PART TWO

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to the status of a cultural reference point was accomplished by means of a series of outstanding leaders who symbolize the meaning of the movement. Some of these figures have a high public profile, while others are less well-known. Through the relationship to these personalities, the organizational memory of the movement is continuously involved in a construction and reconstruction of its identity. The collective identity of the movement is constituted in terms of multiple strata, which are constructed in such a fashion as to place certain levels in varying relation to others.

In this second part of this book, we present portraits of personalities within the movement, historical or contemporary figures that constitute examples and reference points for militants within the movement today. We shall make mention, in the course of examining the key themes of their thought and the concrete contributions of the members of this succession, of a ‘line of witnesses’. The analysis of the modalities, in formal terms, of their standing today will allow us to see to what degree these persons are perceived as important (or not) within the movement. Our first observations, relative to choices made in favor of (or against) certain personalities will establish the reasons for this valuation (or lack thereof) of their inputs, although these reasons may not always be completely understandable.

Over and above the unchallenged foundational contribution of Hassan Al-Bannā (chapter 4) and the unavoidable but controversial contribution of Sayyid Qutb (chapter 5), we have divided our review of the figures of authority within the movement into three categories. First, there are classic intellectual figures whose reputations are not valued equally within the entire movement, such as Muhammad Al-Ghazālī, Mustafā Al-Sibā‘ī, Sa‘īd Hawwā and Sayyid Sābiq (chapter 6). Second, we delineate personalities within the movement itself, for example, leaders rising from within the movement to the head of either the Egyptian movement itself or of some national branch (chapter 7). In this category, we assign a particular importance to Sa‘īd Ramadān and to Zeinab Al-Ghazali. Third, we present contemporary figures who today exert a certain influence across the entire movement, or even beyond it. Within
this category, we distinguish those persons living in the Muslim world from those living in Europe, remembering that certain figures function as bridges between East and West. In this category there are such personalities as the current Guide of the movement, Muhammad Mehdi ‘Akef, as well as Yūsuf Al-Qaradāwī, Rashīd Ghannoushī, ‘Issām Al-‘Attār, and the brothers Tariq and Hani Ramadan. Many other people, often little known in the public sphere, are mentioned here (chapter 8).

We should note at the outset that although this pantheon is rich and imposing enough, it cannot be considered as exhaustive with regard to the whole set of important personalities who have counted for something in the movement since its inception. Our list of portraits has to do above all with personalities who have been referred to in our field work (in interviews and/or militant conferences) in Europe. In this context, it is possible that a certain number of persons, no doubt more embarrassing, or whose writings or sayings do not seem appropriate to the context anymore, were never mentioned at all.

For example, ‘Abd Al-Qādir ‘Awdah (died 1954), who strongly affected the theoretical foundations of the movement, was never mentioned. He was a professional jurist and a disciple of Hassan Al-Bannā, and he briefly became the informal leader of the movement before being hanged for his opposition to the Egyptian regime. He wrote a number of books, among which we may mention Al-islām, bayna jahl abnāʾi-hi wa-ʿajzi ʿulamāʾi-hi (Islam between the ignorance of its sons and the incompetence of its scholars) and At-tashrīʿ aj-jināʾi al-islāmī, muqārana bi-l-qānūn al-wādī (Islamic penal legislation in comparison with positive law). He is considered by certain people to be the most significant political theoretician of the mb, especially since the publication in 1951 of his book Al-Islām wa awdaʾuna al-siyasiya (Islam and Our Political Reality). For R.P. Mitchell, ‘Abd Al-Qādir ‘Awdah contributed, in a more detailed fashion than anyone else of his time, to the determination of the political aspects of an Islamic State; in particular, he enumerated the principles according to which ‘1. The Koran is the fundamental constitution; 2. The government operates on the basis of the concept of consultation (shūra); 3. The executive power is bound by the teachings of Islam and the will of the people. [...] As for organizational details, they must be deduced from these principles’ [Mitchell, 1969:246ff]. Despite all this, members and sympathizers whom we interviewed did not mention him. This does not mean that his principles are no longer taught or discussed within the internal structure of the movement. In addition, it appears to be the case that he is a primary influence upon sheik Rashid