
Aims and Methods of Europe's Muslim Brotherhood

LORENZO VIDINO

In 1990 Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an influential Sunni scholar and the unofficial theological leader of the international Muslim Brotherhood (*al Ikhwan al Muslimoun*), published a book called *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*.¹ This 186-page treatise can be considered the most recent manifesto of the Islamist revivalist movement. As Qaradawi explains in the introduction, the “Islamic Movement” is meant to be the “organized, collective work, undertaken by the people, to restore Islam to the leadership of society” and to reinstate “the Islamic caliphate system to the leadership anew as required by *sharia*.”

Qaradawi's treatise introduces a new agenda and *modus operandi* for the movement, signaling a clear break with many *salafi* groups and even with some past ideological elements of the Muslim Brotherhood. While the book does not rule out the use of violence to defend Muslim lands, it generally advocates the use of *dawa*, dialogue, and other peaceful means to achieve the movement's goals. This doctrine is commonly referred to as “*wassatiyya*,” a sort of “middle way” between violent extremism and secularism, and Qaradawi is one of its key proponents.²

After examining the situation of the “Islamic Movement” throughout the Muslim world, the dissertation devotes significant attention to the situation of Muslims living in the West. Qaradawi explains how Muslim expatriates living in Europe, Australia and North America “are no longer few in numbers,” and that their presence is both permanent and destined to grow with new waves of immigration. While Qaradawi says that their presence is “necessary” for several reasons—such as spreading the word of Allah globally and defending the Muslim Nation “against the antagonism and misinformation of anti-Islamic forces and trends”—it is also problematic. Because the Muslim Nation, and therefore Muslim minorities “scattered throughout the world,” do not have a centralized leadership, “melting” poses a serious risk. Qaradawi warns, in other words, that a Muslim minority could lose its Islamic identity and be absorbed by the non-Muslim majority.

Qaradawi sees the lack of Muslim leadership not only as a problem, however. He also

views it as an unprecedented opportunity for the Islamist movement to “play the role of the missing leadership of the Muslim Nation with all its trends and groups.” While the revivalist movement can exercise only limited influence in Muslim countries, where hostile regimes keep it in check, Qaradawi realizes that it is able to operate freely in the democratic West. Muslim expatriates disoriented by life in non-Muslim communities and often lacking the most basic knowledge about Islam, moreover, represent an ideally receptive audience for the movement’s propaganda. Qaradawi asserts that revivalists need to take on an activist role in the West, claiming that “it is the duty of [the] Islamic Movement not to leave these expatriates to be swept by the whirlpool of the materialistic trend that prevails in the West.”

Having affirmed the necessity of the Islamist movement in the West, Qaradawi proceeds to present a plan of operation. The Egyptian-born scholar openly calls for the creation of a separate society for Muslims within the West. While he highlights the importance of keeping open a dialogue with non-Muslims, he advocates the establishment of Muslim communities with “their own religious, educational and recreational establishments.” He urges his fellow revivalists to try “to have your small society within the larger society” and “your own ‘Muslim ghetto.’”

Qaradawi clearly sees the Islamist movement playing a crucial role in creating these separated Muslim communities and thereby providing it with an unprecedented opportunity to implement its vision, at least partially. Its local affiliates will run the mosques, schools, and civic organizations that shape the daily life of the desired “Muslim ghettos.” And Qaradawi’s ambitions go further still. Without saying so openly, he suggests that *sharia* law should govern the relations among inhabitants of these Muslim islands; Muslim minorities “should also have amongst them their own *ulema* and men of religion to answer their questions when they ask them, guide them when they lose the way and reconcile them when they differ among themselves.”

What Qaradawi outlines in his treatise might, at first glance, appear to be nothing more than a fantasy. In reality, it corresponds to what the international network of the Muslim Brotherhood has been doing in the West for the past fifty years. Since the end of World War II, in fact, members of *al Ikhwan al Muslimoun* have settled in Europe and worked relentlessly to implement the goals stated by Qaradawi. In almost every European country, they founded student organizations that, having evolved into nationwide umbrella organizations, have become—thanks to their activism and to the financial support from Arab Gulf countries—the most prominent representatives of local Muslim communities. They established a web of mosques, research centers, think tanks, charities and schools that has been successful in spreading their heavily politicized interpretation of Islam. Finally, today, with the creation of a supranational jurisprudential body called the European Council for Fatwa and Research, the *Ikhwan* is taking its first, cautious steps toward Qaradawi’s final goal: the introduction of *sharia* law within the Muslim communities of Europe.

Having been the focus of attention of authorities since its early days, the Muslim Brotherhood tends to be extremely secretive, and only if circumstances are favorable do its members reveal their affiliation. While most of the first Islamic activists in Europe were official members of the Brotherhood, moreover, formal links between the group's Middle Eastern base and its European followers have waned over time for various reasons. But the issue of formal affiliation to the *Ikhwan* is moot because the Muslim Brotherhood is more than a group; it is now better defined as a movement whose organization is far from monolithic and whose members are kept together mostly by ideological affinity.

Mohammed Akif, the current General Guide and supreme leader of the Brotherhood and a former head of its Islamic Center of Munich, explained the *Ikhwan's* transcendence of formalities in an interview with Xavier Ternisien, a French expert on religion.³ He said,

We do not have an international organization; we have an organization through our perception of things. We are present in every country. Everywhere there are people who believe in the message of the Muslim Brothers. In France, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) does not belong to the organization of the Brothers. They follow their own laws and rules. There are many organizations that do not belong to the Muslim Brothers. For example, Shaykh al-Qaradawi. He is not a Muslim Brother, but he was formed according to the doctrine of the Brothers. The doctrine of the Brothers is a written doctrine that has been translated in all languages.

In a 2005 interview Akif elaborated further. European *Ikhwan* organizations have no direct link to the Egyptian branch, he insisted, but they nevertheless coordinate actions with them. He concluded the interview saying, tellingly, that “we [the *Ikhwan*] have the tendency not to make distinctions among us.”⁴

Regardless of their official affiliation, many individuals and organizations that identify themselves with the message of the *Ikhwan* operate in Europe and have been actively working toward the goals outlined by Qaradawi in his above-mentioned dissertation. Driven by their firm belief in the superiority of Islam to any other religion or system of life, the European Brothers fight daily to achieve their goal, using all possible tools, including painful but necessary compromises with European authorities. “Islam will return to Europe as a conqueror and victor, after being expelled from it twice,” Qaradawi says. But he adds, “I maintain that the conquest this time will not be by the sword but by preaching and ideology.”⁵ The European *Ikhwan* network, under the cover of various civil rights groups and Islamic organizations, is the vanguard of this peaceful conquest.

Putting Down Roots in Europe

According to Mohammed Akif, “the Brotherhood established itself in Europe” in the 1950s.⁶ At that time Nasser and other pan-Arabist regimes were cracking down on the organization, and many of its members had to flee their homelands. For various reasons most of the Muslim Brothers leaving the persecution of Middle Eastern regimes chose West Germany as their destination. Some had reportedly established links with Germany during World War II when the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, moved to Berlin and aided the Nazi regime in its anti-Jewish propaganda.⁷ Others benefited from the fact that the West German government, implementing what came to be known as the Hallstein doctrine, had opened its doors to dissidents persecuted by regimes that had recognized East Germany, which included Egypt and Syria.⁸ Many were attracted, moreover, by the prestige of the country’s technical faculties and decided to further their studies in Germany’s engineering, architecture, and medical schools.

Among this group of pioneers of revivalist Islam in Europe, Said Ramadan stands out. Born in 1926 in a village north of Cairo, Ramadan joined the Muslim Brotherhood at age 14 after attending a lecture by the organization’s founder, Hassan al-Banna.⁹ In 1946, upon obtaining his law license from the University of Cairo, Ramadan became al-Banna’s personal secretary and began the publication of *Al Shihab*, the organization’s official magazine. In 1948 he fought in Palestine among Arab volunteers and was briefly appointed the head of Jerusalem’s military corps by King Abdallah of Jordan. He then traveled to the newly established state of Pakistan where, despite his young age, he competed for the chair of secretary general of the World Muslim Congress.

By December 1948 the Egyptian government had outlawed the Brotherhood, and the following year Egyptian police assassinated al-Banna. Given these developments, Ramadan decided to remain in Pakistan, where he worked as a “cultural ambassador” of the country to the Arab world. In 1950, as the ban on the Brotherhood was lifted, he returned to Egypt and began to publish *Al Muslimoon*, one of the most important magazines of revivalist thought. Nasser’s sudden rise to power in 1953 shook Egyptian political life and—after a short period of peaceful coexistence among the Brothers and Nasser’s Free Officers government—another clampdown on the Brotherhood ensued.”

Realizing he could not continue his activities in Egypt, Ramadan left the country after his release. Following short sojourns in various Middle Eastern countries, he moved to Europe permanently with his wife Wafa, al-Banna’s eldest daughter. They settled in Geneva, Switzerland, and Ramadan enrolled at the University of Cologne, where he obtained a graduate degree in law with a dissertation on Islamic law.

In 1961 Ramadan founded the Islamic Center of Geneva, located first in a villa donated by an Arabian prince and then in an odd white and green building a stone’s throw from Lake Lemán. Other eminent Islamic scholars sat on the founding board of the center,

including the Indian scholars Mohammed Hamidullah and Maulana Abdul Hassan Ali al Nadwi. It became one of the main headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, and was the first of a score that Ramadan worked to set up throughout Europe with the financial support of Saudi Arabia. The next year Ramadan was also instrumental in the Saudi kingdom's establishment of the Muslim World League, a government-funded transnational organization created to spread the Saudi interpretation of Islam. Ramadan was one of its main founders and even wrote its constitution.

With the ample financial backing of the Saudis, Ramadan began to establish the Brotherhood in other European countries. An early opportunity arose when a group of Arab students in Munich contacted him for help with the construction of a mosque in that city. The Arab students were competing for control of the Mosque Construction Commission, a body that was trying to raise funds for the new Munich mosque.¹⁰ Their adversaries were a group of Muslim ex-soldiers who had fought with the Nazis during World War II and had stayed in Munich after the conflict. Originating from Central Asia and the Caucasus, these ex-soldiers embraced a moderate interpretation of Islam that clashed with the more militant views of the Arabs. By 1960 Ramadan, thanks to his Saudi funding, secured for himself the position of chairman of the commission, and by 1973, when the mosque was completed, the Brotherhood had completely overshadowed other influences over the mosque.

As Geneva was the launching pad for the European operations of the Brotherhood, Munich became its main headquarters in Germany. The Ramadan-dominated Mosque Construction Commission became a permanent organization, which later changed its name to the Islamic Society of Germany (IGD). Ramadan headed the organization for ten years until 1973, when one of the students who had originally contacted him, Syrian-born Ghaleb Himmat, took over at the helm.¹¹

Himmat, who kept his position until 2002, is a prominent member of the European *Ikhwan* network and co-founder of Bank al-Taqwa, a financial institution widely believed to have served as the Brotherhood's clearinghouse in the West. According to European and American authorities, Himmat and Youssef Nada, one of the Brotherhood's top financial minds, used al-Taqwa and an extensive network of companies to finance the construction and activities of dozens of Brotherhood-related projects throughout the West. Both men, whom the U.S. Treasury Department also accuses of having financed Hamas and al Qaeda,¹² have been designated terrorism financiers by various Western countries and by the United Nations.

After Himmat's retirement, the chairmanship of the IGD passed to Ibrahim El Zayat, a younger, German-born activist with a phenomenal talent for both public relations and, like his predecessor, murky financial transactions. In 2002 El Zayat, as a director of the Saudi-based NGO World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) that spreads Wahhabi literature worldwide, came under investigation in Germany for having funneled more

than two million dollars to an al-Qaeda-linked charity and for his involvement in other money-laundering activities.¹³ Yet thanks to its activism and good finances, the IGD is now Germany's most important Muslim organization, representing more than sixty Islamic centers nationwide. Together with Milli Görüş, the Turkish revivalist organization linked to the Refah party that has more than 25,000 members and an estimated 100,000 sympathizers in Germany, the IGD is the *de facto* voice of the German Muslim community.¹⁴ The two organizations—whose leaders are linked through marriage¹⁵—have formally joined forces, creating the umbrella organization Zentralrat, and they monopolize the public debate about Islam in Germany and control the majority of German mosques.¹⁶

Various German security agencies have repeatedly highlighted the links between these groups and the Brotherhood, and warned about the ambiguity of their rhetoric. An official report from the Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Hessen, for example, stated that

the threat of Islamism for Germany is posed ... primarily by Milli Görüş and other affiliated groups. They try to spread Islamist views within the boundaries of the law. Then they try to implement ... for all Muslims in Germany a strict interpretation of the Quran and of the *sharia*.... Their public support of tolerance and religious freedom should be treated with caution.¹⁷

Yet, despite these warnings, German politicians consider the *Ikhwan* groups their primary partners in the dialogue over issues involving the Muslim community, thus granting them legitimacy and empowering them.

Flowering in France

While Said Ramadan was active in developing organizations in Germany, another founding member of the Islamic Center of Geneva, Mohammed Hamidullah, created the first revivalist organization in France. An Indian-born intellectual, author of almost two hundred works on Islamic history, culture and law, Hamidullah headed the Paris-based Association of Islamic Students in France (AEIF). Even though Hamidullah was a moderate, more intent on his studies than on political activities, the AEIF soon became home base for a small group of radical foreign Muslim students who were attending Parisian universities. Among them was Hasan al Turabi, a young Sudanese law student destined to become one of the most important figures of Islamic revivalism of the last thirty years.¹⁸ The son of a *qadi* (Islamic judge) from the southern part of Sudan, Turabi had joined the Muslim Brotherhood on the campus of the University College of Khartoum in the 1950s and continued his Islamic militancy while studying law at the

Sorbonne.¹⁹ Other well-known figures who orbited around the AEIF were Abolhassan Banisadr, the first President of the Islamic Republic of Iran;²⁰ Said Ramadan al Boutih, one of Syria's most prestigious legal scholars; and Issam al Attar, a top Muslim Brotherhood leader who fled Syria to escape the regime and finally settled in the German city of Aachen, where he founded the Bilal mosque.²¹

This select group came to debate the purpose of their sojourn in the West. The Syrian branch of the Brotherhood, headed in Europe by Attar, viewed its exile as instrumental to furthering its struggle in Syria. For them, at least in the beginning, Europe was just a convenient place from which they could operate against the Syrian regime, and the AEIF was little more than a club for foreign Muslim students who were planning to leave France at the end of their studies. It had no serious political mission beyond promoting revivalist ideas among its members. But others in the European Brotherhood, particularly the Egyptians, saw their *hijra* (forced migration, comparing it to the Prophet's time in Medina) as more long-term and Europe as a permanent base from which to expand the *Ikhwan's* struggle to impose God's word worldwide. The Brothers were in Europe to stay, they concluded, and the continent—with its freedom, wealth and growing Muslim population—was the ideal new front from which the Brotherhood could operate.

In 1979 a small group of AEIF members who embraced the long-term vision of the Egyptian branch of the European Brotherhood, and who wanted to extend the influence of the movement to the Muslim population of France, created a new organization—the Islamic Group in France, which in 1983 became the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF).²² While the official founders were two students, Iraqi national Zuhair Mahmood and Tunisian national Abdallah Ben Mansour, the UOIF had two important godfathers. The first was Faysal Mawlawi, a former member of the AEIF during his Parisian days who had returned to his native Lebanon to run the al Jamaa al Islamiya radical political party. The second was Rashid Ghannouchi, secretary of the AEIF between 1968 and 1969 and head of al Nahda, the Islamist movement that battled the Tunisian regime.²³ Ghannouchi and Mawlawi, wise politicians with a tremendous ability to adapt their rhetoric to circumstances, understood that the Brothers needed a well-structured organization to be able to influence the political debate and, simultaneously, to radicalize the Muslim minority in the European country with the largest Muslim population.

Over the last twenty years the UOIF has developed into France's largest and most active Muslim organization, controlling a large number of mosques and attracting tens of thousands of attendees to its annual gathering in Le Bourget. Today the UOIF even boasts its own institution of Islamic knowledge, the European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH).²⁴ Located in a castle in rural Burgundy, IESH offers various degrees and diplomas in Islamic studies, and states that its goal is to educate imams who, in addition to having an adequate theological and scientific background, will demonstrate "good assimilation in the Western reality." Given the background of the individuals involved in

IESH, however, “assimilation” is unlikely to be its primary goal. The institute was founded by key members of the UOIF, such as Ahmed Jaballah and Zuhair Mahmoud, and regularly hosts the most prominent figures of the international *Ikhwan* network.²⁵ Its scientific council is headed by Yussuf al-Qaradawi,²⁶ and Faysal Mawlawi, the spiritual guide of the UOIF, is a frequent visitor and lecturer.²⁷

The French government has a schizophrenic attitude toward UOIF. On the one hand, the French Council of State significantly turned down the naturalization request of Ben Mansour, a founding member of UOIF, alleging that he headed “a federation to which are affiliated many extremist movements which reject the essential values of French society.”²⁸ On the other hand, French Minister of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy publicly stated that he believes the UOIF has always held positions that “respected the Republic” and is a reliable partner in the delicate dialogue over the integration of the French Muslim community.²⁹

UOIF representatives, most of them recipients of degrees from prestigious French universities, are involved in countless interfaith, anti-racism, and pro-integration partnerships with Christian, private, and government organizations. At the same time, however, they have not abandoned their radical worldview and are occasionally caught making blatantly anti-Semitic remarks or defending the actions of Hamas.³⁰ Books such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and works of al-Banna and Qutb are regularly sold at UOIF's events. Tellingly, when UOIF was still a small entity and not under much media scrutiny, one of its representatives, Ahmed Djaballah, defined the launch of the organization as having two stages: “The first stage of the launch is democratic; the second will be putting the Islamic society in orbit.”³¹

Hoping to Rule Britannia

While Arab members of the Muslim Brotherhood spurred the spread of revivalist Islam in continental Europe, Muslims from South Asia initially played this role in the United Kingdom, where the majority of Muslims were Pakistanis and Indians. In the 1950s and 1960s, followers of Jamaat-e-Islami founder Abul Ala Maududi began to establish the first revivalist organizations in Great Britain. In 1962 a small group of Muslim activists from East London founded the UK Islamic Mission, an organization with the stated goal of “bringing about a new spiritual awakening” and building a society “based on the ideals, values and principles of Islam.”³²

The Mission sees Islam as an all-encompassing system that covers every aspect of life. Defining itself as an “ideological organization,” the Mission states that “Islam is a comprehensive way of life which must be translated into action in all spheres of human life. The Mission, therefore, aims at molding the entire human life in accordance with Allah's will.”³³ The Mission also openly declares its desire to introduce *sharia* in Great Britain, at least in the areas of private and family law. The UK Islamic Mission advocates, in fact,

a “continuous campaign for the establishment of Muslim family laws,” and an “Islamic social order in the United Kingdom in order to seek the pleasure of Allah.” While the stated goal of many Muslim organizations created at the time was to safeguard the Muslim identity of the South Asian immigrant population, the scholar Gilles Kepel has correctly noted that the Mission goes beyond such a protectionist aim in openly promoting the Islamization of British society. Following Maududi’s teachings, it urges the Muslim community not to be satisfied with simply keeping its own social values; rather, it should proselytize and strive to impose “the Islamic social order” on all, as a “vanguard to spearhead a life-long struggle in the cause of Allah.”³⁴

In order to carry out its goal of creating an “Islamic social order,” the Mission understood the importance of extending its teachings to the largest audience possible. Today the UK Islamic Mission has become a nationwide organization with thirty-nine branches, over thirty-five mosques and Islamic schools in which about five thousand British Muslim children receive Islamic education.³⁵ It has a youth branch, Young Muslims UK, that attempts to attract the sons and daughters of Muslim immigrants through study groups, summer camps, and Quran competitions. To appeal to the most Westernized among them, Young Muslims UK even sponsors such activities as Go-Karting and Paintball, all conducted in religiously-oriented and sex-segregated environments.³⁶

In 1973 the Islamic Mission established a college and research center, the Islamic Foundation. First located in a small two-room office in central Leicester, the Islamic Foundation has grown to be one of Europe’s largest institutions of Islamic studies and, by 1990, moved its headquarters to a sprawling mansion in rural Markfield, a few miles from Leicester.³⁷ The Foundation regularly organizes symposia and conferences and even runs its own institute of higher learning, the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, which issues diplomas in Islamic jurisprudence. It translates and publishes scores of Islamic texts, with a clear focus on revivalist authors in general and Maududi in particular.

The links between the UK Mission and Maududi go well beyond ideology, moreover. The level of coordination between the Mission and Jamaat-e-Islami is very high, though Mission officers in Leicester have publicly denied that the two organizations are formally linked. “We belong to the international Islamic movement,” claims Dr. Manazir Ahsan, the director general of the Islamic Foundation, “neither to Jamaat [-e-Islami] nor to *Ikhwan* nor to the Refah Party in Turkey—but all of them are our friends.”³⁸ The evidence contradicts him, however, and indicates that the relationship resembles more a symbiosis than a friendship, at least in regard to Jamaat-e-Islami. The first directors of the Islamic Foundation were officers of Jamaat-e-Islami, including Khurram Murad, who became one of Jamaat’s top leaders after leaving Leicester.³⁹ One of the Foundation’s founders and its current chairman is Khurshid Ahmed, a world-renowned Islamic scholar and member of the Pakistani Senate who joined Jamaat-e-Islami in 1956 and currently serves as its vice president.⁴⁰

But it is also true that, as members and sympathizers are increasingly British-born Muslims who feel limited affinity to Pakistani politics, the UK Mission and the Islamic Foundation have developed a life of their own.⁴¹ While issues such as Kashmir remain important, the Mission has increasingly focused its attention on problems affecting the everyday life of British Muslims, with the stated goal of preventing their absorption into mainstream British society.

Radicalizing the Muslim community is the Foundation's first priority, but it also emphasizes the importance of carrying out its *dawa* mission among the non-Muslim British population. The Foundation publishes several introductory books to Islam aimed at British Christians, and its director during the 1980s, the above-mentioned Murad, even published a handbook on how to convert non-Muslims.⁴² The Mission's brochures boast of the organization's successes in proselytizing in order to impress, as Kepel notes, "their Arabian benefactors and confirm the latter's conviction that Islam, in its most intransigent version, would subjugate the whole world, with the Mission forming an avant-garde."⁴³

Outreach toward non-Muslims goes beyond the religious duty of *dawa*, as the Mission attempts to increase its influence in the social and political life of Great Britain. The Islamic Foundation is involved in partnerships with several secular institutions of higher learning, for example, and has signed memoranda of understanding with various Christian organizations. It often works with city councils on issues involving the Muslim community, and it even conducts Islamic-awareness training for British police officers. Given that politicians from all parties attend its conferences, it is not surprising that even the Prince of Wales, sitting beside Khurshid Ahmad at a 2003 dinner in Markfield, praised the Islamic Foundation as "all that is to be admired about Islamic scholarship in the West" and "a fine example for others to follow."⁴⁴

In 1997 the Arab component of the Muslim Brotherhood founded its own organization in Great Britain, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). MAB's leadership includes individuals such as Azzam Tamimi, a former activist in the Islamic Action Front (the Jordanian Brotherhood's political party); Mohammed Sawalha, a self-declared former Hamas member; and Osama al Tikriti, the son of the leader of the Iraqi branch of the Brotherhood.⁴⁵ MAB's founding president, Kamal al Helbawy, was formerly the official spokesman for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in Europe.⁴⁶ Having gained notoriety thanks to its active role in the anti-war campaign during the first months of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, MAB has formed strong alliances with British civil rights and leftist organizations. Its role as a political player became apparent as it endorsed such anti-war politicians and close allies as London mayor Ken Livingstone and Respect Party candidate George Galloway.

Given their large Muslim populations, Great Britain, France, and Germany are naturally the three main centers of activity of the *Ikhwan* in Europe. But virtually every

European country has witnessed some degree of intense activity by the Brothers. As *Ikhwan* members often mention, their vision of Islam as a social religion compels them to create organizations. Tariq Ramadan, the ubiquitous Swiss scholar and son of Said Ramadan—whose affiliation with the Brotherhood is much debated—has stated that the communitarian dimension of Islam is fundamental because “the Islamic faith cannot be reduced to a strictly private affair.”⁴⁷ But other scholars mention more practical reasons for the *Ikhwan*’s organized activism. Qaradawi asserts that the “organized collective work” characteristic of the Islamic Movement “is ordained by religion and necessitated by reality.”⁴⁸ Only a well-structured network enables the Brothers to implement their goals, the first of which is preventing the integration or, even worse, the assimilation of Muslim minorities.

Cozying Up to the Elite

“In conversations with journalists and diplomats [Tunisian Islamist Rachid] Ghanouchi gives a moderate, democratic, pluralist image,” confessed a follower of this very important player in Europe’s *Ikhwan* network. “With us,” he added, “he talks about driving out the American invaders and their allies (the regimes in power), ... of saving the Holy Kaaba and the Tomb of the Noble Prophet from the plots of the enemies of the Arabs and Islam.”⁴⁹ The Muslim Brothers have an unparalleled ability to employ different tactics—to adapt their rhetoric and *modus operandi*—according to the circumstances.

In the first years of their existence, Islamist revivalist organizations took very hard and confrontational positions on issues that involved the Muslim community. This stance was apparently dictated both by the leaders’ radical views and by the desire to make themselves known and gain primacy within the Islamic community. In 1988, for example, the Islamic Foundation of Leicester fought vigorously to play a predominant role in organizing the protests against the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*—protests that swept the South Asian Muslim community in Great Britain. While its outrage was unquestionably genuine, the Foundation appeared to be most concerned about making sure that other Islamic groups did not lead the protests.⁵⁰

The following year, having witnessed how the Rushdie affair enhanced the status of the Foundation, the French *Ikhwan* decided to imitate the tactics of their British comrades when an opportunity presented itself in France. As the first nationwide controversy over the use of the *hijab* in public schools erupted in 1989, the then-relatively powerless UOIF became the most active defender of the right to wear the veil. Hoping to attract the sympathies of the Muslim community, the UOIF showed little interest in pursuing a constructive dialogue with the French government while it organized several protests against the ban and declared that “the Muslims of France could not accept such attacks on their dignity.”⁵¹

Today, now that it has achieved a dominant position within France's organized Islamic community, the UOIF has completely changed its tactics and strives to gain the trust of the authorities. Believing it can gain more by working within the system than against it, the UOIF is avoiding head-on confrontations with the government that could set back its agenda. In March 2004, therefore, when the French Parliament passed a controversial new law banning all religious symbols and apparel in public schools, the UOIF kept incredibly quiet. It abstained from participating in the protests that were organized, not only in France, but also throughout the world. Azzam Tamimi, a leader of the Muslim Association of Britain who was harshly critical of this decision, explained that the UOIF is now "against any activity that could cause a confrontation with the public powers."⁵²

In its change of behavior, the UOIF provides a quintessential example of the Brotherhood's most effective quality: flexibility. If in 1989 the issue of the *hijab* constituted a perfect opportunity to make the UOIF known to the French Muslim community as a strenuous defender of the honor of Muslims, fifteen years later it constituted a dangerous trap to avoid. Because the law passed with overwhelming and bilateral support, the UOIF saw no practical advantage in challenging the establishment.

Challenging the establishment, in fact, is not the current policy of the European Brotherhood. Realizing they are still a relatively weak force, the Brothers have opted for a different tactic: befriending the establishment. They are taking advantage of the European elite's desperate desire to establish a dialogue with any representatives of the Muslim community, and they are putting themselves forward as the *de facto* voices of European Muslims. Thanks to the Europeans' naïveté and their own activism, the Brothers are now the closest partners that European political elites have in discussing the integration of the local Muslim communities. Nowhere is this more evident than in Brussels, where *Ikhwan* organizations have become the only officially recognized representatives of the European Muslim population, monopolizing the debate with the institutions of the European Union.

In 1989 the European Brothers founded the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), with the stated goal of "serving Muslims in European societies."⁵³ Even though it has gained prominence in Europe as a moderate Muslim organization, however, FIOE is nothing more than the umbrella organization for most *Ikhwan* groups in Europe. Its founders and main members are the French UOIF, the German IGD and the British MAB, and its headquarters are in Markfield, located in spaces leased from the Islamic Foundation. Serving on FIOE's board are such prominent European *Ikhwan* figures as UOIF's Ahmed Djaballah and IGD's Ibrahim El Zayat. Its president, Ahmed al Rawi, has personally defended suicide bombings in Iraq and Israel, claiming that Muslims "have the right to defend themselves." And yet he is a habitué of the European circles of power, having testified before the European Parliament and attended John Paul II's funeral.⁵⁴

In 1996 FIOE created the European Trust, a financial institution devoted to raising funds for its various activities, such as the sprawling European Institute of Human Sciences, the Association of Muslim Schools in Europe, and its glossy magazine *Al Europiya*. Also in 1996, in cooperation with the Saudi WAMY, FIOE established a youth branch—the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO). Originally headed by the ubiquitous El Zayat and strategically headquartered in Brussels, FEMYSO has managed to become, in its own words, “the *de facto* voice of the Muslim youth of Europe.” Today it oversees a network of thirty-seven member organizations, and it enjoys regular relations with the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations.⁵⁵

The Long March Toward *Sharia* in Europe

The success of organizations such as FIOE and FEMYSO is the crowning achievement of the Brothers’ thirty years of hard work. The *Ikhwan* groups have managed to become part of the establishment, finding a small niche in the corridors of European power. The Brothers view this triumph as a mere starting point, however. Having gained the trust of large segments of both Europe’s elites and its Muslim communities, the Brothers want to use their newly acquired power to create the “Muslim ghetto” envisioned by Qaradawi. An extensive network of mosques and educational facilities already exists; the next step toward the creation of what Reuven Paz refers to as “non-territorial Islamic states in Europe” is the implementation of Islamic law for Europe’s Muslim population.⁵⁶

An article in a 2002 issue of *Al Islam*, the official publication of the European Brotherhood’s historic Islamic Center of Munich, openly states that “In the long run, Muslims cannot be satisfied with the acceptance of German family, estate, and trial law.... Muslims should aim at an agreement between the Muslims and the German state with the goal of a separate jurisdiction for Muslims.”⁵⁷ The Brothers fully understand that the implementation of *sharia* in Europe is a very difficult task that currently seems quite far-fetched. But patience and long-term vision are two of the movement’s strongest assets, and the Brothers are working to reap their fruits “in the long run.” For now, the *Ikhwan* is generally refraining from officially asking for the implementation of *sharia*, despite hints that make its ultimate aim quite apparent. The Brothers have begun, for example, to create an Islamic legal framework that lays the foundation for imposing *sharia* in the West.

In 1989 the UOIE, perhaps the most important of the various European *Ikhwan* groups, made a small but extremely significant change to its name. Previously known as the Union of Islamic Organizations *in* France, it now called itself the Union of Islamic Organizations *of* France—a small semantic difference that had a huge meaning.⁵⁸ By changing the name, the Brothers declared that they were in France, and in Europe, to stay. They realized that the presence of Muslims in Europe was a permanent and growing

phenomenon, and that it required a new approach. The following year Ghannouchi, one of the historical spiritual leaders of the UOIF, gave a landmark speech at the organization's annual meeting in which he referred to France as *dar al Islam* (land of Islam), a place where the presence of Muslims is permanent.⁵⁹

A definitive new *Ikhwan* position on the juridical connotation of Europe was formalized two years later, at another seminar organized by the UOIF. There, scholars of the importance of Qaradawi, Mawlawi, and Djaballah agreed that the traditional distinction between *dar al Islam* and *dar al Harb* (land of war) did not currently reflect reality. While Europe could not be considered *dar al Islam* because *sharia* was not enforced there, it could not be considered *dar al Harb* because Muslims were allowed to practice Islam freely and were not persecuted. According to Mawlawi, the distinction was based only on *ijtihad* (interpretation, not coming directly from the text) and limited to a historic context that no longer exists. The *Ikhwan* scholars decided, therefore, that it was possible for them to create a new legal category. They concluded that Europe should be considered *dar al dawa* (land of preaching), a territory where Muslims live as a minority, are respected, and have the duty to spread their religion peacefully. Other definitions have followed: Qaradawi has spoken of *dar al ahd* (land of contact), for example, while Tariq Ramadan has adopted the term *dar al shahada* (land of testimony).⁶⁰

By acknowledging that the presence of Muslims in the West is permanent, and by giving their status a new legal definition, the *Ikhwan* scholars set the stage for creating new rules to regulate this presence. While there is extensive jurisprudence that addresses the situation of non-Muslim minorities living in *dar al Islam*, very few provisions cover the relatively new situation of Muslims living permanently in non-Muslim countries. For most European Muslims, this has not been a major issue, either because religion does not play a large role in their lives or because they have found their own ways to reconcile their faith with their lives in the West. But many do many feel the need for guidance from the *ulema* about such everyday matters as marriage, divorce and relations with non-Muslims. These problems require the development of a new jurisprudence, which has come to be known as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) for minorities (*fiqh al aqaliyyat*).⁶¹

Given the lack of intellectual Muslim leadership and structured Islamic clergy in Europe, the Brotherhood sees itself as the entity most able to fill this void and to create this new *fiqh*.⁶² Mawlawi, one of the top *Ikhwan* thinkers on minority *fiqh*, has said, "It is obvious that when secular and Islamic laws collide, a Muslim is expected to honor his Islamic law whenever possible."⁶³ But while affirming the superiority of Islamic law, he refers to the Quranic verse that states "Be observant of Allah to the best of your ability" (*fa-ittaqu Allaha ma istata `tum*).⁶⁴ According to Mawlawi, this verse allows a Muslim who is in the "legal bind" of having to choose between respecting *sharia* or European law to follow the "less detrimental" option.⁶⁵ Other European Brothers hold slightly more ambiguous positions, torn between their beliefs and their political instincts. Thus far,

formal proposals to introduce Islamic law in Europe have been quite timid, in fact, and the reaction from most European politicians has been cold, to say the least.

For the time being, then, officially sanctioned Islamic courts in Europe represent only a dream. The European *Ikhwan* have established an unofficial one, however—the European Council for Fatwa and Research. This body currently limits itself to dispensing advice to Muslims living in Europe who have to juggle obedience to Quranic precepts with respect for the laws of their host countries.

The European Council for Fatwa and Research

In March 1997 FIOE sponsored the first meeting of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, an organization that has become quite a feather in the European Brothers' cap. Held in London, the meeting was attended by more than fifteen well-known Islamic scholars who endorsed the Council's draft constitution. The Council is described as "an Islamic, specialized and independent entity" created to issue "collective *fatwas* which meet the needs of Muslims in Europe, solve their problems and regulate their interaction with the European communities, all within the regulations and objectives of *sharia*."⁶⁶ In practical terms the Council is a jurisprudential body that provides Muslims living in Europe with non-binding legal advice focusing on matters they face in their everyday lives as members of a minority community in non-Muslim countries.

The Council's headquarters are in Dublin, where it operates in conjunction with the local Islamic Cultural Centre. Both institutions have received generous financial backing from the Al-Maktoum Charity Organization, which is headed by Shaykh Hamdan Al Maktoum, the UAE Minister of Finance and Industry and the Deputy Ruler of Dubai.⁶⁷ The Council generally meets twice a year in different European venues and currently comprises thirty-two Islamic scholars from throughout the world, the majority of whom reside within the European Union. (The Council's bylaws specifically state that no more than 25 percent of its total membership should live outside Europe.) Its sessions take place behind closed doors, and the clerics deliberate on issues brought forward by either Council members or European Muslims who ask the Council for advice.

In reality the Council is a body created and dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood's global network. Its jurisprudence is aimed at guiding Muslims through a "program of perfect life for the individual, the family, society and the state"—phrasing that echoes al-Banna.⁶⁸ Among its members are key figures of the European *Ikhwan*, such as UOIF's Djaballah and Ounis Qourqah, IESH's al Arabi al Bichri, FIOE's al Rawi, and the ever-present Ghannouchi. Several other members are high-profile scholars from Arab Gulf countries, most of whom hold positions very close to those of the *Ikhwan*. The Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland's Hussein Mohammed Halawa is the Council's secretary general and oversees its day-to-day operations, while the Lebanese cleric Mawlawi is its

vice president—an honor given to him in recognition of his role in promoting the historic doctrinal change of Europe from *dar al Harb* to *dar al dawa*. As Ghannouchi observed, “Some members [of the Council] belong to the Brothers, some others do not. What is important is the ideology, not the movement.”⁶⁹

Most tellingly, the president of the Council is Qaradawi, whose position of prominence is widely accepted by the other members. Though the Council is technically a democratic body in which the majority rules, its scholars rarely vote, tending instead to avoid internal dissent and to follow the position of Qaradawi and the Council's most influential figures.⁷⁰ Qaradawi is not only the Council's best-known scholar, but also the real driving force behind it. He is a charismatic figure whose prestige is crucially important to the Council's relevance. A gifted speaker with an uncommon ability to deal with the media, Qaradawi disseminates his teachings through his own website and a popular weekly show on *al Jazeera* called “*Al Sharia wal Hayat*” (“*Sharia* and Life”). He should now be considered, according to an internal memo of the British Home Office, “the leading mainstream and influential Islamic authority in the Middle East and increasingly in Europe, with an extremely large popular following.”⁷¹

While Qaradawi is indeed extremely popular and influential well beyond the underworld of the *Ikhwan*, his views, as the same memo acknowledges, are far from moderate. He has repeatedly defended suicide attacks against Israel and American forces in Iraq. He has repeatedly pledged his support to such organizations as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic *jihād*, labeled the Middle East peace process as “a conspiracy to stop the Palestinian Resistance,” and decreed that “*jihād* is incumbent upon the entire Muslim nation in order to liberate Palestine, Jerusalem, and the Al Aqsa Mosque.”⁷² Similarly, in 2004 Qaradawi issued a *fatwa* justifying attacks against all American citizens in Iraq, including civilians, saying “there is no difference between U.S. military personnel and civilians in Iraq since both have come to invade the country” and since “civilians are actually there to serve the U.S. occupying forces.”⁷³

The European Council for Fatwa and Research reflects the dual personalities of Qaradawi and its leaders. Overall, its jurisprudence gives the impression of being quite moderate and innocuous, offering suggestions to individuals who want to follow the requirements of their religion in their new land. Many *fatwas* simply discuss how to perform certain Islamic rituals in non-Muslim countries, solving mostly logistical problems. Some rulings, for example, address questions about praying in buildings in which facing Mecca poses difficulties.⁷⁴ Another *fatwa* deals with the timing of Muslim prayers in Scandinavian countries in relation to sunrise and sunset.⁷⁵ As most Muslims living in the West must deal with the banking system, many decrees attempt to reconcile the need to contract loans, use mortgages, and open bank accounts, with the Islamic ban of *riba* (usury), which the Muslim Brothers interpret to include interest.

On these matters the jurisprudence of the Council is quite liberal. Its *fatwas* urge

Muslims to seek all possible “Islamic alternatives” and “Islamic organizations throughout Europe to enter into negotiations with European banks to find formulas that are acceptable,” as many of them are already doing.⁷⁶ But, if no alternative is possible and the *haram* (forbidden) transaction is vitally important, the Council draws on the principle of accommodation to allow the European Muslim to carry out transactions with *riba*. In general the Court tends to respect Western law as much as possible and espouses a relatively moderate interpretation of Islamic law. No *fatwa* touches issues of criminal law, where any intrusion of Muslim jurisprudence would be perceived very negatively by Europeans. In some cases the Council explicitly decrees that European Muslims should follow the laws of European countries and the rulings of its judges, even if those contradict *sharia*. In cases of divorce, for example, the Council ruled that “it is imperative that a Muslim who conducted his Marriage by virtue of those countries’ respective laws, to comply with the rulings of a non-Muslim judge in the event of a divorce.”⁷⁷

But not all the jurisprudence of the Council follows this moderate trend. Despite its professed focus on issues affecting everyday life, some of the Council’s *fatwas* are extremely political and reveal the radical side of at least some of its clerics. In the July 2003 Council meeting held in Stockholm, for example, Qaradawi described five categories of terrorism, including “terror that is permitted by Islamic law” and “martyrdom operations.” Ruling that Israel could be defined as “invaders” and thus legitimately targeted, Qaradawi stated that “those who oppose martyrdom operations and claim that they are suicide are making a great mistake.”⁷⁸ Mawlawi, the Council’s vice president, holds similar views about terrorism. In issuing a *fatwa* that prohibited Arab countries from cooperating with the United States in the “War on Terror,” Mawlawi noted that what is dubbed terrorism by Washington is in most cases “Jihad and legitimate right,” such as resistance operations in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷⁹

Even more troubling, for its potentially disruptive effects, is the Council’s jurisprudence that deals with family matters. While many rulings uphold Islamic principles that are perfectly compatible with European legislation, some *fatwas* express opinions that are at odds with basic Western concepts, particularly with regard to domestic violence and equality between the sexes. And while some *fatwas* instruct Muslims to follow European marriage and divorce laws, other rulings on the same matters refer only to Islamic law, omitting any reference to respecting Western legislation. The relationship between husband and wife is an area where the incompatibility between the Council’s jurisprudence and Western law is particularly manifest. Various Council rulings state that men should be good husbands and fair to their wives, but some *fatwas* clearly pay no heed to the concept of equality between men and women. A 1997 Council *fatwa*, for example, states that a wife needs her husband’s permission to cut her hair, provided that the cut is significant and “completely change[s] the appearance of the woman.”⁸⁰ By the same token, the Council authorizes a husband to prevent his wife from visiting another

woman, even a Muslim woman, “if he felt that this relationship has an adverse effect on his wife, children or marital life in general.”⁸¹

These rulings are not surprising, given the positions that Qaradawi holds on marriage and marital relations. In his hallmark treaty on Islamic law, *The Licit and Illicit in Islam*, Qaradawi openly states that “the man is the lord of the house and the head of the family.” He asserts, moreover, that when a wife exhibits “signs of pride or insubordination,” her husband is entitled to use violence against her, even though this has to be done without hitting hard and avoiding the face.⁸² These teachings are clearly at odds with the criminal law and public sentiment of every European country. Significantly, the provisions regarding the treatment of women caused *The Licit and Illicit in Islam* to be banned in France in 1995. Charles Pasqua, France’s Minister of Interior at the time, commented that the book deserved the ban because of “its violently anti-Western tones and the theses contrary to the laws and values of the Republic that it contains.”⁸³ Qaradawi has also repeatedly observed that polygamy is a right that all Muslim men should be able to enjoy, provided they respect certain rules.

Polygamy and domestic violence represent two extremes, which would be prosecuted by European criminal laws. But the Council holds other positions that contradict Western laws governing marriage and divorce. It promotes an openly ambiguous situation for Muslims who have contracted marriage under European law, as the Council urges them to respect both the European laws and the conflicting principles of *sharia*. Just as disturbing is the possible application of the Council’s jurisprudence to *nikah* marriages. A small, yet significant, number of Muslims living in Europe do not officially register their marriages but simply get married in an Islamic rite (*nikah*). In these cases, where the marriage does not exist under European law, the only rules that could apply are those of *sharia*, and the Council could potentially become the body regulating such marital relationships.

Conclusion

The Council’s *fatwas* are not legally binding, as they are simply opinions of respected scholars rather than judgments delivered by *qadis*. Members of the European *Ikhwan* network are quick to point out that its role, comparable to that of the Vatican’s, is purely consultative, intended only to advise Muslims about religious issues that arise in their daily lives.⁸⁴ Yet the Brothers’ ambitions for the Council go beyond a merely advisory role. As stated in its bylaws, the Council is “designed to become an approved religious authority before local governments and private establishments, which will undoubtedly strengthen and reinforce local Islamic communities.”⁸⁵ The Brothers see today’s non-binding Council’s jurisprudence as just a step toward their long-term goal of establishing *sharia* for Muslims in Europe.

Most *Ikhwan* groups operating in Europe have the stated goal of establishing Islamic law for local Muslim populations. The Brothers understand that the places where this is most likely to occur are in areas of high Islamic concentration—in other words, in Qaradawi's "Muslim ghettos." The Brothers believe that, once Muslims reach a majority in certain areas of various European countries, European governments will feel compelled to allow Islamic law to regulate the personal/civil relations among them.

While the *Ikhwan's* intentions might appear to be nothing more than a dream, a disturbingly large number of European Muslims seem to favor introducing Islamic law into Europe. A 2005 poll revealed that four out of ten British Muslims want *sharia* introduced into parts of Britain.⁸⁶ Another poll conducted by a local Muslim institute reports that 21 per cent of Muslims living in Germany believe that the German constitution is incompatible with the teachings of the Quran.⁸⁷ But while *salafi* and other extremist organizations are already demanding the introduction of *sharia* in a confrontational and counterproductive way, the more politically savvy Brothers are using a different strategy to achieve the same goal.

The European *Ikhwan* have repeatedly compromised their strict observance of *sharia* in order to advance their cause. Every tactic that might help the movement is justified, even if it entails breaking some Quranic principle, because the higher goal of spreading Islam excuses all deviations. Mawlawi and other *Ikhwan* scholars have asserted, for example, that the creation of Islamic centers in the West is a priority for the Islamic Movement. Muslims should make every effort, therefore, to purchase buildings and turn them into mosques, even if they must resort to financial transactions forbidden by Islamic law to do so.⁸⁸ Similarly, asked whether Muslims could vote and participate in the political life of their European host countries, the Council responded that the issue "is to be decided by Islamic organizations and establishment," which should evaluate what position best serves the interests of the Movement.⁸⁹ At the moment the Brothers have embraced compromise as the best means of increasing their influence, which will allow them in turn to lobby more effectively for their goals—goals that include the establishment of *sharia* in Europe.

Now relatively weak in the West, the Brotherhood has concluded that engaging in dialogue and showing openness and moderation is their wisest strategy. But if the balance of power were to change over the next few decades, nothing guarantees that the *Ikhwan* would not change its approach and discard dialogue. A German government's analysis of the tactics of Islamist groups operating in Germany reveals a well-founded suspicion that the *Ikhwan's* desire for dialogue is far from sincere: "While in recent times, the Milli Görüş has increasingly emphasized the readiness of its members to be integrated into German society and asserts its adherence to the basic law, such statements stem from tactical calculation rather than from any inner change of the organization."⁹⁰

To date European Brotherhood organizations have rarely been directly linked to

specific cases of terrorism, but their contribution to the education and radicalization of violent extremists has already been significant. The Brotherhood's renunciation of violence seems more opportunistic than genuine, moreover, when its European members use fiery rhetoric to endorse terrorist operations in the Middle East. While they are quick to condemn violence in the West to avoid becoming political pariahs, they do not refrain from approving of it elsewhere, notably in the Middle East, because they believe they can get away with it. It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that should it become convenient for them to do so, the ever-flexible Brotherhood would embrace violent tactics in the West as well.

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