CHAPTER SIX
OTHER CLASSIC INTELLECTUAL FIGURES

After Hassan Al-Bannā, spiritual and organizational leader, and Sayyid Qutb, considered as the ideologue of the movement, other persons also influenced the theoretical foundations of the thought of the MB and their diffusion throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Besides ʿAbd Al-Qādir ʿAwda, whom no one mentions, other figures, persons known as intellectuals and members of the organization at the same time, have gained support from certain fringe elements of the movement; most of these tend to be mentioned by sympathizers, and are rarely mentioned by partisans. This is the case with two Egyptians and two Syrians: Muhammad Al-Ghazāli, Sayyid Sābiq, Mustafā Al-Sibāʿī and Saʿīd Hawwā.

1. Muhammad Al-Ghazāli

Muhammad Al-Ghazāli (1917–1996) is a religious thinker, a graduate of the Al-Azhar University and a very prolific author. He is respected by many militants for having kept alive the philosophy of the MB even after the death of the movement’s first thinkers. Beyond the contributions he has made in a number of areas, and his reputation as a scholar (ʿālim), his reputation has been sustained by the fact that he not only knew Hassan Al-Bannā, whose disciple he was, personally, but also by the fact that he has developed his thinking over time.

His works concern a variety of themes such as faith, the defense of dogma and the law of Islam against attacks from Orientalists, the alteration or corruption of religious practices, preaching, refutations of false philosophy, the situation in the Muslim world, the history of the Prophet, and also positions with regard to the people of Israel. His book Al-Sunna al-nabawiyya bayna ahl al-fiqh wa ahl al-hadīth (The prophetic tradition between the men of fiqh and the men of hadith—also translated as ‘Between jurists and traditionalists’),1 published in 1989, turned out to

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1 Fiqh must be literally translated as ‘comprehension’. It initially concerned all forms of knowledge, but later the concept became a synonym for religious and legal knowledge.
be an enormous success, although it generated a high degree of controversy. The argument dealt with the theme of religious authority within Islam, considered in the light of the relation between the Koran and the Sunna, and the place of prophetic authority as the source of Islamic law and the methods used in criticizing hadith. Muhammad Al-Ghazâli showed himself to be very concerned about the practical implications that such choices represented. According to Daniel Brown, who published a very good book about the way in which the Islamic tradition might be rethought in the contemporary era, this book by Muhammad Al-Ghazâli illustrated the increasing influence of Islamic revivalists in this debate. These revivalists try to maintain their connection with the prophetic tradition and to fulfill the divine will, without however giving evidence of any very strict attachment to the classical corpus of the hadith, since it has been maintained that it is imperfect [Brown, 1996: 108ff.].

With regard to fatwas, Muhammad Al-Ghazâli offers flexible solutions when the textual indications are not clearly established; at times he relies upon the liberal argument of the public interest (maslaha) in order to justify his positions and to find appropriate solutions for the cases that are submitted to him. In this regard, he appears to leave a certain space for personal choice [Izzi Dien, 2004:150].

Muhammad Al-Ghazâli appears to be closer to certain militants than to some other thinkers or MB activists who died more than 40 years ago and whose historical contexts and contributions seem fairly distant. He is an important figure of reference for some movement sympathizers who openly favor innovative positions. We will cite two testimonies here from persons who are close to the militant wing of the MB, who explain their relationship to the works and to the person of Muhammad Al-Ghazâli, to whom they are particularly attached.

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It is also translated as Islamic ‘jurisprudence’, the discipline implemented by jurists (fuqaha) that tries to determine good Islamic practices in the area of worship and social relations with regard to the primary sources of Islam, and to a context, and even with regard to a principle such as that of the general interest. The fuqahas try to facilitate religious practices used by believers, by interpreting Islamic prescriptions that are not intangible. For their part the traditionalists (hadith specialists, muhaddithûn) think that religious authority must be judged in the light of conformity to the primary sources of Islam alone, though they concede a primordial importance to the hadith.