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composed mostly of individuals who were some twenty years his junior and had had only limited interactions with him while he was in exile, saw him as an elder to respect but also as somebody who was not part of the inner circle and who had been away from Egypt for too long. Feeling unjustly sidelined, on this account, Helbawy left the organization in anger.<sup>22</sup>

Though only Helbawy can know his true motives, this conjecture seems improbable. In the years before the Egyptian Revolution Helbawy had voluntarily abandoned various executive roles, including that of member of the Guidance Bureau, arguing that individuals over sixty-five should not serve in such positions. And there are no concrete indications that Helbawy sought executive positions while he was in Egypt, whether while still in the Brotherhood or later, when, as we will see, his opposition to the Brotherhood made him popular with the regime of General Abdel Fatah al Sisi.

What this theory does surely capture is a generation gap that divided Helbawy from the Brotherhood leadership he found when he returned to Egypt. While individuals such as the former murshid Mohammed Akef and his successor, Mohammed Badie, were individuals of Helbawy's generation who had personal connections to him, most decision makers inside the group had joined in the 1970s, after the purges initiated by Nasser and during the time when the Brotherhood was regrouping under Anwar Sadat. Helbawy did not have strong ties to this younger generation, and he even had strong antipathies toward one of the most influential among them—the prominent businessman Khairat al Shater, the Brotherhood's first presidential candidate.<sup>23</sup>

Helbawy admits to this gap but frames it more in ideological than in personal terms. “For one year after I came back,” he explains, “I stayed in the Muslim Brotherhood, but I noticed some deviation from the curricula and from the way we were brought up to be members.”<sup>24</sup> He argues that the Brotherhood's leadership in the post-Mubarak era focused almost entirely on gaining political power and relinquished what he believes to be the group's core activity: *dawa*. In doing so, according to Helbawy, the Brotherhood has deviated from al Banna's teachings. “His real teachings could have actually led the Brotherhood to have a leading role in the new world order through intellectual propositions, fighting for justice and against oppression, and educating the youth,” he argues.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the group's leadership has focused solely on seizing power, forgetting its original approach of reforming society from the bottom up.

Helbawy remains a steadfast defender of the Brotherhood's ideology. He believes that if correctly implemented, al Banna's vision would lead to just and prosperous

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Muslim societies and communities. But, according to Helbawy, “the leadership deviated from the route of Hassan al Banna and his curriculum; they are more Qutbist in their way of looking at society.”<sup>26</sup> In this sentence Helbawy encapsulates the philosophical tension that has affected the Brotherhood over the past fifty years. One line of thinking has emphasized dawa and education, believing in a patient effort to Islamize society. But another has been more in line with the teachings of Sayyid Qutb, the Brotherhood leader executed by the Egyptian regime in 1966. In treatises written during his prison years, Qutb argued that the Brotherhood, blocked by the regime from spreading its dawa, should have prioritized other tactics, including violence, to achieve its goal of creating an Islamic society. Qutb’s argument has been embraced by various Islamist groups that opted to use violence as the main tactic to reach their goals. But it has also influenced large cross sections of the Brotherhood, leading them not to follow the jihadist route but to prefer politics and a top-down approach toward Islamization to al Banna’s dawa-centric approach.

Helbawy argues that this latter group—what he terms the “Qutbist wing of the Brotherhood”—has gained power within the organization over the past fifteen years. Many of the members of this wing joined the organization in the 1970s and therefore belong to the generation that is now controlling the group. Moreover, many of them belonged to the Secret Apparatus, the section of the Brotherhood devoted to military and counterintelligence operations.

Given its mission, publicly available details on the Secret Apparatus are scant, and some Brotherhood members even deny its very existence. But Helbawy indulges in a brief history of the circle and its impact on today’s Brotherhood. “In 1940,” he explains, “Hassan al Banna began to think of the Private Apparatus, that’s called ‘secret’ now.” He adds, “The Private Apparatus had three missions to perform. One of them was to follow the colonialists and counter them and their activities and Westernization.” Created at a time when Egypt was still a monarchy under a British protectorate, the Brotherhood’s apparatus engaged in various covert operations—including the assassination of key figures—against the British presence and its local supporters.

“The second aim,” continues Helbawy, “is to prepare for [the] Palestine issue, and Zionists.” This aim was a natural by-product of the colonial era. As tensions simmered in British Palestine and the Zionist movement was making rapid steps toward the creation of the state of Israel, the Brotherhood in neighboring Egypt saw the Palestinian cause as its own and readied itself to aid in a military confrontation—which occurred in 1948. “The third aim,” concludes Helbawy, “is to protect, they call [it], the back of [the]

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dawa, to protect the dawa from the back.” Essentially, according to Helbawy, the Secret Apparatus was tasked from its inception with the protection of the rest of the Brotherhood. Proselytism and education, the group’s main activities, could function only if a muscular defense intercepted threats against them by all means possible.

But some of the members of the Secret Apparatus, Helbawy argues, “began to think in the way that Osama bin Laden was thinking, and they began to think in the way that the jihadists were thinking: they have power, they have arms, they are responsible for a big aim.” “But their interpretation of Islam, the fiqh [interpretation of Islamic law],” he continues, “was not correct. Because they began to say, ‘The king is unjust, the British are not good, but the Egyptians who are dealing with the British are not good also, and they need to be killed.’ So that jihad was wrong, because they began to kill some people whom they believed are attached to colonialists, and they love colonialists more than Egypt, so that is why you can have some crimes.”

Helbawy stresses that the role of the Secret Apparatus was originally intended to be, and for the first decades of the Brotherhood’s history it remained, strictly ancillary to dawa. The Secret Apparatus’s tendency to use violence and resort to tactics other than dawa was kept in check, and the “dawa current” retained control of the organization. But in his view that began to change after the turn of the century, as many of the upcoming leaders of the group belonged to the Secret Apparatus (which he interchangeably refers to as “the Qutbist current”). Helbawy argues that the Qutbist current began to control the organization after Mohammed Akef became murshid in 2004.<sup>27</sup>

The vicissitudes of Akef’s tenure as murshid are well known to Helbawy, given his close personal relationship with Akef. Helbawy claims that in 2009 Akef had spoken to him about his intention to leave the position of murshid before completing his mandate—an event unprecedented in the Brotherhood’s history—because he could no longer bear to stay in an organization that effectively had been taken over by the Qutbist current. Helbawy recalls telling his longtime friend that he should stay on, arguing that he was one of the most respected Brothers and one the few who could “bring all the Muslim Brothers together.” The two men also discussed potential replacements, substitutes, and Helbawy reportedly suggested the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, “because Palestine is a cause that can bring all Muslims together; not [the] Muslim Brotherhood alone but all people, Arabs and Muslims and some people from the West.” In the end Akef completed his term and was replaced by Mohammed Badie in January 2010.<sup>28</sup>

Helbawy’s view of the Egyptian Brotherhood’s current leadership is dire. He believes, agreeing with various scholars, that the “Qutbist current” has gained dominance of the organization’s Guidance Bureau, which in recent years has acquired

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significantly more power than the Shura Council.<sup>29</sup> This, in turn, has created major changes in the way the Brotherhood as a whole interprets its mandate and priorities. “They [the Qutbist wing] will not live their *dawa* mission and they will bring more catastrophe than ever on themselves and the society,” he warns. “I left [the Brotherhood] because I couldn’t bear to deal with this group.”

One of Helbawy’s biggest criticisms directed at the Brotherhood’s current leadership is its obsession with a culture of excessive secrecy—arguably a legacy of their experience in the Secret Apparatus. That mind-set, he asserts, also plagues the Brotherhood in the West. Many Brotherhood members in Europe and North America deny belonging to or having even indirect affiliations with the organization. And it is not unusual for individuals or organizations with clear links to the Brotherhood to engage in aggressive legal disputes with anybody who alleges such links. Helbawy finds this behavior immoral and foolish: “I never went incognito, in Egypt or abroad. ‘Are you a Muslim Brother?’ ‘Yes, I am a Muslim Brother.’ But I am a Muslim Brotherhood [sic] who understood Islam properly, on the hands of great scholars, and they were proud of their affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood, they never participated in something that makes them unhappy or guilty.”

Helbawy argues that the reluctance of members of the Brotherhood in the West to be publicly linked with the organization is a legacy from the Middle East, where affiliation with the group was often severely punished. He finds it understandable that some of the group’s pioneers in the West would harbor those same fears. But after decades in the West, Helbawy insists, that mind-set should have been shed:

They believe it is safer for them, unfortunately. That’s why I was telling the brothers, when I started the Muslim Association of Britain in 1997, I was telling them, “Are we fighting dictatorship in the West?” They say, “No.” “Are we asking for freedom in the West?” They say, “No.” So why still [do] we have that mentality and intellect? We have one aim, that is to, first of all to please God by spreading the word of Islam and correcting the misintroduced [sic] image of Islam and the prophet. That’s all. Training our youngsters to be like that. But be good citizens in the West, not to be good thinkers for the East, I used to tell them that, but unfortunately . . .

If Helbawy’s departure from the Brotherhood shocked many, so did his support for the abrupt end of the Brotherhood government of Mohamed Morsi and the presidency of Abdel Fattah al Sisi. In interviews, Helbawy has also used strong words to describe what happened in Rabaa al Adaweya, the Cairo square occupied in August 2013 by Morsi’s supporters and cleared by the Egyptian military with deadly force:

The leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood allied with [Egyptian terrorist organizations] Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya, Al-Jihad, and other Salafis in Rabaa Al-Adaweya, made an alliance “to support legitimacy” and used violence. They did not accept the will of the people who went out on 30 June, who were asking for early presidential elections. . . . It was clear that the Islamists insisted to stay and blocked the roads and were preparing for a battle, and had some arms inside [the sit-in]. So the army and police had no other way. I do not agree with killing, but I once said: if wise people see a train, they will not stand in front of it. They will move. But they stood in front of the train.<sup>30</sup>

After the dramatic events of Rabaa, the Sisi government appointed Helbawy to be deputy chairman of the Constituent Assembly tasked with amending the constitution that the Brotherhood-dominated parliament had approved in 2012.<sup>31</sup> He engaged in various political initiatives aimed at bringing together prominent Egyptian figures from both Islamist and non-Islamist backgrounds. He also continued to travel around the world, giving lectures to audiences of various political stripes. Beginning in the spring of 2017, health concerns have led him to spend more time in London, where he still maintains a house.

For Helbawy, as for most members who do so, leaving the Brotherhood was not an inconsequential decision. It is debatable whether his high status and very public statements made it easier or instead made it more complex. In the early days after his resignation Helbawy claims to have received several death threats, although none that Egyptian authorities deemed specific. He was also heckled by Brotherhood supporters at various public engagements.

But for somebody like Helbawy, whose entire life was steeped in the Brotherhood, his departure also had many personal implications. His wife and many of his closest relatives are still very active members of the organization. Helbawy is reluctant to speak about family dynamics, saying simply that “my family respected my views and I respected their attitude.” Moreover, most of his social ties were inside the organization. “It is very distressing,” he observes, “when you are friends with someone and next day you find that they are either talking to you in a bad way or will not respect the humanity or different views or ideas or come to discuss or want to listen.”

As a senior Brother devoted to education, Helbawy had a worldwide network of students, younger Brothers who saw him as a teacher and a mentor. Their reactions to

his decision varied significantly. Predictably, some stopped talking to him. “I participated in establishing Muslim Brotherhood in many countries from zero,” he remarks, saddened. “So when you find that your students who you taught for ten to twenty years they are not happy with your attitude because you left the organization . . . but if the organization is diverting from the main course should I go with them? No.” Others took the opposite position and left the organization as well. Most still talk to him but have privately debated his decision. Many, he claims, have expressed agreement with his criticism of the Brotherhood’s current leadership but have told him he should not have left the organization, encouraging him instead to fight it from the inside.

Similar dynamics were manifest in Brotherhood circles in the West. Upon his return to London, Helbawy found that most British-based Egyptian Brothers refused to talk to him. Azzam Tamimi, a cofounder of the Muslim Association of Britain as well as a longtime prominent member of the London Islamist scene, is also “reluctant to talk” to him (“He has a temper,” quips Helbawy). Many other Islamist leaders from other Middle Eastern countries, on the other hand, do interact with him. An indefatigable debater, he privately and publicly engages with them over the need to return to the basics of the Brotherhood’s credo, urging them not to repeat the mistake made by the Egyptian Brotherhood in abandoning *dawa* for politics and power.

Despite his dramatic resignation from the group, Helbawy remains a firm believer in the goodness of the Brotherhood’s message. “I can never detach myself completely from the Muslim Brotherhood, even if I wanted to. Even when I criticize [them] publicly, I’m hoping it helps reform them,” he has declared. Helbawy has had grave doubts about the leadership of the group, which he accuses of having strayed from the organization’s ideological and methodological roots. But he is still committed to the Islamist project outlined by al Banna. “I agree with having a nation based on Islam,” he has stated, “but insofar as it respects Islam’s basic values of respecting equality and human rights, providing basic necessities to your communities, and preserving the society’s dignity.”

Helbawy’s case is unique. Even though many of his militant actions occurred outside of the West and his decision to leave the Brotherhood has mostly to do with dynamics related to Egypt, he is arguably the highest-ranking Brotherhood leader who has spent substantial time in the West to have left the organization. His resignation has also reverberated throughout the Western Brotherhood because of his role in establishing many Western Brotherhood organizations and his personal connections to many of the activists who are running them. And many Western Brothers have debated



the issues that led him to resign, part of the collective and individual soul-searching that has taken place after the Arab Spring.

## Endnotes

1. I interviewed Kamal Helbawy for this book on two separate occasions (May and December 2017) at his London home. We have been interacting for over a decade.
2. Basil El-Dabh, “The Brotherhood ‘Deviated’ from Original Focus, Prioritised Politics Over Revolution: Kamal Helbawy,” *Daily News Egypt*, June 2, 2014.
3. Muslim World League and World Assembly of Muslim Youth, part of the Muslim Networks and Movements in Western Europe Project, September 15, 2010, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/15/muslim-networks-and-movements-in-western-europe-muslim-world-league-and-world-assembly-of-muslim-youth/>.
4. Jamal Barzinji, Ahmed Totonji, and Hisham al Talib left Iraq as students in the 1960s, living first in the United Kingdom and then moving to the United States. Once in America “the three Kurds” involved themselves in high-profile roles in Brotherhood-linked organizations both in the United States and worldwide. Totonji and al Talib served as secretary general of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations (IIFSO), a Kuwaiti-based umbrella organization for worldwide Muslim student organizations linked to the Brotherhood. Al Talib later also served as secretary general of WAMY. Domestically, the three Kurds were no less active. Aside from their involvement in the daily management of the Muslim Student Association, the first Brotherhood-leaning organization created in America (of which Barzinji served as president and chair of its Planning and Organization Committee, Totonji as chairman, and al Talib as founding member), they also masterminded the creation of a web of affiliated organizations. In 1973 they set up the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT), an entity initially headed by al Talib and Barzinji whose purpose was to financially support the activities of the MSA. The three also played a key role in the foundation of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), a Virginia-based think tank for the global Brotherhood with branches on various continents.
5. Ayman al Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*.
6. Helbawy made this point to me in various conversations in the late 2000s, when he was still a member of the Brotherhood.
7. For more on the founding of MAB, see Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014), 107–11.
8. Ian Johnson, *A Mosque in Munich: Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2011).
9. Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah, Sam Roe and Laurie Cohen, “A Rare Look at Secretive Brotherhood in America,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 19, 2004, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-0402080265feb08-story.html>. A

prominent physician, el Kadi was involved with the Muslim American Society and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and served as president of the NAIT. He died in Panama City, Florida, in 2009.

10. Gamal Nkrumah, “Zaghloul El-Naggar: Scientific Being,” *Al Ahram Weekly*, undated, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2005/769/profile.htm>, accessed October 29, 2018.

11. Egyptian Brotherhood members interviewed by Khalil al-Anani stated that “lower-income members pay 1 to 2% of their income; medium-income members pay 3 to 5%; and higher-income members pay 5 to 7%.” See Khalil al-Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 83.

12. For more on the Muslim Welfare House, see Martyn Frampton, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: A History of Enmity and Engagement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018), 366–67.

13. The term “paramosque” was coined by Larry Poston. See Larry Poston, *Islamic Da’wah in the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 94–97; see also Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 98.

14. Mohammed Akram, An Explanatory Memorandum on the Strategic Goals for the Group in North America, Government Exhibit 003-0085 in *United States v. Holy Land Foundation et al.*, 3:04-cr-240 (ND, Tex.).

15. Islamic Relief UK, “About Us,” <https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/about-us/history/>, accessed February 9, 2018.

16. For more on the relationship between Islamic Relief and the Brotherhood, focusing mostly on the early days, see Marie Juul Petersen, “For Humanity or for the Umma? Ideologies of Aid in Four Transnational Muslim NGOs,” thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2011, 169.

17. Confirming this analysis, writes Petersen of Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid, a British-based charity influenced by Jamaat-e-Islami: “While the boards of trustees is by and large unchanged, and many first generation staff members have remained in the organisation, in recent years, both Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid have increasingly incorporated a new generation of staff. First of all, and contrary to the older generation, many of the new staff members have relevant development education and experience. Some have a degree in development studies, others in e.g. journalism, nutrition, politics, or sociology. Many people, in particular among country office staff, have previously worked in national, non-Muslim, NGOs such as BRAC, just like several move on to work in transnational development NGOs such as CARE, Oxfam or Save the Children. They work in Islamic Relief and Muslim Aid, because they want to work in a development NGO, not because they want to work in a religious organisation.” Petersen, “For Humanity or for the Umma?,” 179. She also adds that several staffers at Islamic Relief are non-Muslims.

18. Osama Diab, “A Brother and a Scholar,” *Egypt Today*, November 2009.

19. Diab, “A Brother and a Scholar.”

20. El-Dabh, “Brotherhood ‘Deviated’ from Original Focus.”

21. Mohamed Elmeshad, “Profile: Kamal al-Helbawy, a Defector of Conscience,” *Egypt Independent*, April 9, 2012.

22. The theory was put forward to me by two senior Egyptian Brotherhood leaders. Their names are withheld at their request. The two were interviewed separately, in the United Kingdom in 2015 and the United States in 2017, respectively.

23. Incidentally, it should be noted, al Shater too spent substantial time in the U.K. (in his case, to pursue postgraduate studies).

24. El-Dabh, “Brotherhood ‘Deviated’ from Original Focus.”

25. Elmeshad, “Profile: Kamal al-Helbawy.”

26. El-Dabh, “Brotherhood ‘Deviated’ from Original Focus.”

27. Akef spent several years in Europe and served as director of the Islamic Center of Munich, Germany.

28. For an analysis of these dynamics, see Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood*, 146–49.

29. Hesham Al-Awadi, *The Muslim Brothers in Pursuit of Democracy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 243.

30. Elmeshad, “Profile: Kamal al-Helbawy.”

31. El-Dabh, “Brotherhood ‘Deviated’ from Original Focus.”