

Antonia Bosanquet

**“The Hand that rocks the Cradle is  
the Hand that rules the World”**

**An analysis of Muḥammad Qutb’s portrayal  
of feminism as a Jewish conspiracy**

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that rules the World”

**B*ü*H**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Thesis objective

Muḥammad Quṭb (b. 1919), the younger brother of the deceased Saiyid Quṭb, is an influential teacher and *dāʿī*<sup>1</sup> in Saudi Arabia. As well as teaching in the University of King Abd al-Aziz in Jeddah, he has written around thirty works, held numerous extra-university lectures<sup>2</sup> and enjoys wide popularity in the Arabic-speaking world in general<sup>3</sup>. He is usually regarded as a moderate Islamist amongst his Arabic audience and enjoys particular credibility owing to his relationship with Saiyid Quṭb.

Despite this popularity, Muḥammad Quṭb has received little academic attention. This thesis will attempt to address this gap by examining the portrayal of feminism as a Jewish conspiracy in Quṭb’s works.

There are two reasons for the choice of subject. First, the key role that feminism plays in Quṭb’s thought makes it a focal point for understanding his view of Islam and the relation to the West. Thus an analysis of this subject provides an introduction to his religious and political thought as a whole. Second, his teaching about feminism is the most original and interesting aspect of his thought in general. It appears to represent a new development in the apologetic or anti-Semitic discourse of Islamist *dāʿīs*.

The thesis will focus on examining Quṭb’s portrayal of feminism and embedding this within his view of the woman, the true Islam and its contemporary decline. It will also contextualise his teaching by comparing themes, motifs and arguments with those of

<sup>1</sup> This term is often translated as “propagandist”, without further religious connotations. See Wehr, H.: *A dictionary of modern written Arabic*. Wiesbaden 1961, p. 283. In contemporary use however, the term has come to signify the popular preachers who call people to Islam, usually as part of the contemporary Islamic resurgence. For a discussion of the term and its development since the *daʿwa* of the Muslim Brothers, see Gaffney, P.: *The prophet’s pulpit: Islamic preaching in contemporary Egypt*. Berkeley 1994, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> The best source for his lectures is the website [www.islamway.com](http://www.islamway.com). The website makes them freely available for download or listening.

<sup>3</sup> He is also popular in the non-Arabic speaking Islamic world. Some of his works, such as *Šubuhāt ḥaul al-islām* have been translated into English, German and Turkish. However, this thesis will focus on his work and reception within the Arabic-speaking cultural area.

other Islamist *dāʿīs* or theologians. It will show how Quṭb builds on perceptions and arguments that are well-established amongst his audience to support the more original aspects of his teaching. Following the analysis of his theory and its presentation, a short investigation of Quṭb’s sources will be undertaken. The question will be considered, how far is his thought influenced by European concepts of the early twentieth century, in comparison to the Islamist circles with which he was in contact?

Following a short biography and a review of relevant research, chapters 2 and 3 of this work will address the idealized portrayal of Islam and the woman respectively in Quṭb’s thought. It is against this ideal that Quṭb assesses the contemporary situation; his assessment will form the focus of the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter will examine Quṭb’s portrayal of feminism as a Jewish conspiracy that exploits the weaknesses of the female character to corrupt her and the society as a whole. This chapter will build on the findings of chapters 2 and 3 to show why Quṭb sees feminism as the most dangerous weapon of Islam’s enemies. It will also build on Quṭb’s analysis of Muslim decline discussed in chapter 4, to show how his portrayal of feminism corresponds to a wider interpretive paradigm of hostility towards Islam. Chapter 6 will conclude the thesis by examining potential sources for Quṭb’s teaching and analysing their respective influence.

### 1.2 Current research on Muḥammad Quṭb

Western research on Muḥammad Quṭb tends to focus on his relation to his brother, Saiyid Quṭb, Islamic fundamentalism and the Salafi circle of Saudi Arabia. He is rarely mentioned outside these categories. As yet, no detailed study has been made of his works or thought in general<sup>4</sup>.

The most in-depth study of Muḥammad Quṭb’s thought can be found in Damir-Geilsdorf’s analysis of Saiyid Quṭb’s political and religious teaching. A five

<sup>4</sup> Since this thesis was written, in 2009, a more detailed study of Quṭb’s thought and influence on the *ṣaḥwa* movement in Saudi Arabia has been published; see *Awakening Islam: Exploring the Kingdom’s Al-Sahwa movement* by S. Lacroix, Harvard 2011.

page comparison summarises Muḥammad Quṭb's defence of his brother's political writings and his concept of *ḡāhiliya*<sup>5</sup>. She refers to three of Muḥammad Quṭb's books. References to Muḥammad Quṭb in other studies of Saiyid Quṭb are usually limited to a few paragraphs and rarely mention more than two of his works. Examples include Roald's reference to Quṭb's "traditional view" of female roles<sup>6</sup> and Clarence-Smith's analysis of Quṭb's view on slavery<sup>7</sup>.

Studies of Islamism and fundamentalism occasionally include reference to Muḥammad Quṭb, but again, without attempting any analysis of his thought or influence. Interest has risen since a connection between Osama bin Laden and Muḥammad Quṭb was established; Lawrence Wright, for example, sketches his contacts in Saudi Arabia in his book "The Looming Tower". More academic studies, such as that of Guido Steinberg also summarize his teaching and career, but in relatively broad outlines<sup>8</sup>.

Studies of Salafism<sup>9</sup> in Saudi Arabia or the Saudi intellectual and political life in general take more account of Muḥammad Quṭb than the previous two categories. In his assessment of Saudi academic and political development Kepel pays much attention to the ambiguous relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahhabi *'ulamā'*<sup>10</sup>. The same research interest is the focus of some of Lacroix's works<sup>11</sup>. Both observe the role that Muḥammad Quṭb played in fusing Muslim Brotherhood ideology with Wahhabi doctrine, and the important role that

<sup>5</sup> Damir-Geilsdorf, S.: *Herrschaft und Gesellschaft: der islamistische Wegbereiter Sayyid Qutb und seine Rezeption*. Würzburg 2003, pp. 294–299.

<sup>6</sup> Roald, S.: *Women in Islam: the Western experience*. London 2002, p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> Clarence-Smith, W.: *Islam and the abolition of slavery*. London 2006, p. 281.

<sup>8</sup> Steinberg's summary of Quṭb's career and influence does not add to that of Kepel. See Steinberg, G.: *Der nahe und der ferne Feind: die Netzwerke des islamistischen Terrorismus*. München 2005, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> The term Salafism is used here in its broadest sense to describe the view that Islam was perfect in the time of the Prophet and the Companions and that Muslims should strive to return to that state rather than aping the modernity of the west. For more on Salafism and its various strands see Meijer, R. (ed.): *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*. New York 2009.

<sup>10</sup> See Kepel, G.: *The war for Muslim minds*. London 2004, *The Brotherhood in the Salafist Universe, working paper for Center for Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World*, Hudson Institute 2008.

<sup>11</sup> See Lacroix, S.: *Saudi Arabia: Fundamentalist Islam at a crossroads*. Washington 2008, *Les islamistes saoudiens: Une insurrection manquée*. Paris 2009.

he enjoyed as brother of the martyred Saiyid. Kepel contextualises Quṭb's career, intellectually, politically and historically. However, he does not assess Quṭb's thought in itself; the sketch that he and Lacroix provide is wider and focuses on the general outlines of intellectual development, rather than the roles of individual scholars.

Arabic language research on Quṭb is minimal and does not extend beyond biographical sketches or interviews. At the time of writing, no in-depth analysis of Quṭb's thought or work was available, either in Arabic or in any European language.

### 1.3 Method

Due to the lack of extensive secondary work on Quṭb, this thesis will rely on primary sources when presenting and discussing his theories. These can be divided into three categories. The first includes his written works, which are published by the Lebanese publishing house Dār aš-Šurūq<sup>12</sup>. The second includes his lectures, which can be downloaded from the website Islamway.com and his television appearances recorded on Youtube. The third includes internet articles or documents, which are attributed to Quṭb or quote his teaching.

Only the first category of sources will be relied upon in this work. This is partly due to time and space limitations that do not permit the transcription of oral sources. It is also due to the questionable methodology of relying on internet sources that cannot be verified and may change or disappear without prior notice. Whilst blog entries, chatrooms and Islamist websites have formed an important support for the comparison and reception of Quṭb's thought, the findings about his teaching are based on his published works only.

### 1.4 Muḥammad Quṭb: biography

Quṭb's life can be divided into two phases; the years spent in Egypt, up to and including his six-year imprisonment, and the years spent in Saudi Arabia, where Quṭb became one of the major influences on Islamic intellectual discussion.

<sup>12</sup> Appendix 1 contains a list of Quṭb's written works.

Muḥammad Quṭb Ibrāhīm was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1919 in the village of Mūšā in the upper Egyptian province of Asyūṭ. In addition to his brother Saiyid, he had two sisters, 'Amīna and Ḥamīda<sup>13</sup>. Muḥammad's relationship to Saiyid Quṭb appears to have been close and marked by respect as well as love. In interviews he refers to Saiyid as "brother, father and dearest friend"<sup>14</sup>. In particular, he emphasizes the influence that his elder brother had on his cultural education<sup>15</sup>.

After the death of their father in 1933, Muḥammad's mother, Fāṭima 'Uṭmān, moved with her children to the Cairene suburb of Ḥilwān<sup>16</sup>. Rather than attending Al-Azhar as his mother appears to have wished, Muḥammad studied English literature at Cairo University, graduating in 1940. Like his brother before him<sup>17</sup> he then entered Dār al-'Ulūm, a teacher training institute whose programs represented a compromise between the education of the modern university and the religious training of Al-Azhar<sup>18</sup>. He graduated with a diploma in pedagogy and psychology.

Upon graduation, Quṭb worked as a teacher and a civil servant<sup>19</sup>. In 1954 he was arrested together with Saiyid Quṭb and a number of other Muslim Brothers for the attempted assassination of Abd al-Nasser<sup>20</sup>. Although he was released relatively quickly, Saiyid's internment lasted ten years and Muḥammad was forced to take over as the breadwinner of the family. Saiyid Quṭb was released in 1964 to be arrested again a few months later during the second "Muslim Brother purge" of Abd al-Nasser. Muḥammad, 'Amīna and Ḥamīda Quṭb were also held, as was one of 'Amīna's sons, who died as a result of the torture

<sup>13</sup> Other sources refer to three sisters in the Quṭb family. However, only 'Amīna and Ḥamīda are ever named.

<sup>14</sup> Maḡdūb, M.: *'Ulamā' wa mufakirrin 'ariftuhum*. Al-Qāhira 1986, p. 291.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in „Muḥammad Quṭb [...] ḥizānat al-islāmiyin al-fikriya", *Aḥbār al-'ālam*, 28.10.2009.

<sup>16</sup> Maḡdūb, M. 1986, p. 292.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, L. 2006, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Shepherd, W., "The Development of the thought of Sayyid Qutb as reflected in earlier and later editions of 'Social Justice in Islam'" in: *Die Welt des Islams*, 1992, Vol. 32, p. 238.

<sup>19</sup> Between teaching jobs he also worked as a translator in the Ministry for Cultural Affairs for four years and spent two years working in the Ministry of Education. See *Aḥbār al-'ālam*, 28.10.2009.

<sup>20</sup> This is Quṭb's only reference to his participation in the Muslim Brothers. Although he was a member and much of his teaching reflects their ideology, he rarely talks about his links to the organization.

to which he was subjected. The younger sister was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Saiyid was executed in 1966 but Muḥammad was released in 1971. He subsequently left Egypt for Saudi Arabia.

Muḥammad Quṭb's emigration to Saudi Arabia in 1972 formed part of the "second wave" of Muslim Brother refugees who had left Egypt for the Saudi state since 1954<sup>21</sup>. The Saudi regime welcomed the Muslim Brothers as an additional support against the threat of Arab nationalism and socialism. Many received high positions, comfortable salaries and access to decision-making institutions, on the tacit condition that their proselytizing did not extend to critique of the Saudi monarchy. In order to avoid conflict with the Wahhabi *'ulamā'* many of the Muslim Brothers limited their religious activities to educational institutions and international organizations. They staffed the offices of the Muslim World League<sup>22</sup> and the headquarters of the World Assembly for Muslim Youth in Jeddah. Despite the low profile that the Muslim Brotherhood kept as an organization in Saudi Arabia, the individual members built up an excellent inter- and intra-national network and their influence on the younger generations, particularly in intellectual circles, soon rivalled that of the Wahhabi decision makers.

The summary given here provides the context for Quṭb's career in Saudi Arabia; he was well-received in the state and moved between teaching positions in the *Dār al-Ḥadīṭ* of the Islamic University of Medina, the Sharia faculty of Mecca's Umm Qura University and the University of King Abd al-Aziz in Jeddah. Through his supervision of doctoral theses and gifted students he is credited with awakening a new awareness of the role of Wahhabi Islam in solving the problems of modern civilisation. Amongst the doctoral theses that he supervised, that of Safar al-Ḥawālī is of particular relevance, given the influence that he went on to have in the Islamic world. In 1988 Quṭb received the King Faisal prize for Islamic teaching.

<sup>21</sup> Kepel, G. 2004, p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> This had been set up in 1962 to combat Nasser's anti-Islamist propaganda and remains an important forum for international Islamic discourse. See Schulze, R.: *Islamischer Internationalismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Islamischen Weltliga*. Leiden 1990.

In recent years Quṭb's activities have slowed down somewhat. His last work was published in 2006<sup>23</sup>. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2009 he suffered a stroke and was transferred to the national hospital in Jeddah for treatment. His recovery has been slow but stable, according to hospital authorities.

### 1.5 Muḥammad Quṭb: reception

Muḥammad Quṭb has a positive reputation in the Arab world and the Islamic world more generally. His books are widely available and have been well received<sup>24</sup>. His opinions are frequently discussed or mentioned in blogs and online forums and his recorded lectures have been downloaded by tens of thousands of users.

Criticism of his works comes from two quarters. The first is the liberal, westernized sector that sees his teaching as encouraging violence and extremism. Both in Islamic and in western circles, the admiration of Osama bin Laden for Muḥammad Quṭb's lectures has been seen as an indication of the radical implications of Quṭb's teaching. The degree of repetition in his works has also been commented on<sup>25</sup>.

The second quarter is the Salafi circles of Saudi Arabia which pursue a more rigid but also less political interpretation of Islam<sup>26</sup>. Here Muḥammad Quṭb is harshly criticised for his defence of Saiyid Quṭb's ideas and for his own critique of the Companions and Righteous Forefathers. For example, in his article "At-tauḍīḥ li-mā fi ḥiṭāb Muḥammad Quṭb 'an kutub aḥīhi min at-taṣrīḥ"<sup>27</sup> the well-known Salafi writer and *dā'ī* Rabi'ī Al-Madḥali<sup>28</sup> criticizes Muḥammad

Quṭb for allowing the books of Saiyid Quṭb prior to "Fī zilāl al-qur'ān" to be published (his earlier works are more liberal than his later works). By permitting the publication of these works and through his own criticism of the Companions and the Righteous Forefathers (he sees the downfall of the *umma* as beginning in Mu'āwiya's rule and mentions errors made by the Companions in some passages), Muḥammad Quṭb is putting his own faith in question, argues Al-Madḥali.

It is important to note the extent to which Muḥammad Quṭb is judged on the basis of his brother's message, as well as his own. Whether positive or negative, whether liberal or Salafi, the extent to which Muḥammad Quṭb has affected the impact of Saiyid Quṭb on the contemporary Islamic society is an aspect much more clearly perceived by Arabic than western writers<sup>29</sup>.

Arabic academic and religious discourse tends to make fewer references to sources than comparable literature in Europe and it is therefore difficult to tell how far Quṭb's teaching has influenced other Islamic intellectuals or ideologues. Certain similarities, particularly between the ideas of Quṭb and his doctoral students imply direct influence<sup>30</sup>. In addition, the extent to which Quṭb's concepts and arguments are echoed by other *dā'īs*, combined with the length of Quṭb's career makes it likely that his ideas have shaped fundamentalist and Islamist discourse to a certain extent. In a formal sense however, there is little research on or academic reception of Quṭb's works in the Arabic cultural area.

posito, J.: *The 500 most influential Muslims of 2009*. Amman 2009, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> Damir-Geilsdorf refers to Muḥammad Quṭb's support for his deceased brother and the similarities between their ideas, without mentioning the former's role in editing Saiyid Quṭb's texts. Damir-Geilsdorf, S. 2003, p. 294.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Safar al-Ḥawālī's thesis on secularization and his subsequent works lay heavy emphasis on the role of the classical and "modern" Murji'ites in the destruction of Islam. The portrayal of "modern Murji'ites" and the relating of this to the present Islam-west conflict is a theme that is addressed in the works of Muḥammad Quṭb before it is discussed by al-Ḥawālī.

### 1.6 Works and ideological orientation

Muḥammad Quṭb began writing whilst still in Egypt. His first work "Al-insān baina 'l-māddiya wa-'l-islām" (published in 1951) brought him some acclaim<sup>31</sup>. Initially however, he was chiefly known for his relationship to Saiyid Quṭb and he spent much of his career editing the works of his deceased brother. All rights to the publishing and editing of Saiyid Quṭb's works belong to Muḥammad Quṭb, allowing him effective control over the interpretation of his brother's works<sup>32</sup>. He also refers frequently to the interpretation or teaching of Saiyid Quṭb in his own work.

His own teaching reflects and extends his brother's ideological heritage. His most famous work "Ġāhiliyat al-qarn al-ʿiṣrīn" develops the argument that *ḡāhiliya* is a religious phenomenon rather than a historical moment and that the current *ḡāhiliya* is the deepest that mankind has ever undergone. This argument was central to Saiyid Quṭb's works<sup>33</sup>, but Muḥammad Quṭb takes it further. For example, his definition of *ḡāhiliya* in "Kaifa naktub at-ta'riḥ al-islāmī"<sup>34</sup> focuses not only on the concept of ingratitude and ruling by a law other than sharia, as Saiyid Quṭb argued, but also on the departure from an agreed code of conduct which he describes as belonging to the original meaning of ḡa-ha-la. Another example is his deepening of Saiyid Quṭb's concept of the non-military attack on Islam<sup>35</sup>.

Despite his teaching position in the faculties of sharia and hadith, Muḥammad Quṭb has no formal theological background and his works provide little academic material on either subject. Rather, his writing focuses on the problems of contemporary civilisation and the Islamic solution to these. A central motif in his thought is the rebirth of a purified Islam and the worldly glory that religious renewal

<sup>31</sup> Maḡdūb, M. 1986, p. 292.

<sup>32</sup> Muḥammad Quṭb gave the Lebanese publishing house Dār aš-Šurūq the sole rights to the publication of his and Saiyid Quṭb's works, on condition that he oversee the editing of both. His letter confirming this was published by Rabi'ī Al-Madḥali, in his article, "At-tauḍīḥ li-mā fi ḥiṭāb Muḥammad Quṭb 'an kutub aḥīhi min at-taṣrīḥ", pp. 4–5.

<sup>33</sup> See Quṭb, S.: *Ma'ālim fi 't-tariq*. 1966.

<sup>34</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Kaifa naktub at-ta'riḥ al-islāmī?* Al-Qāhira 1992, p. 49. Quṭb builds on this information to include "deliberately turning away from a mutually agreed contract" within the definition of *ḡāhiliya*. This has important consequences for the fate of the citizen in such a society.

<sup>35</sup> This is discussed in 3.3 of this work, pp. 61–64.

will bring. His works address the use of *tarbiya* (up-bringing) as the main means to achieve this religious renewal<sup>36</sup>. Another important motif is the rewriting of history to highlight religious and moral truths<sup>37</sup>, which is also discussed in Saiyid Quṭb's works.

Muḥammad Quṭb's intellectual career spans over five decades. Although changes in emphasis and the introduction of certain motifs can be noted in later works, a lineal development of ideas is not really observable in his writings. Given the fact that the order of publication does not always reflect the order in which his works are written, reconstructing the thematic development of his thought is problematic.

His self-understanding as ideologue and Islamic *dā'ī* is reflected in his support for the *ṣaḥwa* movement of Saudi Arabia. The *ṣaḥwa*, of which Quṭb's former student and protégé, Safar al-Ḥawālī<sup>38</sup> is also an important member, emerged in Saudi Arabia in the late 1960's. Its central ideology fuses the *tauḥīd* motif which is the pivot of the Wahhabi doctrine with the *ḥākimiya* motif central to the Muslim Brothers' political ideology. Lacroix<sup>39</sup> sees Muḥammad Quṭb himself as having played an important role in conjoining the two elements.

The reform oriented activism of the *ṣaḥwa* members brought them into conflict with the regime following the latter's rejection of their "Letter of Demands" (1991) and "Memorandum of Advice" (1992)<sup>40</sup>. Relations with the regime improved following the release of important members from prison but the "friendship" is one of convenience not congeniality; the ultimate objectives of the *ṣaḥwa* are far removed from those of the monarchy<sup>41</sup>. Muḥammad

<sup>36</sup> This is also an important theme in the ideology of the Muslim Brothers. Quṭb addresses the subject at length in *Kaifa nad'ū an-nās*. Al-Qāhira 1998.

<sup>37</sup> See Quṭb, M. 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Safar al-Ḥawālī is a Saudi Salafi scholar and founding member of the *ṣaḥwa* movement. His views are expressed primarily on his website, www.alhawali.com.

<sup>39</sup> Lacroix, S. 2008.

<sup>40</sup> These two petitions called for reform rather than radical change and had over 100 signatories, including the Grand Mufti Ibn Bāz, Salman al-ʿAuda and Osama bin Laden. The monarchy rejected the first document and began to repress the movement following reception of the second, which eventually led to the wave of arrests in 1994.

<sup>41</sup> The *ṣaḥwa* movement and its relations with the Saudi regime have been discussed extensively in a number of works. A good overview is provided in Kepel, G. 2004, pp. 176–93 and in Calvert, J.: *Islamism: a documentary and reference guide*.

Qutb's praise for the *ṣaḥwa* (in one passage he describes the movement as the barrier that prevents darkness from washing over humanity<sup>42</sup>) and his role in its development reflect his dynamic and political, rather than purely academic, orientation.

What ideological category best describes Qutb's thought and activity? Although pigeon-holing for its own sake is irrelevant, the question is significant for the degree of comparison with contemporaries in the same category that a definition allows.

This work will refer to Qutb as a fundamentalist and an Islamist. The term fundamentalist is used here according to the definition reached by the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences<sup>43</sup>. Although their work is predominantly focused on movements rather than individuals, the ideological criteria by which they define fundamentalists are nonetheless relevant for understanding Qutb's thought. They also help to define categories of comparison with other ideologues, whether in the Islamic, Judaic or Christian tradition.

The five points in the criteria established by the Fundamentalism Project are; the reactive nature of religious fundamentalism, its selectivity, moral Manichaeism, textual inerrancy and messianism. The last of these components is generally seen as less relevant for Qutb and Sunni Islamic fundamentalism in general but the first two in particular are of great analytic value. That Qutb's thought is of a reactive character is an important premise of this work, both in the analysis of his portrayal of feminism as part of western cultural aggression<sup>44</sup> and the discussion of his incorporation of European sources. The role of selectivity is also central to an understanding of Qutb's ideology; his portrayal of the Islamic religious tradition, like his critique of contemporary western culture, only uses certain aspects of both traditions and in his selection and emphasis on these aspects he

Westport 2008, pp. 163–168. These authors also consider the global implications of the *ṣaḥwa* movement.

<sup>42</sup> Qutb, M.: *Ru'ya islamiya li-ahwal al-'alam al-mu'ashir* 1991a, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> The findings of the Fundamentalism Project have been published in a series of works, listed in the bibliography. Unless otherwise specified, the conclusions referred to here are taken from Almond, G., Appleby, R.: *Strong religion: the rise of fundamentalisms around the world*. Chicago 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Qutb refers to western cultural aggression as the *ḡazw fikri*; his development of this motif is discussed in chapter 4.3 of this work, p. 40–43.

effectively reshapes the tradition that he transmits. Fundamentalism is used here to define a religious orientation and does not necessarily imply militant extremism or indeed, any political orientation at all. This is why the term Islamist will also be applied to Qutb, as it helps define his political and specifically Islamic outlook.

Greg Barton defines the term Islamism to refer to the belief that Islam can and should form the basis of a political ideology<sup>45</sup>. As he himself observes however, this belief can cover such a wide spectrum of convictions that it is hardly useful as a research concept<sup>46</sup>. What for example, do the Taliban have in common with the Turkish AKP?

An important element of the Islamist ideology as defined in relation to Muḥammad Qutb is the claim that no truly Islamic society has ever existed, with the exception of the rule of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. As Denoëux describes it,

“it provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.”<sup>47</sup>

The role played by reinvented and idealised concepts is central to the Islamist discourse. Most Islamists are products of a secular and technical education and have developed their thought in relation to the important western ideologies of communism, capitalism and socialism. Their central problem is how to develop a modern political ideology that maintains their religious identity whilst enabling an accommodation with the modern world and even a victory over the imperialism of the West. Despite the centrality of Islam, they generally have an ambivalent attitude to the *'ulamā'* (at best) and are heavily influenced by western concepts.

<sup>45</sup> Barton, G.: *Jemaah Islamiyah and the soul of Islam*. Sydney 2004, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> In addition to its lack of analytical value, this definition also fails to distinguish Islamism from Islam itself; most contemporary Muslims envisage their religion as playing a role in politics, but it is the extent of the role and how this should be implemented that divides their views.

<sup>47</sup> Denoëux, quoted in Ayoob, M.: *The many faces of political Islam: religion and politics in the Muslim world*. Ann Arbor 2008, p. 2.

A second element of Islamism, as defined here, is the vision of individual transformation as a prerequisite to political reformation. This explains the survival of the ideology in oppressive authoritarian states and provides an excellent theoretical basis for the globalization of the ideology.

Violence is not an integral part of the Islamist ideology and neither is the separatist vision embodied by the *takfir wa-hiḡra* movement in Egypt. However, many Islamist writings do allow for the possibility of violent confrontation before the final “enthronement” of Islam and Qutb's writings also belong to this category.

The elements listed here enable a definition of Islamist ideology incorporating the vision of al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, but also Saudi Wahhabism, various shades of Salafism and the Shi'ite variant in Khomeini's Iran. It is the same ideology to which the Muslim Brotherhood ascribes, although the compromises with the government upon which the younger generation have embarked reflect a move away from their original purism<sup>48</sup>.

The more differentiated definition of Islamism used in this work is closer to Olivier Roy's category of “neo-fundamentalist” than to the much wider concept of Islamist that he sees as outdated<sup>49</sup>. Rather than adopting Roy's terminology, this work will maintain Islamism as a term of reference, as it allows constructive comparison to thinkers in the same category whilst acknowledging the ideological continuum with the wider spectrum of political Islamic movements.

<sup>48</sup> The more worldly, pragmatic approach of the younger generation of Muslim Brothers is discussed by Ternisien, X.: *Les frères musulmans*. Paris 2005, pp. 72–110.

<sup>49</sup> See the discussion on Islamism and neo-fundamentalism in: Roy, S.: *The politics of chaos in the Middle East*. New York 2008, pp. 55–58.

## 2. “The true Islam”; Qutb's portrayal of Islam as a religious and social system

Little of Qutb's teaching about Islam is qualitatively new. His interpretation relies on the arguments and motifs of the main Salafi thinkers of the twentieth century. The lack of novelty does not detract from the significance that the subject will be given here; firstly, because Qutb's understanding of Islam is the basis on which he builds his theories about feminism, and secondly, because the resonance that his teaching finds with existing concepts amongst his audience is precisely the reason why his thought has found so much acceptance in Islamist circles. Thirdly, an identification of similarities and differences is an important step in identifying the influences on Qutb's thought and the degree to which he himself has influenced Islamist discourse<sup>50</sup>. By analysing how Qutb envisages Islam, in terms of its structure, expression and role in the world, this chapter contextualises his theory of degeneration, Jewish aggression and the key role that feminism plays in this complex.

### 2.1 “The construction of an image”; how Qutb portrays Islam in his works

The way in which Qutb constructs his image of the religion not only contributes to the content and the meaning of that image, but also reveals a lot about his world view. In this section the three main methods or resource categories used by Qutb to define Islam will be analysed and their emotive implications considered.

The first category can be seen as textual strategy. Qutb makes heavy use of Qur'an quotations and frequently incorporates hadith into his works. He re-

<sup>50</sup> Similarities to other Islamist thinkers and Saiyid Qutb in particular will be noted throughout this study where relevant. However, space requirements necessitate their being kept to a minimum. Some study of the influences on Qutb has been undertaken in 2.5 and chapter 5. But the question of how his thought has developed and the role that it plays in contemporary Islamist discourse is unfortunately much too wide to be done justice in a Magisterarbeit.

fers to the rulings of the sharia occasionally and in a more general sense<sup>51</sup> and uses the written works of Islamic scholars to support his argument when relevant. For example, he refers to Ibn Taimiyya and Ibn Qaiyim al-Ğauziyya when explaining why it is adherence to the sharia and not mere enunciation of the *řahāda* that makes a person a Muslim<sup>52</sup>. It is notable that he rarely deviates from the stock trade of Islamist polemic. Although his citations of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Ibn Taimiyya, Ibn Kaṭīr<sup>53</sup> and Saiyid Quṭb in particular are frequent, references to other Islamic theologians or writers are rare.

This use of textual resources to support the presentation of Islam given in Quṭb’s works can be contrasted with a second method that features heavily in Quṭb’s works. This is the reference to the Companions (*řahāba*) and Righteous Forefathers (*as-salaf ař-řālīh*) as living examples of Islam in its original perfection. Both the personality of the Muslim and the ideal of the Islamic state are exemplified through historic reference. For example, a discussion of the correct attitude that a ruler should have to God and his subjects is illustrated with the account of ‘Umar b. al-Ĥaṭṭāb being held to account by Salmān al-Fāriři<sup>54</sup> and the lack of racism in Islam is demonstrated by early Islam’s incorporation of all colours and cultures without distinction<sup>55</sup>. Emphasis is laid on the moral probity and religious sincerity of the first generation of Muslims. The Righteous Forefathers are portrayed as the paradigms of true Muslims and their worldly success is the consequence or even the embodiment of the glory of Islam.

The fact that it is Islam that is seen as responsible for the successes of this generation and the spirit of Islam which motivates their moral probity serves to depersonalise the characters about whom Quṭb

writes. This depersonalisation deepens the impression that it is not a group of outstanding individuals that he is describing but Islam itself, working through personal agents.

A similar portrayal of the Companions and the Righteous Forefathers can be observed in the works of Saiyid Quṭb and al-Maudūdi (to whom Muḥammad Quṭb also makes frequent reference<sup>56</sup>) and many other Islamist intellectuals.

There has been much discussion about the mythologisation of a “golden period” amongst fundamentalist movements in general and Islamic fundamentalisms in particular. Riesebrodt and Zeidan<sup>57</sup> argue that the fundamentalist portrayal of history as degeneration and fall from revealed law is the basis of the argument that a return to past purity, rather than progress or participation in modernity is the answer to social ills. Thus the focus on a “golden period” justifies the lack of engagement with the modern world.

Whilst this insight is helpful for an understanding of Quṭb’s world view, it omits the political and forward-looking dimensions that this mythologisation also implies. The coupling of moral strength and military invincibility in early Islam reinforces the political message that a return to the values of Islam will bring worldly success for the Muslims. At the same time, the fact that this period is given the de-historicising character of myth allows it to be used with a degree of flexibility; specific practices, institutions and even messages can be read into the sources about this “golden period”, which awards them a legitimacy that they would not otherwise possess<sup>58</sup>. Thus the past is more than a golden age; it is a normative horizon, the construction of which lies in the response to the present. The selectivity

with which Quṭb handles history corresponds well with the criteria of fundamentalism established by the Fundamentalism Project<sup>59</sup>.

The “response to the present” is an important element and represents the third approach by which Quṭb constructs the true Islam. Much of his rhetoric in defining Islam is reactive; he describes an aspect of contemporary life and in condemning this, contrasts it with the Islamic ideal or original state. Thus the shabby work ethic of contemporary Muslims is contrasted with the diligence of the Companions and the technological under-development in Muslim countries is lambasted as un-Islamic, the result of Muslim misunderstanding of their duty on earth. He also draws contrasts with Christianity, particularly when discussing Islam as a *manhağ al-ḥayāt*<sup>60</sup>. However, the antithesis that serves to define the “true Islam” is a role more frequently fulfilled by the West than the contemporary Islamic world. Therefore Quṭb focuses most heavily on the moral decay in western<sup>61</sup> society to illustrate the boundaries and the benefits of Islamic social ethics. He creates a dichotomous image of reality, in which Islam is juxtaposed with the last stages of moral and social decay.

The use of dichotomies on a Manichaean scale is another characteristic feature found in the writings of fundamentalists<sup>62</sup>. They serve as a rhetorical device that simplifies the world of the writer and offer conclusive arguments of the moral or religious superiority of the religion for which he argues. Such binary dichotomies also set the stage for the portrayal of battle which underlies much fundamentalist rhetoric. This aspect is particularly noticeable in Saiyid Quṭb’s later works, where the inevitable battle between *ğāhiliya* and *ḥākimiya* is an important motif<sup>63</sup>. It is also an important theme in Muḥammad Quṭb’s writings, although more emphasis is laid on *da‘wa* (the call to Islam) and *tarbiya* (practical education about Muslim faith and life) than on conflict as such.

<sup>59</sup> See above for the Fundamentalism Project’s criteria of defining characteristics.

<sup>60</sup> See following section.

<sup>61</sup> “Western” is used in this thesis to refer to Europe and America. This is the sense in which Quṭb uses the word. However, his references are usually to European rather than American writers and society.

<sup>62</sup> See Almond, G. 2003, p. 94., Zeidan, D. 2003, pp. 243–250.

<sup>63</sup> The fullest portrayal of Saiyid Quṭb’s portrayal of the contrast and conflict between *ğāhiliya* and *ḥākimiya* is given in his famous work, *Ma‘ālim fi ‘t-ṭariq*.

The three methods that Quṭb uses to portray Islam can be summarised as textual strategy, portrayal of the early generations as exemplary Muslims or even personifications of Islam, and the negative contrast with the West. The latter two methods are used more frequently. These two methods both have a dynamic and normative aspect. The construction of a “golden age” establishes a normative horizon and a call to return to Islam, whilst the use of dichotomies with a culture already perceived of as foreign and threatening serves to create a world view of manageable simplicity, in which the superiority of Islam is morally confirmed.

## 2.2 Islam as *manhağ al-ḥayāt*

This analysis of Muḥammad Quṭb’s portrayal of Islam as a *manhağ al-ḥayāt* will begin with a consideration of the key concept of *manhağ* and its meaning in Quṭb’s works. The question will then be asked; what implications does this portrayal have for how a Muslim conducts his life? This will be followed by an examination of the social and political dimensions of the concept, which will serve as the theoretical basis of the structure of the Islamic society discussed in the following section. Finally, it will be shown how Quṭb’s portrayal of Islam as a *manhağ* emphasizes the flexible nature of the religion and of its rulings for humankind.

Throughout this section it will be shown that the descriptive portrayals given by Quṭb contain an important prescriptive, dynamic dimension. In saying what Islam is, he is implicitly and often explicitly, telling Muslims what they should do.

The word *manhağ*<sup>64</sup> is derived from the Arabic root na-ha-ğa, for which the primary meaning in “Lisān al-‘Arab” is given as “clarify, particularly in relation to a path or way”. Correspondingly, *manhağ aṭ-ṭariq* is defined as the clarity of a path and not the path itself<sup>65</sup>. In modern Arabic the word is used to mean method in a relatively abstract manner (*al-manhağ al-tağribi* refers to the experimental method for example) and a concrete course or program such as a

<sup>64</sup> The word is also transliterated as *minhağ* in some dictionaries, with no discernible difference in meaning. The former transliteration will be used here because it is more common.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Manzūr, M.: *Lisān al-‘Arab*. Bairūt 1995, p. 1105.

<sup>51</sup> In contrast to his presentation of hadith, where Quṭb usually quotes the collection and number for the relevant passage, his references to the sharia are never supported with textual references. Even his work on the subject, *Ḥaula taṭbiq ař-řarī‘a*, only deals with very general sharia rulings. This aspect is also noticeable in the works of other Islamist theologians who have graduated from technical rather than religious institutes.

<sup>52</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Mafāhim yanbaği an tuřahḥağ*. Al-Qāhira 1987, pp. 94–99.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Kaṭīr is the Qur’ān commentator most frequently referred to in Islamist writings by Saiyid Quṭb in particular.

<sup>54</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Al-iřlām ka-badīl ‘an al-afkār wa-‘l-aqā‘id al-mustaurada wa-abḥāṭ uḥrā*. Al-Qāhira 1993, p. 47.

<sup>55</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Al-insān baina ‘l-mādđiya wa-‘l-iřlām*. Al-Qāhira 1977, p. 64.

<sup>56</sup> Quṭb’s reliance on al-Maudūdi is both explicit and implicit. For example, he praises al-Maudūdi’s discussion of Islamic monetary laws in *At-taṭauwur wa-‘t-ṭabāt fi ḥayāt al-bařar*, p. 245. In *Ğāhiliyat al-qarn al-‘iřrin*, p. 51, he gives a description of the Roman Flora theatre that was exclusively for female gladiators and served the sexual gratification of male viewers. His account is almost a verbatim repetition of a passage in a work of al-Maudūdi (*Al-ḥiğāb*, p. 27). He also refers frequently to *ḥākimiyat Allāh*, without mentioning al-Maudūdi as the author of this concept.

<sup>57</sup> Riesebrodt, M.: *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der “Kampf der Kulturen”*. München 2000, p. 90, Zeidan, D.: *The resurgence of religion: A comparative study of selected themes in Christian and Islamic fundamentalist discourses*. Leiden 2003, p. 200.

<sup>58</sup> Damir-Geilsdorf, S. 2003, p. 99.



school syllabus. Muḥammad Quṭb uses the term in both an ideational and concrete sense. So too, does Saiyid Quṭb, whose portrayal of Islam as *manḥağ al-ḥayāt* is closely followed by Muḥammad Quṭb.

In its abstract sense, the term is used to refer to the religion and the living norms that it prescribes; in “Ġāhiliyat al-qarn al-‘iṣrīn”, for example, Quṭb uses *manḥağ* as a synonym for *dīn* and shortly afterwards, for *sunna*<sup>66</sup>. Although these two terms are, strictly speaking, not interchangeable, the fact that *manḥağ* is used to refer to both does not impede understanding of the meaning. It is clear that Quṭb’s references to Islam as a *manḥağ al-ḥayāt* are intended to convey the religion’s self-sufficiency as a normative method for structuring individual or social life. The term also implies systemisation and an order to the structure, which reinforces the rational aspect of Islam above the supernatural or Sufi dimension<sup>67</sup>.

In its concrete sense, *manḥağ* is used to indicate a specific method followed by a person or even a society. Although this also involves orientation and goal, it is less wide-reaching than the other use in that it represents the method for a specific realm of human activity rather than the ideational underpinning of human existence in an abstract sense. Thus Quṭb speaks about the *manḥağ* that he has followed when writing his book<sup>68</sup>. And in a slightly wider sense, he refers to *al-manḥağ al-tağribī* to describe the process of hypothesis, test and conclusion used by Islamic scientists.

The similarities between the use and meaning of *manḥağ* in the works of Saiyid Quṭb and Muḥammad Quṭb makes it likely that the latter was directly influenced by the former, or that he saw his work as continuing the teaching of his brother. At the same time however, it is important to note the extent to which the concept of Islam as *manḥağ al-ḥayāt* has entered Islamist argument<sup>69</sup>. In contrast to Saiyid Quṭb, or

<sup>66</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Ġāhiliyat al-qarn al-‘iṣrīn*. Al-Qāhira 1965, pp. 34 and 16.

<sup>67</sup> Shepard sees this feature as a reflection of the rationalization that Quṭb’s thought has undergone, rather than relating it to a secularization process. See Shepard, W.: “Islam as a ‘System’ in the later writings of Sayyid Qutb” in: *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, 1989, pp. 31–50.

<sup>68</sup> Quṭb, M., 1965, p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> The influential Egyptian *dā‘ī* Wağdī Ġunaim recently gave a series of lectures entitled “*Islām, manḥağ al-ḥayāt*” for example. The lectures can be seen on Youtube.com. Running a Google search on the term will return thousands of results, including an enormous range of Islamist chat rooms, videos and articles.

Al-Maudūdī, who were writing at a time when the systemisation of Islam was still at a relatively early stage, the portrayal of Islam as a comprehensive life system or method in modern fundamentalist writings is much more common. Thus Muḥammad Quṭb’s portrayal can be seen as relating to a wider appreciation of the subject<sup>70</sup>.

As a *manḥağ al-ḥayāt*, Islam is the structuring force behind the life of the individual. It provides the orientation to all his thoughts and activities, whether sacred or profane, in all times and stages of his life<sup>71</sup>. It is not possible for the Muslim to differentiate between acts and belief, or for a contradiction to exist between the two. Indeed, an important theme in Quṭb’s teaching is his critique of the “Murji’ites” who claim that their religion is in their heart without implementing their faith publicly. The *ṣahāda*, he argues, is not pronounced with the tongue or the heart only, but with the body, through prayer and with the acts of the believer<sup>72</sup>.

Quṭb’s interpretation of Islam is consciously worldly. His view that Islam is the religion that harmonises the relations between this world and the hereafter most perfectly leads him to see both the daily life of the believer and worldly status as reflecting and fulfilling the relationship to God.

Considering the former aspect first, Quṭb rejects the concept of privatized religion that he identifies in the West. He argues that the believer must practise his religion openly; indeed, his entire private and public life must be regulated by Islam.

Thus the Muslim who practises his religion privately is inferior to the Muslim who lives and works in a Muslim society or, even better, helps to build a Muslim society for others. Quṭb fiercely criticizes the Sufis who withdraw from society to practise their faith alone<sup>73</sup>. He accuses them of having contributed

<sup>70</sup> W. C. Smith discusses the systemisation of Islam in more detail. See Smith, W. C.: *Islam in modern history*. Princeton 1957.

<sup>71</sup> Quṭb, M. 1987, p. 180.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

<sup>73</sup> This criticism is a relatively common one amongst Islamic fundamentalists. However, Sufism has frequently played a role in the rejuvenation of Islam and in Islamic activism. See: Weissman, I.: “The politics of popular religion: Sufis, Salafis and Muslim Brothers in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hamah” in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 37, Nr. 1, 2005, pp. 39–58.

to the downfall of the Muslim *umma* by not having participated in the social expression of the religion. Without social implementation the religion became passive and lethargic, until it degenerated to its current state.

The realization of Islam in the public sphere necessitates the role of sharia as the sole source of legislation in society. This is also necessitated by the second aspect mentioned above, that worldly status reflects religious truth. Quṭb uses verse 50 of *sūrat al-mā’ida* to emphasize the blasphemy inherent in placing man made law on the same level as the law of God<sup>74</sup>. Only the society in which sharia is the sole legislative principle can be defined as an Islamic society. Although Quṭb acknowledges that Muslims living in non-Islamic societies are not unbelievers, he makes this judgement contingent on the exceptional circumstances in which Muslims find themselves today and on the condition that the Muslim work at every possible opportunity for the establishment of an Islamic society<sup>75</sup>. Thus even his concession makes it clear that the primary sphere in which he perceives the implementation of Islam is the social and the political one, and that sharia is as central to Islam as *tauḥīd*<sup>76</sup>. This principle is basic to his thought.

The growing importance that the legislative role of sharia is receiving in Islamist and Muslim dialogue and the fact that this does not necessarily correspond to the classical portrayal has been widely noted<sup>77</sup>. Whilst the topic is too complex to be done justice to here, it is relevant to note the extent to which Quṭb’s definition of the Islamic society and his calls to “reinstate” the sharia as exclusive governance correspond

<sup>74</sup> This verse is frequently used in Islamist rhetoric about the role of the sharia. It is referred to 21 times on the personal website of Safar al-Ḥawālī, for example. See [www.alhawali.com](http://www.alhawali.com). The interpretation given by Muḥammad Quṭb is also found in Saiyid Quṭb’s Qur’an interpretation, *Fi zilāl al-qur’ān*.

<sup>75</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Ḥaula taṭbīq aṣ-ṣarī’a*. Al-Qāhira 1991b, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> Quṭb describes the change that Islam brought as two-fold; firstly, it taught the Arabs to turn away from polytheism and to worship God alone, and secondly, it taught them to “stipulate their *ḥalāl* and their *ḥarām* according to the command of God and not their own desire”. Quṭb, M. 1987, p. 28. The institution of sharia is thus placed on the same level as *tauḥīd* itself, an ideological structure that is repeated throughout Quṭb’s works.

<sup>77</sup> Krämer’s article “Islamic discourse contested; Middle Eastern and European perspectives” emphasizes the current significance of sharia in Muslim discourse and contrasts this with the more traditional perspective. The article contains a number of references for further research into the subject.

to those of other Islamists and thus resonate with existing ideals and teachings. It reflects a conscious rejection of the privatization of religion associated with a secular, western modernity.

The systematisation or rationalisation of Islam as a *manḥağ* and the prioritisation of the sharia is an important basis for Muḥammad Quṭb’s understanding of the eternal relevance of Islam. He portrays Islam as a self-sufficient system in itself and wholly independent of foreign additions. As such, it possesses a flexible structure that allows it to adapt to new circumstances, whilst maintaining a rigid basis that encompasses the teaching of revelation. In “At-taṭauwur wa-ṭ-ṭabāt fi ḥayāt al-baṣar” Quṭb describes this tension between rigidity and flexibility that allows Islam to maintain its relevance to modern life.

Quṭb’s presentation of Islam as a comprehensive, integrated *manḥağ* precludes the possibility of its privatization or any compromise with a secular society. The definition of faith through acts makes it incumbent upon the Muslim to follow Islamic law in every aspect of his life and to constantly work for the establishment of the Islamic society. Indeed, it is the role of sharia as the sole legislative source and not a Muslim demographic majority that defines a society as Islamic. The following section will examine how Quṭb envisages this society, in which all political, social and private activities are governed by the sharia.

### 2.3 Quṭb’s vision of the Islamic society

The Islamic society (*al-muğtama‘a al-islāmī*) is a central concept in Quṭb’s thought. His call for its establishment gives his work important political implications. However, he avoids direct conflict with the regime by focussing on the lower, social levels of society, rather than the higher, political levels.

The lowest level is that of the individual. Muḥammad Quṭb’s depiction of the individual is far deeper and more scientifically oriented than that of Saiyid Quṭb, despite the fundamental similarity in the social and political outlook of the brothers. In contrast to Saiyid Quṭb, who rarely discusses the psychology of the individual in his works, Muḥammad Quṭb established his reputation with his important

work “Al-insān baina ’l-māddiya wa-’l-Islām”, published in 1951. The work discusses psychological and sociological theories of the individual in western contemporary science and much of Muḥammad Quṭb’s subsequent work has focussed on the Islamic response to these<sup>78</sup>. And although he refers to many of the writers that Saiyid Quṭb also refers to in his works (Darwin, Nietzsche, Huxley, Carrel and Morrison) Muḥammad Quṭb tends to focus more on the implications of their thought for the individual than for society, as Saiyid Quṭb does.

His work is heavily influenced by his engagement with European psychological and social science and the works of Freud, Durkheim and Marx in particular<sup>79</sup>. He is fundamentally opposed to the materialist basis and orientation of their thought and frequently refers to this as a Jewish attempt to undermine the morals of European society<sup>80</sup>. He attributes the enthusiastic response in European circles to these theories to the desire to be freed from the oppression of the church<sup>81</sup> combined with an innate materialism in European culture as a result of its Greek and Roman heritage<sup>82</sup>.

In conscious distinction to the materialist perception (and in common with all religious world-views), Quṭb portrays the human personality as divinely instilled, with a specific orientation and a specific goal. He sees this as the decisive difference between humans and animals. However, he does also describe humans as influenced by their physical functions and to a lesser extent, by their material surroundings, reflecting the influence of Freud and Marx.

Quṭb depicts human personality as consisting of a mass of differing and conflicting urges and desires<sup>83</sup>, including the sexual drive, aggression, and the desire to raise children. He also sees the attraction to material wealth and worldly status as innate aspects of the human personality and supports this argument with verse 14 of *sūrat Āl-’Imrān*<sup>84</sup>. He emphasizes the human need for revenge and for respect and recognition which can cause conflict in society. Alongside the destructive desires, he also emphasizes the orientation towards worship and the intrinsic goodness in the human personality that pulls man towards God. All of these desires are present in the human *fiṭra* and cannot be repressed or ignored. Rather, they must be given a channel for expression and prevented from dominating the other dimensions of the personality.

Thus, the individual is portrayed as consisting of conflicting urges, which are coordinated by a correct Islamic understanding. He is capable of having a fundamentally positive relationship to society, if the society is also regulated by Islamic *taṣawwur*. Conflict is a sign of imbalance and insufficient religious understanding. In turn, religious understanding is transmitted to the individual through education, upbringing and his social surroundings.

This role is most directly fulfilled by the family. Before discussing it more deeply however, a few points about Quṭb’s definition of the family should be made. Firstly, he takes the existence of the family entirely for granted. Even in his most colourful presentations of the degeneration of western society he maintains the view of children with a father and mother, albeit a mother who they rarely see. His unquestioning faith in the classical form of the family reflects the social realities of his childhood in Egypt and the tone of the European literature that he was reading in the thirties, forties and fifties. However, it is interesting that the picture does not change in his later works. For an English-speaking, newspaper-reading and internet-savvy adult in the Gulf, there are sufficient sources testifying to wholly different forms of the family in western society. Single-parenting, homosexual marriage and communal living

<sup>83</sup> Quṭb, M.: *ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> “Beautiful for mankind is love of the joys that come from women and offspring and stored up heaps of gold and silver and horses branded (with their mark) and cattle and land. That is comfort of the life of the world.” 3;14. From the translation of Pickthall, M.: *The glorious Qur’an*, New York 2006, p. 56.

are all “degenerations” of which other Islamic ideologues have made use<sup>85</sup>; it is curious that Quṭb, who makes western degeneration a recurring motif in his works, never refers to these innovations.

Secondly, although he perceives the core of the family to be the mother, father and children, it is clear that his definition of the family as an institution includes the wider circle of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins etc. He criticizes the social changes in Egypt that have led to the demise of the extended household outside rural areas.

The role of instilling and directing the religious conscience is the most important function of the family. Indeed, it is only the family that can properly fulfil this role, due to the unique influence that it exercises on the child during his formative years. The child learns his religion, his values, his orientation and his behaviour in the family, before and after entering social life. The family is the source of religious education and socialization of the individual, although in Quṭb’s world view the latter function is only an aspect of the former anyway. Klatch identifies a similar “civilising function” for the family in her analysis of Christian fundamentalist discourse<sup>86</sup>. She observes that the necessity of the family to civilise the individual reveals an essentially pessimistic view of human nature in the Christian fundamentalist world view. This pessimism is certainly identifiable in the works of Quṭb, particularly in his emphasis on the need for guidance and education in the upbringing of humanity.

In addition to the pedagogic function, the role of the family as a haven of rest and regeneration from the turmoil of social life is also emphasized by Quṭb. This reinforces his portrayal of the family as a kind of halfway house between the individual and society. It both prepares the individual for social life and shelters him from the hardship that he might experience there.

<sup>85</sup> Examples are Muḥammad al-Ġazālī and al-Qaraḍāwī, whose work, *Al-usra kamā yuriduhā al-islām* makes frequent and disgusted reference to the legality of same-sex marriages, the tolerance for homosexuality recommended by the UN conference on women and family affairs, and the right of women to abortion that was recommended by the same conference. See al-Qaraḍāwī, *idem*. pp. 4, 44–49.

<sup>86</sup> Klatch, R.: *Women of the new right*. Philadelphia 1987, p. 22.

The family is portrayed as having a direct effect on the course of history. This is partly through its decisive influence on the character of the men that run society and partly through the regeneration that these men find at home which is crucial to their success. Thus the most basic unit is also the most important. This is a recurring motif in Quṭb’s works. His portrayal of society and politics can be described as “bottom-up” in that he sees the lower, simple levels as formatively influencing the higher, more complex layers of a structure<sup>87</sup>. Similarly, he frequently warns that an instable basis will lead to the collapse of a society or institution. And his “call for action” to the Muslim *ṣaḥwa* is to begin with the most simple level of society and the young, before spreading the message up through the echelons. Thus he emphasizes the importance of the lower levels of the hierarchy in both a social and age-related sense. This “bottom-up” approach is characteristic of almost all Islamist movements and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, whose political ideology has heavily influenced that of Quṭb. In his speeches Ḥasan al-Bannā’ calls for the conversion of the individual, then the family and then society, rather than beginning with the leader. Given the repressive circumstances under which Islamist movements operate, this perspective has obvious pragmatic benefits. It also reflects the level of dissonance that the writers feel with the ruling factions of society, which is often due to their own lower-middle class origins and the low chances of their finding political acceptance.

The third “level” in Quṭb’s structure is the social sphere of work and civil interaction. This sphere is an exclusively male domain and the participation of women is described as a threat to the order and the harmony that characterises it<sup>88</sup>. Non-Muslims are also partially excluded from this sphere; although Quṭb emphasizes their right to work and live safely

<sup>87</sup> In political science, bottom-up is a term used to describe the movement of a grass-roots movement such as the Muslim Brotherhood on higher political structures such as government. It is usually used to describe a process and not, as I am using it here, to describe an ideological orientation. However, because the image that the phrase implies is so clear and because this ideological orientation is usually implicit within the process that it describes, I think that its use in this context is justified and understandable.

<sup>88</sup> Gender divisions in Quṭb’s work are discussed in more detail in the following section. See pp. 30–44.

<sup>78</sup> See for example, Quṭb, M.: *Fī ’n-nafs wa-’l-muḡtama’*. Al-Qāhira 1975, *Dirāsāt fī ’n-nafs al-insāniya*. Al-Qāhira 2005.

<sup>79</sup> His interest in Durkheim is interesting, as Durkheim is not one of the standard names mentioned in the Islamist discussion of western science. It may reflect his studies in psychology at Dār al-’Ulūm, where it is likely that the syllabus included reference to Durkheim’s social theories.

<sup>80</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Al-insān baina ’l-māddiya wa-’l-Islām*. Al-Qāhira 1977, p. 28. Quṭb supports this argument by emphasizing the Jewish identity of the three scientists. Quṭb’s portrayal of European science and liberalism as a Jewish conspiracy is discussed more fully below. See 4.3, p. 40–43.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p.16.

<sup>82</sup> Despite this opposition, he does incorporate significant amounts of their teaching. See chapter 5 for an analysis of Quṭb’s incorporation of western thought.

in a Muslim society, it is clear that he does not award them a status equivalent to Muslim citizens.

As explained above, the implementation of the sharia is the main criteria in Quṭb's definition of an Islamic society. So central is this theme to his thought that he has dedicated an entire book ("Ḥaula taṭbīq aṣ-ṣarī'a") to the application of sharia to modern life, as well as referring to it in other works. In particular, he defends the *hudūd* punishments against "western" claims that they are barbaric or antiquated<sup>89</sup>, portraying them as a last resort and mainly invoked for their deterrent effect.

In addition to the legal rulings of the sharia, the society portrayed by Quṭb is one motivated by the same love of Islam and spirit of jihad that moved the Righteous Forefathers. The shared religious understanding minimises the potential for social conflict. Although Quṭb is at pains to avoid idealising the Islamic society and emphasizes that no society can wholly escape crime<sup>90</sup>, he describes the proportion of criminals and mentally ill as lower in an Islamic society than in any other. He dismisses the social illnesses and exploitation described by Freud and Marx as only applicable to sick western societies, in which the monopoly of the Church or the overindulgence of the senses has destroyed the real spirit of social interaction.

Beyond the emphasis on the importance of the *hudūd* for maintaining social order, Quṭb makes very little reference to the social institutions or structures required to support an Islamic society in the twentieth century. Shepard notes the same characteristic in Saiyid Quṭb's work<sup>91</sup>. Muḥammad Quṭb takes an interest in how an Islamic society would tackle modern problems such as unemployment or the need for bank loans and he refers the readers to other works (such as al-Maudūdī or 'Isā 'Abduh Ibrāhīm) that discuss these<sup>92</sup>. However, he describes the subject as not fitting for discussion "in this context", reflecting his self-understanding as an ideologue rather than a politician in a practical sense. The omission may also reflect his slightly more relaxed attitude to the

<sup>89</sup> Quṭb, M. 1991b, pp. 21, 149.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>91</sup> Shepard, W.: "The development of the thought of Sayyid Quṭb as reflected in earlier and later editions of 'Social Justice in Islam'" in: *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 32, Nr. 2, 1992, pp. 196–236.

<sup>92</sup> Quṭb, M.: *At-taṭawwur wa-ṭ-ṭabāt fi ḥayāt al-baṣar*. Al-Qāhira 1974, p. 251.

form of social and political structures, in comparison to the domestic model. In "Ḥaula taṭbīq aṣ-ṣarī'a" Quṭb argues that the institutions and structures in a society are not God-given. As long as innovations do not contradict the sharia, any necessary alterations may be introduced. In contrast to the flexibility that he proposes in this sphere, he sees the form and structure of the family as God-given and therefore not subject to any change<sup>93</sup>. This contrast could be seen as symptomatic of his bottom-up world view discussed above.

The structural level that features the least in Quṭb's discourse is the highest, or the ruling level. His discussion of Islamic government tends to focus on the duties of the citizens rather than those of the leader.

Whereas Islamists such as Ġannūṣī<sup>94</sup> defend Islam's democratic credentials with reference to the *šūra* principle, Quṭb rejects the institution as a whole. He praises democracy as one of the most positive aspects of *ḡāhiliya* society, but emphasizes that the principle of majority rule contradicts the rule of God represented by sharia<sup>95</sup>. Other forms of political philosophy or organization (such as socialism, liberalism or dictatorship) are referred to by Quṭb, but in a wholly negative sense and mainly to exemplify the crisis to which *ḡāhiliya* political thought can lead<sup>96</sup>.

Despite, or perhaps because of his rejection of democracy, Quṭb is at pains to emphasize the absence of tyranny in an Islamic society; the rule of God through sharia excludes any possibility of human despotism. He describes the sole function of the ruler as the implementation of sharia and emphasizes the lack of personal decision involved. Because the ruler is bound by the same law that he makes for others,

<sup>93</sup> This is the same view as that expressed by al-Qaraḍāwī in his book, *Aṣ-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiya bain al-ḡuḥūd wa-ṭ-taṭarruf*. Online resource 2004.

<sup>94</sup> For more on Ġannūṣī's portrayal of the relationship between Islam and democracy, see Ġannūṣī, R.: *Al-ḥurriyāt al-ḡamma fi ṭ-daula al-islāmiya*. Bairūt 1993.

<sup>95</sup> Quṭb, M. 1991b, pp. 53, 86. For more discussion of rejection and "islamization" of democracy see Zeidun, D. 2003, p. 219–224, Shepard, W.: "Islam and ideology: Towards a typology" in: *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 19, 1987, pp. 307–336. Shepard considers the apologetic or rejectionist attitude towards democracy as part of the criteria for distinguishing between Islamic "modernists" and Islamic "traditionalists".

<sup>96</sup> In *Maḍāhib fikriya mu'āsira* (2001) Quṭb concentrates on the various political philosophies with which *ḡāhiliya* society has experimented over the centuries.

he is unlikely to make unjust decrees or to lay unduly heavy burdens on his citizens, argues Quṭb.

A further argument against tyranny is the conditional nature of civil obedience in an Islamic society. A ruler who does not administer sharia correctly or is corrupt in any way has no claim on his subjects' loyalty, argues Quṭb<sup>97</sup>. Furthermore, subjects are compelled by their Islamic duty to challenge a leader whose political or moral probity is in question. An important motif in Quṭb's and indeed most Islamists' writings is the Qur'anic injunction to "command the good and forbid evil"<sup>98</sup>. Whilst this command forms the basis of his criticism of the Sufis and Murji'ites who fail to prevent social decay, Quṭb also interprets it as a call to hold the leader to account for his actions. He makes frequent reference to Salmān al-Fārisi's questioning of 'Umar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb as an example of Islamic insistence on an upright ruler<sup>99</sup>. Thus the structure portrayed by Quṭb contains a two-part political control mechanism; rulers are constrained from above, by the divine commandments of the sharia and from below, by the Muslim citizens. It is the lack of constraint from either direction that has led to the current political crisis.

Quṭb portrays the application of Islam as *manḥaḡ al-ḥayāt* as the success formula for every social level. Although the individual is a complex and inherently flawed being, a correct understanding of Islam can harmonise his relationship with himself and with his surroundings. Correspondingly, a correct Islamic understanding within society as a whole will minimise internal conflict and correct the humiliating international status from which the Muslim world currently suffers.

The portrayal reflects his bottom-up perspective discussed earlier; the lower the structural level and the more basic the influence, the stronger the effect on the fate of society<sup>100</sup>. It also reflects his assump-

<sup>97</sup> Quṭb, M. 1991b, p. 39.

<sup>98</sup> *Al-amr bi-ṭ-ṭaḥrīf wa-ṭ-n-nahy 'an al-munkar*. Cf. Qur'an 3:104 etc.

<sup>99</sup> Quṭb, M.: *Al-Islām ka-badīl 'an al-afkār wa- ṭ-ṭ-aqā'id al-mustaurada wa-abḥāṭ uḥrā*. Al-Qāhira 1993, p. 47, Quṭb, M. 1987, p. 279.

<sup>100</sup> Central to this perspective is the level of influence and not the size of the unit. Therefore, although the individual is "smaller" or more basic than the family in terms of numbers, the family shapes the outlook of the individual and is more basic in terms of influence. Correspondingly, the family and not the individual is the most basic and central element in

tion that methods and mentalities can be transferred between levels or areas to achieve the same results. Thus the Islamic understanding that brings an individual to inner harmony can be applied to a political leader, a banker or an international community to achieve the same results. The highly idealistic and schematic nature of this vision hardly needs pointing out here. Quṭb's idealism is not inappropriate; his own definition of an Islamic society excludes every Muslim society in history, save that of the Prophet, from fulfilling this criteria. His merging of idealism with a future almost within grasp of the believers is an extremely powerful rhetorical method. Not only does it render practical details irrelevant, it also encourages the readers to renew their struggle, for the sake of the glorious new order that is approaching. The unparalleled superiority of this new order will be examined in the following section.

Quṭb's bottom up perspective. See footnote 87 for a discussion of this point.

Muḥammad Qutb (b. 1919) is the younger brother of the Islamist ideologue Saiyid Qutb. Despite his popularity as a writer and thinker in the Islamic world and his influence on the interpretation of the teaching of his brother, his work has received little attention from western scholars. This study examines his thought by focussing on his theory of feminism as a Jewish conspiracy to destroy Islam and the need to counter the threat in order to bring about the rebirth of the religion. It also shows how he develops the teaching of Saiyid Qutb as well as introducing new concepts not found in the work of his brother.

# BíH

## ZUR AUTORIN

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