

2006

Egyptian Social Services

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Egyptian Social Services

Degree Type

Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department

Social Work

First Advisor

Lynn Nybell

Keywords

Social service Egypt, Social movements Egypt

Subject Categories

Social Work

Egyptian Social Services

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Senior's Thesis

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May 2, 2006

My goal, after completing my education, is to engage in the community development aspect of social work in Egypt or some other Middle Eastern nation, focusing on such issues as poverty, hunger, lack of basic necessities, unemployment, and lack of housing. In order to accomplish this, there exist certain aspects of social work practice in Egypt that may differ from practice in the United States about which I will have to become informed before I am able to practice there. Through the use of interviews and a literature and web review, I have analyzed Egyptian human service organizations using social movement theory, and have arrived at a relatively accurate understanding of the Egyptian social welfare system.

There are, however, many limitations to this research. A relatively small amount of scholarly research has been done on this topic, and much of that is either outdated or in Arabic. Because I have relied on English-language sources, Western theories have been applied to social phenomena in Egypt. While I feel that the perspectives put forth in this paper are still valid ones, they may not express the full theoretical continuum available on this topic. In addition, what information was accessible to me often focused only upon legally registered organizations, which tend to be middle class-based and on comparatively good terms with the Egyptian government, and which are also far outnumbered by extra-legal organizations. I performed several personal interviews in an effort to compensate for these shortcomings. All interviewees are referred to by pseudonym only: Mr. Smith Number One, Mr. Smith Number Two, etc.

Level of Formal Education Required for a Social Worker in Egypt

In Egypt, as in the rest of the Middle East, social work is not a licensed profession. A few Middle Eastern universities, particularly in Egypt, offer degrees in '*amal al-ijtima*', literally translated as "social work". Students in these programs are trained in areas such as food

distribution, domestic violence, and other social issues. A few related degrees are also offered in fields such as urban development or mental health. Because social work is not a licensed profession, social workers in Egypt are not required to have any formal education whatsoever, although most do, though those with degrees in '*amal al-ijtima*' are in the minority. However, social work is not a well-defined profession, and most of the "social work" practiced in Egypt would not be called '*amal al-ijtima*'. Furthermore, the vast majority of social work practice in the Middle East occurs at mezzo- and macro-levels; Middle Eastern society is more collectivistic than Western, and interpersonal practice is rare. Because the practice of social work in the Middle East exists in forms that are very different than those practiced in the Western world, much of it frequently goes unrecognized and unresearched by Western scholars.

Despite the fact that it is not a licensed profession, I shall henceforth refer to all persons who perform social work jobs as social workers. Most social workers perform social work as a form of part-time employment in order to supplement their income while simultaneously serving the disadvantaged. The type of social work they do is usually somehow connected with the profession they have been trained in; for example, a doctor may volunteer some time at a clinic in a low-income area, or a teacher may also work part-time at a free school run by a non-profit organization.

What Is a Social Movement?

McCarthy and Wolfson (1992) suggest this definition of social movements: “. . . A set of opinions and beliefs in a population representing preferences for changing some elements of the social structure or reward distribution, or both, of a society” (p.275). This set of opinions and beliefs is often expressed through the use of organizations and sets of strategies aimed at

achieving the desired change(s). Social movement organizations can encompass groups as diverse as religious movements, revolutions, and human service agencies, among others. I would add that in order for an organization to be classified as an social movement organization it would have to: (1) ally itself with a certain social movement, (2) identify a specific social issue that it aimed to affect, and (3) be, directly or indirectly, change-focused in its tactics and interventions.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory can be defined as a set of ideas having to do with the life cycle of social movements at micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels. Prior to the 1970s, with the exception of the institutional school of thought, dominant trends in social movement theory analyzed at the micro-level and focused on the issue of movement emergence. They disagreed only on the points of what characteristics caused individuals to participate in social movements and how these characteristics led individuals to become involved.

At this time, the collective behavior approach emphasized the role of values and norms that provided the basis of specific social movements. To mass society theorists, movements emerged due to individual feelings of alienation that were produced by the so-called “massification” of society. Relative deprivation theorists developed the notion that movements arose out of members’ perceptions of deprivation or injustice relative to some other group(s) in society, focusing on economic factors in particular. The fourth school of thought, the institutional school, studied the evolution of certain social movements over the passage of time, in terms of the structure and goals of movements and how they adapted to changes in their respective environments.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the many social movements taking place throughout much of the Western world seemed ill-explained by existing theories. A new generation of theories arose, creating two new trends in social movement theory: the resource mobilization and political process models. Neither one contradicting the other, both trends brought a new emphasis on macro-level processes, particularly in the political context. Furthermore, both trends study how movements are maintained, what tactics they use to attain their goals, and what causes social movements to decline. Finally, according to McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1988), both trends assume rational thinking on the part of individual movement participants, and emphasize the connection between institutional and movement politics (p.697).

To resource mobilization theorists, deprivation and discontent are social constants, and it is not changes in the level of deprivation, but rather, *variations* in the resources available to movements that allow them to emerge successfully and be maintained. By contrast, political process theorists emphasize the importance of indigenous organization and political opportunity structure in determining whether movements emerge and are maintained successfully.

Another current approach to social movement theory that could be applied to the case of Egypt is one that contends that the degree of consistency between the values professed by social movement organizations and the values of the general population is the primary factor in movement maintenance. In this case, organizations frame social problems in terms of participants' moral or religious obligation to help address them, and participants join movements out of this sense of moral obligation or duty that outweighs the costs or dangers of membership. Movements are maintained as long as that sense of moral obligation is maintained in participants.

A final approach applied to the case of Egypt in this paper relates to both the resource mobilization and political process models. In terms of resource mobilization, this approach argues that the success of social movements is partially based upon the ability of organizations to build diverse coalitions that incorporate broad sectors of domestic society and international actors. It departs from the political process model by stating that the success of movements is not determined only by the relative openness of the political systems in question. Rather, successful movements are often centered upon opposition to a single powerful dictator who has little legitimacy with the population. Hence, successful movements often rely upon the formation of "negative coalitions" that involve diverse members in opposition to a powerful dictator.

Unfortunately, as pointed out by McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, (1988) social movement theory has taken a pendulum-swing between micro- versus macro-levels of study, and the question of movement formation versus that of movement maintenance and change. This has resulted in a disconnect between these approaches, and a gap in information that could bridge these varied approaches. Instead, the authors suggest that social movements be studied from a variety of angles and approaches simultaneously: micro, mezzo, and macro; movement emergence, maintenance, change, and success/decline (p.698).

Applying what is commonly called the "social work perspective" --- ideally, a holistic analysis of all aspects of social life at micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels, with an emphasis on issues of social justice and empowerment, could suit research on social movements in Egypt and other nations very well. And for those who perform research to inform their work and practice, such an analyses could provide both necessary contextual information and inform possible solutions and areas of advocacy.

Indeed, as a social worker studying the provision of social services in Egypt, I believe that future studies should provide some insight specifically into the social service aspect of social movements. With the exception of Clark, this important aspect of social conditions and social movements has been largely neglected by the intellectual community in its discussions of social movement theory. However, due precisely to the facts that the provision of social services directly affects social conditions, and that organizations providing social services are frequently powerful actors in social movements, more research should focus on this area of study.

Finally, current social movement theory tends to view the processes of politicization and mobilization only in concrete terms; that is, there is little discussion of the politicizing nature of the ways in which social problems are defined and how this affects the solutions that created. Due to this shortcoming, much of the political activity that takes place in Egypt goes relatively unresearched (with Wickham providing a noticeable exception). However, it seems apparent that social movement organizations play an active role in interpreting social phenomena, defining social problems, identifying appropriate routes for change, and creating solutions. For example, an Islamist organization in Egypt might identify lack of affordable housing as a social problem and state its causes in structural terms of government, society and community. This organization might proceed to describe the “appropriate” change agent as a group of people who recognize that “Islam is the solution” and who see the Islamic reform of society as their religious duty. The resulting problem solution involves groups of active citizens who use their religion to provide a basis for reform of governmental, social, and communal structures. That, I argue, is also mobilization of the populace, and could potentially lead to broad-based political and social changes.

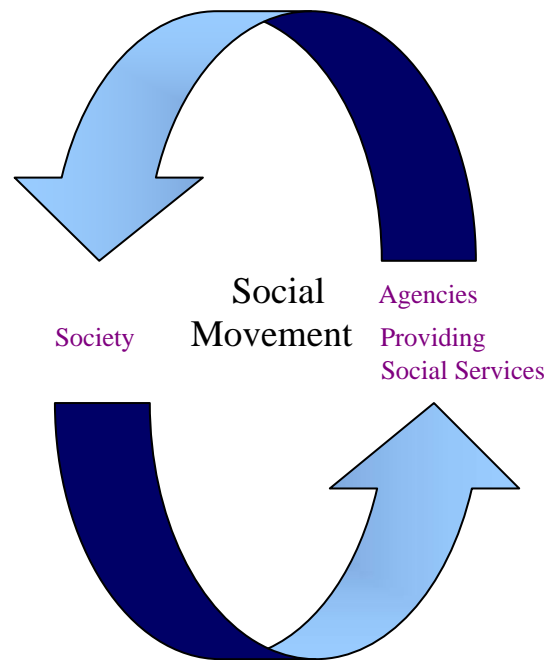
The idea that definition of social problems and identification of appropriate routes for change are important tasks of social movement organizations is not new. Indeed, Wickham (2002) discusses how Islamist groups use an activist approach to Islam to encourage potential recruits to become involved in activism for the Islamic reform of society. As part of its attempt to counter this message, the Ministry of Religious Endowments has sent “religious caravans” into provinces that are centers of Islamic activism, with senior clergy admonishing youth to refrain from politics (p.210).

Indeed, Mueller (1992) states that:

. . . The actor [activist] is socially located or “embedded” in terms of group identities and is rooted in social networks, especially those based on nationality, race-ethnicity, class, gender, or religion . . . Social locations intersect and overlap in providing cultural materials that are drawn upon by a meaning-constructing actor who participates with others in interpreting a sense of grievances, resources, and opportunities . . . (p.7).

Thus, we see that social movement organizations exist as part of broader social movements, where the social context affects problem definition by the organizations, and where those definitions are used to affect society in turn.

Social movement organizations can be viewed as part of a cycle of social change:



In summary, existing literature adheres mainly to the concepts of resource mobilization and political processes. Some also discuss the importance of a sense of moral obligation amongst participants and the formation of negative opposition coalitions. While these approaches can be used to help describe social phenomena occurring in Egypt, studies would perhaps present a more complete description of affairs if they were more holistic, provided more information on the social service system per se, and adhered to broader definitions of politicization and mobilization.

Egyptian Social Structure

Egyptian society is essentially composed of an enormous population dwelling in varying levels of poverty, and a small upper class (for statistics on poverty and inequality, see below).

The political system is controlled by a few families (approximately eighteen as of the 1980s, according to Wickham, 2002, p.97), and this centralization is reflected in an economic system which, to a very large extent, is controlled almost exclusively by those same upper-class persons who are at the top of the political and social systems. Mr. Smith Number Three (2005), an activist who once worked with the Muslim Brotherhood (perhaps the largest provider of social services now operating in Egypt), likened the situation to the type of monopolistic capitalism that characterized capitalism in the United States in the early 1900s, where an entire industry may be dominated by a single man and his family (personal interview).

Existing under this elite class is Egypt's huge mass of poor people. A relatively high percentage of people are poor by the United Nations' Human Poverty Index, and almost all are poor in comparison to the standards of the industrialized world. Although a sizable middle class existed during Nasser's presidency, this middle class quickly began to disappear with the economic liberalization programs adopted by subsequent presidents Sadat and Mubarak. Now, the main difference between the middle and lower classes in Egypt is not in income, but, rather, in education level. Middle class persons, perhaps more appropriately referred to as the "educated class", have received professional training either in a private university or one of Egypt's public universities. Upon completing their degrees, the majority of these people either remain unemployed or find employment in the public sector where the income does not or else barely manages to provide for their basic needs and maintain their standard of living. The poorest poor, in contrast, often receive little formal education, and, instead, are forced to join the labor force at a young age in order to provide for themselves and their families

Many Islamic social movement organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have formed with the stated goal of bettering the conditions of Egypt's poor, and

identify as social movement organizations. Although the number of these social movement organizations and NGOs did increase in the 1970's (due to economic liberalization and accompanying increase in poverty combined with a lack of government support), Egypt's strong tradition of social justice and volunteerism is actually much older, dating back as far as the Islamic empires. NGOs have existed in the same general form that they do today since at least the nineteenth century. Probably the most broad-based, powerful, and controversial of these NGOs are the Islamic NGOs.

It is arguable as to whether these NGOs rally people to a common cause of social justice and social change and unite them across class, or whether NGO membership is relatively class-homogenous and aimed at helping people to survive within the existing structure at the eventual expense of the poor. According to a 2004 study by RAND Corp., an organization that contracts with and does research for the United States military, all Islamic NGOs are basically covers for insurgent military activity with a goal social change:

The insurgent rhetoric of Islamic justice can be buttressed by the ability of these organizations to use humanitarian facilities to support their political and military objectives.

Insurgents (both jihadist and Muslim ethno-nationalist) are using hospitals, schools, and mosques for deployment of personnel and supplies and have established clandestine clinics to treat fighters and their families, as well as members of the local community" (Rabasa et al, 2005, p.81).

However, Clark (2004), Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Guelph, who has researched Islamic NGOs in nations throughout the Middle East, has a differing opinion. She argues that Islamic NGOs essentially consist of educated or middle class memberships whose stated purpose is to serve the poor. In the process of providing services,

horizontal ties among the middle class are strengthened, but the poor themselves are frequently alienated and have their interests ignored. Further, Clark (2004) continues, “. . . Moderate Islamism seeks more to coexist and compete with the dominant institutions and social arrangements than to dramatically alter them” (p.33). Some of my own interviews and second-hand experience with the Muslim Brotherhood seem to affirm Clark’s analysis. As Mr. Smith Number Four (2005), a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups that provide social services, remarked concerning the Brotherhood: “The Brotherhood compromises too much. It does not want change. It wants a piece of the pie” (personal interview).

According to Clark's (2004) view, while the poor benefit from the services provided by NGOs, they are viewed only as clients rather than as part of a grassroots movement, and are not being politicized by active participation within these organizations. The NGOs must cater to educated-class interests in order to maintain its membership of educated professionals, collect donations, and win and maintain legitimacy. For this reason, Clark states, most NGOs currently operating in Egypt are not change-oriented. Instead, there is a visible inequality in the provision of services, with NGOs operating in poor areas often being less-equipped and less-funded than NGOs that serve primarily middle-class clientele (p.31).

While Clark does offer some valid points, I believe that the majority of the research (Moussalli, 1998; Abdo, 2000; Wickham, 2002; Roberson, 2003; Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 2004; Wickham, 2004), and most of my own experience depart from her analysis, indicating instead that Islamic NGOs do indeed have some mobilizing effect on the Egyptian population. Clark analyzes mobilization only in terms of direct actions such as demonstrations, civil disobedience, and various forms of violent action. If, however, mobilization is viewed in a broader sense of

how problems are defined and what solutions are created, then the Islamic NGOs have a powerful mobilizing effect upon the general population.

Egyptian Laws Concerning the Provision of Public Welfare

There are currently three types of government-provided welfare in Egypt. The first is the food subsidy, which reaches the largest population. Bread is provided to all citizens at one-third the cost of production. Sugar and cooking oil are provided according to a two-tier system of ration cards based on income and need.

The second type of public welfare program is the cash transfers from the Ministry of Social Affairs, which include social security payments and Sadat and Mubarak pensions. Social security payments are meant to provide for the elderly, but they are only accessible by those who have been employed in the formal sector, which effectively discludes many of Egypt's poor. The pensions, however, are eligible to families that lack access to the labor market due to age, disability, or motherhood. This program currently suffers from lack of funding. Mr. Smith Numbers Three, Four, and Five (2005) all emphasized the fact that state monthly pensions are not even enough to provide for an average family for one week (personal interviews).

The third type of government welfare program is the Social Fund for Development. It aims to increase opportunities for employment and increase access to basic services. It includes programs such as the Small Enterprise Development Organization, the Public Works Program, the Community Development Program, and the Human Resources Development Program.

In addition to these three programs, the Egyptian government also offers public education through college, and "guarantees" public employment for every citizen. Again, however, the promises extend far beyond the ability of the system to deliver: the quality of public education

has been on a thirty-year decline, and cannot be accessed in some areas, and many wait in long queues for government jobs that do not pay living wages.

Important Issues Relevant to Social Work

Perhaps the most relevant issue with regards to social work that affects Egypt today is poverty. According to the 2005 United Nations Human Development Report on Egypt, in 2002, 43.9% of the Egyptian population lived below the two-dollar-a-day poverty standard. That same year, the wealthiest ten percent consumed 29.5% of the resources, while the poorest ten percent consumed 3.7% of the resources, placing the ratio of resources consumed by the wealthiest ten percent to those consumed by the poorest ten percent at 8.0% (Handoussa et al).

The United Nations Development Programme (2005) puts forth the argument that ". . . inequalities in assets, opportunities and voice are barriers to national prosperity. The energies and talents of a significant number of Egypt's citizens are available for development if equity considerations are brought to the forefront of policy-making" (p.1).

Clark (2004) describes the situation thusly: "Micro-level conditions have never been so bad: wages and salaries have fallen; average per-capita yearly incomes have fallen; prices on foodstuffs, transportation, rents, gasoline, and electricity have risen as subsidies have been removed; and the incidence of malnutrition has risen" (p. 47).

Although there was some development in the late 1990s, it was focused upon Lower Egypt, particularly the metropolitan areas. Upper Egypt actually experienced a downturn, with the rural areas of Upper Egypt suffering the most. Upper Egypt is below Lower Egypt on virtually every development indicator.

According to the Egypt Human Development Report 2005, the official unemployment statistics in Egypt increased from 8.9% in 2000 to 11% in 2003 (the unofficial rate was probably higher, and has increased since). 89.3% of the unemployed are aged 25 years or under, and 25.3% have a university degree or higher (Handoussa et al). World Bank (2001) statistics indicate that unemployment is highest in the urban areas, but that most of the rural poor are seasonal or unpaid workers, and are the most deeply impoverished (p.25).

Lack of education presents yet another problem. The Egypt Human Development Report 2005 places the adult illiteracy rate at 44.4 percent (Handoussa et al). The public education system is of a notoriously low quality and cannot be accessed in some rural areas. For this reason, Egyptians must either pay the expensive private rates, or send their children to a school run by an NGO that charges minimal or no fees. The World Bank (2001) states two main reasons that young Egyptians quit school. Firstly, poverty forces many young people to end school early and enter the labor force, making them more job insecure than they otherwise would be, and trapping them in the cycle of poverty. Secondly, many children miss large portions of their schooling because poverty is correlated with malnutrition and poor sanitation and creates a higher incidence of disease among children (p.24).

The national public health system suffers from chronic lack of funding. Much of the population has difficulty accessing the system, because there are not enough public clinics to provide for the needs of the population at-large, and fewer clinics are located in poor and/or rural areas. Public services tend to be of low quality, with under-equipped facilities and under-paid doctors. Thus, most Egyptians are forced to either pay exorbitant private rates, or to go to the clinics run by the NGOs. The NGO clinics help to bridge the gap between government services and the needs of the population, offering high quality services at minimal or no charge.

Lack of affordable housing is also a major problem, and has resulted in an increasingly high utilization of extralegal housing units. According to the 2005 Egypt Human Development Report 2005, Egypt's population increases at a rate of approximately two percent annually, with most of the births in any given year being into poor families (Handoussa et al). Although low-income housing is badly needed, rent controls on low- and middle-income housing, and the lack of any similar controls on upper-income housing, have encouraged private companies to build housing that is beyond the means of the poor. Many renters find it more profitable to leave housing units vacant, or to charge high prices as so-called "key money" in order to circumvent rent controls. The Egyptian government poured funds into the building of New Cities of affordable housing, but because the New Cities are distant from main population centers, jobs, and social services, and because public transportation is far less than adequate, the New Cities have failed to attract the number of tenants projected. Currently, many of the poor "squat" on empty land or in vacant housing units in the old cities. According to the Egypt Human Development Report 2005, the number of informal housing units grew on an average of 3.2% annually from 1991 to 1998, as compared to the 0.8% annual increase of formal housing during that same time (Handoussa et al). These communities lack urban planning and sanitation, as houses are placed in a haphazard fashion without setting aside buildings for public services, and public sewage systems often do not reach these densely-populated areas.

In the Egypt Human Development Report 2005, statistics for 2003 place the percentage of Egyptians with access to the public sewage system at just over half of the population, with over eighty percent of that number dwelling in urban areas (Handoussa et al). Most of those without access live in either informal urban housing communities or in rural areas. As increasing numbers of people gained access to pumped water sources, the waste water levels rose and

overburdened the old sewage systems. This pollutes living spaces and drinking water, and may be linked to the higher incidence of infant mortality and ill health in Upper Egypt and the poorer urban areas.

In addition to the gradual economic privatization policies instituted by Sadat and Mubarak, the Egyptian government agreed to its present Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in 1991, in order to reduce its foreign debt. Although the program has been successful on a macro-level, conditions on the micro-level have been worsening. Public sector employment was cut and government spending was reduced on all levels, causing dramatic increases in unemployment subsidy cuts that further resulted in lower wages and higher prices. In addition to all this, existing social welfare programs were also cut. This means that, for most Egyptians, their incomes were decreased as their expenses were increased, and any kind of social safety net was rendered inaccessible to them.

The Historical Context of Egypt's Current State of Affairs

The above list of social problems does not by itself provide any information on the formation or evolution of the many oppositional Islamist groups that exist in Egypt today. The connection between Egypt's social problems and the Islamic resurgence lies in the historical context in which both the social problems and the Islamist groups arose.

Beginning in the 1970s and expanding in the 1980s, then-President Sadat instituted the policy of *intifah*, or economic opening, which led to a decade-long resource boom. In a move away from the socialism of Nasser's era, the *intifah* consisted of a series of legislative measures designed to attract foreign capital, increase support for the private sector, and stimulate trade

with other nations. However, the legitimacy of the Egyptian state with most of the population still rested upon the provision of certain social services by the public sector, particularly in the areas of employment and education (including the university level). Thus, while much of the social safety net that had existed during Nasser's presidency gradually eroded away during Sadat's and Mubarak's eras, two of the most large-scale provisions that still remained were public education and public employment.

Using profits from the resource boom, the state expanded the education and employment programs in an attempt to make them more accessible to broader sectors of the population. The expansion of the public education system resulted in the growth of the degreed labor force far beyond the capacity of the state to employ new graduates. Public funding was also stretched more thinly amongst those who managed to gain public employment, resulting in a decline in the incomes of public employees. In many cases, incomes are so low that individuals are forced to work two or three jobs in order to make a living wage. Wickham (2002) describes how unemployment and under-employment rose tremendously in Egypt, with most of this population being made up of degreed persons new to the labor force (p.43).

At the same time, the *intifah* and following resource boom meant that those employed in the private sector had significantly higher incomes than those employed in the public sector. Thus, the *intifah* brought with it the formation of new class strata and masses of educated people who were unable to earn a living wage.

The Formation of Islamist Groups

Increasing poverty and lack of opportunity brought with them other, less tangible social problems. A primary one in the eyes of many Egyptians is lack of principle, or normlessness,

that directly affects if and how individuals can access services to improve their life circumstances. It is said that everything in Egypt, whether it be high grades on college exams, employment, or the completion of legal paperwork, requires a *wasta*, or a series of influential social connections. Thus, formal sectors in Egyptian society have become characterized by bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption. The problem is not reserved to simple poverty, but to access to services and benefits; frequently only those wealthy enough to afford bribes, or those with enough status to gather powerful *wastas*, are able to access necessary services through the formal sector.

This situation has eroded the faith of the population in the formal sector and the government itself, and resulted in a general feeling of political alienation amongst the populace. As the government would not or could not address the host of existing problems, oppositional groups arose, professing to have a solution and to address the needs of the population. While the 1980s were times of increasing poverty and inequality in Egypt, they also marked the beginning of the Islamic resurgence. This resurgence can be seen throughout society, whether it is expressed in the domination of professional associations by members of Islamist organizations, the vast majority of Muslim women wearing headscarves and Islamic dress, the high involvement of Egyptian youth in educational Islamic programs, or any other area of scrutiny.

The current state of affairs in Egypt could perhaps have led to the formation of oppositional groups espousing a variety of different views, and to some extent this is the case. But the vast majority of groups, and certainly the most powerful ones, are of Islamist orientation. This means that they are based upon Islamic principles and apply Islamic solutions to the problems that they address. Such organizations include private mosques; private Islamic voluntary associations, such as welfare societies, health clinics, schools, cultural societies, etc.; and Islamic for-profit

commercial and business associations, such as Islamic banks, investment companies, publishing houses, and others.

There are many reasons for the primacy of Islamist organizations in Egypt's oppositional movement. Firstly, Egypt's defeats in the wars in 1967 and 1973 produced a lack of faith in socialism and a rejection of "Western" solutions to problems in Egypt and throughout the Middle East. Secondly, when Sadat first came to power and began implementing the *intifah*, he faced the strongest opposition from the socialist groups that had become powerful under Nasser's patronage. To combat them, he gave his strongest support to Islamist groups, hoping that they could balance the power of the socialists.

The main reasons that Islamist organizations have become so powerful in recent decades, however, have more to do with the grievances of the population, the messages espoused and transmitted by the organizations, the social backgrounds of the Islamists themselves, and the methods used for message transmission and the dissemination of information. The grievances identified by much of the Egyptian population have to do with poverty, the apparent unwillingness of the government and ruling elites to address social issues, and the inefficiency and corruption that exists throughout the government and many formal institutions throughout Egypt. Islamist organizations, however, demonstrate both willingness and ability to effectively address social issues by providing the population with accessible schooling and low-cost medical care, distributing food, and a variety of other social services. And by encouraging the adoption of Islamic principles, Islamist organizations also offer a solution to the lack of principle that exists within the government and bureaucracy.

Another reason for the successful spread of Islamist organizations is the status of their membership. Besides mostly holding degrees, members use the Islamic concept of *dawa*, or

Islamic outreach, to describe and give legitimacy to the process of garnering support for their viewpoints within the broader population. By utilizing Islamic principles and viewpoints as the basis of their worldviews and actions, Islamist organizations are using symbols and forming identities that are consistent with cultural norms.

By building their organizations on the foundations of their religion, Islamists are able to tap into existing religious structures, institutions, and rituals to disseminate messages and viewpoints adopted by the movement. For example, mosques in Egypt frequently serve a social purpose similar in some respects to the multi-service centers of the Western world. There, people can receive and provide social services, receive religious education, participate in religious discussions, disseminate political information, and become involved in oppositional political activities. Snow and Marshall (1984) quote one Tunisian citizen, observing that:

You can ban student meetings and check the papers of everybody who goes in and out of the university . . . but you can't stop people going to the mosque on Friday and getting together when they come out. There are too many, they can be anywhere. And how could the government come out against prayer (p.141)?"

By co-opting well-established, socially sanctioned, indigenous, grassroots social structures, Islamist organizations are able to both offer services and transmit information to the public. At the same time, they are able to avoid being discredited by those who oppose them.

In the same vein, the success of opposition groups in Egypt can be explained using four different aspects of social movement theory. The “rational actor” aspect emphasizes that movements attract members by offering a series of “selective incentives” ---- material, social, and emotional benefits ---- that motivate member participation, even in less-than-ideal circumstances, like that of Egypt, where the likelihood of gaining reforms is low and the

potential risks are high. In this light, Egyptians are motivated to join Islamist organizations by poverty, inequality, and lack of access to social services and benefits on the one hand, and the provision of these services and some measure of social status by Islamist groups on the other.

A second school of thought in social movement theory, the political process model, contends that it is the nature of the indigenous organizations and openings for political and social reforms that form “political opportunity structures” and largely determine the success or failure of social movement organizations. In her analysis, Wickham (2002) cites McAdam’s list of four dimensions to assist in gauging levels of political opportunity:

1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system.
2. The stability or instability of the broad set of elite alignments typical undergirding a polity.
3. The presence or absence of elite allies.
4. The state’s capacity and propensity for repression (p.93-94).

However, this model was developed mainly based upon the formation of social movement organizations in the United States and other industrialized Western nations, where political opportunity structures would generally seem more favorable towards the success of social movements than in the developing world. Counter-intuitively, however, successful social movements have taken shape in nations where it would seem that conditions are least favorable. Wickham (2002) notes in her analysis that, in the case of Egypt, where the institutionalized political system is relatively closed, elites are stable, and the state has a high capacity for repression, the government has still been unable to prevent the formation of opposition groups. Instead, social movement organizations have formed and thrived outside of the formal system at the grassroots level, with a decentralized structure that the government has difficulty attacking

(p.94). Based on this information, I would also suggest a fifth dimension of the political opportunity structure: The level of willingness on the part of the general population to actively engage in reforming society, in spite of risks. Although this dimension is difficult to quantify, I only mention it in an attempt to address the fact that even under the most favorable circumstances, social movements cannot take place unless large sectors of the society perceive a problem(s) and engage in high levels of social involvement.

The third aspect of social movement theory contends that individuals join movements to express deeply-held values and beliefs. If viewed in this light, Egyptians are motivated to join Islamist organizations due to the very Islamist nature of these groups, as they are congruent with Egyptian culture, and profess values such as fairness, compassion, and social justice that the formal sector is perceived to lack. Islamist organizations define active attempts to reform society as a central part of Islam that is mandatory for all Muslims. Thus, by definition, activists have “God on their side”, and members are more likely to undertake the risks associated with activism and membership in an Islamist organization as they come to view it as a central part of their religion.

Dix (1984) offers a fourth approach to social movement theory that can also be applied to the case of Egypt, which perhaps helps to address the problem with the political process model framed above. He notes that factors such as low human development indicators, high inequality, and high external economic dependence, although all contributing factors, cannot by themselves explain the success or failure of revolutionary movements; indeed, many revolutionary movements in nations that combined all of these factors still failed. Instead, he states that: "The crucial variable in distinguishing between revolutionary success and failure was therefore the nature of the incumbent regime, and the attendant ability – or lack of it – to build a broad-based

opposition coalition . . . (p.438)" Egypt is governed by a powerful and oppressive dictator who is perceived to be illegitimate by much of the nation's population. Islamist organizations build "negative" coalitions of groups in society that are united by what is perhaps the single thing they can agree on: the illegitimacy of their ruler. This may help to explain why revolutions sometimes take place even in societies where the political system seems the least open to change. Islamist groups also build coalitions between different classes and segments of society along religious lines: rich, poor and middle class; urban and rural; educated and uneducated; men and women. They are also beginning to form coalitions outside of purely religious structures, which include socialists, Christians, and special interest groups. They garner sympathy and support from the international community based upon their opposition to an oppressive dictator and their desire for free elections. Another way that Islamist groups become successful, then, is by forming negative coalitions to oppose a dictator who has little legitimacy with the population.

In addition to the causes of their success, scholars also debate if and how Islamist organizations mobilize the populace. If mobilization is viewed narrowly as direct, concrete acts of opposition, such as demonstrating, engaging in civil disobedience, assassinating political figures, and the like, then comparatively few organizations can be found to have a mobilizing effect on Egyptian society. Such direct acts of opposition, however, are not the only types of political acts that Islamist organizations engage in. Islamist organizations, both those engaging in direct political activity and those not, gain most of their funding, volunteers, and logistical support from the Egyptian population itself.

Islamist organizations are also active participants in defining and forming solutions to existing social problems. These organizations exist in the context of a broader social movement: a broad-based, grassroots Islamic resurgence. While the organizations are to an extent

outgrowths and expressions of this movement, the organizations themselves create definitions and identities that are designed to involve the population in Islam-based activism. Thus, problems such as poverty, lack of housing, and lack of accountability in government are defined in structural terms, and are traced to a general lack of principle and accountability in government and society. Hence the motto of *Al-Ikhwan*, the Muslim Brotherhood: "Islam is the solution," implying that the application of Islamic principles could reintroduce norms in society and enforce accountability. In other words, the way in which social problems have been defined by Islamist groups has helped them to form broad-based, Islamic solutions to these problems.

Al-Ikhwan: A Case Study of a Powerful Islamic Social Movement

Organization

Although it is difficult to say for certain, because the Muslim Brotherhood is not a legally registered organization, the research performed by Rand Corp. (2005), Clark (2004), Wickham (2002) and myself indicates that the Muslim Brotherhood may be the single most broad-based PVO provider of social services in Egypt. For this reason, it is important to look closely at the history, purpose, and structure of the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization.

The Muslim Brotherhood, or simply *Al-Ikhwan* (the Brotherhood) in Arabic, was founded as an anti-colonialist movement in Egypt by a Muslim scholar, Hasan Al-Banna, in 1928. *Al-Ikhwan* has since spread to countries throughout the Middle East and the Muslim world, and has different goals and techniques, depending upon what area it is located in and the belief systems of those who compose its membership. In general, *Al-Ikhwan* states its fundamental belief that Islam is " . . . *ad-din wa-dawla, al-kitab wa-saif, wa-tariqat lil-hyat*" [. . . religion and government, book and sword, a way of life.] Its core objectives include:

- 1). Building the Muslim individual
- 2). Building the Muslim family
- 3). Building the Muslim society
- 4). Building the Muslim state
- 5). Building the *Khilafa* [union of Islamic states] (Muslim Brotherhood Movement)

The Egyptian Brotherhood has stated its purpose to be, as quoted by Clark (2004): “. . . Achieving social justice; providing social security to every citizen; contributing to popular service; resisting ignorance, disease, and vice; and encouraging charity work” (p.15). To this end, the Brotherhood established many schools, clinics, and charity services that reached millions of people. Al-Banna also declared that “*Al-Islam huwa al-hal*” [Islam is the solution], and if society could return to Islamic morality and *shari’a* [law], then poverty and exploitation could be eliminated. At this time, the *Al-Ikhwān* had a peaceful and gradualist notion of social change, hoping that, by spreading its message to middle class professionals, the Islamic movement could gradually overtake the decision-making roles in society and change policies in order to create a new society.

Al-Ikhwān suffered from extreme persecution under the colonial government, and then under Nasser. Sayyid Qutb, another scholar and a more radical thinker than Al-Banna, began to influence thinking in the Brotherhood. He encouraged the use of violence in order to force the change that he thought was needed in society. Although the mainstream Brotherhood continued to follow the thinking of Al-Banna, Qutb provided a bridge between the mainstream Brotherhood and the groups that would eventually break off from it.

When Sadat came to power, he released imprisoned Brotherhood members who had survived the persecution of past years. He planned to use them against the secular leftist sectors of society

that had been left following Nasser's demise. His plan was turned against him, however, when, following the defeat of the Arab forces in 1967 and 1973, the Islamic groups began to gain even broader support amongst Egypt's population. They were further disaffected by the poverty and inequality produced by Sadat's *intifah*, or economic opening policy, and saw the peace treaty that he signed with Israel as a betrayal of Arab and Muslim interests in favor of oppressive Western super powers.

During this same period, the structural organization of *Al-Ikhwan* had become authoritarian and restrictive. Also, many segments of the population had lost faith in the gradualist model of change, and were prepared to use violence to produce change. These two factors caused several more radical groups to break off from the Brotherhood over the years.

One of these groups was *Al-Gami'a Al-Islamiyya*, or the Islamic Congregation. It was members of this group who were responsible for Sadat's assassination in 1981. Following this event, the Egyptian government entered a low-key guerrilla war with the Islamic groups. In addition to directing aggression against government soldiers, radical groups also kidnapped and killed tourists, hoping to stem the flow of foreign capital into Egypt's coffers and force the government to go bankrupt and resign. According to Rand Corp., between 1992 and 1997, 1,200 people were killed in Egypt. In 1997 was the last and largest attack, when 66 tourists were killed at Luxor (Rabasa et al, 2004, p.96).

After the Luxor massacre, there was a large-scale, harsh government crack-down on all NGO activity, particularly that of Islamic groups. Members of violent and non-violent groups were jailed, tortured, and killed. As Mr. Smith Number Three (2005) somewhat jokingly put it: "They rounded you up if you had a beard, attended the mosque more than once a year, or if your second cousin's sister-in-law happened to wear a head-covering" (personal interview). The harsh

government crack-down, coupled with a loss of popular support and a general feeling of apathy, essentially put an end to the largest radical groups. What groups do exist today are largely underground. The Brotherhood has formally renounced any goals of violent political change, and wishes primarily to engage in social work and *da'wa*, or outreach to the people.

In a bid to increase waning international support of his regime, Mubarak announced parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005. A wide variety of opposition parties and interest groups joined forces under the coalition name *Kifayya* [Enough], including amongst them socialists, women's groups, and a wide range of Islamist parties. Islamist parties won strong support, with the most votes garnered by *Al-Ikhwan* (running under a legal party name, *Hizb al-Shaab*), which increased its presence in parliament by five times. As expected, however, opposition parties lost both the parliamentary and presidential elections, and local elections were postponed until 2008. According to reports by the BBC, dozens of people – candidates, voters, and protesters alike – were killed and dozens more injured when police and government-hired crowd-breakers fired on crowds, beat voters, and sexually assaulted women. Opposition parties reported hundreds of arrests of opposition party members, candidates, and their relatives ("Violence" 2005). Ayman Nour, the second runner-up in the presidential election, remains in prison on charges that are widely believed to be politically motivated.

As the Egyptian judiciary has the constitutional obligation to monitor elections, judges of Egypt's highest appeals court pressed for an inquiry. At least two of them have been jailed, and several more have claimed to be harassed or beaten by government agents. Fifty judges are holding a sit-in outside of their headquarters to protest what they say is increased political repression since Mubarak's promise of "political reforms" in 2005 ("Clashes" 2006).

While many moderate, non-violent Islamists hold the view that they pose no real threat to the current regime, both Wickham (2002) and Boulby (1999) point out that it is precisely the moderation of groups such as *Al-Ikwan* that *increases* their threat to the state. Their moderation, pragmatism, and middle-of-the-road stances make them more acceptable to a broader sector of the population, including powerful Islamist professionals and elites. This level of support from various sectors of the population makes moderate social movement organizations a threat to the current regime, perhaps even more so than more radical groups (Wickham. p.214 and Boulby, p.159).

According to reports from the BBC, "The possibility of an Islamist takeover has been used by the ruling NDP [National Democratic Party] as an argument against allowing the Brotherhood to operate legally" (Abdelhadi 2005).

Egyptian NGOs That Provide Social Services

In discussing the provision of social services in particular, it is perhaps best to narrow research to private Islamist voluntary organizations (PVOs). While other types of groups exist as part of the broader Islamic social movement, and some of them, such as mosques, also provide social services, the *main purpose* of PVOs is to directly provide social services most similar to the common definition of "social services" in this country, which cannot be said for all types of Islamist organizations. Because of this, it is easier to analyze social service provision by narrowing our view to PVOs for the time being.

Clark (2004) places the number of private voluntary organizations that are legally registered in Egypt at 12,832, with 2,457 Islamic organizations making up the single largest portion of

these. It is also reported that for every legally registered organization, there exist at least seven extralegal organizations (p.12 & 54).

In order to obtain legality, all PVOs must register with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). MOSA sets forth fourteen categories of PVO activity: community development; social assistance; religion, science, and cultural services; maternity and child welfare; family welfare; special categories and handicapped welfare; old-age welfare; friendship among peoples; family planning; social protection; management and administration; prison inmates' welfare; literacy; and multiple activities.

Most PVOs in Egypt, Islamic or otherwise, are, as previously stated, educated-class based, and there is some inequality in social services provided for the poor. Facilities in poorer areas are often less sufficient than in educated-class areas. This may be because educated-class practitioners see their interests as lying less with the poor and more with the educated-class of which they are a part and from which they recruit professionals and donators. Thus, practitioners in PVOs may be united horizontally across class by a sense of shared purpose and organizational affiliation, but vertical ties, although certainly there, are not as strong. However, another important reason for the lower quality of services in poor areas may be that most PVOs rely heavily upon neighborhood resources to provide services. In addition, government policies also prevent PVOs from forming centralized structures or pooling their resources. Thus, neighborhoods with fewer resources simply have fewer services.

Studies cited by Clark (2004) and Wickham (2002) as well as the testimonies of Mr. Smith Numbers One - Six (2005) agree that the main sources of funding for PVOs in Egypt are returns from services rendered and non-governmental donations from within Egypt. Governmental aid, registration fees, and foreign donations are also important sources of revenue. Governmental aid

is mostly directed towards those PVOs that mainly implement government projects and thus function as extensions of the MOSA. Foreign aid is collected from persons in the United States, Europe, and the oil-rich Gulf nations. These donors tend to be Egyptian ex-patriots, but are often simply supports from outside of the country (Clark, p.59; Wickham, p.102; Mr. Smith Numbers One - Six, personal interviews). In addition, Clark (2004) cites a World Bank study that indicates that religiously-based PVOs (of which the majority are Muslim) are far less dependent upon government aid than secular PVOs. This seems to be due to the broad-based support enjoyed by many religious PVOs, which makes it much easier to collect donations from the local community (p.60).

Most groups gather support by mobilizing their middle class social networks. They address the public, make phone calls and write to family, friends, and neighbors. They attempt to gather donations and skilled volunteer labor, as well as form and utilize connections within the government that can help them to navigate the legal quagmire that all Egyptian PVOs must deal with. Indeed, PVOs cannot gain legal status without such ties to the Egyptian government, which is why many small PVOs located in poorer areas are extralegal.

The benefits of legality for PVOs are many. They receive from the state their permits, and often financial aid and preferential treatment above other NGOs. Government aid can take three forms: direct payments, technical assistance and material support. Clark (2004) cites that less than 40 percent of PVOs are assisted by the Egyptian government or any other institution, but that such assistance can make an enormous difference in terms of what services an PVO is able to offer, or whether or not it survives or is forced to shut down.

Although the Egyptian government provides some assistance to PVOs, it also greatly restricts their activities, mainly through the use of Law 32. As Sullivan (2000), a professor at Northeastern University, aptly describes it:

Use of the terms 'Private Voluntary Organizations' and Non-Governmental Organizations to describe charitable, development, non-profit, and other organizations is done with some skepticism in Egypt. Virtually all participants and observers of NGO activity in Egypt recognize that these organizations are far from being independent of the government and many are in fact creations of that government (p.5).

Islamic NGOs bear the brunt of this restriction, because of the government's fear of the power of the Islamist movement and the insurgent activities of certain Islamist groups.

Under Law 32, the MOSA is able to authorize or reject the formation of an NGO, or to dissolve it once it is formed. An organization does not have the right to appeal a dissolution, and rejections can only be appealed to an administrative authority within the MOSA itself. Furthermore, the MOSA is given the power to nominate up to 50 percent of an NGO council's membership from the MOSA for an unlimited period of time, and to dissolve councils and appoint new ones. The MOSA has the power to regulate sources of funding for NGOs, especially both foreign and domestic donations.

Clark (2004) and other sources discuss the way in which Article 12 of Law 32 bases the criteria upon which an NGO may be authorized on several broad and vague statements, such as "consistency with the requirements of society". In a similar fashion, Article 2 sets the grounds for dissolving an NGO as the "violation of public order and morality" and "undermining the security of the republic or the government's republican form" (p.52).

These statements can and have been used by the Egyptian government to legalize NGOs, put a stop to their activities, and torture and imprison their members. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood, although illegal at this time, was legalized once under Nasser and once under Sadat. Now, Brotherhood members are at a constant risk of “disappearing” into one of Egypt’s jails. Another prominent example provided by Sullivan (2000) was the Arab Women’s Solidarity Association (AWSA), which was dissolved by the Egyptian government in 1991 (p.5).

Law 32 has been argued to be unconstitutional in the sense that it violates Egyptian citizens’ right to freely associate, and to contradict the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified by Egypt in 1982).

Thus, the Egyptian government is in ironic the position of both needing NGOs in order to provide services to the population that it cannot and/or will not provide itself, perhaps stemming a revolution, and of fearing the revolutionary power of these same NGOs.

Relationships between NGOs are not always amicable, either. Both Mr. Smith Numbers Three and Four (2005) stated an important reason for this to be the fact that different Islamic NGOs are based upon different schools of thought within Islam itself, and so they incorporate the seeds for conflict into their very formation (personal interviews). Other reasons cited for conflict between NGOs are competition for limited resources, and favoritism from the government which is aimed at using the different NGOs against each other in order to control their power (Rabasa 2004 p.83).

Furthermore, Clark (2004) states, that due to the restrictions of Law 32, most PVOs do not have close or open ties with nationally-registered associations or political parties, and what ties exist between NGOs tend to remain of a social nature only (p.20). The Muslim Brotherhood is a rarity among NGOs in Egypt in the sense that it also has a more political branch through which

members are able to run for political office. Although the Egyptian government does not allow the Brotherhood to register as a political party, candidates may run under the party name *Hizb Al-Shaab*, the People's Party, and a limited number of more politically conservative members are allowed to run for office and win elections. However, whether PVOs are closely tied to political parties or not, both share many of the same goals and methods, and exist as part of the same broader social movement.

Implications for U.S. Social Workers

Although this paper primarily concerns Egypt, many of the findings expressed here have strong implications for social workers in the United States. Firstly, as professionals who adhere to the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics, including ethics related to social justice and activism, it is important for us to recognize the role of the United States in forming policies in Egypt and most of the developing world. While the 2005 Egyptian Human Development Report strongly urges the Egyptian government to "strengthen its welfare responsibility" and "reinvigorate the legitimacy of the welfare state", it also states that:

The pressure to reduce public expenditure and reduce tax rates so as to stay competitive on the global scene has led to many rich western countries dismantling some social programs and/or resorting to means-testing and other targeting schemes . . . Some cite these trends to argue that nations who are less advanced, have fewer means and larger populations, have all the more reason to reject public spending on social welfare (Handoussa et al).

Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and wealthy nations such as the United States, Egypt is being urged to cut social spending, even when that is clearly against

the interests of its population. At the same time, nations such as the United States also exert political control. As one article in the BBC news states:

The United States has tried to exert control by using regional powers such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as its proxies . . . US support has often increased the coercive resources available to the ruling elites of these countries . . . Within this context political groups seek to close the gap between rulers and ruled by making rulers more accountable, and find themselves facing a repressive machinery that is often supported by western powers (Sayyid p. 2).

In other words, the United States and other world powers are using their political and economic control of the region to force nations such as Egypt to adopt capitalistic economic policies and cut social spending, while also increasing their coercive resources to help them to tighten their control over their populations. Besides the fact that policies such as these could be argued to have produced the rage and violence we see directed at the United States today, U.S. social workers should stand against them because they are unjust towards the peoples of other nations.

Secondly, this research indicates that what we typically think of as "providing social services" is most effective when combined with mobilization efforts. At this point in U.S. history, social work is very individually-based, and usually not very empowerment- or change-oriented. Aside from an individualistic culture, this is also the result of laws regulating 501(c)(3) organizations prohibiting them from engaging in partisan politics or placing many resources in macro-level advocacy. Whatever the cause, this focus on interpersonal practice means that we are failing to address the social problems that emerge in our individual clients lives. We are, in effect, like doctors treating symptoms instead of sicknesses. Although mobilization efforts can include

direct political acts, they also involve the way in which we define problems, and the solutions we create.

We can make our day-to-day practice in agencies more politicizing in a variety of ways. First, we must have ways of identifying problems commonly faced by our clientele. This can be gathered in intakes, periodic evaluations or assessments, or at client councils. Second, problems must be defined in structural yet "solveable" terms, in order to encourage activism and the formation of structurally-based solutions capable of affecting wide sectors of the population. Third, we must engage in community building strategies to help clients view themselves as a common people with a common goal, in order to encourage unification and discourage fracturing along lines of social difference. Community building activities could be as simple as potlucks, writing signs in all the languages spoken in a specific community, or client councils. Fourth, we must network with other professionals and clients in other agencies, in order to form coalitions and gain leverage. Fifth, we must develop broad-based, structurally-focused solutions with our clients. Finally, we must develop consistent ways of gaining feedback on programs, services, and policies from our clients.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research

In doing this research, I have found that a social work degree is not a requirement for doing social work in Egypt. Using social movement theory to analyze the Islamic social movement in Egypt, I found that Egyptian society contains vast inequalities on political, social and economic levels, and, despite laws in Egypt establishing social welfare programs, programs seem to be largely ineffective at improving the population's overall standard of living. Social problems in Egypt include poverty and inequality; under/unemployment; lack of education; poor public

healthcare; lack of affordable housing; lack of sanitation; and inadequate public welfare programs, lack of government responsiveness in general, and government restriction of NGO social welfare activities.

Islamist social movement organizations in Egypt define problems in religious and structural terms, promoting broad-based Islamic activism by the population. There are currently thousands of NGOs operating in Egypt offering a plethora of social services. The largest numbers of NGOs of any one type are Islamic, and tend to be based in educated-class networks. Funding comes mainly from returns from activities and donations from Egyptian sources. Mobilization occurs along educated-class social networks and takes the form of public address as well as speaking, calling, and writing letters to family, friends, and neighbors. The Egyptian government gives associations their permits, financial support, and sometimes favorable treatment. It also strictly controls NGO activity through Law 32. Due to various factors, NGOs in Egypt have a fragmented and sometimes competitive nature between themselves.

I believe this study would benefit from the addition of more Arabic-language resources, to counter any Western bias in the information. As stated above, I believe it could also benefit from more research on human service organizations, more holistic analyses that take into account a larger variety of social factors, and a broader definition of mobilization that better incorporates problem definition and how social movement organizations choose to interpret their social contexts.

I have also discussed the implications of this research for social workers in the United States. I believe it would be more effective for us as social workers to engage in more political, even revolutionary, social work. This research instilled in me a greater respect for the power of grassroots movements and gradual change. If nothing else, I think it possible for U.S. social

workers to modify tactics used in Egypt and apply them to the situation of the U.S. to promote social justice.

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