

**Book Review: Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton University Press, 2013).
By Barbara Zollner**

Considering the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power after the Arab Spring of 2011 and its subsequent Ikarus-like fall in 2013, there is much interest in the question of whether the organization harbours violent tendencies. Avoiding an oversimplified answer, Wickham's book 'The Muslim Brotherhood' provides a timely historical analysis which gives a much needed insight into the ideology of one of largest and most active Islamist movement in Egyptian politics. Tracking the movement's development from its beginnings to its peak, the book gives readers the tools to better understand the intricacies of the Brotherhood's decision-making processes and its relationship to politics. Unlike other authors, Wickham provides a non-partisan analysis, which explains the Brotherhood's evolving presence as a vocal opposition group against Egypt's authoritarianism and its political choices during the short-lived phase of democratic transition. Although the book does not cover the Brotherhood's fate after 2013, Wickham's account of the Muslim Brotherhood's history is highly relevant to understanding the current state of affairs. The examination of intra-organisational dynamics thus builds the foundations for further debates on the movement's weaknesses in terms of its survival, but also its possibilities for revival.

Wickham's book is the product of years of research and fieldwork. It draws on her long-term interest in the organisational dynamics of Islamist groups for which she is well-known in scholarly circles. The list of her previous publications includes a book on *Islamic Activism* which in itself is a ground-breaking sociological study of the Brotherhood's inroads into political activism through student movements and professional organisations. Still, her recent book does not merely repeat what has been said elsewhere. In her recent book she deliberately adopts a historical perspective. It provides readers with an accessible account of the organisation's ideological development, one that speaks to specialists and non-specialists alike. Unlike other accounts of the Brotherhood's history, it gives a unique insight into intra-organisational dynamics and shows how these play out in Egypt's dramatically changing political context. Wickham's analysis is backed by careful research. She makes the effort to assess a wide range of sources in English and Arabic, including a selection of not easily accessible Brotherhood-internal documents. She also conducted interviews with leaders of the Brotherhood as well with a number of critical voices, amongst them secular opponents of the organisation, but most

notably also dissident members. The result of Wickham's detailed research is a balanced account which is full of primary material.

The analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood's history starts with its formative years under al-Banna. In quick steps it follows its development until recent years. The chapters on the Brotherhood's formative years and the period of persecution provide a useful background, but the bulk of the analysis focuses on the organisation's gradual entrance onto the political stage. Focusing on the Brotherhood's ideological and political development since the 1970s, the book is particularly valuable in terms of understanding the Brotherhood's political decisions, challenges and failures in its attempt to achieve power following the uprising of 2011. The final chapter follows the Brotherhood's development until the augmentation of the organisation to the highest state institutions in the course of the so-called Arab Spring, ending with the election of Muhammad Mursi as President of Egypt in 2012. The book therefore does not cover the downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood, its re-designation as a terrorist organisation or the renewed persecution under the regime of President 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. However, this does not limit the current relevance of the book. On the contrary, Wickham's work is key to understanding why the Brotherhood alienated potential allies and thus failed to secure Egypt's democratic transition.

Historical analysis is not simply a tool for Wickham to revisit the story of the organisation's rise and fall. Put differently, the book does not merely describe events, dates and circumstances 'as they happened'. Instead, Wickham's review of history is to study the necessary context of the organisation's ideological development and, more crucially, the dynamics within its ranks. This allows for a reflection on the scope but also on the limits of the organisation's shift towards political participation and moderation. It is on this issue that Wickham provides the reader with an important contribution. It engages with the debate on whether changes in the Brotherhood's public appearance are evidence of substantial ideological reconsiderations of its religious interpretation and political attitude or whether the conciliatory political rhetoric is merely a pragmatic strategy or even, as its harshest critics argue, a calculated deception. The author's approach to the topic however defies quick and simple answers.

Exploring the many dimensions of the Brotherhood's world leads Wickham to focus on a number of themes. These run through its organisational and ideological make-up from the very beginning. Firstly, her analysis shows that the Muslim Brotherhood

is not a monolithic block, but that it harbours individuals and groupings which pursue conflicting agendas and which hold opposing religious interpretations. Wickham investigates with great accuracy the evolution of three main intra-organisational groupings to examine their substantially different political aims: these are the conservative da'wa faction which dominates the Brotherhood's highest administrative body, the Guidance Council; a number of reformists who have their beginnings in the grass-roots political activism of the student movement of the 1970s and finally a group of conservative pragmatists who share the background of the reformists but who choose to subordinate themselves to the leadership of the Guidance Council. Following the development of these factions through decades of authoritarian rule and locating these groups within the administrative structure of the Brotherhood, Wickham accurately depicts intra-organisational tensions. Because Wickham relates these dynamics to the wider political history of Egypt, she is able to explain the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Brotherhood's politics. Secondly, although Wickham does not deny that there is an overall shift in the Muslim Brotherhood's political rhetoric, which manifests itself in the adoption of the discourse on democracy and human rights, she nevertheless points out that this development is not uniform. On the contrary, the conservative Brothers tend to resent fundamental ideological revisions because ideas of liberal reform clash with their orthodox religious world-view. Reformist members on the other hand tend to be more open to liberal concepts in so far as they are more responsive towards non-orthodox religious interpretations. It explains the array of sometimes fundamentally contradicting political ideas and religious justifications. These are particularly evident in statements on shari'a, the role of women and the status of minorities, where illiberal views, often drawn from orthodox interpretation of religion, coexist with the emphasis that the organisation also stands for equality, human rights and democracy. Thirdly, the uneven and non-linear ideological progress which can be traced through the Brotherhood's political behaviour of past decades is not only the result of the power seesaw between conservatives and reformists in respect of influence within the Brotherhood's ranks. Wickham's historical approach evidences that these factions are shaped by restrictions and opportunities within a changing political framework on the one hand and, more substantially, by religious convictions which divide proponents of orthodoxy from more liberal-minded reformists on the other. By exploring the micro-dynamics of the Brotherhood, Wickham presents a multi-dimensional picture of the organisation. It thus leads her to argue that motivations for change are complex.

Beyond the study of the Muslim Brotherhood, Wickham's book is an important contribution to the theoretical debate about the relationship between political participation and moderation. Of course, Wickham does not deny that the Brotherhood underwent ideological changes over the years. Still, her observations test the 'participation-moderation' thesis. Her investigation into the given micro-dynamics leads her to dismiss the position that there is a causal link and, even less, a linear progression that starts with political participation and that ultimately ends in political moderation. By extension, her contention that religious beliefs set limits to substantial political reform is a real challenge for those interested in debates about framing processes, political socialisation and democratic transformation. Clearly, Wickham is critical of structuralist positions such as suggested by Rational Choice Theory. However, her contentions are equally relevant to debates in Social Movement Theory which takes a more constructivist position on the question of moderation and thus is not quite as comfortable with Wickham's view. Her excursion in chapter 8 engages in a brief comparative analysis which considers Islamist movements in Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait. These cases are well-chosen, not only because she looks at groups which belong to the larger Brotherhood family, but because they question the concept of a fixed pattern of moderation in respect of Islamist movements which choose to participate in the political systems. Whether this warrants, as Wickham seems to suggest, the dismissal of the concept of moderation altogether, replacing it instead with even more diffuse ideas such as socialisation or habituation, is debatable. After all, one cannot deny that political participation has a positive effect as it, on the one hand, opens authoritarian regimes to a more pluralist political spectrum and, on the other hand, challenges Islamists to self-restrain as it demands of them adherence to the rules of the political game. As for 'real' change and moderation, the process of opening up to new ideas starts with the individual and one can only hope that it results in the gradual but substantial reform of Islamist movement and, in consequence, fundamental changes within the organisation, not just for reasons of strategic political positioning, but at a deeper level, leading to more liberal views on religion and society.

'The Muslim Brotherhood by Carrie Wickham is a must-read for anyone researching the organisation's ideological development and its relationship to the Egyptian state. Unlike many other recent contributions on the Brotherhood which seem to fill the shelves since the Arab Spring and the coup of 2013, Wickham's research avoids the trap of giving an oversimplified answer as to whether the Islamist organisation is Egypt's defender of democracy or whether it poses a security threat. Instead her

book gives scholars, students and policy makers a well-researched and balanced analysis of intra-organisational dynamics and how these shaped the organisation's fortunes in the context of repression and in the face of political openings. The result is a book which will become core literature for the study of this organisation. It already sits in my bookshelf next to Richard Mitchell's account.