Members and sympathizers of the Mb organization have been coming to various European countries as political exiles or students since the end of the 1950’s. They represent a juxtaposition of generations that is sociologically diverse. The dynamic of the Mb is in fact today composed of persons who, while sharing a (profound) affinity for the heritage of the Brotherhood (in accordance with various levels of affiliation that are more or less formalized), are the product of very different social experiences.

The Brothers are not numerous, but since the 1980’s, they have become leading actors in society thanks to their great dynamism. This dynamism is a product of their motivations, their intellectual capacities, and their proven organizational experience. In multiplying their activities in many different locations, notably in creating diverse associations that amount to arenas as much as showcases for their activity, they have acquired increased importance at the heart of Muslim communities. However, their visibility as the Muslim Brotherhood is still extremely moderate, because the movement is above all composed of a variety of informal networks, themselves based upon interpersonal relationships, and the long-term objective of these networks is educational activity. But, all the while seeking to promote Islamic values, including in the public sphere, they lead a number of major initiatives from modern organisations, aiming to represent and include all European Muslims.

1. The confluence of different histories and sociological generations

The arrival of the Mb in Europe is above all the result of individual trajectories; the organization’s implantation is not the result of a group intention or decision on the part of national movements and/or the international structure, even if we cannot be certain that such a plan never existed.¹

¹ After 1945, a liaison bureau with the Islamic world was created at Cairo, intended to maintain relations between the leaders of various Islamic movements and to see to
The organizational dynamics typical of the MB are organized gradually, beginning with more or less fortuitous meetings between persons who share, or who come to share, common frames of reference and a desire to become involved and to make progress.

Some members of the MB arrived in Europe following waves of repression which, in their home countries, led not only to a very great number of arrests, but also to the disappearance of persons. Such was the case in Egypt, at the time of the repressive actions ordered by Nasser in 1954 and in 1965, which in fact continued until 1971, and then began anew under Al Sadate from 1978 to 1981, and finally under Mubarak in 1995. Other waves of repression were organized, for example in Iraq in 1971. In Syria, repressive actions began around 1980, and the regime has never relaxed the prohibition of the movement. In Libya, repression took place during the 1980’s and 1990’s (particularly in 1997). In Tunisia, a violent wave of repression was directed against every part of the movement in 1981, and then again in 1987, and the political climate is no more favorable to Islamists today than it was more than 15 years ago. In the nineties, certain Iraqis emigrated at the beginning of the Gulf war in 1991 and from 1995 onwards some members of the Sahwa Islamiyya movement close to the Muslim Brotherhood left Saudi Arabia, with the same destination—Great Britain—, to escape government repression from a regime that no longer accepted criticism of its Islamic legitimacy by the Islamist movement [International Crisis Group, 2004].

Globally, the waves of migration toward Europe have now slowed down considerably because of immigration and labor policies on the part of most European countries that are more and more restrictive.

During this same period, other members of the MB arrived in Europe as students, mostly since the 1960’s, their numbers varying essentially in relation to disturbances at the international level. Some students were already sympathetic to the ideas of the MB before arriving in Europe, but many discovered those ideas after arriving. This flow of students was significant up to the middle of the 1980’s, and then dropped off precipitously: student scholarship support increased significantly as regards opportunities for study in the United States and in Australia, while more

the exchange of information between them. Although it devoted most of its attention to Muslim countries, three committees out of nine in that bureau dealt with the Muslim minorities that were found in the United States, in the Soviet Union and in Europe [Mitchell, 1969:172–174]. We have no further information about the seriousness of these activities; it is nonetheless very probable that they did not get very far, given that the emphasis at that time was always placed on national causes.