



Program on Extremism

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Kamal Helbawy: Pioneer of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West

An excerpt from the forthcoming book *The Closed Circle:
Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West*

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About the Program on Extremism

The Program on Extremism at George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. The Program aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public.

About the Author

Lorenzo Vidino is director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University. He is the author of *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Columbia, 2010). In 2014 he worked for the British government's Review on the Muslim Brotherhood and often consults with various Western governments on the subject.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Program on Extremism or the George Washington University.

Foreword

In his forthcoming book, *The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Columbia University Press, 2020), Program on Extremism Director Lorenzo Vidino provides critical new perspectives on Muslim Brotherhood networks in the West gathered from extensive interviews with former members of the group in Europe and North America.

The individuals profiled occupied various ranks within the organization. They operated in different countries and at different times. While some spent many of their years in the Brotherhood living outside of the West, all of them spent a substantial amount of time active in Western Brotherhood networks.

The author conducted the interviews over several months and in various countries. Each individual was interviewed at length, and in some cases over multiple days. These interviews were supplemented by additional research and interviews with related individuals in order to both verify and contextualize the information provided by the interviewees.

Each chapter follows a similar three-part structure based on three cycles of militancy: Becoming, Being, and Leaving. The first part of each chapter focuses on how each individual joined the Brotherhood. Attention is devoted to both the recruitment processes employed by the organization and the psychological processes that drove the individual to join. The second part describes the life of each individual inside the organization: the role he/she covered, the activities he/she engaged in, the organizations and the people he/she interacted with. More so than the other two, this part provides deep insights into how the Brotherhood in the West works. The third part covers disengagement: the reasons that lead each individual to leave the organization, how he/she did so, and what the aftermath was.

In this excerpted chapter, Dr. Vidino tells the story of Kamal Helbawy, a legendary figure in Islamist circles for more than 60 years and one of the most senior members of the Brotherhood to have ever operated in the West. Helbawy discusses how he joined the Brotherhood in the 1950s and his international work for the group, including his time as head of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and as Brotherhood envoy to Afghanistan. Helbawy, who played a key role in establishing core clusters of the Brotherhood in the West, then describes the history and inner workings of Brotherhood-linked organizations in Europe and North America such as Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). He finally recounts how and why he left the organization in 2012.

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Joining the Brotherhood

Charismatic, indefatigable, and deeply committed to the organization for more than 60 years, Kamal Helbawy belongs to a handful of individuals who have shaped the course of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West.¹ Helbawy was born in 1939 in Kafr el Batanoon, a small village in Egypt's Delta area, in the Menoufia governorate. Having proven himself in elementary school to be particularly gifted, his parents decided to enroll him in a fast-track school that would have allowed him to reach university at a younger age than the norm. While various schools offered such program, his parents choose one run by the Muslim Brotherhood. Even though they did not belong to the organization, the Helbawys thought that a Brotherhood school, while also providing a solid education in various subjects, better reflected the conservative Islamic values of their rural community. In 1951, at age 12, Kamal Helbawy enrolled in secondary school in the town of Shibin El Kom (incidentally, the same school that the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak had attended a few years earlier).

“For three years,” reminisces Helbawy with a smile, “I did not know that I was a member [of the Muslim Brotherhood].” In recounting his lifelong experience in the Brotherhood, in fact, Helbawy starts from the observation period that most future members of the group—particularly those not born into Brotherhood families—undergo and that was described in the previous chapter. “You are in an elementary course for two or three years. In that elementary course, you don't need to pay any money, you don't need to attend night prayers, or you are not responsible, you are more free [sic].” According to Helbawy, senior Brotherhood members, some of whom were the very teachers who taught regular subjects such as Arabic or mathematics, observed their students' intellects, personalities, dependability, and devoutness. When they spotted individuals possessing these characteristics they involved them with increasing frequency in activities (classes on Islam, social outings) organized by the group—without ever mentioning that the Brotherhood was involved.

Individuals who are in the preliminary stages of joining the Brotherhood, recounts Helbawy, are continuously tested. “They test your honesty, they test your courage, they test your understanding, they test your behavior, they test your character.” Many tests entail performing seemingly pointless acts just to gauge the candidate's obedience and dependability. “For example, they tell you, ‘At 1 o'clock [in the morning], we have a very important meeting. At such a place. At the railway station.’ And then you show up, and then your supervisor, we call him naqib, as you know, he says to you ‘I am happy to see you, go back home.’ So some people may say ‘Why did you bring us?’ But this was a test.”

Helbawy also explains that this policy of testing extends to individuals who have already formally joined the organization in their youth. Thus, he said, aspiring members of the Secret Apparatus, the secret branch of the Brotherhood devoted to security and paramilitary operations, undergo a stricter and constant scrutiny. For example, they might be asked to carry a heavy bag from one place to the other, perhaps without using any means of transportation on the way, and with instructions not to open it. The bag might contain simply stones or iron bars of no value, but the task serves to test their commitment.

According to Helbawy, these dynamics first tested and then shaped individual members' behaviors; but they also provided the group with internal discipline, one of the Brotherhood's crucial characteristics. Helbawy recounts how this phenomenon became apparent to him during the protests against the monarchy that took place throughout Egypt in the early 1950s: "I noticed big differences between the demonstrations led by the Muslim Brotherhood brothers and those led by other political parties." The former, in fact, were well structured, with senior members cordoning off the Brotherhood group marching in the street. "Nobody can get in and nobody can get out unless there is a necessity." In contrast, in his view, demonstrations organized by forces other than the Brotherhood lacked that order and internal discipline, and its participants would frequently commit acts of vandalism or theft.

This discipline at demonstrations, points out Helbawy, was also displayed by the Brotherhood in the tense days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, when street protest engulfed Cairo. The Brothers, seeking to avoid provoking a backlash from what they assessed to be a stable regime, were at first reluctant to participate in street protests. But as the days went by and the idea of toppling the regime no longer seemed far-fetched, the Brothers decided to descend into the streets. And, thanks to their organizational skills, they became leaders of the demonstrations, managing the encampments, delivering food, and running security—all actions that enabled them to gain the trust of the initially diffident fellow protesters whose backgrounds were not Islamist.

Life Inside the Brotherhood

Helbawy recalls his early days in the Brotherhood fondly. In stark contrast to the teachings of the group's current leadership, as we will see, he talks about the tenets of his first teachers in the Brotherhood as perfectly in line with Islamic values and capable of making anybody who follows them an exemplary person.

I became a member because they never taught us something against, as I said to you, the moral values. Main, religious moral values. Be polite, respect your fathers and parents, respect your teachers, your elderly. Memorize your lessons properly. Try to become the first in your class. Compete with people nicely. Clean yourself, keep your books clean. Help others in the street if they need help. If you see a man, a blind man or woman, help them to cross the road. They encourage you to do charity, even with a penny, and sometimes with students, you don't have much money, very, very few, but they encouraged you, they cultivated love of charity in yourself. That is why I joined.

After three years “under observation,” Helbawy officially joined the Brotherhood, becoming a full-fledged, dues-paying member. He continued his studies, progressing to university, where he obtained degrees in literature (from Cairo University, 1960) and business administration and simultaneous translation (from the American University in Cairo, 1971). By the early 1960s he was working for the Brotherhood's Central Training Organization, the unit devoted to training new members and spreading the organization's credo.

It was at that time that his troubles with the Egyptian authorities began. The 1960s were one of the darkest times for the Brotherhood, a decade characterized by the regime's brutal repression of the group. Helbawy found himself under heavy surveillance and routinely interrogated, although, unlike many of his Brothers, he was fortunate never to serve time in prison.

When Gamal Abdel Nasser died in 1970, the travel ban to which Helbawy had been subjected was lifted and he decided to leave Egypt. It was the beginning of decades of whirlwind traveling around the globe to spread the Brotherhood's approach to education and dawa—Helbawy's lifelong passion. He first traveled to Nigeria, where together with Sheikh Ahmed Lemu and other local clerics he established the Islamic Education Trust in Sokoto, a city in the country's Northwest.

According to Helbawy, the success of his experience in Nigeria led “some Brothers” who had moved to Saudi Arabia to contact him. In the 1970s the Gulf country had become one of the main refuges for Egyptian Brothers (and some from other countries as well) seeking to escape persecution in their home country. They found hospitality in a country that shared a similarly conservative interpretation of Islam and had recently gained immense wealth through oil. Further cementing the relationship between

Brothers and the Saudi monarchy was their common animosity toward the secular Egyptian regime, the former's sworn internal enemy and the latter's geopolitical foe.

Some Brothers engaged in lucrative business activities, enriching themselves and, consequently, the Brotherhood. Others were tasked by the Saudis with running the many organizations they set up to translate the country's newfound wealth into geopolitical influence by spreading its brand of Islam. Among the Egyptian Brothers who called Helbawy to Saudi Arabia was Tawfiq al Shawi, a member of the Brotherhood's founding committee whom Helbawy calls "one of the great senior Brothers." According to Helbawy, al Shawi had convinced King Faysal of Saudi Arabia that Saudi-funded but largely Brotherhood-run and -staffed organizations were the best vehicles to spread their ultraconservative interpretation of Islam worldwide.

The brainchildren of this cooperation between Brothers and the Saudi monarchy were organizations such as the Muslim World League (MWL, founded in 1962) and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY, founded ten years later). In 1972 Helbawy moved to Jeddah and was appointed WAMY's executive director, overseeing many of its projects in the West and in other parts of the world. "I was the first executive director and we had to spread globally by establishing camps for youth and introducing Islam to them, providing them with books and activities, and to take care of Muslim youth and student associations. This gave me the chance to work globally."²

It was during these years that Helbawy, as a senior officer of an organization with an immense budget whose mandate was to support Muslim organizations spreading an interpretation of Islam compatible with the Saudis', began to travel throughout the West. As he puts it, WAMY was conceived after Tawfiq al Shawi had convinced King Faysal that "that there are now in the West societies, Muslim societies, in universities and communities, and this will have great effect and impact on the future, but they need help and assistance." Helbawy implemented this vision, as he organized conferences throughout Europe and North America and brought together the first pioneers of the Brotherhood in the West. And while Helbawy, by his own admission, had never been very involved in the financial aspects of the organization, other parts of WAMY (and the MWL) provided financial support for various Muslim but mostly Brotherhood-controlled or Brotherhood-leaning organizations in the West. In the words of the Pew Research Center, "Between the 1970s and 1990s, the European activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth became so intertwined that it was often difficult to tell them apart."³

To describe these dynamics, Helbawy fondly recounts his close connections to Turkish Islamism, which started with a visit by Necmettin Erbakan to Saudi Arabia in 1974. The godfather of Turkish Islamism, Erbakan founded various Islamist parties that were routinely shut down by Turkish authorities, and in June 1997 he was deposed by the Turkish military from the position of prime minister. The current ruling party in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), was founded in 2001 by veterans of Erbakan’s various political parties who strategically opted for a less confrontational approach toward the secular Turkish establishment, and many of AKP’s current leaders were once disciples of Erbakan. Erbakan was also the founder of Millî Görüş, the most prominent Turkish Islamist organization in Europe, with hundreds of thousands of followers throughout the continent. Erbakan’s parties and the Brotherhood in the Middle East—and, by the same token, Millî Görüş and the European networks of the Brotherhood—have always been fellow travelers, independent and with a different local focus (Erbakan and Millî Görüş added a distinctive Turkish nationalist flavor to boilerplate Islamism) but tied together by fundamental ideological affinities.

During his Saudi visit, recounts Helbawy, Erbakan was received by top Saudi leaders, including the minister of education and the president of King Abdulaziz University, as well as the heads of WAMY. In his meetings Erbakan brought up the issue of Northern Cyprus, which that year the Turkish government had annexed through military intervention, and expressed his concerns that Muslims in Cyprus were thoroughly secularized (“There was no lady with a hijab in Cyprus, not one,” recalls Helbawy). WAMY leaders then decided to establish a dawa center and host a large conference in Northern Cyprus in order to correct this situation.

Helbawy began traveling to Turkey along with Mohammed Mahdi Akef, at the time senior advisor to WAMY and later general guide of the Egyptian Brotherhood, to work on these projects. While Erbakan was his main contact in the country, he also interacted with some of Erbakan’s most devoted disciples, who included the current president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (whom Helbawy describes as “at the time, a student for the movement”). This work came to fruition in 1977, when WAMY organized its first camp and conference in Northern Cyprus. Helbawy and Akef met personally with Rauf Denktaş, the founding president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and obtained from him a favorable lease (“Ninety-nine years, the first ten years free of charge, after that \$2,000”) for eight villas near Kyrenia.

The camp near Kyrenia was, in Helbawy’s words, “well attended”—one of the countless examples of well-funded events that over the past fifty years have brought

together seasoned and budding Islamist activists from all over the world and have helped build the Brotherhood's transnational network. According to Helbawy, attendees were a who's who of 1970s Islamist activism, including Yusuf Nada, the Western Brotherhood's chief financier, and his lifetime business partner Ghaleb Himmat; Jamal Barzinji, Ahmed Totonji, and Hisham al Talib, three Iraqi Kurds who played leading roles in establishing various Brotherhood-linked organizations in the United States; and prominent Turkish Islamists like Temel Karamollaoğlu. In describing the success of the event near Kyrenia, Helbawy stresses that "our means in [the] World Assembly of Muslim Youth were not traditional means like sheikhs going to give lectures or money or so [on], but how to train young men." These young men were the future leaders of the Brotherhood's transnational network, well-trained individuals who could count on extensive financial resources and high-level contacts worldwide.

Helbawy's time in Saudi Arabia came to an end in 1988, when the Brotherhood dispatched him to Pakistan and Afghanistan to be its liaison to the Afghan forces battling the Soviet occupation. Though it has little direct relevance to the history of the Brotherhood in the West, Helbawy's time in the Afghanistan/Pakistan region is nonetheless filled with significant anecdotes that he recounts with particular pleasure. One of them has to do with how Abdullah Azzam—the man recognized by many as the founder of contemporary jihadism by virtue of the role he played in mobilizing thousands of Muslims worldwide to travel to Afghanistan and, more broadly, in crafting the concept of volunteering in jihadist causes worldwide—became involved in the Afghan conflict.

The Brotherhood's first envoy to Afghanistan, according to Helbawy, was Kamal al Sananiri, a prominent Egyptian Brotherhood leader who was married to Sayyid Qutb's sister Aminah. Sananiri represents a legendary figure in Islamist circles. Tellingly, his early role in liaising with the Afghan mujaheddin has been acknowledged also by Ayman al Zawahiri, the current leader of al Qaeda and himself a veteran of the Afghan conflict. "We were preceded to Peshawar by Kamal al-Sananiri," writes Zawahiri in his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, "may he rest in peace. We could see that he had left his mark wherever we went. He had played a pioneer role in establishing the hospital where we worked and whenever we met with mujahideen leaders, they would speak of his assistance to them and his efforts to unite them. Although I never met him, his actions and contributions demonstrated his generosity and beneficial services in the cause of God."⁵ By the time Zawahiri had arrived in Afghanistan, Sananiri had been arrested in Egypt in the crackdown that followed the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and reportedly died in prison.

During the first months of the Afghan conflict, Sananiri reportedly traveled to the Arab Gulf to mobilize support for the cause. While visiting Jeddah he met Azzam, who had just obtained a post at Jeddah's King Abdul Aziz University after having been expelled from Jordan for his radical rhetoric. Azzam already had a reputation as a firebrand and skilled orator. Yet, according to Helbawy, at the time he met Sananiri, Azzam had not yet grasped the mobilizing potential of the Afghan conflict. When Sananiri visited Helbawy at his office at WAMY, the two went to see Azzam, as the campus of King Abdul Aziz University was only a few meters from WAMY's offices. Helbawy recounted that Azzam told Sananiri: "I am ousted from Jordan, and this is the only place [I can stay]; I came to work in the university as a professor." But it was Sananiri who told him, "It is better to go to Afghanistan," setting in motion Azzam's interest in the Afghan jihad and thus a chain of events whose consequences are still strongly reverberating today.

According to Helbawy, King Abdul Aziz University granted leave to Azzam, allowing him to work at King Faisal University in Islamabad and divide his time between the Pakistani capital and Peshawar, the Pakistani city on the border with Afghanistan that served as a base for the Arab mujaheddin. By 1988 Helbawy himself had relocated between Peshawar and Islamabad, where he worked as an advisor to the Institute of Policy Studies—an institute founded by Khurshid Ahmed, who was a prominent leader of Jemat-e-Islami, the Brotherhood's sister movement in the Asian subcontinent. While Helbawy claims his Afghanistan-related activities remained purely political and humanitarian, he was intimately connected with the Arab mujaheddin who lived in Peshawar. He remained close to Azzam and argues that at the closing of the Afghan conflict, Azzam was in the crosshairs of those who sought to turn the Arab factions in Afghanistan into an organization that would continue the jihad worldwide—what would later become al Qaeda. Following one of the most plausible theories regarding the November 1989 assassination of Azzam, Helbawy is convinced that he "was treated by some of the violent groups as a kufur, not a Muslim, until they killed him."

Even during his time in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan/Pakistan, Helbawy used to travel frequently to the West, attending conferences, giving seminars, and participating in meetings of the growing numbers of Western Brothers. In 1994, sensing that the U.S. government had put pressure on the Pakistani government to stem Arab Islamist networks on Pakistani soil and aware that the Mubarak regime was prone to incarcerating Islamists returning from the Afghan conflict, Helbawy found that the safest place he could land was London—a city he had frequented often in previous decades.

As soon as he settled in the British capital, Helbawy began lecturing at local universities and established various businesses, including a nursing home in Wembley, the area of North London where he still lives today. Most important, he immediately gained a prominent role in the thriving local Islamist scene. In 1995 he opened the Muslim Brotherhood Global Information Centre, the organization's first official office in the West. Helbawy says that the idea of launching a center that was openly affiliated with the Brotherhood was criticized by various Brotherhood activists in the West, who argued that the organization should operate more secretly and indirectly.

It is a point of contention that has for years pitted Helbawy against the majority of Brothers and that, eventually, was a major factor in his desire to leave the organization. "We are not selling opium or drugs, we are propagating dawa," emphatically argues Helbawy, who has long been critical of what he believes to be the Brotherhood's excessive secrecy and deception when presenting itself to the West.⁶ "And I can't be ashamed of my selection [sic] or my dawa program," he adds. "If it is followed right, it is a source of happiness, not sadness." To Helbawy's chagrin, the Muslim Brotherhood Global Information Centre was renamed after he left its helm in 1997.

Helbawy also played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for two of Britain's most influential Muslim organizations. In May 1997 he was one of the founding members of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the umbrella organization seeking to represent British Muslims. Although MCB was heterogeneous in its membership, its leadership was from the outset dominated by Islamists of the Jamat-e-Islami persuasion. This Islamist bent has often been the source of tensions with the British establishment, which initially saw MCB as the de facto official and sole interlocutor within the Muslim community.

More openly Islamist is the other organization Helbawy cofounded in the same year, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB); he became its first president.⁷ Intended to unite various ethnic Arab activists based in Britain, MAB is a quintessential Western Brotherhood organization in its origins, ideology, connections, and methodology. Aside from Helbawy, MAB's leadership includes experienced political activists from various Middle Eastern countries, among them the Palestinian Mohammed Sawalha; Anas al Tikriti, the son of the leader of the Iraqi branch of the Brotherhood; and Azzam Tamimi, the former director of the parliamentary office of the Islamic Action Front, Jordan's Brotherhood offshoot. A founding member of MCB, MAB is also a key member of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), the Western Brothers' Brussels-based pan-European umbrella organization.

Despite having been in the United Kingdom as a permanent resident for just a couple of years, Helbawy found himself at the center of the local Muslim and Islamist scene. This position was due in part to his stature and charisma, in part to the fact that he had been traveling throughout the West for some twenty-five years. While technically a relative late addition to the Western Brotherhood, Helbawy had known the scene well and had actually played a key role in developing it through his activities with WAMY. His description of how that scene was formed and how it still operates therefore carries particular weight.

Helbawy confirms that the Brotherhood “never intended to come to the West so early; the aim was to concentrate on the Arab countries, but when the problem occurred with Nasser, in 1954, some students fled to the West.” He adds, “Some other Brothers came to study [in the West] from different countries like Iraq, like Jordan, like Syria.” In Helbawy’s account, student organizations were the first embryo of Brotherhood presence in the West. “They came to study,” he explains, but “they did not forget their dawa. They got acquainted in the university campuses, and they began to form the Muslim societies, Muslim student societies. I remember when I used to come to lecture in England, in 1975, 1976, and I went to America [in] 1977 for the first time in Indianapolis University.” Helbawy’s recollection of a visit to a college campus in Indiana (albeit Indianapolis University, which did not exist) is not surprising. The Muslim Student Association, the organization created by longtime associates of Helbawy’s including Barzinji, al Talib, and Totonji, had its inception on various campuses in the Midwest, and it was in Indianapolis that the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) was established by some of the very same founders of MSA.

In describing the passage from MSA to ISNA in the United States, Helbawy captures a dynamic that was replicated, albeit in different time frames, in all Western countries as some of the first Western Brothers decided or were forced to stay in the West: they turned their original nuclei of student organizations into all-purpose entities that today still represent some of the most active and visible Muslim organizations in the West. At that time, the Islamic revivalism that has swept through the Arab and Muslim world over the past forty years was in its infancy, and most Muslims living in the West were largely secular in their outlook. But among those embracing a more conservative interpretation of Islam, remembers Helbawy, “the most flourishing groups were the Muslim Brotherhood’s.” As he recalls, “Before Salafis came, and the jihadists came, and violent groups came, it was the Muslim Brotherhood.” By turning their student organizations into organizations with larger aims, as in the transformation from MSA to ISNA, the Brothers demonstrated their understanding that their presence in the West

was permanent and needed new forms.

Among the pioneers Helbawy remembers Said Ramadan, Hassan al Banna's son-in-law and personal secretary, who was among the first Brothers to establish a base in Europe (first in Cologne and then in Geneva). He also acknowledges the crucial role played by Yussuf Nada, one of the Brotherhood's main financiers in the West. The importance of Ramadan and Nada in creating the first kernel of the Brotherhood in the West by establishing some of its first Brotherhood organizations and linking them to Arab Gulf money cannot be overstated.⁸

But Helbawy is most intimately familiar with Anglo-Saxon countries, throughout which he used to travel frequently in the heyday of the Western Brotherhood. In North America he cites as leaders of the "earlier generation" the three Kurds already mentioned above (al Talib, Barzinji, and Totonji); the late Ahmed el Kadi, who in 2004 became one of the few Brotherhood leaders in the West to agree to an interview with a newspaper (the Chicago Tribune) and to publicly disclose his role in and some of the inner workings of the organizations in America;⁹ Mahmoud Abu Saoud, a prominent economist who was instrumental in developing the modern concept of Islamic banking and—demonstrating the key role played by marriage in the Brotherhood's structure—was el Kadi's son-in-law; the University of Halifax professor and ISNA cofounder Jamal Badawi; and Sayed Hassan Desouqi, who moved to the United States in 1964 to work at Lockheed Martin and taught aviation engineering in various American universities while also setting up the movement in the country.

In the United Kingdom the names Helbawy cites as pioneers of the first generation are Zaghloul el Naggar, a renowned Egyptian scholar who has written countless treatises combining his passion for geology and natural sciences with his faith in Islam;¹⁰ the former Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood leader (and father of MAB cofounder Anas al Tikriti) Usama al Tikriti; and Ahmed al Rawi, an Iraqi who is the longtime director of the Europe Trust, one of the European Brotherhood's most important financial structures.

Discussing how the Brotherhood established itself in the West naturally leads to the problematic issue, already examined in the previous chapter, of what the Brotherhood in the West actually is. In tackling this complex question, Helbawy adopts a tripartite framework, based on different degrees of connectivity to the Brotherhood, that is similar to my own. Helbawy agrees that the "pure Brothers"—the highly skilled and devoted individuals who are sworn members of the organization (whether they have

publicly disclosed their affiliation or not)—represent a relatively small group at the heart of the much larger machine that is the Brotherhood in the West broadly conceived.

In describing the inner workings of this core, Helbawy paints a picture of a formal structure that resembles, albeit on a smaller scale, how the Brotherhood works in Egypt or other Middle Eastern countries. “The first unit or block is the usra,” he explains, “a group of five to ten people, either living in a neighborhood or working in the same mission, orientation: engineers, doctors. So they meet every week, or every other week, and are trained properly to understand Islam properly. That is one.” Exactly as in Egypt, also in the West “ten usras come together under one leadership and they have certain programs. . . . And then you have the executive local unit that takes administration of that area, and then you have the, you can say, the local shura of this region.”

Obviously, because the number of Brothers in Western countries is relatively small, this structure is not always perfectly replicated, and the region of competence of the shu’ba or the local shura might be the entire country. Helbawy, who was a key clog in the U.K. Brotherhood system for decades, estimates that the number of individuals in Britain who are “active Ikhwan”—that is, sworn members who are inserted in the usra system—is somewhere between six hundred and one thousand. In many other Western countries the number is significantly lower. That small number, according to Helbawy, does not preclude their effectiveness: “Since they are well organized, and they are obedient to their leaders, they can implement a lot. Do this, you are assured that it will be done. Do that, no need for much thought, it will be done. And this is what I meant about active members.”

Part of this discipline is also implemented at the financial level. Every active member, according to Helbawy, “has to pay some of his income, maybe sometimes 3 percent, 7 percent, 10 percent to the organization.”¹¹ “In times of crisis, like Palestine, for example, or Somalia, or Syria, we pay one day of our salaries or income to help certain issues—this is in addition to the [original amount].” Helbawy adds that it is not unusual for wealthy Brotherhood members to make large one-off donations to the organization and that many also give some of their possessions to the organization after they die. As noted above, external sources of funding have been crucial to the Brotherhood’s success. But given that most Brotherhood members, including some who do not devote the entirety of their time to activism, are successful professionals or businessmen—a natural consequence of their being highly educated and belonging to the upper middle class—this form of internal taxation provides the organization’s coffers with ample resources. Essentially, the core Western Brothers have created a secretive structure that mirrors the

one adopted in Middle Eastern countries in all aspects. At the same time, according to Helbawy, they have created a large web of heterogeneous organizations that, while fully controlled by Brothers, have a tangential connection to that core structure—what some have termed “Brotherhood spawns.” Helbawy brings up the Muslim Welfare House (MWH), an organization he helped establish in 1970 in London in a corner building in front of the Finsbury Park underground station.¹² MWH, according to Helbawy, “maybe was the first organization established by Brothers in the U.K.,” and “it was established with two intentions.”

The first was to “receive Muslims coming from abroad for any reason and help them.” Beginning in its heyday, the Brotherhood, a transnational organization par excellence, has created an efficient hospitality network for its members. Brothers traveling to a foreign country or another city can rely on the aid of the organization’s local members, who can host them in their homes and help them with all their needs during their visit. This system naturally increases the organization’s transnational connections and the members’ feeling of belonging to a genuine band of brothers. It was only to be expected that in London, historically one of the global hubs for the Brotherhood, the Brothers would establish a purpose-built hostel to receive visiting members.

The second goal of an organization like MWH—illustrating the organization’s mind-set as clearly as does the first—is for “those who are living in the West, not to Westernize their lives. . . . They can eat halal foods, they can marry Muslim women, or even Christian women, but to keep Muslim; to meet once a week or once every month to gather in one place to pray together. So that’s why we established the Muslim Welfare House at that time.” MWH was, essentially, one of the first organizations created by the Brothers that protects from contact with Western society that would dilute the Muslim identity of its members and, more broadly, the larger Muslim community.

MWH was thus one of the first examples of Brotherhood “paramosque.”¹³ Rather than being a simple place of worship, Brothers intend their mosques as the center of the community’s life, a forum for social, religious, educational, and political engagement. Even though such a range of activities is not exclusive to Islamic centers controlled by Western Brothers, it reflects their vision of religion as a comprehensive system encompassing all aspects of life. According to an internal memorandum penned by Mohammed Akram, a self-avowed member of the American wing of the Brotherhood, Islamic centers should become a place for “study, family, battalion [sic], course, seminar, visit, sport, school, social club, women gathering, kindergarten, the office of domestic political resolution and the center for distributing our newspapers, magazines, books.”¹⁴

Located in every major American city, the Islamic center is meant to become, according to Akram, “the axis of our Movement”—“the base for our rise,” necessary to “educate us, prepare us and supply our battalions in addition to being the ‘niche’ of our prayers.” All the activities of the paramosque, from football games to field trips, from lectures to initiatives to clean up local parks and neighborhoods, are designed to forge a sense of community and to advance the movement’s message.

The difference between pure Brotherhood structures and Brotherhood spawns is at times blurry, as Helbawy admits. Secrecy, one of the Brotherhood’s main features, makes categorization complicated. As Helbawy puts it, “There are different types of [Brotherhood] organizations in the West; there are organizations purely for Ikhwan, and maybe no one will know about the name, or know about the essence.” Even more complex is the identification of a Brotherhood link in organizations belonging to what has been identified as the third category: organizations influenced by the Brotherhood. In many cases, as other chapters will show, making that identification is difficult even for people who have been deeply involved in those very organizations for years.

“There are other organizations,” explains Helbawy, “especially in the field of welfare and relief organizations, that are run by [the] Muslim Brotherhood . . . and can involve Muslim Brothers and non-Muslim Brothers.” As example, Helbawy points to Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW). Founded in 1984 in Birmingham, IRW has become a global aid giant with, according to its website, “over 100 offices in 40 countries worldwide.”¹⁵ Somewhat epitomizing the complexity of ascertaining the true nature of this kind of organization, on the one hand IRW has partnership agreements with entities like the UNHCR, the World Food Program, and the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department; on the other hand, in 2014 it was included in a list of terrorist organizations by the United Arab Emirates and banned by the governments of Israel and Bangladesh from operating in their territories.

“[IRW’s] leadership,” explains Helbawy, “are Brotherhood, but the people who contact [donors] for donations are not necessarily even Muslims; they can be Christians, and Jews, and whatever.” Essentially, Helbawy argues that organizations like IRW are funded and run at the senior leadership level by Brotherhood members. In the case of IRW the clear links between the charitable organization and the Brotherhood include one of IRW’s cofounders, Essam el Haddad, a senior Egyptian Brotherhood official who served as President Mohamed Morsi’s assistant for foreign relations and international cooperation.¹⁶ But, argues Helbawy, most of the people who work for IRW, even in senior positions, are not members of the Brotherhood and in most cases have no idea of—and

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fYUlj Ymga U`bi a VfzgUWfX]b[lc < YVuknzXc bchX]a]b]g` h Y6fch YfgD
Xca]bU]cb`cZh Ygycf[Ub]nU]cbgZUg`h Ynk]` Uk Ung`a U]bU]b`gk UnVnWb]fc`]b[h Y
VcUFXubXi gbl `ch Yf`hUW]g`5hh YgLa Yha Yzh YdfYgybW] cZMb]b] Yfnj]g]VY
dcgl]cbg] cZ]bX]j]Xi Ugk\c WUf`mLFYbchA i g]a `6fch Yf\ccXa Ya Vf]g]g
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IA i g]a `6fch Yf\ccX] UX]Z]W`hcbYlc`g] g]Ub"

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cbYcZh Ya cghj]g]VYUbX]bZi Yb]U ZUWgcZ6f]U]b]g]A i g]a `UbX=g]La]g]gWbYg`
: U]hZ `lc h Yj]k \Y\UgcZMb di V]Wm] dfYgg]Xh UidYcd Yc`XYf`h Ub`gl hm]Zj Y
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9[n]h]Ub V]bW`cZh Ycf[Ub]nU]cb] Xyg]h]`U]b[VYb]b Y]YZca `h YWi b]fmZf`
n]Ug] \YZWg]Xa cghcZ]g]gYa]b[`m]bXYggYbYf[mcb Ubi a Vf`cZch Yf`dfc`W]g`-b`
&S(z]b`h Yk U_YcZh YI "G"]bj Ug]cb`cZ=fUe UbXWbWf]bYXUci h`h YgW]f]Ub]m]g]cbg`
h Uh]a a YX]U]m]Z`ck YX]h]Y`Y`YUX]h Y: cfi a `Zf=g]La]W b]h]z]Ub`cf[Ub]nU]cb`
g]Y]b[`lc`dfca chYg]]U]G] bb] i bXYg]UbX]b["-b`&S* zUh`h Y`Y] [\hcZh Ygc!W`YX
K Uf`cb`H]f]cf`UbX]b`h Yk U_YcZh Y>i `m&S) U]UW]g]b`@cbXcbz`Yg]Uf]hXh Y7Yb]fY
Zf`h YG]i XncZ]H]f]cf]ga]b`cfXYf`lc]f]n]lc`dfcj Yh Uh]H]f]cf]ga \Ugbc`ca YUbXbc`
g]W]Z]W]h fY]`% < YWb]h]bi YXlc `W]fYh`fci [\ci h6f]h]Ub`UbXk`cf`Xk]XZ]UddYU`cb`
H] zdyb Uf]W]g]za Yb]cf Vi XX]b[U]W]j]g]g]UbXU]Ug]UWb]fU`bcXY]b`h Y6fch Yf\ccX]g`
h]Ub]g]U]cbU`bYk`cf`zU`Uf] Yf!h`Ub!]Z]Z] i fYk`c`k Ug]Uddf]W]U]X]UbX`]g]m]bYXlc`
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5gk Ug]fi YcZa cgh6fch Yf\ccXU]W]j]g]g]b`h Yk Yg]z< YVukn]g`]Z]W]Ub] YX
Wa d`Y]nk]h`h YU]j Yb]cZh Ygc!W`YX5fUVGdf]b[]b`&S%%<]g]b]U]j Y9[n]h]k Ug`
gk YdhVndUf]W]Uf`m]b]h]g]Yfyj`c`i`h]cb]f]nk]bXg]UbXcb: Yfi Uf]m]h]h`YfY]]a YcZ
< cgb]`A i VU]U`zk`c` \UXfi `YXh YWi b]f]nk]h`Ub]fcb`Z]g]Zf`Ua cgh]h]f]m]n]Uf]g]UbX
k Ug]g]Yb Ug]dfcj]X]b[`h Yei]b]h]g]Yb]U`Y] Ua d`YcZg]UVY5fUV[cj Yfba Yb]zk Ug`
h]dd`YX`Cb`5df]`) zU]m]h`k Yb]m]h`fY]m]Uf]g]b`Y]]Yz< YVukn]f]Yi fbYXlc`9[n]h]`Y`
fYW]j YXU`Yfc]g]k YWa YUh7U]f]c]g]Uf]dcf]h]Zca `Z]a]`na Ya Vf]g]UbXg]b]cf`
6fch Yf\ccX`YUX]f]g]b]W`X]b[`A`c`Ua a YX5_YZ`]g]c`XZ]]bX]UbXh Ycf[Ub]nU]cb]g`
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Upon returning to the country, Helbawy immediately immersed himself in the political frenzy that was engulfing post-Mubarak Egypt. He reconnected with fellow Brotherhood senior leaders, lectured to younger ones, and became a staple in the country's newspapers and television debates. Yet this initial enthusiasm was quickly tempered by various decisions taken by the Brotherhood's leadership with which Helbawy disagreed. "They were flip-flopping in their position and aspiring for power in a way that did not differ much from [Hosni Mubarak's] National Democratic Party," Helbawy has stated in an interview. In particular, the Brotherhood abandoned its initial pledge to field candidates for only one-third of the seats in Parliament. Helbawy was direct in his criticism: "I think if you break your promises, you can't be trusted and you will never succeed."²⁰

Helbawy was also disturbed that the Brotherhood's leadership began to ostracize members, including very senior ones, who raised objections to some of their decisions. The harsh treatment the group reserved for Abdel Moneim al Futuh, a widely respected Brotherhood leader who had been in the group's inner circle since the 1970s but had loudly criticized some of the group's positions in the post-Mubarak phase, was especially concerning to Helbawy. While he acknowledges that internal discipline is a crucial characteristic of the Brotherhood, historically the organization has allowed its members to hold a plurality of views. He felt that publicly humiliating and spreading rumors about its dissenting members were actions that did not meet the true ethical standards of the Brotherhood.

Disappointed by these and other decisions by the Brotherhood's current leadership, Helbawy began firming up his decision to leave the organization to which he had devoted his life. On March 31, 2012, the night the Brotherhood decided to walk back on another political promise it had made—of not running a candidate for the presidency—Helbawy took the dramatic step of formally and publicly announcing his resignation from the group. "Despite my deep sadness," he told a reporter for an Egyptian newspaper, "my conscience is clear that I am not participating in this nonsense."²¹

Much has been said and written in and outside Egypt about his decision, both because of Helbawy's high profile and because the announcement of his resignation was so public. Predictably, theories as to what motivated him abound, particularly in Islamist milieus. Some hinge on preposterous conspiracies, but a seemingly plausible theory is that upon returning to Egypt, Helbawy expected to receive a prominent position within the Brotherhood or in the political institutions the Brotherhood came to control in the first months of the post-Mubarak era. The leadership of the Brotherhood,

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.²²

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.²³

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.”²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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

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.”²⁶ 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]

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 2004.²⁷

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 2010.²⁸

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

significantly more power than the Shura Council.²⁹ 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.³⁰

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 2012.³¹ 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.”