist roots of Islamism abound. The Tanzim al-Jihad group in Egypt, responsible for, among other things, the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat in 1981, also fits this description (Guenena 1986; Ansari 1984; Ibrahim 1980). In the 1980s, nearly 70 percent of Jihad’s members were either students or professionals. Over 77 percent were between the ages of 20 and 30. And a disproportionate number had studied engineering at secular universities. In Algeria, nearly every leader of the Islamic Salvation Front came from the capital city of Algiers and had a higher degree in a technical subject, such as chemical engineering. Many had studied at top universities in France.

Manfred Halpern was right to suggest 40 years ago that political power in the Middle East was increasingly being seized by a salaried “new middle class” of “managers, administrators, teachers, engineers, journalists, scientists, lawyers, or army officers.” It is a “class of men inspired by nontraditional knowledge, clustered around a core of salaried civilian and military politicians, organizers, administrators, and experts” (1963, 52). Clearly, while this class did seize power through the army in a number of Arab countries, the relatively liberal scenarios Halpern forecast have not materialized.

What I am suggesting here is that the Islamist leadership in the Middle East is very much a component of the new middle class that Halpern described. However, its ideological framework runs counter to what Halpern and other proponents of modernization theory predicted. Modern Western educa-
tion was supposed to breed greater secularization in the new middle class. But, for a number of reasons, significant segments of the new middle class have used Islamist ideologies, not secular-based ones, to address concerns of social justice, political power, and the distribution of resources. Such are the ideologies of authenticity (Ajami 1981).

Even with the exigencies of life under Israeli occupation, the same cleavage was produced in the Palestinian middle classes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: a dominant secular ideology of nationalism and an influential Islamist rival. It is important to remember that the leaders of both camps came from more or less the same social backgrounds that Walzer described above. There were class cleavages within the nationalist and Islamist camps but not between the leadership strata. The main fissure in the Palestinian new middle class was along ideological, not class, lines. Ideology, in this case, should not be construed as epiphenomenal or as a mask to advance material class interests. However, how that ideology was put into practice—or, more precisely, who put the ideology into practice—within each of the large ideological groupings did often parallel class lines.

Palestinian Islamism emerged for many of the same reasons as other Islamist movements that appeared at the same time. The general reasons are well known and much analyzed elsewhere: the failure of secular Arab regimes to build strong economies and open polities, the demonstration effect of the 1978–1979 Islamist revolution in Iran, and the regional impact of oil money from Saudi Arabia and other conservative Gulf states, all of which were critical in propelling Islamist thought forward.

Causes specific to Israel also helped build Palestinian Islamism, especially the Likud Party’s 1977 rise to power with its strong messianic message. In addition to its antagonistic policies in the West Bank and Gaza, the Likud’s ideology helped frame the conflict in religious—as opposed to nationalist—terms, coinciding with and bolstering Islamist tendencies. Moreover, Israeli policies beginning in the early 1980s assisted the Muslim Brotherhood organization in the West Bank and Gaza, primarily by providing political space to organize and mobilize. Israel viewed the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as its main enemy in the occupied territories and followed a “divide and conquer” strategy of pitting the Islamists against the secularist Palestinians. In this regard, Israel was no different from many other Arab regimes, which initially supported Islamist movements as a counterweight to the more serious secular opposition. Israel’s policy was largely effective because Islamist-PLO relations became more strained in the 1980s.

Before Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist movement was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood organization. Founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood was an active opponent of many of the secular state policies adopted in the Arab world, in addition to Western colonialism and Zionism (Mitchell 1969). During its first 50 years, the Muslim
Brotherhood was illegal in most countries, including Egypt, and was often harshly suppressed because of its politics and various assassination attempts. In Egypt, the movement was gradually co-opted by the upper stratum of the merchant class, which supported the concept of passive social Islamization and amiable ties with the regime. In part as a response to this trend in the Muslim Brotherhood—strongly encouraged under the leadership of Umar al-Tilmisani in the 1970s—more radical Islamist groups arose in Egypt, seeking to overthrow the state and kill the state’s “apostate” leadership. Unlike Egypt, Jordan generally tolerated the Muslim Brotherhood’s political activities. In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only continuously legal political organization in the West Bank when Jordan controlled the area from 1948 to 1967. While under Jordanian authority, the Muslim Brotherhood generally limited its political activities to its social agenda. That is, it advocated the gradual Islamization of society through education and adherence to Islamic principles, especially those encoded in the shari'a, or Islamic law.

The differences between Egyptian and Jordanian policies toward the Muslim Brotherhood between 1948 and 1967 go a long way toward explaining the disparate state of affairs for the Islamist movement in the Gaza Strip and West Bank under Israeli rule following 1967. The fact that Nasser outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood gave its activists in the Gaza Strip experience in building decentralized and clandestine organizations. In contrast to the secretive and militant forms of Islamism in Gaza under Egyptian rule, the lawful status of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Jordan-annexed West Bank put no premium on clandestine organizational talents. In addition, since Jordan did not permit cross-border violence against Israeli targets, there was no tradition of armed militancy against Israel in the West Bank, as opposed to the experience of the Gazan branch. Whereas the Gazan Muslim Brotherhood migrated to Fatah in the late 1960s, the West Bank Brotherhood politically stayed put, as that organization was technically illegal but widely indulged by Israeli authorities. Thus, ties between Islamist and nationalist organizations in Gaza have historically been very strong, while those ideologically differentiated organizations in the West Bank have remained isolated.

In part because of these very different histories and orientations, the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza and the West Bank never formed a common organizational link. Even after the two remaining parts of Palestine were reunited under a common military occupation in 1967, the West Bank Brotherhood members continued to be associated with their colleagues in Jordan, not Gaza, while those in Gaza were generally independent of outside ties.

In spite of both the harshness of military occupation and the persistent rhetorical attacks by nationalists on the seeming ideological acquiescence to the occupation by the Muslim Brotherhood, the leadership of the Brotherhood remained committed to the primacy of social Islamization, not confrontation with Israel. For the ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood, it was im-
possible to separate Israel from a larger campaign by the West to discredit and undermine Islam; it was equally impossible to politically differentiate Palestinian Muslims from the greater Islamic world. At base, then, the question of Palestine for the Muslim Brotherhood was essentially an Islamic problem and had to be addressed in those terms. For the Muslim Brotherhood, Palestine had been lost in large measure as God’s punishment for turning away from Islam. The logical first step in its recovery was for Palestinians to return to Islam, and only after that could Israel be confronted effectively.

The relatively passive policies adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood leadership vis-à-vis Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—the Islamization process could go on indefinitely—put the Brotherhood under intense pressure from the nationalist camp. The Brotherhood was often ridiculed for its inaction in the face of occupation. Such arguments and pressure were especially intense on university campuses, where student elections frequently centered on the subject. Despite its generally strong showing in university elections, the Islamist bloc was clearly on the ideological defensive throughout the occupied territories in the decade leading up to the Intifada. The sharp attacks by the nationalists on the political implications of Brotherhood policies increasingly affected student activists within the Islamist movement.

The Islamist movement began to divide along class and ideological lines in the 1980s, a fissure that pitted the old elite of the Muslim Brotherhood against an activist middle stratum. In terms of social class, the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood tended to be urban, upper-middle-class merchants. In addition to being generally more well-to-do than their followers, the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood had very close ties—including financial ones—with a number of conservative Arab states, principally Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan.

Because of its economic stake in the status quo, the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in the occupied territories could in no way be construed as revolutionary. The Islamist ideology it propagated, unlike those of Ayatollah Khomeini, Sayyid Qutb, or Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, reflected the Brotherhood elite’s concern with not unduly disrupting the social and political order. Not surprisingly, the leadership of the Brotherhood constructed various alliances with non-Brotherhood notables and other wealthy businessmen and came to their defense when they were criticized by nationalists for political quiescence.

However, because of the Brotherhood’s recruiting strategies in the 1980s, a middle stratum of activists developed that opposed the leadership’s policies. Recruitment focused on high school and college students, teachers, and youths from camps and villages, and tended to stay away from the working classes. The middle activist stratum that developed consisted primarily of university-educated men from the lower middle class. In addition, this stra-
tum was primarily based in refugee camps, domains that were formerly bastions of Arab nationalism.

The ideological fissures within the Islamist movement did not center on ultimate goals, since both sides wanted the establishment of an Islamic state in all of Palestine with strong ties to the larger Islamic world. Rather, the question was one of tactics: whether it was better to free the soul or the nation first. Should the occupation be confronted and rolled back first and society purified later, or was successful confrontation with Israel impossible without a genuine Islamic society being created first? Increasingly in the 1980s, the middle stratum of the Islamist movement chose the former “top-down” course, whereas the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood maintained its long-standing “bottom-up” position, which emphasized prior social Islamization. Thus, the fissure separating the two Islamist camps had overlapping class and ideological implications. The fact that the Muslim Brotherhood was decentralized under Israeli rule delayed a confrontation, at least until the Intifada began.

The first and most important activist-oriented offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood was the Islamic Jihad, or al-Jihad al-Islami, founded in Gaza in the early 1980s by Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Awda and Fathi al-Shaqaqi. The Islamic Jihad differed from the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood by advocating immediate confrontation with the Israeli occupation, although the formulation of this line of thought did not fully and clearly emerge until about 1986. Both of the founders had studied at Zaqaziq University in Egypt and were close to the factions of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood influenced by Sayyid Qutb. Both leaders were ultimately deported by Israel from the occupied territories in 1988. Shaqaqi was assassinated by Israel in 1995.

Jihad leaders believed in a dialectical relationship between political power and social piety. Because of the intimate relationship between the struggles to obtain political power and purify society, they believed that one challenge should not be undertaken in the absence of the other. Therefore, confronting the occupation and Islamizing Palestinian society should be done simultaneously (Abu-Amr 1990). The use of strikes against Israeli targets as a way of implementing the ideology of Islamic Jihad attracted adherents within the Islamist movement and support from Palestinian nationalists and leftists. It showed that an Islamist ideology could simultaneously fight the occupation and Islamize society. More important, it acted upon this ideology. Islamic Jihad carried out some audacious acts against Israel, including a 1986 grenade attack against members of the Givati Brigade (an elite army unit) while it was gathered in front of the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem during an initiation rite for new recruits, and a 1987 jailbreak from the central Gaza prison (something that had never been done before). Jihad showed the second stratum of the Muslim Brotherhood, indeed all of the Brotherhood, that such action was possible. This prompted greater action against the occupation.
The debate within the Brotherhood sharpened considerably when the Intifada began on December 9, 1987. As Jihad acted, pressures mounted for the Brotherhood to join the uprising and put aside its ideological imperative to purify society before any confrontation. The realization grew that if the Brotherhood did not join in the Intifada, it would lose its political legitimacy within the Palestinian community.

The overlapping class and ideological fissures—in addition to mounting social pressures—finally resulted in a palace coup by the middle stratum of the Muslim Brotherhood against its leaders. The outcome was the establishment of Hamas. In essence, the formation of Hamas constituted an internal coup within the Muslim Brotherhood that brought the middle stratum cadres to the fore of the Palestinian Islamist movement and relegated the old leadership to a more peripheral position (Abu-Amr 1994, 67–68, 134). Hamas rapidly absorbed the mantle and commandeered the institutions of the Muslim Brotherhood. It did not represent a break with the Muslim Brotherhood; rather, it was a reorganization with a new name and mission.

**Social Movement Theory Applied to Hamas**

In this section, I apply the fundamentals of social movement theory to Hamas in order to show both that SMT can shed important light on the dynamics of Hamas and that Hamas is not an unusual social movement organization (SMO).

**Political Opportunity Structures**

William Gamson and David Meyer have correctly warned, “The concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment—political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts. . . . It threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all” (1996, 275).

In order to avoid this problem, the analyst must show how specific changes in the external environment led to specific changes in the opportunities available to the SMO. In this section, I discuss four specific external (to Hamas) changes that directly enhanced Hamas’s opportunity to organize and mobilize: a post-1977 change in Israeli policy toward the Islamist movement, a post-1977 enhanced international demonstration effect of Islamism, the 1987 start of the first Palestinian Intifada, and the 1993 Oslo accords. The first notable change in the political opportunity structure for the Palestinian Islamist movement came with the election of the Likud Party in Israel in 1977. In response to the growing influence of the PLO in the occupied
In the 1970s, the Likud implemented a starkly different set of policies toward the Palestinians than had its Labor Party predecessors. Among the numerous policy shifts was a new strategy to contain the PLO by enhancing the position of an anti-PLO alternative. Two groups were identified: rural tribal elders and the Muslim Brotherhood. Enhancing the position of the first group came formally through the ill-fated Village Leagues policy. Enhancing the position of the second group came informally by allowing the Muslim Brotherhood space to organize, space that was not provided to the PLO.

The political space provided to the Muslim Brotherhood (and then Hamas) throughout the 1980s was critical to the development of the Islamist movement in Palestine. Whereas PLO political rallies were banned, those of the Muslim Brotherhood were tolerated. Indeed, the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) looked the other way when demonstrators burned the Red Crescent Society in Gaza during a Muslim Brotherhood rally in 1981. Israel supported the Islamist camp, believing it could use the Islamists as a counterweight to the PLO, which was viewed as the greater threat to Israeli interests and security. While a number of observers claim Israel “created” Hamas—including the former IDF commander in Gaza, Zvi Poleg—that is undoubtedly an exaggeration. Rather, support came in different forms, the most important of which was political and social space (Shipler 1986, 177; Sela 1989). The Brotherhood could organize, demonstrate, and speak with little fear of arrest, whereas their nationalist colleagues were punished for similar actions. Israel’s promotion of the Islamist movement as an alternative to the PLO continued during the early part of the Intifada, until Hamas was finally banned in September 1989.

For their part, the Islamists benefited from Israeli assistance in their drive to undermine the PLO and push their own agenda in its place. There was clearly no ideological love lost between Palestinian Islamists and Israel. The cooperation Hamas received from Israel must be considered tactical. In any case, much of this help was not sought by Hamas and was in a form that Hamas could not refuse: space.

Some Hamas officials were relatively open about the Israeli connection. In an interview, Muhammad Nazzal, a Hamas representative in Jordan, objected to the idea that Israel “created” Hamas, but admitted that Hamas was given more room to grow than the PLO. He went on to note that Israel was “playing the game of politics, trying to play off groups. But this does not make us its agents. The Israeli mentality is security first, before politics and everything else. It thought its security was enhanced by allowing us to grow, without thinking what might happen down the road” (Nazzal 1994).

A second change in the political opportunity structure for Palestinian Islamists was the international demonstration effect of Islamist power in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Two specific events had a particularly strong impact. First, the 1978–1979 Islamic revolution in Iran demonstrated that an
unarmed but mobilized Muslim population could overthrow a powerful (and hated) regime that was supported by the United States. The Iranian revolution reverberated throughout the Muslim world, enhancing the prestige of—and the ease of recruitment for—Islamist groups everywhere. Virtually overnight the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Palestine was widely seen as a viable means of struggle against Israel’s occupation.

The emergence of Hizbullah in Lebanon during the 1980s likewise enhanced the opportunity structure for the Palestinian Islamist movement. In this case, an armed, explicitly Islamist group inflicted serious damage to IDF occupation forces in Lebanon, initially forcing Israel to withdraw to a self-proclaimed “security zone.” Mounting IDF casualties eventually compelled Israel to withdraw entirely from Lebanon under Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Hizbullah claimed, with some justification, to be the only group that had ever “defeated” Israel by compelling it to surrender territory it militarily controlled. The Sunni/Shi‘i divide did not prevent Palestinian Islamists from learning a number of lessons from the Hizbullah, most notably the art of suicide bombings—something unknown in Palestinian history.

The third and most important change in the political opportunity structure came with the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987. As noted earlier, Hamas is best understood as a revolt of the activist second stratum of the Muslim Brotherhood against the more reform-minded first stratum. The Intifada provided the opportunity for the second stratum and its Islamist ideology to come to the organizational fore, leading directly to the creation of Hamas in early 1988. While Hamas did not create the Intifada (contrary to its claims), it is the group that benefited the most from its outbreak. Thus we see where an exogenous event (the start of the Intifada) led to the birth and empowerment of a new SMO.

Finally, the adoption of the Declaration of Principles (the first of the Oslo accords with Israel) by the PLO in September 1993 dramatically restructured and complicated political opportunities for Hamas. The Oslo accords established a Palestinian government (the Palestinian Authority, or PA) with some territorial control in the West Bank and Gaza, thus creating a new reality to which Hamas needed to respond. In general, the seven years of the Oslo process were a mixed blessing for Hamas. Initially, it appeared that Oslo would result in a net loss for Hamas for two reasons. First, the PA had a vested interest in circumscribing Hamas and had the resources to do so. Second, Hamas was cornered ideologically as to whether or not to participate in the governing institutions created by an agreement it rejected. As long as the “peace process” was going reasonably well, Hamas’s opportunities were clearly limited. However, as Oslo failed to deliver Palestinian rights, Hamas’s star rose and its opportunities for action increased. Israeli reluctance to fully end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strengthened Hamas, which had predicted Oslo’s failure from the start, and made it the only significant
opposition movement in Palestine. The Palestinian Left (primarily the PFLP, DFLP, and PPP) had never recovered from the demise of Marxism and combined could muster only single-digit support, according to numerous public opinion surveys. The political center, Fatah, transformed itself from an oppositional movement (to Israel) to a governing one (over Palestine). Only the Islamist Right, Hamas, constituted a viable opposition. As a result, its membership included not only the true believers but also a large “derivative” element. That is, Hamas became a political home to those who were disillusioned by Oslo. The failure of Oslo is properly seen as an event external to Hamas that significantly altered and ultimately enhanced Hamas’s political opportunities.

Mobilizing Structures

One of the leaders of Hamas, Imad al-Alami, stated in a 1992 interview, “Hamas is an institutional movement and is not tied to any one person.” He was correct in his assessment. Hamas is a social movement with an institutional base far more important to its success than any individual leader, including Ahmad Yasin, its titular head. Indeed, while Hamas’s reputation in the West is that of a terrorist group, its ability to mobilize support in the West Bank and Gaza is tied to its vast institutional network, which supplies many types of social services. In this section, I divide those services into three types: mosque-based institutions (especially the Mujamma’), other medical and educational institutions, and explicitly political institutions.

A common explanation for the rise of Islamist movements everywhere in the Arab world begins with the fact that all Arab states are authoritarian to one degree or another and therefore dominate the public sphere. Since opposition is not allowed to develop in the public sphere, it is pushed into private and semiprivate realms. In most cases, this means the mosque, since it is the one institution that the state dare not challenge directly. Islam, as both physical and discursive space, has become the only consistently legitimate sphere in which to discuss political issues in the Arab world today. The Palestinian case parallels this general trend, almost by default, and the mosque became a key institutional focus for the development of Islamism first in Gaza and then in the West Bank.

The most obvious institutional expression of the growing Islamist movement was the increasing number of mosques found in the occupied territories. Mosques in Gaza more than doubled between 1967 and 1987, with the greatest increase during the decade before the Intifada. The West Bank also experienced a mosque-construction boom, with 40 new mosques built annually. The seven-year Oslo period witnessed another boom, since funding channels for outside monies (e.g., from Saudi Arabia) no longer had to be secret and the financial institutions in Palestine were better able to handle transfers.
Most of the new mosques, as well as many older ones, were controlled by the al-Mujamma al-Islami (Islamic Association of the Muslim Brotherhood). Founded in 1973 in Gaza, the Mujamma rapidly came to dominate Muslim institutions of all kinds in Palestine. The particular genius of the Mujamma was to combine religious and social activities, so that the mosque was not only a place of worship but a provider of social services as well. In fact, the Mujamma built mosques, schools, kindergartens, clinics, hospitals, charitable associations, sports clubs, nursing schools, and related institutions. Often, these facilities were located within the mosque, and sometimes they included an activity room for women and girls and a social gathering hall (Abu-Amr 1994, 16; Mishal and Sela 2000, chapter 1 and appendix 1). The Mujamma comprised seven specific committees to oversee its institutional network: preaching and guidance, welfare, education, charity, health, sport, and conciliation (Mishal and Sela 2000, 20). While no fieldwork has been done to confirm this hypothesis, it is likely that the Mujamma also spawned significant informal networks as well, since this has happened in roughly similar circumstances in Jordan, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere (Denoeux 1993; Wiktorowicz 2001; Singerman 1995). Such informal networks would bind Palestinians together in new (and hard to detect) ways. When the Muslim Brotherhood morphed into Hamas in 1987–1988, the Mujamma and all of its institutions likewise went with Hamas.

In addition to these more explicitly religious-based institutions, the Islamist movement in Palestine built numerous other social service institutions, primarily in the medical and educational realms. As above, many of these institutions were also under the control of the Mujamma. In the medical realm, for example, Hamas started the Scientific Medical Association in 1997 as a counterweight to the Red Crescent Society. The Scientific Medical Association operates medical clinics, dental facilities, and a blood bank (Mishal and Sela 2000, 157). Hamas’s Association for Science and Culture, also started during the Oslo period, provides K–8 education for thousands of Palestinians. Perhaps most significantly in the educational realm, Hamas (through the Mujamma) operates the Islamic University in Gaza, where the faculty and student body constitute a hotbed of Hamas support in Gaza. The Mujamma took over the Islamic University from Egyptian control following the Egypt-Israel peace treaty and has run the university ever since. Following the lead of all the major PLO factions, Hamas even got into the labor union business when it opened the Islamic Workers Union in 1992.

The PA under Yasir Arafat has had a complex relationship with these organizations. To paraphrase the old saying, Arafat can’t live with them and he can’t live without them. These institutions, particularly the medical ones, provide invaluable support to the general Palestinian population (Hroub 2000, 241). If these institutions were suddenly removed, thousands would suffer. Indeed, it is estimated that 95 percent of Hamas’s annual budget of $70 mil-
lion went to support these social programs (*Journal of Palestine Studies* 1996, 169). The PA cannot easily replace these institutions on its own. On the other hand, during the Oslo period Arafat came under intense Israeli and American pressure to close down any and all institutions under Hamas control. Periodically, Arafat felt compelled to act, as he did most forcefully in 1997 when the PA closed down more than 20 charitable institutions belonging to Hamas (Hroub 2000, 241). Another significant round of closures occurred in late 2001 and early 2002. Usually, the charitable institutions were allowed to re-open after a period of time and under a new name—further evidence of the PA's need to allow critical social services to remain operational.

Hamas has also built explicitly political institutions of mobilization. By far the most important of these has been the student political parties at Palestinian universities and secondary schools. Throughout the 1980s, Islamist blocs at Palestinian universities garnered significant support. In fact, in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, Islamist blocs in the West Bank and Gaza gained control of a number of student councils. For the most part, however, alliances of various nationalist and leftist factions enabled the PLO to maintain its hegemony in West Bank universities, even while it relinquished authority to the Islamist bloc in Gaza. In effect, while the PLO—in particular, Fatah—remained the dominant political power at most Palestinian universities in the 1980s, the Islamists represented a powerful counterforce or opposition. In each of the three elections at Birzeit University that immediately preceded the Intifada, the Islamist bloc received approximately one-third of the total vote, second only to Fatah. In the 1985–1986 and 1986–1987 academic year elections at al-Najah University in Nablus, the Islamist bloc won 38 percent and 41 percent of the vote, respectively. In both elections the Islamist bloc finished second to Fatah (which won 49 percent and 48 percent, respectively), but far ahead of the leftist PLO factions. Similar results were seen at Hebron University. At the Islamic University in Gaza, the Muslim Brotherhood won every election in the 1980s. In the 1987 election, the Islamists won three-quarters of the vote, with Fatah gaining most of the remainder. Only at Bethlehem University, with its large Christian minority and official ties to the Vatican, has the Islamist bloc been of marginal importance. Even during the Oslo period when Fatah and the PA had more direct control over student elections, Hamas continued to rival Fatah in university elections, winning majority support in some cases.

In many ways, universities were more important than mosques for the Islamist movement in the occupied territories, principally because the universities had greater autonomy under the occupation (Jarbawi 1989). Many mosques were linked to Islamic endowments, or *waqfs*, whose administration was tied to Israeli and Jordanian authorities. The university-based Islamists, on the other hand, were unfettered by material interests tied to Israeli or Jordanian concerns and thus better able to construct ideologies independent of state interests. Direct Israeli infringement upon Islamist autonomy at Pales-
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tinian universities was generally limited to military coercion during periodic confrontations.

While these student blocs were the most important mobilizing political institutions for Hamas, they were not the only ones. Although the National Islamic Salvation Party always maintained that it was independent of Hamas, groups within Hamas supported its formation in preparation for the 1995 legislative elections in Palestine. For its part, Hamas declined to participate in the elections directly, viewing them as little more than a legitimization of Oslo. The formation of the party indicated a split in Hamas’s thinking about how to engage PA institutions. Given the absence of elections since 1995, including the indefinite postponement of municipal elections (in which Hamas promised to participate), the importance of the National Islamic Salvation Party as a mobilizing structure has never really been tested.

Hamas has also been cognizant of the importance that public relations play in mobilizing support and framing issues. During the Oslo period, Hamas founded the Supreme Council for Islamic Information in order to disseminate its perspectives in Palestine. It created information bureaus in other countries as well to broaden the reach of its message.

With all of these institutions of mobilization at work over the past three decades, how strong is support for Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza? According to the respected polling institution CPRS in Nablus, the mean level of open support for Hamas between 1993 and 1997 was just over 18 percent of the population. Hroub believes this number is low, citing the high number of “no response” answers and the much higher turnout for Hamas candidates in various professional and student elections. He believes actual support is more likely about 30 percent (Hroub 2000, 229, 233). With the breakdown of diplomatic efforts and the start of the second Intifada in September 2000, other polls suggested Hamas had pulled even with Fatah in overall Palestinian support, although Fatah still controlled “the street.”

Cultural Framing

To effectively popularize its ideology, a social movement must be able to provide clear summations of its ideology that resonate with its target audience. Such cultural framings represent the popular, bumper-sticker version of the broader ideology of the movement. While it is unreasonable to expect its hundreds of thousands of supporters (some illiterate) to have detailed knowledge of its ideology, Hamas can expect snippets of its ideological worldview to be known and repeated by all of its followers—indeed to permeate the public consciousness at large. In this way, Hamas can shape the public debate and the popular imagination in its own way. Clearly, the array of tools in the cultural toolbox available to an Islamist movement in a largely Muslim society is far greater than those available to, for example, a Marxist-Leninist group. Hamas has had a relatively easy time shaping the debate through the way it
has framed the issues. In this section, I present five of the major frames employed by Hamas to depict its overarching ideology. As noted above, a single cultural toolbox gives rise to multiple competing and overlapping ideologies, which in turn each produce a handful of frames that best capture the essence of that ideological worldview.

1. *Palestine is waqf.* Hamas argues that all of Palestine is a religious endowment (*waqf*) given by God for all time exclusively to Muslims. By extension, therefore, no man or government has the right to negotiate away part of the *waqf* to non-Muslims. This argument is clearly aimed at denying Arafat the ability to settle for a Palestinian state in only the West Bank and Gaza. It also makes it difficult to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the remainder of historical Palestine. As Hamas put it in Article 11 of its 1988 Charter:

   The Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic *waqf* endowed to all Muslim generations until Judgment Day. No part of it may be squandered or relinquished. No Arab country, no king or president, no organization—Palestinian or Arab—possesses that right. Palestine is Islamic *waqf* land consecrated for all Muslim generations until Judgment Day. This being so, who could claim to have the right to represent all Muslim generations until Judgment Day? . . . This *waqf* will endure as long as heaven and earth last. Any action taken in regard to Palestine in violation of this law of Islam is null and void.

   Like most good frames, the “Palestine as *waqf*” argument puts a new twist on an old institution. It refers to a charitable contribution, usually of productive land for a fixed period of time, for the benefit of the Muslim community, which is administered by the clergy, or ulama. Much of the Old City of Jerusalem, for example, is Islamic *waqf* property, particularly the area in and around the Haram al-Sharif, or the Temple Mount.

   All Palestinians are quite familiar with the institution of *waqf*; however, Hamas puts a radical new spin on the notion of religious endowment by conflating private property with sovereignty. Traditionally *waqf* lands were treated as a form of private property (indeed, the benefactor typically received a tax benefit for endowing property). Hamas is not saying that all of Palestine is private property endowed as *waqf*. Rather, it claims that, in this case, *waqf* implies sovereignty—God’s sovereignty over an entire country. Such an expansive interpretation of *waqf* has never been so prominently made before in Islamic history. Yet it is the kind of framing that resonates among Muslim Palestinians, very few of whom are historical scholars.

2. *Islam is the solution.* Replicating the most famous frame among Islamist movements in the Middle East, Hamas has employed the powerful phrasing
that “Islam is the solution” (al-Islam, huwa al-hall). This phrase is employed on a regular basis by Hamas supporters in Palestine. Indeed, a constant refrain by Hamas is that Palestine was lost, in part, because Arabs turned their backs on Islam, and only by embracing Islam can Palestine be won back. The entire Hamas Charter of 1988 reads this way, with numerous quotes from the Qur’an used to motivate Muslims to return to the fold. A few (non-Qur’anic) samples from the Charter (articles six, eight, and nine) should suffice to highlight the Hamas frame that Islam and only Islam is the right path for regaining Palestinian rights:

Hamas has evolved at a time when Islam has been removed from everyday life. Thus judgment has been upset, concepts have become confused, and values have been transformed; evil prevails, oppression and obscenity have become rampant, and cowards have turned into tigers. Homelands have been usurped, and people have been expelled and fallen on their faces in humiliation everywhere on earth. The state of truth has disappeared and been replaced by the state of evil. Nothing has remained in its right place, for when Islam is absent from the scene, everything changes. . . . Hamas owes its loyalty to God, derives from Islam its way of life, and strives to raise the banner of God over every inch of Palestine. . . . In the absence of Islam, strife arises, oppression and destruction are rampant, and wars and battles take place. . . . God is our goal, the Prophet our model, the Qur’an our constitution, jihad our path, and death for the sake of God our most coveted desire.

This simple message that “Islam is the answer” or “Islam is the solution” is quite powerful. Needless to say, “Islam” per se has no specific solution to offer. Rather, it is Hamas’s interpretation of Islam as it pertains to the conflict that becomes the real answer.

3. The Jewish conspiracy. Hamas, like most Islamist groups, is fundamentally anti-Semitic (in the commonly understood sense of the word). This is seen in at least two ways. First, the Hamas discourse refers primarily to “Jews” (al-yahud), less so to “Zionists” (al-sahyuniyun), and almost never to “Israelis” (al-isra’iliyun), thus seeing the conflict in fundamentally religious, not nationalist, terms. On this score, perhaps, Hamas can be forgiven because Israeli Jews themselves quite often refer to “Jews” rather than “Israelis.” Think of Benyamin Netanyahu’s famous campaign slogan championing himself as “Good for the Jews.” However, Hamas is properly termed anti-Semitic for propagating the slander of Jewish control of the world, particularly the world’s financial health. Indeed, according to Hamas, Jews are engaged in a grand conspiracy, primarily through the United States, against Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims. Only this conspiracy has prevented Muslims and Palestinians from acquiring what is rightly theirs. This conspiracy can be seen in
the (rumored) Jewish hidden hand behind the September 11, 2001, attacks on
the World Trade Center (Jews, possibly Mossad, were behind the attack, Jews
working in the buildings were warned ahead of time to leave the building,
etc.), and other events. Again, the Hamas Charter vividly describes this Jew-
ish conspiracy. At one point confirming the validity of the Protocols of the
Elders of Zion (article 32), the most sustained discussion of the grand Jewish
conspiracy comes in article 22:

The Jews have planned well to get where they are, taking into account
the effective measures in current affairs. Thus, they have amassed huge
fortunes that gave them influence that they have devoted to the realiza-
tion of their goals. Through money they gained control over the world
media, such as news services, newspapers, printing presses, broadcast
stations, and the like. With money they financed revolutions throughout
the world in pursuit of their objectives. They were behind the French
revolution, the Communist revolution, and most revolutions here and
there that we heard about and are hearing of. With wealth they estab-
lished clandestine organizations all over the world, such as the Freema-
sions, the Rotary and Lions clubs, etc., to destroy societies and promote
the interests of Zionism. These are all destructive intelligence-gathering
organizations. With wealth they controlled imperialist nations and pushed
them to occupy many nations to exploit their resources and spread mis-
chief in them. Concerning the local and international wars, let us speak
without hesitation. They were behind the First World War in which
they destroyed the Islamic Caliphate, picked the material profit, mo-
nopolized the raw wealth, and got the Balfour Declaration. They created
the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They
were behind the Second World War, in which they grew fabulously
wealthy through the arms trade. They prepared for the establishment of
their state; they ordered that the United Nations be formed, along with
the Security Council, in place of the League of Nations, so that they
could rule the world through them. There was no war that broke out
anywhere without their hands behind it.

Unfortunately, such anti-Semitism plays well to many common Palestini-
ans, who are ready to believe in the grand Jewish conspiracy. Thus, by fram-
ing the conflict as merely a by-product of larger Jewish power, Hamas is able
both to produce a message that resonates truth for many people and to absolve
Palestinians of their weakness: there is no way such a simple people could
have beaten such power. Note, however, that this message is in contradiction
with the second frame that Islam is the solution. Implicit in that frame is the
notion that had Palestinians and Arabs not abandoned Islam, all would be well
today. Consistency is not a requirement in cultural framing.
4. Patience (sabr) is paramount / The peace process will fail on its own. Hamas has responded to the peace process, begun with the Madrid conference of 1991, with a call for patience (sabr) (Mishal and Sela 2000). The concept of sabr has been utilized by Hamas to justify a number of strategic and tactical decisions. Strategically, the notion of sabr underlies the argument that Oslo is fatally flawed and will collapse under its own weight and lack of logic—it is just a matter of time. Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzuq stated this:

From the outset, Hamas has said that this type of agreement will not work. The Oslo agreement is a very obscure document which, because of its special nature, will never be able to free Palestine from Israeli occupation. It will not put the Palestinians on the road to an independent state. Decisions in Oslo will always be made by the stronger party, which in this instance is Israel. The Palestinians will achieve nothing from the Oslo agreement, and we told Yasir Arafat so from the outset. (1997)

This logic, of course, means that Hamas need not be impatient in trying to hasten the collapse of Oslo since it will happen in any case. Thus, when Hamas is relatively quiescent, sabr explains the inaction. On the other hand, when Hamas’s Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades undertake an attack, that does not contradict sabr either, as patience certainly does not require complete inactivity.

On the tactical side, the notion of sabr has allowed Hamas leaders to take the apparently contradictory position of rejecting the very legitimacy of Israel while showing a willingness to accept a Palestinian state in only the West Bank and Gaza, next to Israel, as an “interim solution.” Through the lens of sabr, they can take the long view and accept such a state as merely an intermediary step in the eventual liberation of all Palestine. This argument is made regularly by Hamas leaders, as in the following statement by Hamas political bureau chief Khalid Mish’al during a 1997 NPQ interview:

We have no problem accepting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as a transitional solution, but without giving up our right to the rest of the land of Palestine and without giving legitimacy to the state of occupation and aggression [Israel]. This transitional liberation is only one stage in our quest for the total liberation of Palestine. (Question: “You are then ready for an interim solution, but in the long run you refuse to coexist with a Jewish state?” Answer: “Of course.”)

The notion of being patient while Oslo fails and taking the long view of generations had undeniable appeal among Palestinians, particularly as year after year of “peace” went by without much to show for it (except more settlements). In other words, as Oslo collapsed, Hamas was in a perfect position to say, “We told you so.” This has only enhanced the credibility of Hamas’s message.
Hamas offers a more authentic nationalism. The Palestinian national movement has a long history, and a contender for power in Palestine dismisses nationalist sentiment at his peril. In a philosophical vacuum, Islamism and nationalism share little in common. What Hamas has needed to do, and has done, is to frame nationalism in a different way and then suggest its variant of nationalism is more authentic and powerful. Hamas has come a long way in this regard. In the early 1980s, nationalist parties openly condemned the Muslim Brotherhood as a prop for the occupation. The framing of the nationalism question has thus had to be done very carefully so as not to raise these old ghosts. The Charter is Hamas’s first attempt to praise Palestinian nationalism and the PLO while staking out a somewhat different vision. Much of the Charter praises the legitimate role that nationalism has played in the Palestinian struggle (articles 12 and 14):

Nationalism, from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement, is part of our religion. Nothing in nationalism is more significant or important than waging jihad when an enemy treads on Muslim land. While other nationalisms are concerned just with material, human, and territorial causes, the nationalism of the Islamic Movement has all this in addition to the more important divine qualities that give it soul and life. The question of the liberation of Palestine is bound to three circles: the Palestinian circle, the Arab circle, and the Islamic circle. Each of these circles has its role in the struggle against Zionism.

Parallel with its acceptance of nationalism, Hamas also gave due credit to organizations that espoused nationalism, principally the PLO (articles 25 and 27):

The Islamic Resistance Movement respects the Palestinian nationalist movements and appreciates their circumstances and the conditions surrounding and affecting them. It encourages them as long as they do not give their allegiance to the Communist East or the Crusading West. The Movement assures all the nationalist trends operating in the Palestinian arena for the liberation of Palestine that it is there for their support and assistance. The Palestine Liberation Organization is close to the heart of the Islamic Resistance Movement. The PLO counts among its members our fathers, our brothers, our cousins, and our friends, and the Muslim does not estrange himself from his father, brother, cousin, or friend. Our homeland is one, our situation is one, our fate is one, and the enemy is a joint enemy to all of us.

However, Hamas argued that the reason the PLO adopted a secular, nationalist ideology was not through informed choice but rather because of “the ideological confusion prevailing in the Arab world as a result of the ideological invasion under whose influence the Arab world has fallen since the defeat of
the Crusaders” (article 27). It was only because of the purposeful confusion perpetrated by “Orientalists, missionaries, and imperialists that the PLO adopted the idea of the secular state.” While such misperceptions by the PLO can be understood in their historical context, Hamas argued in article 27, they cannot be reconciled with the true nature of Islamic Palestine:

Secularism completely contradicts religious ideology in its attitudes, conduct, and decisions. That is why, with all our appreciation for the Palestine Liberation Organization—and what it can develop into—and without belittling its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, we are unable to reconcile Islamic Palestine and secularism. The Islamic nature of Palestine is part of our religion. The day the Palestine Liberation Organization adopts Islam as its way of life, we will become its soldiers and fuel for its fire, which will burn our enemies. Until such a day, and we pray that it will be soon, the Islamic Resistance Movement’s stand toward the PLO is that of a son toward his father, a brother toward his brother, a cousin toward his cousin: We will suffer his pain and support him in confronting our enemies, wishing him to be wise and well guided.

By accepting Hamas’s vision of the proper interpretation of nationalism, a Palestinian can simultaneously support the Islamist Hamas and still view himself as a Palestinian patriot. Thus, Abu Marzuq could legitimately claim to be a Palestinian nationalist because “Hamas now carries the Palestinian hope and will fight to achieve Palestinian identity and achieve independence” (1997). Alternatively, Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Abu Ghawsha could declare, “History shall record that Hamas is the Palestinian group which safeguarded the fabric of Palestinian society. The picture would have been different had the Islamists been in power and the secular Fatah movement in the opposition” (1998). Nationalism is a great thing, but only within the context of Hamas’s interpretation of what nationalism actually means.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that social movement theory can shed valuable light on Hamas and that Hamas is intelligible as a social movement, similar to other social movements around the world. This would achieve two goals. First, it would continue the recent trend in Middle East studies to be self-consciously theoretical in our treatment of data, either through the generation of new theory or, as in this case, the application of existing social science theory to a Middle East case study. Second, it would make the point contra-Orientalism (which exists more in the press and policy worlds than it does anymore in the academy) that Islamism, like other things Muslim, can be understood through the application of general concepts and does not exist in
a parallel explanatory universe where a completely different set of theoretical tools is necessary to make sense of it.

Moreover, I have argued that SMT is best understood as a middle path between structuralist and rational choice theories of collective action, which recognizes the constraints under which choices are made as well as the partial efficacy of purposeful action. The analytical tools available to social movement theorists can construct a more powerful conceptual understanding of groups like Hamas than competing analytical approaches.

Finally, I have suggested that the relationship between “terrorist group” and social movements is far more complex and problematic than simplistic categorizations can account for. The dynamic relationship between tactical violence and a social movement has profound policy and theoretical implications.

Notes

1. The following discusses these schools in terms of ideal types. Although I recognize that there are important attempts to bridge the micro/macro division, for analytic purposes I highlight the distinctive tendencies in the different approaches.

2. An excellent collection of essays that explicitly use rational choice theory to explain rebellion can be found in *Rationality and Revolution* (Taylor 1988).

3. Some rational choice theorists have begun to apply their model to strategic group decision-making. This would seem to deny the fundamental theoretical underpinnings of rational choice theory.

4. Perhaps the most sophisticated statement to date on why SMT provides a better explanation of volunteerism and its relationship to structures than either rational choice or structural theories is Jeffrey Berejikian’s “Revolutionary Collective Action and the Agent-Structure Problem” (1992).

5. There is some evidence to suggest that in Egypt in the 1990s the profile of a typical radical Islamist changed somewhat to a younger, less educated individual. According to the Ibn Khaldun Center’s statistics on arrested Islamists, the “typical” Islamist was younger (the median age going from the upper twenties to the lower twenties since the 1970s), less educated (four out of five Islamists in the 1970s went to university; only one out of five in the 1990s did), and less urban (55 percent from large cities in the 1970s; only 15 percent in the 1990s).

6. The ideological arguments for such views were most famously articulated by Sayyid Qutb in a book (entitled *Ma'allim f'il-Tariq*, literally “Signposts on the Road”) that indirectly called for the overthrow of Nasser’s regime. Qutb, who sought to take the Muslim Brotherhood in a more confrontational direction, was hanged for his views.

7. While its charter called exclusively for social and cultural activities, the Brotherhood in Jordan was clearly a political organization as well. The Brotherhood was used as a counterweight by the regime against both pan-Arabists and more radical Islamists.

8. In his 1990 *Intifada*, Don Peretz has suggested that there were eight offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s in Gaza alone (103).
There is some debate over interpreting the creation of Hamas. Ziad Abu-Amr, in his *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* (1994), argues that the formation of Hamas did not represent a break in the Muslim Brotherhood but was rather a logical continuation of Brotherhood policy, made by longtime Brotherhood leaders (67–68). His analysis denies the kinds of internal pressures that had built up in the Brotherhood, in part because of the changing nature of its recruitment in the 1980s. At the same time, Abu-Amr admits that a radicalization of the Islamist movement occurred (134), but gives no sociological explanation for the change. The model employed above corrects this deficiency.

For clarity, I refer to Hamas throughout this section without trying to differentiate between pre-1987 Muslim Brotherhood and post-1987 Hamas.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Israel helped set up a system of “Village Leagues,” local Palestinian organizations designed to act as intermediary institutions between the local Palestinian populations and the Israeli authorities. Most Palestinians viewed those who participated in the Leagues as collaborators.

Poleg served as commander of the IDF in Gaza from July 1988 to March 1990 and was later elected mayor of Natanya. In an interview published December 15, 1994, in the *Mideast Mirror*, he stated: “Hamas was set up by us, in the mid-1980s, as a competitive movement to the PLO. The idea was that Hamas would carry out cultural, educational, and humanitarian activities. Within a few months the movement became more militant and began leading the violent resistance, including the use of guns against the IDF” (5–6). Marwan Muasher, Jordan’s first ambassador to Israel and former spokesman for Jordan’s delegation to the Washington peace talks, likes to tell a story that confirms this suspicion among public policymakers. When the delegation went to meet with President Bush, a delegate commented that Israel had “created” Hamas. Surprised, Bush turned to advisor Dennis Ross and asked if this was true. Ross replied affirmatively (interview with Marwan Muasher, April 11, 1994, Amman).

Funding support also occurred (see Shipler 1986, 177). Michel Sela, a respected Israeli journalist, reported that assistance also included arming certain Islamists, although this was certainly a less common form of support. See her article “The Islamic Factor,” *Jerusalem Post*, October 25, 1989.

The World Bank noted that, before Oslo, Palestinian NGOs (including the Hamas NGOs) provided 60 percent of the costs of primary health care and 50 percent of the costs of secondary health care in the West Bank and Gaza.

Hamas uses the Arabic *wataniyya*, not *qawmiyya*. The former is usually employed in Arabic to represent state-based nationalism (e.g., Egyptian nationalism), while the latter has a communal or ethnic sense and is used in the phrase “Arab nationalism” (*al-qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya*).

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