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A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab

by

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Abstract:

This thesis is a cross examination of the life and writings of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The main thesis argues that both Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab largely interpreted Islamic doctrines in light of their own relevant political issues. Through the process of legitimating their political struggles through Islamic texts they distorted the image of Islam to suit their own purposes. The thesis tries to assert the relationship between the religious interpretation of these two Islamic scholars and compare them based on the critical analysis of relevant scholarship. The conclusion of this thesis, in accordance with this view, is that Islam does not advocate compulsion in religion and that militant religious extremists like Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab have used the teachings of Islam to further their own political agendas, rather than apply a profoundly insightful interpretation of the sacred texts. The final goal of this thesis is to advocate an increased awareness and renewed dialogue between the spiritual aspects of Islam versus the political or legal aspects of Islam.

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Table of Contents:

- ❖ Introduction: pg. 1

- ❖ Chapter 1: Biography of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab: pg. 6

- ❖ Chapter 2: The Writings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab: pg. 32

- ❖ Chapter 3: Biography of Sayyid Qutb: pg. 42

- ❖ Chapter 4: The Writings of Sayyid Qutb: pg. 71

- ❖ Chapter 5: Comparing and Contrasting Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb:
pg. 97

- ❖ Chapter 6: The Influence of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab on
Abdullah Yusuf Azzam pg. 118

- ❖ Chapter 7: Conclusion: pg. 124

- ❖ Bibliography: pg. 129

I.) Introduction

Two of the most important Islamic scholars in the modern era are Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb. For better or worse, these two individuals helped shape how Islam is viewed and practiced around the globe. Their ideas reflect important religious, social and political themes that were defined by their times and continue to redefine the Islamic intellectual discourse through their ideological legacy. Their ideas and ideology has trickled down through the ages and promoted drastic social change. It is undeniable that the effects of these two figures continue to have a resonating scholarly effect that permeates modern discourse in both major and subtle manners. To some Muslims they remain great Islamic reformers that challenged the misguided orthodoxy of their times. In particular, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, an influential Palestinian Islamic scholar who helped the Afghani Mujahedeen fighters in the 1980's and was a mentor to Osama bin Laden, took the ideas of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as a platform to launch his own ideas of political Islamism.¹ However, to others they remain a source for violent rhetoric and intolerance towards both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The objective of this thesis will be to better understand these two figures in order to validate these claims and in order to assert exactly what their legacies have been over time.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb are individuals that aimed to address and correct problems within the practice of Islam on the social, political and spiritual levels. However noble or admirable their intentions might have been there was undoubtedly a misplaced merger between Islam as a religion and the political atmosphere of the time. The issue here is the fact that these figures used religious rhetoric as a political tool towards obtaining political objectives. This merger between religion and politics even at the best of times allows politics to

¹ Miller, Frederic, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, Alphascript Publishing, 2010

mask itself in religious rhetoric. Moreover, this allows political messages and tenets to be portrayed in a message of religious fervour and subliminal devotional undertones. In the case of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, it was the political alliance that he forged with Muhammad Ibn Saud that transformed his message of theological reformation from the status of humble Arabian Islamic scholar to the socio-political policies of the First Saudi State. Likewise, it was Qutb's involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood that took Qutb's theological scholarship from a theoretical academic undertaking towards a militant political doctrine. These issues will be explored in the subsequent pages in order to compare and contrast the salient features of each scholarly figure.

Yet, what is first necessary is a cognitive foundational framework in order to understand exactly what the ideology for militant Islamic extremism advocates so that one will better comprehend how these scholarly figures strengthen their ideology. Mark Jurgensmeyer in his book Global Rebellion uncovers, through his deep analysis of militant religious extremists that extremists commonly believe that their cause is tied to what they view as a cosmic warfare paradigm. According to Jurgensmeyer, extremists believe that there is a type of divine conflict going on and they view themselves as soldiers on the side of good and they are pitted against the sinister forces of evil. Subsequently, the battles or acts of terrorism they inflict are viewed as sacred deeds and this violence symbolizes their struggle to defeat the forces representing their perceived sense of evil in the world. Jurgensmeyer argues that it is not religion per se that is the problem but rather the religious response to political problems that proves problematic.

People often allow for religion to personalize an ongoing political conflict by seeking religious types of rewards, ie. Heaven, merit or spiritual redemption. Religion also creates a common community from which organizational networks can be formed in order to solidify the

basis of a leadership structure that can control and persuade large groups of like-minded individuals. Jurgensmeyer further explains this research by stating:

Religion's images of cosmic war further complicate a conflict that has become hardened by positions reinforced with religious authority. The notion of cosmic war is by definition an all-encompassing worldview. Supporters of Christian militia movements, for instance, described their "aha" moment when they discovered the worldview of the totalizing ideology that helped them make sense of the modern world, their increasingly peripheral role in it, and the actions they can take to set the world right. It gives them roles as religious soldiers who can literally fight back against the forces of evil. When the template of spiritual battle is implanted onto a worldly conflict, it dramatically changes how those engaged in it perceive that conflict. It absolutizes the conflict into extreme opposing positions and demonizes opponents by imagining them to be satanic powers. This absolutism makes compromise difficult to achieve and holds out the promise of total victory through divine intervention. A sacred war that is waged in a godly span of time need not be won immediately, however. The timeline of sacred struggle is vast, perhaps even eternal. (Jurgensmeyer, pg. 255)

This passage powerfully encapsulates the apparent paradigm from which militant religious extremists view the world. This notion of a cosmic warfare model that Jurgensmeyer outlines eloquently explains the mentality of many Islamic extremists and also many other religiously oriented militant organizations. One of the main reasons why Jurgensmeyer's analysis is so powerful is due to the fact that it draws upon the relevant ideology of what it means to have a religious struggle. It is likewise reflected in certain aspects of Qutb's and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's ideology.

In many major religions, there is this theological conception of a cosmic struggle taking place between the forces of Good and Evil. Many times this struggle is theorized to have God on the side of Good and Satan on the side of Evil. This simple black and white construction of reality allows for religiously orientated militants to envision their political struggles against this larger cosmic framework. Inevitably, if religious extremists depict themselves as struggling to

defeat their adversary then their adversary must therefore represent the side of evil.² This helps to explain why religious extremists are so adamant about their political positions and are willing to risk everything in order to obtain their goals. Therefore, when politics and religion become intertwined it has the possibility of creating a dangerous ideology that ties itself up in the cosmic struggle that theology references. This applies not only to Islamic extremists but all religious extremists that perceive in a form of cosmic dualism predicated upon a struggle between Good and Evil.

The arguments that Jurgensmeyer underscores allow for a practical understanding of how militant religious extremists are able to cloak their political ambitions in a style of religious rhetoric that suits their own goals or ambitions. Yet, it is relevant to note that in Islam, religion and how one chooses to practice religion is a matter for an individual to decide. This is apparent in the fact that the Quran itself states:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects tagut [anything worshipped besides God] and believes in Allah [God] hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks and Allah [God] heareth and knoweth all things. (Quran 2:256)

This passage would indicate that there is no compulsion to follow any of the commandments in religion except for the benefit of one's soul. Yet, political conceptions of social justice dictate certain regulations that must be obeyed. For example, murder is not permitted by the state and is subject to criminal penalties. However, both Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Qutb have at times sanctioned killing based on a religious ideology and have unfortunately opened the ideological gates for more radical extremists to use their scholarship as a precedent for their own heinous

² The term evil is a distinct term within Religious Studies denoting many different meanings. In the Islamic and Judeo-Christian delineation of evil, based on the Quran and Bible, is predicated upon the direct opposition to the will of God.

crimes.³ Extremists have used their precedents to judge fellow Muslims and condemn them to death in places like Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

In the following chapters, this thesis will attempt to explain the writings of Ibn Abd Wahhab and Qutb in order to better understand how they intertwined religion and politics. Through this research the goal will be to better comprehend how followers became militant religious extremists through hijacking religious principles and twisted them to suit their own goals. We turn first to the life and times of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

³ See: Aboul-Enein, Youssef, Militant Islamist Ideology, Naval Institute Press, 2010, pg. 112-113

Chapter 1: Biography of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab

i.) Sources

In many ways, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was a creation of his time. The geopolitical, political and social struggles that were going on around him helped to shape and mould Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's character. The author Natana J. Delong-Bas in her book Wahhabi Islam thoroughly researched the history of Wahhabism or Salafism as it is also known.⁴ One of the first things that Delong-Bas does is review the biographical sources that clarify Ibn Abd Wahhab's character from different sources. Delong-Bas states:

Most of what is known about Ibn Abd al-Wahhab comes from four types of sources: (1) contemporary chronicles written by his supporters, the most important of whom were Husayn Ibn Ghannam and Uthman Ibn Bishr; (2) polemical works written by his opponents, the most important of whom was Ahmad bin Zayni Dahlan; (3) accounts written by Western travelers to Arabia; and (4) Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own written works. Of all of these accounts, the chronicles contain the most biographical information and are considered to be the most accurate in terms of biographical information because of the proximity of the writers to their subjects. (Delong-Bas, pg. 14)

What this passage reveals is that even during Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's time he was a controversial figure who attracted both support and condemnation from critics. What is also clear is that it is difficult to ascertain the truth regarding Ibn Abd al-Wahhab due to the fact that the most accurate reports of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab actually came from his supporters or Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself,

⁴ The term Wahhabi is a Western academic term that was used to describe the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. However, the term that the followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab use to describe themselves is Salafis. This is mainly due to the fact that the Wahhabis/Salafis believe that the term "Wahhabi" is pejorative since the title "al-Wahhab" is a title of God meaning "the Bestower". This discussion is rather arbitrary since the term Wahhabi is completely different in both meaning and wording from 'al-Wahhab'. Furthermore, the term "Wahhabi" is a rather slanderous term in the modern vernacular due to the fact that the term "Wahhabi" is used almost synonymously with the idea of one being a radical extremist Muslim (at least in the Western academic world), which partially explains why the followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab choose to distance themselves from this term.

which undoubtedly contain at least some sort of bias. Likewise, since his critics were so dismissive of his ideology and critical of his methodology it is difficult to find a balance between what is factual and what are polemical attacks. Yet, with this in mind it does seem possible to at least establish some firm grounding in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's character.

ii.) Najd

The next step for understanding Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is to acknowledge the society from which Ibn Abd al-Wahhab came. This primarily means that it is important to examine the Najd region of Saudi Arabia prior to his arrival. Najd is a vast expanse of desert land in Central and Central-East Arabia. Najd has often been described as a desert wasteland, standing in contrast to the more cosmopolitan Hijaz region, which is home to the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. While the Hijaz has been at the forefront of international commerce and educational exchanges, Najd has traditionally been considered a more isolated region, off the beaten track of the caravan routes. These factors help explain why Najd has never been a prime location for tourism or foreign conquest.

What is also important to note is that the later Muslim empires chose to ignore this region, rather than to incorporate it as part of their empire. This would suggest that Najd had a distinct advantage of being left to its own course of action. Although there was an influx of culture and the exchange of ideas, this remained on a smaller scale than in more cosmopolitan regions. Consequently, Najd's history has been marked more by local tribal warfare and chieftains struggling for power than by its position as part of a broader state or empire. Even when other portions of Arabian Peninsula were claimed by the Ottoman Empire, Najd retained its

independence.⁵ This is important to keep in mind because it refutes the notion that Wahhabism or Salafism was a direct response to European colonialism or even Ottoman influences.

iii.) Reformist Movement

The 18th century into which Ibn Abd-al-Wahhab was born is often described as the century of renewal and reform in Islam; it was a time when revivalist movements of various types arose in a variety of locations.⁶ Although each movement had its own specific characteristics, reflecting the environments and contexts in which they arose, 18th century revival and reform movements share some common themes and emphases. Unlike the movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, which arose in response to external aggressions, like European imperialism, or the desire for political independence, the movements of the 18th century arose largely in response to internal conditions. The most important of these was the perceived deterioration of Muslim beliefs and practices.

For 18th century reformers, one of the major signs of the deterioration of Islam was the adoption of rituals and beliefs from other religions, such as praying to saints and believing that saints could grant blessings or perform miracles. In some cases, people had adopted superstitious practices, like spitting in a particular way or wearing charms to ward off evil spirits. Reformers were puzzled and perturbed by these practices, particularly when they were accompanied by a failure to respect Muslim rituals and prayers. They wondered whether the people engaged in these activities knew why they were doing so or what such actions symbolized. Some questioned whether a person engaged in such activities could still be considered a Muslim since their actions

⁵ Delong-Bas, Natana, Wahhabi Islam, Oxford University Press, 2004

⁶ Ibid

reflected a belief that people and things other than God possessed the power to grant requests or provide protection. These reforms were in many ways a positive step towards reaffirming the original principles of the faith and removing the negative innovations.

These reformers believed that the very nature of absolute monotheism or “tawhid” in Arabic was under threat.⁷ Therefore, the conclusion for many Islamic scholars of the time was a necessary return to “tawhid” and the removal of innovations in Islam by a stricter adherence to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad [p.b.u.h.].⁸ Delong-Bas elaborates this point further by stating:

18th century reformers believed that adherence to tawhid should also be reflected in public life by placing God at the center of the political order. Theoretically, this meant recognizing God as the creator and sustainer of all life and as the ultimate sovereign and lawgiver. Practically, it meant reimplementing Islamic law (Sharia) as the law of the land. 18th century reformers believed that this restoration of God to the center of Muslim public life was the key to recovering the power and prestige that Muslims had enjoyed in the past during the rules of the great empires and caliphates. (Delong-Bas, pg. 9)

In this quote, it becomes evident that reformers were in many ways a response to the religious deterioration of the time. Just as the pendulum of a old-fashioned clock swings back and forth, the reformers saw their faith pushed to the brink of shambles and they sought to swing the momentum towards the far other side by re-stabilising Islamic law. What this meant was that the superstitions and false beliefs that had crept into Islam needed to be removed. Yet, what was even more important for these 18th century reformers was a firm conviction that a type of political Islam under the guise of Islamic law needed to be brought forward. However, the methodology that these reformers utilized for the implementation of Islamic law was not through

⁷ Ibid

⁸ The parenthesized [p.b.u.h.] is used as a sign of respect for talking about a prophet and simply is the abbreviated form of “peace be upon him”.

a type of planned totalitarian political system but rather through a grass-roots movement of social reforms that moved private ethical and moral values to the forefront of the social scene. It was hoped that through this reawakening to public moral conduct the reformers would enact a “sociomoral reconstruction of society” (Delong-Bas).

The ambition of these reformers was to convince people via logical and reasonable arguments to forsake their erroneous practices which they wrongly believed were part of Islam, in favour of what the reformers believed to be the true spirit of Islam. Through this widespread acceptance of Islamic law in theory and principle, the reformers believed that there would be no need to coerce people into accepting their interpretation of Islamic law since people would willingly accept it and implement it in their daily lives without repressive state involvement. The crux of this strategy was the reinterpretation of the Hadiths (the recorded sayings and deeds of Muhammad [p.b.u.h.]) and to a lesser extent a reanalysis of the Quran (the word of God that was revealed to Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] by the archangel Gabriel).

It was believed by these reformers that by analysing and referencing these literary resources that the people would become more educated and through its knowledge begin to turn away from innovations in Islam. According to Delong-Bas, the reformers sought out a fundamentalist interpretation of the scriptures, just as the 19th century Christian fundamentalist movement sought to return to the core words of the Bible. This shift in focus to the core scriptures of the religion of Islam was immensely important because it replaced centuries of religious scholarship in favour of a direct interpretation of the scriptures. Additionally, Delong-Bas writes:

The dual emphasis of the 18th century reformers on the Quran and Hadith was neither unusual nor revolutionary, Muslims believe that the Quran and Hadith are complimentary.

The Quran, as God's Word, is a statement of God's will for all of humanity. Although it contains some legal prescriptions, it is not a law book. Rather, the Quran provides moral and ethical guidance and values that human beings are supposed to apply in their personal and public lives, individually and communally. The Hadith provides practical advice on how this is to be done. (DeLong-Bas, pg. 9-10)

It is clear from this passage that the Quran and Hadith were offered up by the reformers as a set of texts that would bring about this grass-roots movement towards reform and change. There was nothing particularly violent or militant about their interpretation of the Quran or Hadiths but rather the focus was on working towards ideals for society to uphold and methods for obtaining these ambitious goals. Based on the life of Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] and the revelations from the Quran, it was hoped that the people of Arabian Peninsula would see the error of their ways and seek a greater understanding for the religion they professed to follow. In religious scholarship there was likewise a shift in the studies of the Hadiths.

Part of this shift was due to how the Hadiths themselves were interpreted and accepted. According to the reformers, the life of Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] was a very important example for devout Muslims to follow. Yet, the reformers would break away from traditional Hadith scholarship by not only focusing on the chain of transmissions in the Hadiths but also the contents of the Hadiths themselves. This line of inquiry introduced new parameters towards understanding the authenticity of certain Hadiths. DeLong-Bas states:

The Hadiths were initially a series of oral testimonies transmitted by Muhammad's Companions and wives. Because they were oral, Hadiths were originally verified by determining whether the chain of transmitters (isnad) was credible. That is, could the original source truly have had knowledge of the issue in question because he or she had direct contact with either Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] or one of his Companions? Was the testimony passed down through a credible series of witnesses who were known to have had enough contact with each other to have made accurate transmission possible? Was the chain of transmitters unbroken in time? And were there multiple reports of the same incident, which would bolster the claim to authenticity? In the past, if the chain of

transmitters was found to be credible then the Hadith was declared authoritative and was incorporated into the later written compilations. (DeLong-Bas, pg. 10)

This passage outlines the rigorous methodology and critical analysis that needed to take place when dealing with the Hadiths. To take any Hadith at face value as being authentic was not only dangerous from a religious perspective but also ingenuous to the study of the Hadiths. That is why great care and careful discernment needed to take place when one attempted to uncover the authenticity of a Hadith. From the perspective of 18th century reformers this was not something entirely new, but was an added scrupulous methodology that sought to uncover the truth about Islam and spark a renewed dialogue in regards to the Hadiths.

Additionally, since many Hadiths were discovered to be forgeries or fabrications, the new methodology that these reformers sought to implement was to not simply base Hadiths on the chain of transmission as it had been in the past, but also on the continuity between the Hadiths and the Quran. Prior to this new methodology, the chain of transmission in the Hadiths was verified in order to ensure that the individuals who were narrating the Hadiths were truthful and virtuous individuals whose testimony could be accepted as factual. However, these new reformers sought to discern the content of the Hadiths for validity as well. The new stipulation for acceptance of a Hadith became the belief that a Hadith must be in agreement with the Quran. This ensured that both the Hadiths and the Quran would act as complimentary sources, with each validating the other. In the case where a Hadith had a strong chain of transmission but the content disagreed with the Quran then the Hadith would be rejected in favour of the Quran. This methodology would prove to be a key tool for Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his later followers since it provided a useful means of revitalizing the Islamic community by engaging in a new critique of the Hadiths and opening up a renewed interest in the study of the Hadiths.

The intention of these reformers was not to attempt a re-creation of the Islamic community of the Prophet Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] but rather it was an attempt to re-ignite a passionate quest for reinterpreting and understanding the scriptures. For those living in Najd at the time, it offered hope for a new and prosperous future that sought to reinvigorate religious adherence and remove false superstitions. The goals of these reformers were nothing short of a complete transformation of society by uncovering the true eternal values and ethical guidelines that the Quran and Hadiths had to offer. It was hoped that through this meaningful approach of studying the religion of Islam, a new conscious and cognitive awareness could be sparked that would forever change the private and public spheres of influence. Therefore, this reformist movement was viewed in much grander terms than merely an intellectual exercise but rather a broader social movement that would be able to reshape the very fabric of society.

This shift in the religious dynamic of the time period was in contrast to the more conservative approach to religious study as a form of jurisprudence. Despite the religious challenges by these reformers, there was still a large emphasis by the more conservative religious establishment to focus on Hanbali jurisprudence as a means establishing a firm legal system. The reformers were in many ways a break away from the traditional approach of studying Islamic law (Sharia law) as a practical enterprise that would lead one towards the future career as qadis (judges). In the book Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab by Abd Allah Salih al-Uthaymin the author notes:

It is apparent that Najdi scholars at this time concentrated their studies on jurisprudence, little attention being paid to other branches of religious knowledge. The main purpose of education in the region was to provide a sufficient number of scholars to act as judges in the towns. A man able to read and understand the Hanbali works on fiqh [jurisprudence] would most probably be entitled shaykh or alim (scholar) and have the opportunity to become a qadi [judge]. (Salih al-Uthaymin, pg. 22)

This confirms that the 18th century reformers were a break from the traditional past of Hanbali jurisprudence because their focus was more concentrated on social issues and a transformation of society. The winds of social change would pit this old established religious order against the newer voices that advocated more radical types of reforms. It was in this climate that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would be born and it would help shape the man that he would later become. In many ways, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would take the reins of the fledgling reformist movement and turn away from his family's traditional Hanbali jurisprudence.⁹

iv.) The Man and the Legend

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born in 1702 C.E. in the town of al-Uyaynah in the Arabian province of Najd¹⁰. He was a descendent from a prestigious family of Hanbali jurists and theologians. His grandfather, Sulayman ibn Ali ibn Musharraf, was a judge or “Qadi” in Arabic and was recognized as the greatest scholar and authority on Hanbali jurisprudence in Najd during his lifetime. His uncle Ibrahim ibn Sulayman, was both a judge and an issuer of legal opinions, known as a “mufti”. His father, Abd al-Wahhab ibn Sulayman, was the qadi of al-Uyaynah and served as his first teacher in both religion and jurisprudence, also known as “fiqh” in Arabic. This rich heritage in Islamic jurisprudence gave him a solid base for his future career in Islamic studies.

The life and teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder and ideologue of Wahhabism/Salafism, reflect these 18th century themes and power struggles as they were played out first in his home province of Najd and later throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Like his

⁹ Al-Uthaymin, Abd Allah Salih, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009

¹⁰ Ibid

contemporaries, he called for the socio-moral reconstruction of his society through greater adherence to monotheism (tawhid) and renewed attention to the Quran and Hadiths. He rejected imitation of the past (taqlid) in favour of fresh and direct interpretation (ijtihad) of the scriptures and Islamic law by contextualizing them and studying their content. He was first and foremost a religious scholar. He established a protective relationship with local political leaders, who agreed to implement his religious teachings. Jihad was neither the primary goal nor the purpose of the movement he inspired. He was opposed by local religious scholars and leaders who perceived threats to their own power bases from his teachings.¹¹

v.) Social Reform

Salih al-Uthaymin in his book describes that local leaders perceived Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings as a challenge not only to their political authority but also to their moral authority. They discerned that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reforms would not remain at the private, individual level but would ultimately have an impact on the public sphere and consequently their own bases of power. When the implications of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings about monotheism (tawhid) and his denunciation against innovations in religion became clear, there was political friction between him and the local authorities. Part of this friction came from the fact that the society at the time cherished many of these innovations as social customs and sacred spots were pilgrimage sites that tourists visited. The local leaders responded by refusing to recognize any truth in what he taught in an attempt to marginalize his views.

Opponents of the Wahhabi/Salafi movement point to the fact that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was pushed into leaving his home town as evidence of the "extremist" and "heretical" nature of his

¹¹ Ibid

teachings. However, the fact that his teachings were accepted until the local authorities began to feel that their bases of power were threatened makes it clear that the issues were really about power struggles and not so much about heretical religious teachings. Yet, this experience would prove to be a valuable learning experience for Ibn Abd al-Wahhab about the importance of political alliances.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's main methods were based on the power of persuasion. He sought to propagate his views of Islam through dialogue and discussion, rather than violence. From the accounts of his life and his own writings it is clear that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's primary concern was to remove "shirk" or the association of with anything with God and to remove "bida" or the innovations in Islam. In particular, the practices of Shia Islam and Sufi Islam he found full of what he deemed to be these deviant aspects of Islam.

The teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab first began to spread widely when he entered into a political alliance with Uthman Ibn Hamid Ibn Muammar, the ruler of al-Uyaynah. In exchange for Ibn Muammar's support for his religious teachings, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab agreed to support the ruler's political ambitions to expand his rule over Najd and beyond. On the surface it would appear as though Ibn Muammar held the upper hand because Ibn Abd al-Wahhab used his religious scholarship to legitimate Ibn Muammar's rule and therefore served as a useful political advantage.¹²

The alliance formed between Ibn Muammar and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was important for several reasons. First, it foreshadowed the later alliance between Muhammad Ibn Saud and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab that led to the foundation of the First Saudi State, which remains intact today as

¹² Ibid

the Third Saudi State. This proved to be a popular tactic that was adopted by many other 18th century reformers throughout the Muslim world as a means of propagating their religious message. This proves that the formation of a religious-political alliance was not unique to the Wahhabis/Salafis movement. Yet, it is a break from traditional Islamic scholarship since an Islamic scholar must then walk a fine ideological line between calling for reforms while still muting criticism of the undesirable political policies enforced by the political leadership.

Second, this alliance formulated the religious basis for the political movement that grew out of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious teachings and ultimately became known as Wahhabism/Salafism. This amalgamation of the religious sphere and the political sphere was ultimately justified on the basis of implementing tawhid [oneness of God] and therefore implies that political means justify religious end goals. This ideology proposes that all earthly power in the form of politics necessarily had to grow out of recognition of the unique and all-powerful role of God. This approach emphasized the importance of carrying out one's actions. Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab stressed that one must have the proper recognition and enforcement of the Oneness of God (tawhid) as the basis for one's actions, especially with regards to politics. This might be problematic because a political leader might only be working for self-aggrandizement, a goal that was clearly at odds with tawhid.

The third issue of importance was the three acts that essentially symbolize the Wahhabi/Salafi movement of this time. These acts were the cutting down of a sacred tree, the destruction of a tomb monument, and the stoning of an adultress. All of these activities reflected the practical application of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's overarching message of tawhid. They have also come to be considered the hallmark of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's movement and a prominent example of the kind of incidents that his critics would seize upon as evidence of the extremism

generated by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings. They not only made Ibn Abd al-Wahhab famous in his own time but would later help the Wahhabi/Salafi movement become dominant across the centuries and throughout the world. However, it would be the political alliance formed with Muhammad Ibn Saud that would truly give Ibn Abd al-Wahhab a place in the history books.

vi.) Politics

One of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's earliest critics was Sulayman ibn Suhaym from Riyadh. Although Sulayman ibn Suhaym was at first supportive of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's views, he would later oppose them. As Salih al-Uthaymin explains, this was due in part to the fact that Ibn Suhaym feared that he would lose his social reputation as a result of people second guessing his knowledge. Furthermore, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab publicly criticized Ibn Suhaym for accepting bribes and other forms of compensation as 'gifts'. This negative publicity would prove to be the beginning of a heated antagonism between Sulayman ibn Suhaym and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. In response, Ibn Suhaym would write letters to the Muslim ulama [scholars] of al-Ahsa Basra and al-Haramayn stating that they should refute the doctrines of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab so that the people would not fall victim to his deceptive teachings. To further discredit Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Sulayman ibn Suhaym levied hefty charges against Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Salih al-Uthaymin writes:

The charges which Ibn Suhaym made against the Shaykh [Ibn Abd al-Wahhab] were: he burned the book *Dala'l al-Khayrat* because its author referred to the Prophet [p.b.u.h] as our master (sayyid) and our Lord (mawla)... he also burned the work *Rawd al-Rayahin* [The garden of fragrant herbs] and renamed it *Rawd al-Shayatin* [The garden of devils]... he says that if he gets into a position of power he will destroy the room of the Prophet [p.b.u.h.], and replace the golden spout (mizab) of the Ka'ba with a wooden one... he says that the people have not been following religion—have nothing to stand on—(laysu'ala shay') for the last six centuries... he demolished a mosque in the same location [as some saint's tombs] without any religious justification other than his own evil caprice... he considers as infidels those who do not agree with whatever he says and swear that it is the truth, while he regards as the

faithful those who believe him even if they are sinful; thus apparently he is preaching for his cult and not for the unity of God... (Salih al-Uthaymin, pg. 46)

These charges are quite serious and are only a select few of the damning indictments that Ibn Suhaym levies against Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. It is hard to determine to what degree of validity these charges can be true since Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was well aware of these charges and disregarded them as slanderous. However, the basic point that should be noted from this list of charges made by Ibn Suhaym is the seriousness of their nature with regard to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings and actions. It further shows how divided the Muslim community of the time was in regards to the doctrine of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and how drastic his actions of reform were perceived by some individuals. This division would lead to Uthman ibn Hamid ibn Muammar, the ruler of al-Uyaynah being forced to remove his protection from Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

vii.) The Alliance With Muhammad Ibn Saud

Due to this political confrontation over Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings and many others, Muammar had to remove his political protection from Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This provoked Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to leave for the town of al-Dir'iyah. It was in al-Dir'iyah that he quickly began collecting a following and came into contact with the leader Muhammad Ibn Saud. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab greeted Muhammad Ibn Saud with the message of tawhid [oneness of God], promising him that if he dedicated himself to the promotion of tawhid and the eradication of associations (shirk), ignorance (jahil), and divisions among the people, God would grant him and his descendants rule over the lands of Najd and its regions, as well as the people within them. It is clear from his remarks that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's interest remained in religious issues but that he was also a pragmatic man who realized that no political leader would be willing to take such

great risks for the sake of religion unless some kind of earthly reward accompanied it. One could argue that this promise that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab granted to Ibn Saud was the point at which he became willing to compromise his Islamic principles for the sake of political power. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab allowed for his reformist ideology to be used as a means to judge the faith of other Muslims and allowed Ibn Saud to conquer territories as a result.¹³ After all, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had no authority to assure Ibn Saud wealth and power would be provided as a blessing from God. However, Ibn Saud supporters became emboldened to carry out further conquests with a firm sense of righteous support.

The result was that in 1744 the famous alliance that led to the foundation of the First Saudi State was formed between Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad Ibn Saud, sealed by a mutual oath of loyalty. According to this arrangement, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was responsible for religious matters and Muhammad Ibn Saud was in charge of political and military issues. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab promised not to interfere with Muhammad Ibn Saud's state consolidation and Muhammad Ibn Saud promised to uphold Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious teachings. However, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab showed notable disdain and some might say regret, for the type of war that was waged against fellow Muslims in Arabia. He had hoped Muhammad Ibn Saud would eventually tire of warfare and focus more on the spiritual matters of the people, yet this dream never materialized.

Delong-Bas is rather quick to point out that there were growing divisions between the idealistic religious goals of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud's desire for material comforts. After all the preaching of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was made abundantly clear, the subjects of Ibn Saud expected to reap luxurious material comforts in return for their political loyalty. Ibn Saud

¹³ The evidence for this will be expanded upon in the subsequent pages.

being a savvy politician and head of state was amply aware of these expectations that people in lower positions of power had. This situation led to the people under Ibn Saud's leadership to compromise the religious principles that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab offered in exchange for the material comforts of the worldly life. Delong Bas writes:

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was appalled by what he witnessed in lands controlled by the Al Saud family. The inhabitants were not following basic Islamic rituals and had adopted a luxurious lifestyle. Incensed by what he perceived to be their "extreme" levels of ignorance (jahiliyyah), he demanded that they abandon their materialism and take their religious duties more seriously. He reprimanded them for neglecting their prayers and other Muslim obligations, particularly required tithe of 2.5% of Muslim's wealth (zakat), preached to them about greater and lesser shirk [associating partners with God], and reminded them of their pledge to uphold tawhid [oneness of God]... This accession to wealth and power was not interpreted as God's favour due to faithful adherence to Islam. In fact, just the opposite was the case, as wealth and power came only when religious reforms and restraints were set aside. Ibn Bishr notes that by the time Abd al-Aziz [Ibn Saud's son] acceded to leadership the people "had tired of holding back their hearts." They were not interested in pure religious reform. They wanted earthly power and rewards—reflections of the tribal society in which they lived. Thus, the shift from a more religiously oriented era of educational endeavours to an emphasis on political and military power is clear. (Delong-Bas, pg. 39)

Based on the evidence that Delong-Bas brings forward, it is evident that Ibn Saud and his followers were first and foremost political opportunists rather than true religious reformers. They sought out wealth and power to enrich themselves and used the religious message of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to create a façade of religious righteousness to stir up followers into a false sense of religious fanaticism to justify their conquests in the name of a noble cause. Delong-Bas specifically notes that "wealth and power came only when religious reforms and restraints were set aside" (Ibid), which demonstrates that Ibn Saud's leadership and alliance with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had the opposite intended effect of strengthening the adherence towards Islam. This gives credence to the notion that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message did not gain widespread popularity but was selectively utilized in terms of labelling an adversarial tribe apostates while

the Saudi kingdom enriched itself. Although it was not obviously Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's intention to create a wealthy kingdom in the name of religious reforms, but that is precisely what Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message was utilized for. Ultimately, he was disgusted by the decadence he helped create. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab hoped that he would instead create meaningful social change in the form of ideals that people could aspire towards.

The tension between the two was also apparent in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's carefully constructed roles. Muhammad Ibn Saud took the role of amir or political leader. Meanwhile, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab took the role of imam or religious leader. According to this vision, the amir was responsible for political, military and economic matters and the imam for religious issues. Only the imam could declare jihad [an Arabic word for 'struggle' with several different meanings] as 'holy war' and this only when the motivating factor was faith alone. Jihad was not intended to serve as a means of acquiring power, wealth, or glory, but conveniently it often did so.¹⁴ However, this arrangement did not preclude the amir from engaging in military activities that he believed were necessary or expedient. What it did do was limit the religious legitimization of those military activities. Because only the imam could declare a jihad as 'holy war', the Amir could not automatically claim that any and all military activities were being carried out in the name of jihad. Therefore, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was able to restrict the declaration of jihad to cases he believed fit his religious criteria.

Yet, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's preferred method of spreading his ideology was through discussion, debate, dialogue and persuasion instead of force. Nonetheless, Ibn Saud was waging wars of conquest against his fellow Muslims in Arabia and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab went so far at

¹⁴ Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was able to label certain Muslims as infidels and they were subsequently vulnerable to military conquest by Ibn Saud and his followers.

times to condone or sanction such politically motivated violent bloodshed. In 1773, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab finally withdrew his support and renounced his position as imam, which further supports the claim that he did not entirely support all the military campaigns of Muhammad Ibn Saud but by that point Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had seen that the ultimate concern of Ibn Saud and his followers were primarily focused on conquest and wealth. Finally, in 1792 Ibn Abd al-Wahhab passed away and his followers would dedicate themselves to spreading his teachings.

The historical context of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's later life demonstrates that he seemingly acknowledged his failure to bring about his vision for social reforms. He attempted at first to achieve his goals through dialogue and reason but this was a slow and tedious process that created a serious backlash. Then he attempted to utilize political alliances as a means of disseminating his ideology. Through his alliance with Ibn Saud he finally resorted to using violence as a means of entrenching his ideology in society, but this was still to no widespread avail. One can only imagine the frustration that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab endured. However, it should be noted that he did judge his fellow Muslims to be apostates and legislated that they should be killed in the name of defending Islam from innovations. The Quran gives no justification for judging a fellow Muslims faith and condemning a fellow Muslim to death unjustly is abhorrent in the deepest regard.

viii.) Beliefs

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was a man of intense religious conviction. He believed in the importance of living one's religious beliefs in both private and public life. He valued education and was eager to engage in discussions and debates with others. He was a master of logic and a prolific writer. He was a man who sought to teach and guide individuals from every walk of life,

reflecting his belief in the equality of all Muslims, regardless of their ethnic or socioeconomic background. He also was devoted to the concept of social justice, dedicating significant portions of his writings to the protection of women, the poor and respect for human life and property. He believed that women had the rights of men in both private and public life, leading him to insist that these rights be restored and protected. He denounced corruption, bribery and hypocrisy, which he continuously and vehemently abhorred. He was neither a pacifist nor a warmonger. He believed that there were times when violence was justified, as in the case of self-defence or infidelity of faith. However, he was not a continual promoter of violence because he believed that it stood in the way of the ultimate goal of Muslims—the winning of converts. He believed that life was something to be not only respected but celebrated.

In The History of Saudi Arabia, Alexei Vassiliev meticulously notes how Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to purify Islam from what he believed were innovations. Vassiliev points out that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his followers borrowed a great deal from the earlier works of Ibn Taimiyya and Ibn al-Qayim. Specifically, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab borrowed from their works a system of argumentation that focused on attacking the cult of saints and bida [innovation]. The works of Ibn al-Qayim and to a lesser degree the works of Ibn Taimiyya served as informative textbooks that entrenched his points of view and stirred passionate feelings through their fiery rhetoric. This was mainly due to the fact that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab shared their view that the people were following error over guidance and the quality of society was deteriorating as a result. As Vassiliev explains it:

In the Wahhabis' opinion, the Islamic world had deviated from these principles of monotheism. People indulged in bida [innovation], considered the worst sin. They endowed Allah's [God's] creations with His abilities and attributes. For example, they went on pilgrimages to the mausoleums of Muslim saints, made vows to them, offered

sacrifices and asked for their help, in the conviction that the saints could do good or evil. Even plant and stones were endowed with Allah's [God's] attributes, which was incompatible with genuine monotheism. (Vassiliev, pg. 74)

The idea conveyed through this quote demonstrates that the Islamic practices of the original Muslim community had been transformed to combine elements of Catholic saint reverence with elements of pre-Islamic paganism. It was this conflated and misrepresented picture of Islam that set up the fiery rhetoric and stark condemnation from the 18th century reformers such as Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab were centrally focused on rejecting all forms of *bida* and returning to the Quran and unsullied Hadiths. On the surface, Vassiliev makes Ibn Abd al-Wahhab appear as though he is preaching an Orthodox form of Sunni Islam. However, Vassiliev is rather dismissive of this label in favour of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab being part of a unique sectarian group.

This notion that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings were orthodox Islamic views comes from numerous sources such as Abu Ras al-Nasiri, Ibn Sanad, Muhammad Hamid al-Faqih, Hafiz Wahba, Taha Husain and many others. They were considered orthodox by many in the Cairo ulama [scholarly community] since Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's views about social reform were shared by a large number of religious scholars. Some viewed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings as the spirit of Hanbalis of the past generations. Others saw his teachings as Islam in its purity with the removal of polytheism and idolatry.

Yet, Vassiliev is rather unconvinced by these arguments since at its core, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings were a call to purify the dominant form of Sunni Islam at the time. In Vassiliev's consideration this would make the Wahhabis or Salafis sectarians. In their ideological struggle they borrowed heavily from the teachings of Ibn Taimiyya, who himself relied on al-Ghazali. It was precisely this widespread opposition to the dogma of orthodox Islam

that set up Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's followers to desire to change the fundamentals of the orthodox Sunni faith. Vassiliev also thoughtfully argues that it was not until the more recent events of the 20th century that the more extremist manifestation of sectarian ideology had been removed from the Wahhabi/Salafi movement.

In addition, a common interpretation of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in Western and Arab literature stems from the notion that he was a 'puritan' in the same manner that Protestant Christian sects hold their views up as a puritan form of Christianity. However, Vassiliev rightly dismisses this false facade as something contrived in an intellectually simplistic manner. The main basis for this comparison stems from the notion that both the Protestants and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to return to a pure original nature of their religions. Yet, this point ignores the more salient aspects of the two phenomena. In particular, the two preach drastically different theological messages and contain dramatically different socio-political sets of ideology. In particular, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message proved popular due to the widespread dissatisfaction with the religious status quo and a desire to rediscover the roots of true Islam by applying the 18th century reformist methodology. Vassiliev notes:

Although scholastic theology and dogma form a considerable part of the teaching, it cannot be disputed that its socio-political content is original. The fact that 90-95% of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's works consists of quotations from the orthodox Hadiths and works by the ulama [community] of the first centuries of Islam does not contradict this judgement. (Vassiliev, pg. 76)

Vassiliev in this statement is rightly pointing out that at the core of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message was an appeal through reason for the faithful to examine the sources closely and to abide by its contents. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab connected the traditional scholarship of Hanbali jurisprudence with the reformers of the time and sought to link them with modern day needs of the Muslim community. It was through this interwoven ideology that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought

to forever dispel the innovations that crept into the religion of Islam and turn people back to what he perceived the true path to be.

In terms of social justice, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab taught that payment of zakat [charity/alms tax] was something obligatory instead of it being something that was voluntary. This allowed for the revenue generated through these collections made by the authorities' treasuries quite prosperous and in turn helped alleviate the financial burdens on the poor. Giving money to the state was therefore seen almost as a religious obligation rather than a cumbersome burden. However, just as the state had obligations to the people, the people had obligations to obey their authorities. Subsequently, mutinies and revolts were seen as contrary to the principles of the original spirit of Islam. This meant that it was seen as subversive to the established order to challenge authority. Yet, Vassiliev notes:

At the same time, Wahabism required the emirs and the nobility to be just to their subjects, appealing to them to take care of slaves, servants and hired workers. They flattered the sentiments of the poor by glorifying poverty, denouncing greed and claiming that access to paradise is easier for the poor. In practice, the Wahhabis strongly condemned usury. (Vassiliev, pg 76)

This point demonstrates the social dynamic that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab attempted to create. It illustrates that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's goals and ambitions were more than religious reforms of society but a grand ambition to reconstruct the fabric of society. His vision for society included the minute aspects that related a servant to his master or an emir to his subjects. It was these interdependent bonds that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab hoped would strengthen and unite society in a common cause. By allowing for each member of society to feel they played a role, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed that a common brotherhood could be fostered that would be conducive towards social justice. However, this also appears to hold a dual meaning since it helped strengthen the

status of the political establishment by assuring the rights of people like Ibn Saud to have unquestionable leadership by appealing to religious sentiments to obey one's leader.

ix.) jihad

One of the major issues that inevitably comes out with any discussion on Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is the issue of "jihad". The word "jihad" in Arabic literally translates into the English equivalent of "struggle" with no inherent violent connotation but its meaning in Arabic can also be stretched to mean "holy war" in the sense of an armed conflict. The Wahhabis/Salafis movement even at the time of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was notoriously intolerant to the views of others, including fellow Muslims. Vassiliev goes as far as to say that those "who did not share their teachings [non-Wahhabi/Salafi] to be far worse polytheists than the people of the jahiliya [time of pre-Islamic ignorance]" (Vassiliev, pg. 77). This would notably cause many clashes between the followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his critics in the form of ideological clashes and physical confrontations between tribal factions. It appears blatantly obvious that even during Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's lifetime, he proved to be a divisive and polarizing figure. Among those who were brave enough to openly challenge Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own brother Sulayman. Vassiliev reflects on the writings of Ibn Zini Dahlan, a Hijazi historian, who noted how Sulayman once confronted Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab by stating that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had instituted a sixth pillar in Islam that required Muslims to follow his teachings. This was quite a controversial statement since in Islam there are five main pillars of faith that one needs to abide by in order to be considered a true Muslim. However, by unofficially implementing a sixth pillar Sulayman is suggesting that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab needed Muslims to follow his teachings to the letter. It was precisely this level of

fanaticism that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's critics seized upon as evidence of his extremist and intolerant views.

Likewise, Vassiliev also notes that Ibn Sanad, a Basra historian, found similar themes of intolerance amongst the Wahhabis/Salafis. Ibn Sanad in one story recounts how Tuais, who was a black slave, took it upon himself to murder Thuwaini, who was a sheik of the Muntafiq tribe in the lower region of the Euphrates. Upon hearing this, Wahhabi/Salafi supporters of King Saud were joyous over this murder because they were convinced that Thuwaini was an infidel or non-believer. In addition, "they were similarly convinced of the infidelity of all people on earth who did not share their convictions" (Vassiliev, pg. 78). Furthermore, Vassiliev states:

In opposing the dominant form of Islam, the Wahhabis went much further than ordinary sectarians. In the words of E. Belyaev, 'According to the firmly established notion of the Muslims themselves, the followers of all directions trends and sects in Islam are treated as Muslims. To the Wahhabis, however, all believers in heterodox sects were polytheists, not Muslims. They held that everybody who had heard their appeal and did not join them was a kafir (infidel). Subsequently, the Wahhabis treated even Jews and Christians less harshly than non-Wahhabi Muslims, allowing them to pray at home. The only restriction on their rights was the jizya (poll tax) of 4 piastres. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's followers seem to have been guided by the fact that the Prophet recommended showing tolerance towards the 'People of the Book'. (Vassiliev, pg. 78)

This passage illustrates how zealous the followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab became in their quest to reform Arabian society. Their once noble goals of returning people back to the true path of Islam through argumentative reasoning became a quest to force orthodox Sunni Islamic views into conforming to their own puritanical notion of what Sunni Islam was meant to be. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message slowly became a banner of self-righteousness that was used to judge and condemn fellow Muslims based solely on the faith the Wahhabis/Salafis believed their form of Islam to be true while other forms of Islam were bordering on polytheistic heresy.

Their zealous nature is further supported by their destructive actions whenever the Wahhabis/Salafis would seize an oasis or town within the Arabian Peninsula. Once firmly in control of a new area, the fervent religious zealots would seek out the graves of saints or pious individuals and violently smash any monuments that were constructed in their honour. In addition, the followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would burn the books of any scholar who disagreed with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings. Even arguing in favour of alternative doctrines to what Ibn Abd al-Wahhab taught were ground to have a scholar's works burned.¹⁵

From these actions it is clear that the practice of Wahhabism/Salafism contributed to a fanatical interpretation of Islam. It is also important to understand how their religious fervour was also a political windfall in terms of military conquests. By labelling opponents as 'infidels' or 'polytheists' the followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab were able to ensure that their political opponents could justifiably be fought. However, if the Wahhabis/Salafis instead held to the belief that they were fellow Muslims then they could not justifiably be killed. The Quran is quite clear in this regard when it states that "Never should a Believer kill a Believer except by mistake..." (Quran, 4:92). This is considered an especially egregious sin and the Quran goes on to state that the recompense for such action is Hell. In contrast, if one delineates one's enemy as a 'polytheist' or 'infidel' then suddenly their military campaigns of conquest can take on a spiritual dimension. Vassiliev writes:

An emir derived clear advantages from adopting the Wahhabi teaching as his weapon. From a mere leader of a raid upon his neighbours, he became a fighter for the 'purity of the faith', while his enemies were 'the devil's servants', 'idolaters' and 'polytheists'. Making the jihad against the 'polytheists' its most important postulate, Wahhabism was an ideology of military expansion and raids from the outset. (Vassiliev, pg. 78)

¹⁵ Vassiliev, Alexei, The History of Saudi Arabia, New York University Press, 2000

This quote shows how the spiritual dimension of a cosmic battle between the forces of Good (Wahhabis/Salafis) against the forces of Evil (idolaters/polytheists) was a convenient means that justified the brutality of war. Although it would be the later followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab that would take this ideological justification for holy war to its zenith, it was Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who ultimately set the precedent to accuse others of incorrectly following Islam and could justifiably be killed in the name of purifying Islam.¹⁶

It was Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's followers who helped transformed the religious reform movements of the 18th century into an ideological weapon of military conquest. It spawned generations of religious fanatics that sought to recreate Islam according to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's interpretation of what Islam should be. Through Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's convictions and desire to create reforms, he managed to cohesively unite the diverse tribes of Arabia under a common cause. Even the nomadic Bedouin tribes were united under this newly conceived banner of Islam. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab began his life journey with the intention of reforming the religion of Islam but his journey became intertwined with the politics of the time period. By destroying sacred shrines and holy places he conflicted with the economic prosperity that these sites brought with them through pilgrimages made by the faithful. It also managed to upset a lot of individuals who for generations saw these sacred sites as holy places that the Wahhabis/Salafis intended to desecrate. This in turn created political turmoil from the rulers of the day and caused Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to make political alliances out of necessity in order to protect his own life. However, it was ultimately these political alliances that caused Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to sacrifice the pristine nature of his message of religious reform (for the political alliances brought a new wayward mix of religious fanaticism and military conquests).

¹⁶ Ibid

Chapter 2: The Writings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab

The majority of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings fall into the category of classical Islamic scholarship which is primarily concerned with the practical application of interpreting and applying the Islamic principles found in the Quran and Hadith. In addition to these more formal tasks of Islamic scholarship, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was also engaged in writing to supporters and defending himself against his critics. One of the most relevant aspects of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings to this thesis is his doctrines regarding the validity of one's faith and the issue of jihad.

i.) Mufid al-Mustafid fi Kufr Tareeq al-Tawhid

In Salih al-Uthaymin's book entitled Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the author documents numerous relevant works of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. One work that is particularly relevant to the discussion thus far is the work entitled Mufid al-Mustafid fi Kufr Tarik al-Tawhid, which deals with the issue of one who abandons monotheism. This work was initially written as a doctrine of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to refute his brother Sulayman Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who at the time vigorously opposed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings. Sulayman argued that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab erroneously excluded Muslims from the community if they made offerings, prayers or sacrifices to dead people, specifically saints. One of the notable allegations that Sulayman makes is that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had a faulty interpretation of the Sharia Texts (the codified scholarly works utilized in Islamic law). Furthermore, Sulayman who was a judge in the town of Huraymila also noted that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was not technically qualified to make such judgements in regards to shari'a because he had not reached the status of a full-fledged jurist (al-mujtahid al-mutlaq). This is a

serious issue because Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was deliberating on matters within the community from a position of authority that was not acceptable to fellow scholars.

Moreover, Sulayman cited the fact that Ibn Taymiyya, the well-known and respected scholar in the Islamic community of the time, from whom Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself derived much of his principles, would have disagreed with Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine regarding the issue of saint veneration.¹⁷ According to Ibn Taymiyya's scholarship, saint veneration was considered only a minor form of polytheism, despite the fact that Islam abhors any form of polytheism since it detracts from the worship of the one true God. Nonetheless, Ibn Taymiyya believed that this action would not in itself justify the accusation of someone being an infidel. In addition, Ibn Taymiyya was of the opinion that no individual form of Islam needed to be rejected entirely but rather merely reformed.

Yet, in contrast Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab disagreed with both his brother Sulayman and Ibn Taymiyya by suggesting that the veneration of saints amounted to a major form of polytheism. This strong condemnation and delineation that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab made concerning people who venerated saints basically gave them the same status as apostates. Salih al-Uthaymin notes about Mufid al-Mustafid fi Kufr Tarik al-Tawhid:

After quoting the tradition in which the Prophet [p.b.u.h] predicted that idols would be worshipped by a section of his community, the Shaykh [Ibn Abd al-Wahhab] mentions that it is obligatory for every Muslim to stand firmly against infidels, apostates and hypocrites, apparently meaning his opponents, and affirms that one should not associate with innovators. He cites many traditions to support his attitude on the subject and then finishes the work with a letter written by Ibn Taymiyya to show that one has to be determined in the struggle against the enemies of God, and quotes his pronouncement on

¹⁷ Al-Uthaymin, Abd Allah Salih, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009

the hashish (cannabis), in which he says that anyone claiming that it is permitted is an infidel and is to be killed unless he repents. (Salih al-Uthaymin, pg. 87-88)

This passage demonstrates how fanatical Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's positions truly were. On the one side, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believes that he has the ability to choose who meets the criteria of a Muslim and who should be considered an infidel.¹⁸ This would not be so shocking if not for the fact that if one were to be considered an infidel then they could justifiably be killed. It is literally a life or death situation that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab has created based solely on his interpretation of Islam.¹⁹ Despite the arguments his supporters make regarding his logical and reasonable methodology, his rhetoric and actions speak volumes about the type of man he truly was.

The fact remains that the Quran itself declares that there is "no compulsion in religion" (Quran2:256). If there is no compulsion to follow the edicts of religion then Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrine regarding the issue of saint veneration is very severe in regards to those who stray from traditional Islamic practices. The system that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab set up through his ideology is a somewhat fascist ideology that would ensure that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his subsequent followers would play out the role of judge, jury and executioner for anyone who did not comply with their interpretation of the practice and compliance with certain Islamic principles. No matter how well intentioned or noble the goals may be, the ultimate realization of giving someone the power to determine another person's faith inevitably leads to a totalitarian dictatorship that robs the individual of their God given right to free choice. After all, an individual must have free choice in order to choose to believe or disbelieve, otherwise there can be no such thing as faith at all. If someone was to be forced by the tip of a sword or the barrel of a gun to prostrate in worship of God then one would be acting out of compulsion. However, God

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ One is free to repent but this notably meant adopting Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's entire Islamic doctrine and not just removing the innovations from Islam.

gives humans the freedom of choice and through that choice one is free to either comply to what God asks of humanity or to disobey God. Yet, the decision must ultimately rest with the individual alone otherwise it renders the very nature of faith and religion itself meaningless. If the preservation and the purity of religion is what Ibn Abd al-Wahhab truly sought then his doctrines must allow for people to practice their religion without being forced to abide by only what Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrines would dictate.

ii.) Mukhtasar al-Hady al-Nabawi

In the work entitled Mukhtasar al-Hady al-Nabawi, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab writes about the lessons that one should derive from Prophetic guidance. According to Salih al-Uthaymin, the work is an "abridged version of Zad al-Ma'ad fi Hady Khar al-'Ibad" (Salih al-Uthaymin, pg. 101) by the well-respected scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. In it, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab deals with the major aspects of the Prophet's [p.b.u.h.] life. It also features a discussion on jihad that is divided into four categories. Salih al-Uthaymin writes:

1. Against oneself; to endeavour to learn the way of the Prophet in all aspects of life; to work according to it, to preach it and, finally, to be steadfast whatever may be the consequences resulting from such an attitude.
2. Against the Devil; to resist doubts about God and religion that he may introduce into your mind, and to defy his temptations to do what is prohibited.
3. Against infidels and hypocrites; this should be pursued with one's heart, tongue, wealth and blood.
4. If possible, oppressors and innovators should be shown physical opposition but in any case the heart should be against them. (Salih al-Uthaymin, pg 101)

From this portion of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings it is evident that he acknowledges different forms of jihad. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab also believes that jihad should be waged against infidels, hypocrites, oppressors and innovators. To what degree these people should be fought with is another issue all together. In this work, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is rather unspecific over the matter but Delong-Bas further explores this issue and comes up with some intriguing discoveries.

According to Delong-Bas' research there are three categories in which jihad may be called for when one examines Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings. These three instances include: 1.) when two opposing factions meet face to face [Ibn Abd al-Wahhab cites Quranic verses 8:45 and 8:15], 2.) when an enemy departs from their own territorial boundaries, 3.) when the imam recognizes the need for jihad. However, it should also be noted that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believes that when the imam calls for jihad it is incumbent for his followers to obey him. Delong-Bas further notes:

In each of these three cases, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab specifically used the verb fight (qaatala [form III]) rather than kill (qatala [Form I]).²⁰ While it may be assumed that some killing is likely to occur during the process of fighting, it is important to note that the goal is to fight so as to cause the enemy to retreat or submit, not to annihilate the opposing forces. Thus, the degree of violence here is not as extreme as the Wahhabis are often portrayed to encourage. (Delong-Bas, pg. 203)

While this passage signifies that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had placed limits on what jihad entailed in hindsight of the historical record of history, this appears as though it is scholarly posturing. Although on the one hand it seemingly demonstrates that the goal was not simply to kill but rather to force people into submitting to the policies of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. On the other hand it defeats the statements made regarding the logical and reasonable methodology of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. If Ibn Abd al-Wahhab truly believed in the virtue of his reformist movement then Ibn Abd al-Wahhab should have made tremendous efforts to avoid resorting to violence. Delong-Bas shows that Ibn Saud and his followers were mostly the aggressors in their ambitious conquests, which demonstrates that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was generally complicit through his alliance with Ibn Saud in these conquests. Had Ibn Abd al-Wahhab not made a clear alliance with Ibn Saud and merely remained under his protection then perhaps Ibn Abd al-Wahhab could be awarded

²⁰ The different forms suggest that there are different connotations to each type of verb. Through using different verbs there is a subtle yet distinctive meaning that delineates separate scenarios.

some innocence towards being a complicit third party in Ibn Saud's wars of conquest but this never happened.

Even if Ibn Abd al-Wahhab at times limited jihad as was the case in his work entitled Kitab al-jihad, there was a reluctance to stop Ibn Saud's wars of expansion on religious grounds. Ibn Saud and his fervent Wahhabi/Salafi followers utilized Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reformist doctrines as a means of furthering their political ambitions. This point would further demonstrate that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was equally as much a political pragmatist as he was a religious reformer. This is illustrated by Delong-Bas' statement:

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's stance [of limiting the labelling of someone a kafir/non-believer] did not, however, prevent some of his more enthusiastic followers from actively seeking an excuse to label someone a kafir because he or she refused to join the movement. The desire of such followers was clearly to engage such people in military action that could potentially result in their deaths. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings indicate that he was aware of such distortions of his teachings even during his own lifetime. (Delong-Bas, pg. 221)

Through this quote, one can see that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's doctrines were potentially manipulated to suit the political ambitions of those who sought power and to coerce others into joining their movement. To label someone a kafir/non-believer is no light matter, but then to believe they should be justifiably killed is such a heinous abuse of the teachings of Islam that it should be condemned in the highest regard. Yet, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would not dismiss this practice all together but restricted it to instances when a person has accepted Islam but reneges on their word to obey the Quran and Hadiths. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab legitimized fighting such an individual because it was perceived that they had rejected faith and their vows towards monotheistic Islamic principles.

Some credit should be awarded to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab since he rejected the doctrine of the Hanbali scholar Ibn Tamiyya regarding labelling someone a kafir. In Ibn Tamiyya's writings anyone who did not follow his writings was to be regarded as an unbeliever who needed to be fought. This proves that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's views were not as radical as some of his predecessors, but still extremely harsh nonetheless. For Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, one could be considered a kafir if one was a Muslim and professed to acknowledge the Word of God but continued to assign partners with God, citing Quranic verse 9:66. Delong-Bas cites Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's works entitled Fatawa wa-Masa'il and Kitab al-Tahid and states:

It was for this reason [the seriousness of the crime of unbelief and apostasy] that he taught that the appropriate response to such a situation was to read the erring individual the Quranic verses appropriate to the situation, so as to provide concrete evidence as to why the behaviour was wrong. Only if the person then refused to behave appropriately did fighting become appropriate. Thus, rather than engaging in name calling and exclusionism by dividing the world into two opposing spheres in order to justify fighting and killing, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab engaged in a more positive and inclusive approach of dialogue and discussion geared towards reconciliation and cooperation whenever possible. Fighting became an option only if the enemy refused both conversion and a treaty with the Muslims. (Delong-Bas, pg. 201)

This method of seeking to further stipulate the preconditions needed to charge someone with unbelief was a step away from the more radical views of Ibn Tamiyya. Yet, it demonstrates the consistent narrow mindedness of these Arabian scholars such as Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who were so self-righteous that they honestly believed that they could justifiably label someone as a believer or non-believer. How can someone with a limited knowledge of a person be qualified to make assertions whether someone meets some arbitrary criteria of belief or disbelief? Furthermore, this is one more piece of evidence that demonstrates that violence was actually viewed as a reasonable solution that could force compliance upon people viewed as non-believers.

It would be fair to say that someone who commits a crime such as murder or theft should inevitably be punished by a judiciary legal system that would seek to correct this person's behaviour and protect society. In the case of a spiritual crime, it would be that individual's soul that would be punished through the judgement of God and presumably the punishment of Hell. Yet, for someone to suggest that they have the moral authority to go about judging other individuals with regard to the manner in which they conduct their religious faith is something that borders on religious fascism. The early methodology that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab employed involving logic and reason is an intellectual enterprise of admirable recognition. However, through Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's political alliances he tied his hands and compromised his moral authority by sanctioning the murder and spiritual judgement of others. He was not an individual qualified by the academic standards of the times to make these assertions. Nor was Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's actions in line with the spirit of the Quran. Instead, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab used his position as a someone well versed in Islamic religious texts to put forward and support a doctrine that sought to forcibly apply his interpretation of faith upon a host of people against their own volition. It is simply an absurd contradiction to insist that the religion of Islam has no compulsion but then on the other hand to suggest that one must comply to a set of doctrines created by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in order to be considered a Muslim.

Moreover, in Madawi Al-Rasheed's book entitled A History of Saudi Arabia, the author assesses that the political alliance and the religious message that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab brought forth was a windfall combination for Ibn Saud. Al-Rasheed believes that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message of jihad helped Ibn Saud garner support from nomads and urban-dwelling Muslim communities who would be reluctant to take up arms against neighbouring tribes. Al-Rasheed further states:

Without Wahhabism, it is highly unlikely that Dir'iyah [home city of Ibn Saud] and its leadership would have assumed much political significance. There was no tribal confederation to support any expansion beyond the settlement, and there was also no surplus wealth that would have allowed Muhammad Ibn Saud to assemble a fighting force with which to conquer other settlements. The settlement itself did not have sufficient manpower to initiate conquest of other oases or tribal territories. (Al-Rasheed, pg. 17)

Based on Al-Rasheed research and findings it appears evidently clear that without Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious authority to grant jihad and convert Muslims to his doctrine, Ibn Saud would not have been able to have conquered the lands that he did. The message that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab brought forward united the people of the area into a 'quasi-tribal confederation' that was able to conquer surrounding territories. The political results of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's message was to propel Ibn Saud from the depths of obscurity into the forefront of the Arabian political scene under the guise of purifying Islam from polytheists and non-believers.

Based on this reasoning it is easy to see how even well-meaning individuals such as Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who have sought to purify Islam have in fact done more harm than good to the image of Islam. By combining virtuous moral justifications with the political apparatus of the state, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab created a wayward amalgamation of religion and politics. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's extremist doctrines would further be exploited by creating a legacy that would spawn generations of religious radicals that would find nothing wrong with forcing people to comply with their interpretation of Islam and killing anyone who opposed their barbarous enterprise.²¹

In the next chapter, the thesis will examine the biography of Sayyid Qutb and explore the environment that helped shape the man that he would become. Similar to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Qutb would attempt to be a reformer of his time and seek to alter Islam's place in society by both

²¹ Al-Uthaymin, Abd Allah Salih, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009

challenging the established religious ideology and the political structure of the time. Qutb's life and writings just as those of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would be the fuel that would ignite the flames of militant Islamic extremists.

Chapter 3: Biography of Sayyid Qutb

When one examines the life of Sayyid Qutb one of the remarkable things that separates him from other religious scholars was how his environment truly shaped who he became. Unlike Islamic scholars such as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab who exhibited strong religious orientations throughout his life, Qutb proved to be quite different. In Adnan Musallam's book entitled From Secularism to jihad, the author explains that although Qutb was raised with a fairly modest Islamic education, he distanced himself from this religious orientation in the 1930's and 1940's. He focused on a secular literary career rather than a staunch religious scholarship that is traditionally the hallmark of renowned Islamic scholars. Yet, it was Qutb's journey to America combined with the provocative politics of 1950's Egypt that shaped Qutb's outlook into a radical perception of Islam. Qutb's impassioned writings were provocative and zealous. These writings in many ways encapsulated the rage and discontent with the current failings of a world seemingly headed in the wrong direction. Furthermore, they would spawn the extremist basis and justification of violence in many later intellectual thinkers including fellow Muslim Brotherhood alumni such as Ayman al-Zawahiri.

To fully understand Sayyid Qutb one must first look at the context from which he was born. Qutb was born on October 9, 1906 in a small village of Musha along the Nile.²² From a very early age Qutb was exposed to a variety of social changes that were transforming Egyptian civilization from its traditional roots into a Westernized modern nation. There was a growing gap between those who were brought up with a traditional religious education and those with a secular education. Increasingly those with the Westernized secular educational training became

²² Musallam, Adnan, From Secularism to Jihad, Praeger Publishers, 2005

prominently placed in positions of power and authority, meanwhile those with traditional religious educational backgrounds were finding that Westernized modernity had few places left that valued their skills. This momentum continued to gain and increasingly a small minority of the religiously oriented Egyptians turned to violence as a way of fighting back against what they perceived was a social discrimination. What this clash turned into was a polarization of Egyptian society, whereby the many Egyptians were faced with an increasingly limited set of choices. On the one hand Egyptians could accept Western modernity that included secularism to a certain degree or be faced with either the Marxists or the Muslim Brotherhood as the only viable alternatives.

i.) Egypt in the Early 20th Century

The period of time that Sayyid Qutb was born into had a great transformative effect on him. According to Musallam, there were so many social, economic and political conditions that were going on in Egyptian society that deeply affected the way Qutb viewed the world. Between the period of 1919 and 1952 Egyptian society was slowly divorcing itself from its traditional social structures and moving towards an idealistic notion of modernity. This meant that old social values and customs were beginning to appear more and more as though they were some distant relics of the past that should be shunned in favour of a new vision of the future. Egyptian society in many ways was opening itself up to a vibrant discovery of all things Western. These Western experiences ranged from a rich literary heritage of the West to the theatrical entertainment of theatre and cinemas. These new sensations provoked tantalizing revelations for both the mind and the eyes to experience.

It was in the wake of the 1919-1922 revolt in Egypt against British occupation that a wave of liberal nationalism was created which stirred the country's intellectuals into dreaming of a future course for the Egyptian people. Part of this vision for Egypt evolved into a conception of an emulated Western society within Egypt that would contain all the hallmarks of what Egyptian intellectuals perceived to make Western civilization so advanced. In part this led the liberals in Egyptian society to place an increased emphasis on the Western style of formal education over the more traditional religious education. This development began the first major fracturing between the old nostalgic notions of traditional Egyptian culture with the modernists social interpretations and their conviction of the superior path of Western emulation. This rift would slowly graduate further and further apart by pitting the two factions in opposing ideological camps.

By the middle of the 1930's it was clear that popular public opinion was shifting away from the idealized vision of liberal modernization. Several factors played a key role in delineating this shift away from this vision. Among the catalysts for this support was the Western suppression of fledgling independence movements and nationalist parties in the Middle East. In addition, the people were angered by failure of the liberal elites (who were the staunchest supporters of this new modernist movement) to deliver on their promises of economic prosperity for the majority of Egyptian society. This last catalyst proved to be a serious disillusioning factor that heavily altered popular opinion since the dream of liberal elites was only tenable so long as it offered tangible change. Musallam explains:

The resurgence of Islamic and anti-Western sentiments in public life in the late 1920s and 1930s, as well as the emergence of mass movements in the 1930s, including the Society of Muslim Brothers, Young Egypt Party and Communist Party which functioned outside the political system can be attributed, inter alia, to the bankruptcy of the Egyptian liberal

nationalist regime. A closer examination of the parliamentary monarchical regime of the 1923 to 1952 attests to an undistinguished record of failure in the monarchical regime's efforts both to realize the ideals of the 1919-1922 uprising (the total liberation of the Nile Valley from British tutelage) and to solve the pressing problems of the nation. (Musallam, pg. 10)

From this statement, Musallam is explaining how the traditionalists in the form of ideological Islamist supporters and anti-Westerners were regaining their position within the dialogue of Egyptian society. The liberal elites of the country that grew wealthy and comfortable with the adaptation of Western culture could no longer easily disregard their critics as relics of the past or having a phobia of all things Western. As more of the glamorous dreams that the metropolitan upper class envisioned failed to come to pass for the rest of society, there was a notable reactionary push that polarized Egyptian society. More and more people began to weigh their options and new political organizations began to take root among this discontent.

The situation was not helped by the fact that King Faud and later his son King Faruq ruled via a form of despotism. These kings saw little utility in the liberal ideals of the upper class members of society but instead governed Egypt according to their own whims. This division in the leadership structure was just another compounding fracture upon Egyptian society that saw numerous political groups arise to voice the concerns of the people. There were the Wafdists on one side, who enjoyed limited power after repeated attempts by the King to subvert their constitutional powers. On another side was the Ittihadists (Union Party), who were essentially minions of the King and also the Sha'bists (People's Party) who also jockeyed for political influence. It was simply a messy political system that was exacerbated by British interference on Egypt's internal political affairs. Britain still considered the Suez Canal an invaluable strategic asset and it ensured that the political situation in Egypt would ultimately be in Britain's best interest.

Yet, as the British continued to exert their influence in the region the more forceful the winds of change began to blow. The Wafd Party began to lose public support and even its members saw its policies as a betrayal of the Egyptian nationalist movement, that in turn made them abandon the party. In the face of this British colonialism there was a growing rise in, and a new sense of Egyptian nationalism. This movement towards an Egyptian identity created a battle of competing ideologies that struggled for control of the future of Egypt. One of the main groups that was formed in this climate of uncertainty was Jamiyyat al-Ikwan al-Muslimin or better known as the Society of Muslim Brothers, founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. In the Sayyid Qutb Reader that is edited by Albert Bergsen, the author summarizes how this applies to Qutb by stating:

...Qutb is part of a wider 20th-century context of contentious political factions, parties and interest groups. These included the Wafd party in the early 20th-century, organized around Sa'd Zaghul who was inspired by the reformism of Muhammad 'Abduh, the regime of Nasser who made overtures to the Soviet Union and expounded an ideology of pan-Arab socialism, and, of course the Muslim Brothers, created by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, who argued for the restoration of Islam in all aspects of Egyptian life. Politically the competitive relations between the Muslim Brothers and Nasser's Free Officers provide the immediate context for Qutb's imprisonment, while their struggle over ideologies of political governance provide a broader context for his developing ideas. (Bergsen, pg. 6)

This passage helps point out the volatile political climate that Qutb was faced with during his lifetime. There were so many competing ideologies and political factions that forced intellectuals like Qutb to inevitably take a side and become deeply polarized to that ideology. The inability of the Egyptian political structure to provide meaningful benefits for Egyptian society created organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood that attempted to fill the social and political needs of a dissatisfied population. For religiously minded individuals struggling to make sense of the chaotic social atmosphere the Muslim Brotherhood provided a welcoming alternative to the Marxists and the parties that were sympathetic to British colonialism.

Although there had always been a deeply entrenched Muslim reform movement in Egypt with figures such as Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashd Rida leading the way, these individuals were unable to “translate their Islamic ideology into religious mass movements” (Musallam, pg. 17). However, when Hassan al-Banna arrived on the political scene, the fortunes of this stalled Islamist ideology finally gained political traction in the 1930s.²³ The Muslim Brotherhood was uniquely positioned in Egypt to deliver both a feasible political alternative in the arena of warring political parties and also the Islamic social values that traditionally minded Egyptian society held dear. Most of the core supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood were disillusioned Wafd party members who defected into the Brotherhood’s camp. Once the combined influence of the seasoned politicians from Egypt’s political system were combined with the traditional Islamic ulama, the Brotherhood’s fortunes turned around.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica explains that the initial formation of the Muslim Brotherhood was based on its religiously orientated programs, including religious education. The Egyptian people enjoyed critical social services from the Muslim Brotherhood which helped garner support for the Brotherhood as a grass-roots organization. It was only during the late 1930s that the Brotherhood took a more active role in the political structure of Egypt by being one of the few viable oppositions to the country’s ruling Wafd party. The Muslim Brotherhood began to stage popular protests that increased their public appeal and granted their organization increased national exposure. Moreover, the Encyclopaedia Britannica states:

An armed branch organized in the early 1940s was subsequently linked to a number of violent acts, including bombings and political assassinations, and it appears that the armed element of the group began to escape Hssan al-Banna’s control. The Brotherhood

²³ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/399387/Muslim-Brotherhood> (accessed on December 21, 2011)

responded to the government's attempts to dissolve the group by assassinating Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi in December 1948. Hasan al-Banna himself was assassinated shortly thereafter; many believe his death was at the behest of the government. With the advent of the revolutionary regime in Egypt in 1952, the Brotherhood retreated underground. An attempt to assassinate Egyptian Pres. Gamal Abdel Nasser in Alexandria on Oct. 26, 1954, led to the Muslim Brotherhood's forcible suppression. Six of its leaders were tried and executed for treason, and many others were imprisoned. Among those imprisoned was writer Sayyid Qutb, who authored a number of books during the course of his imprisonment; among these works was Signposts in the Road, which would become a template for modern Sunni militancy. Although he was released from prison in 1964, he was arrested again the following year and executed shortly thereafter. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Muslim Brotherhood)

This excerpt illustrates how influential and at times quite dangerous the Muslim Brotherhood proved to be throughout Egypt's modern history. The violent actions of the Brotherhood proved counter-productive to the stability that Egyptians sought in the aftermath of continuous political struggles of the early 20th-century. In the midst of this violent struggle for political domination, Qutb found himself at the epicentre of the militancy within the Muslim Brotherhood, preaching his socio-political messages alongside his radical extremist interpretation of Islam. It was the Muslim Brotherhood that gave Qutb the support that propelled his ideology into the forefront of the Egyptian political scene.

The evidence presented thus far demonstrates how the political climate of Egypt proved to be the precise atmosphere that Qutb would need in order to preach his message of jihad and political upheaval. Qutb was a political opportunist who seized upon the power that the Muslim Brotherhood forged. However, Qutb was likewise shaped by the internal social conditions within Egypt that determined how he would interpret the teachings of Islam and utilize the Islamic scriptures to justify his extremist ideology. With this background information in mind, one can better understand just who Qutb was.

ii.) The Life of Sayyid Qutb

Much of Qutb's early life is recounted through his autobiographical work entitled Tifl min Al-qaryah, which translated means 'Child from the Village'. This book was first published in 1946 when Qutb was gaining public recognition as a prominent literary critic in Egypt. From this work it is clear that Qutb is deeply attuned to this growing conflict between the forces of tradition and modernity. However, what is notable from the very start of Qutb's life is how important his Islamic upbringing was. By the age of 12 he had fully memorized the entire Quran. Although Qutb seemed to realize that he was the product of the two different worlds, one being the world of modernity and the other world being one of traditional values these divergent spheres of influence soon deteriorated into a disenchanted conception that modernity spread corruption. The evidence of this was found in the manner in which liberal elites in the upper class of society basked in the decadence of material comforts. Meanwhile, those holding onto traditional values appeared to live in an age of the past, mainly due to their traditional education that did not grant them high paying jobs. In addition, Egyptian society was taking on the guise of modernization and all the conveniences it provided. In effect from Qutb's point of view Cairo had transformed from a city that represented "the seat of purity" (Musallam, pg. 29) into "the symbol of corrupted morality" (Ibid). This corrupted morality, from Qutb's perspective, bred the types of vices that robbed people of their virtuous nature.

Qutb would later trace the influences of modernity and moral corruption to the West as the primary source. However, Musallam and other scholars on Qutb believe that these notions were based on a nostalgic concept of the past that in fact never truly existed except in the mind of Qutb. He assumed from an early age very naive notions of the moral purity of the Egyptian people in a type of idealized sense of his childhood past. This has obvious repercussions that

would affect Qutb's outlook on politics. It is quite clear that despite Qutb's religious knowledge, his real passion was politics. Musallam writes:

Sayyid also became interested in more serious works that reflected the nationalistic mood of Egypt toward the end of World War I. For example, his schoolteacher lent him a nationalistic diwan (anthology of verses) by the political prisoner Thabit al-Jurjani and another nationalist historical work by Muhammad al-Khudari. Sayyid patiently copied out the verses of the diwan as well as the introduction of al-Khudari's work. Thus, through the influence of his home which was a meeting place of the local branch of the Nationalist Party, and the influence of his teachers, together with the prevailing nationalist mood sweeping the country, Qutb became aware of politics. When the revolution broke out in 1919 under the leadership of Sa'ed Zaghlul, thirteen-year-old Sayyid Qutb was already making speeches and composing nationalistic verses, which he recited at mosques and at public gatherings. (Musallam, pg. 32)

What this passage signifies is the early influence nationalist politics had on Qutb and how even at an early age he was formulating his own political opinions. What one starts to see developing at this early point in Qutb's life is a tangled web of politics and religion combining into one conglomerate mass under the guise of maintaining a fabled notion of returning Egypt back to Qutb's perceived state of moral purity. In addition, the younger Qutb appears more poised for a political career than a literary career, so it is rather astonishing to see him choose the latter.

Furthermore, Qutb's early life was filled with his insatiable lust for knowledge in any form. It is clear that Qutb was not an average Egyptian boy from his early years but rather an aspiring intellectual academic who engaged his mind with thought provoking ideas. The wheels in his mind began yearning for something more intellectually gratifying than what his simplistic village life could offer. In Radical Islamic Fundamentalism, Ahmad Moussalli notes that at the young age of thirteen, Qutb's world drastically changed when his family moved to Halwan, which was close to Cairo. He continued on his path of schooling and later enrolled at the Dar al Ulum's Teachers' College. His college education awarded him with a B.A. degree in the Arts of

Education in 1933. Additionally, he found employment at this same institution and helped launch his literary career. Eventually, Qutb obtained a job at the Ministry of Education from 1933 to 1939.

It was in this period that Qutb became more vocal in terms of his literary career. He published one of his first major works entitled the Mahammat al-Shair fi al-Hayah, which roughly means ‘The Poet’s Responsibility in Life’. What was so remarkable about Qutb’s early literary career was the non-religious and non-political nature of his writings. His written works were mainly about poems, education, autobiographies and literary criticisms. None of these works would foreshadow his later discourse. However, these works display a breadth of knowledge that very few other Islamic scholars can attest to. Moussalli also notes:

In Ma’alim fi al-Tariq (Signposts on the Road), Qutb described himself as someone who lived in the jahiliyyah (period of ignorance). For many years [he] devot[ed] himself to the quest for knowledge and studying whatever sciences came to his hand. However, he entertained no regrets; for this period of about forty years in the jahiliyyah acquainted him with and made him study many and diverse fields of human knowledge. Among other things, this experience resulted in profound changes in his intellectual and political outlook that lead to his conviction of the irreconcilability of the jahiliyyah with Islam and to his belief in the futility of human knowledge as a source of truth and happiness. The jahiliyyah is a conceptual framework used by Qutb not to indicate only the historical epoch before the Prophet Muhammad’s [p.b.u.h] time, but as an indication of the condemnation for those whose life styles do not conform to divine guidance... Thus, jahiliyyah is an epistemological device that allowed him to reject Western, Eastern and Islamic philosophies and thought. Also, it is a social and political device that allowed him to reject Eastern, Western and Islamic political order and international organizations. (Moussalli, pg. 19-20)

This passage underscores the voracious appetite Qutb had for all forms of knowledge and demonstrates that religion was not his foremost concern as he matured. In this quote the concept of jahiliyyah is also introduced which is something that became a reoccurring theme throughout

Qutb's later writings.²⁴ What is even more remarkable is the fact that Qutb recognized his own early jahiliyyah that separated him from having a deep religious conviction. Yet, it is precisely this same state of jahiliyyah that he would rhetorically condemn his political adversaries for being partly aligned towards. Ultimately, it was this quest for knowledge that convinced Qutb that Islam held the most meaningful answers regarding life and political solutions. Additionally, this quote reveals that Qutb was not a follower of all Islamic philosophy or political doctrines and used the concept of jahiliyyah to denounce certain aspects of these doctrines with which he did not accept.

iii.) Secularist Literary Career

Although the religion of Islam would provide an invaluable anchor in the later portion of Qutb's life, for his early years it was the study of all forms of knowledge that occupied his mind. Musallam notes that during Qutb's early secularist inclinations he was entranced by the study of modern psychology, Western literature, sociology, psychoanalysis, the theories of Darwinism, chemistry and also Einstein's theories on relativity and the nature of the universe. These deep matters seemed to be intellectual food for his young mind but his most passionate affection was held for poetry. Musallam states:

According to Qutb, poetry is one of the fine arts which serves as an intermediary between what is and what ought to be, and which draws us closer to the "highest ideal" (al-mathal al-al'la). Poetry addresses one's inner self, describing the sensitive feelings in a mysterious way, allowing one's feelings to be liberated and one's imagination to wander freely and without limit throughout the spacious world of the spirit. (Musallam, pg. 37)

²⁴ The Arabic term "Jahiliyyah" simply refers to the period of pre-Islamic Arabia where ignorance towards the will of God was prominent. This term will be fully addressed later on in the thesis.

These eloquent words beautifully articulate the emotional resonance that Qutb held for poetry. Poetry for Qutb was his true love and passion in the early stages of his life. It was most likely his early Quranic studies that first introduced Qutb to the expressiveness of poetry and the evocative power that poetry could emit. From Qutb's perspective it was the idealistic ambitions that poetry spoke of that moved the human soul to envision the possibilities that reality could hold. It was this philosophical quest to seek out the greatest ambitions of the soul that most likely led Qutb from his secularist path towards religious inspiration. From Qutb's own confessions it is rather self-evident that he was intent on achieving a higher level of awareness and would ultimately attempt to transform Egyptian society according to this newly forged state of awareness.

The early poetry of Qutb reveals him as a man of grand ambitions with the mind of a philosopher and the heart of a poet. He was deeply yearning for the secrets and meaning in life, to no great avail. However, his poetry also reveals a somewhat darker side of Qutb, revealing a restless soul that is continually frustrated with the human experience. Furthermore, his preoccupation with death demonstrates his ample awareness of the mortality of the human condition. His poetry appears to run the gamut of human experience, stretching from pessimism to ecstasy and the more intimate desire to find one's idealized beloved. Qutb's writings illustrate a man who is deeply emotional and attuned to his own sentimental nature.

Sayyid Qutb's sincere appreciation for poetry is a notable point in Qutb's life and illustrated his focus in his early secular literary career. It is noteworthy that Qutb chose to study literature and Arabic in university rather than Religious Studies. Although Qutb never outright forsook Islam, the fact remains that when he writes about Islam his views reflect those of the unfamiliar with the critical textual analysis that religious scholars need to familiarize themselves with in order to make qualified opinions about Islam. This is an important issue for those critical

of Qutb's writings where verses of the Quran are taken out of their context and put forward in a way to support Qutb's own political views. In addition, his time spent as a literary critic exposed Qutb to more Egyptian nationalist sentiments and also helped refine his own political inclinations. What was clear was that religion for Qutb was not something at the front of his mind in his early adult years. Musallam states:

In the 1920s and the 1930s, Qutb was not religiously oriented. Instead, he ventured outside the religious frame of reference in his day-to-day life. Like the literati of his time, he was greatly influence by liberal nationalist currents. His attitude toward religion at this stage was that of a Muslim secularist. The term Muslim secularist (in Sharabi's definition) "derives from the fact that this secularist was Muslim (hence to be differentiated from the Christian westernizing intellectuals) and that he was not religiously oriented (hence to be differentiated from the Muslim traditionalists and reformists). (Musallam, pg. 50)

This period of secularism seems to be a direct contradiction to the later period in Qutb's life. To support this assertion one needs to only examine the way that the Qutb of this period viewed Islam as something that was based on intellectual research.²⁵ In addition, Qutb at this point asserted that religion should not be compared to the Arts or Sciences since they used a different faculty of the human mind. Also, by making unfair comparisons in this way Qutb believed that this could harm religion. This way of thinking is in stark contrast to the Qutb of years later who would put forward the notion that Islam was an all-encompassing outlook. This was especially true of Islamic art, which according to Qutb was a type of 'guided art', whereby the concept of life in Islam was brought to light.

The fact that Qutb was focused on secular aspects of life and literature contains a very revealing insight into where Qutb's passions originally came from. Instead of modelling himself after some renowned Islamic scholar such as Abu Hamid Muhammad or Muhammad Ghazali,

²⁵ Musallam, Adnan, From Secularism to Jihad, Praeger Publishers, 2005

Qutb chose to become an avid supporter of Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, who was a famous Egyptian intellectual and thinker.²⁶ Al-Aqqad was a notable pro-Western intellectual who Qutb appears to mimic in terms of ideology and even his writing prose. It was this type of pro-nationalist orientation and literary heritage that Qutb chose to be a part of as a means of academic focus. This secularist career also demonstrates just how drastically his experiences in America would later change his outlook.

Qutb dived head first into heated literary debates of the time with the people of the Apollo Review group and Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i supporters. Although there were a few instances where religion was injected into the debates, Qutb never demonstrated the strong attitudes towards Islam that his later writings enforce. Qutb once quipped that "Religion... Religion... This cry of the feeble and the weak who take refuge in religion every time the current overwhelms them" (Musallam, pg. 51), demonstrating his earlier views regarding religion. However, most of the time Qutb's secularist writings in academic circles were focused on literary criticism of certain texts or academic ideologues rather on the finer discussions of religious perspectives. This is an important issue since for Qutb's critics it demonstrates a lack of academic knowledge of Islam from a scholarly perspective. Furthermore, it illustrates that Qutb was focused on the social, economic and political issues of the time. It also demonstrates that Qutb had always tried to intellectually steer the discourse towards the pertinent issues of human aspirations and that it was only later in his life that religion became the de facto means by which he believed he could affect meaningful change in the world.

iv.) Broken Dreams and the Turning Point

²⁶ Moussalli, Ahmad, Radical Islamic Fundamentalism, American University of Beirut, 1992

A notable turning point in Qutb's life can be seen in the novel entitled Ashwak, that in English means "Thorns". From this novel one can get a glimpse of Qutb exploring experiences and ideas that were very emotionally damaging for him that resulted from a failed engagement with a woman. This holds significance because much of Qutb's writings carry subtle undertones of a fear of feminism and more specifically the dangerous seductive power of women's influence.²⁷ In addition, the animalistic sexuality that American women seemingly exuded disgusted Qutb to his very core. This becomes apparent when Qutb arrives in America to study, and will help solidify his status as a lifelong bachelor. Musallam recounts this by stating:

Another event that partially explains Qutb's increasing interest in the Quran was an unsuccessful love affair (around 1942 or 1943) that is depicted in his prose and verse. Following his mother's death it appears that Qutb sought to fill the void in the life through marriage, and consequently he fell in love and was engaged. Problems developed that led to the breakup of the engagement. Deeply shattered, Qutb was never again seriously involved with a woman. It is generally believed that Qutb's novel Ashwak (Thorns), which appeared in Cairo in 1947, reflects this disastrous affair. Qutb dedicates his work "to the one who plunged the thorns within me, bled as I bled, became miserable as I became miserable, and went her own way as I went mine, both wounded after the battle." (Musallam, pg. 68)

What this passage points to is that the once idealistic picture of love that Qutb believed could occur was shattered. He would later make it clear that he never married because he had not met a woman who was pious enough for him. However, this seems to be a mask that would hide his deeply hurt soul and fears of liberal individualism that taught women's liberation. The combination of his ailing health, the death of his parents and the loss of his fiancé would lead Qutb increasingly to seek refuge in the words of the Quran as a source of reassurance.

²⁷ Musallam, Adnan, From Secularism to Jihad, Praeger Publishers, 2005

The novel Ashwak displays quite an intriguing array of existentialism, liberalism and scepticism. These facets along with the novel's plot about a failed marriage reveal an intimate glance at the scarred soul of Qutb. For an idealistic poet and philosopher like Qutb to put forward all of his hopes and dreams into his prospective marriage reveals that this experience must have devastated Qutb. The idealism that Qutb wrote about in his poetry regarding love failed to mirror the abrasive truth that reality held. This incident would eventually become just one of many dreams that Qutb so vigorously pursued only to find them shattered before his eyes. From a psychological perspective, this failure of things to live up to his idealistic notion of love probably left Qutb very disillusioned with life and desperately searching for something that made sense when so many other ideals failed to meet his expectations. However, these internal struggles would spark a renewed interest in the Quran that remained a firm foundation in Qutb's life when the rest of his environment appeared as a turbulent storm.

v.) The Quran as a Refuge

The Quran increasingly became his crutch for comfort when so many things in this world had failed him, especially worldly things such as his health and his attempt at marriage. In addition to his renewed reflections on the Quran, Qutb looked to Islamic revivalists such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. The revivalists were highly critical of the perceived moral and spiritual decline in the Muslim world. From this moral decline it was perceived that society itself would suffer as a direct result, culminating in repressive regimes and military weakness to exert power. Jihadists would later point to the failed 1967 war with Israel as a direct consequence of the harsh actions by the Nasser regime against the Muslim Brotherhood and the declining morals of society as evidence of this humiliating defeat.

This reanalysis of the Quran from a salvation perspective laid the ideological framework that totally rearranged Qutb's outlook on life. His secularist literary career had failed to bring Qutb to a place where his idealistic dreams could be achieved. Instead, he became rather disillusioned with life and became increasingly critical of the utopian notions that Westernization and modernity were supposed to usher in.²⁸ Qutb increasingly saw the failures of his life and of the larger Egyptian society coming from the lack of practical application of the principles of the Quran. Even before he went to America, he began formulating his new views that Western lifestyles were focused on decadence and shallow pleasures rather than deeper spiritual aspirations. It is clear that his secularist inclinations were becoming eroded by this new spiritual awakening that he was undergoing.

In the years following World War II it becomes evident that Qutb supported a political agenda that became increasingly more radical. His views against the West and modernity were re-hashed and combined with his renewed interest in the Quran. In conjunction with his established ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and growing Egyptian nationalism, Qutb wrote his first major book called Al-'Adalah al-Ijtima'iyyah Fi al-Islam or Social Justice in Islam as it is better known. This book was steeped in verses from the Quran to justify the major points that Qutb made about the superior type of social justice that Islam offered. Also, Qutb unleashes a cascade of damning condemnation against capitalism, communism, democracy, socialism and many other "isms" in a relentless tirade to assert Islam's supremacy in every fashion his imagination could wield. In the book Qutb writes:

Why then do these attempts to present Islam seek to contrast it to failed systems such as socialism, and democracy? Socialism is a socioeconomic system invented by human

²⁸ Musallam, Adnan, From Secularism to Jihad, Praeger Publishers, 2005

beings and subject to fallacy. Democracy is a system of government made by human beings. It carries with it the characteristics of human beings and subjected to fallacy. Islam, however is a comprehensive program for human life. It contains the conception of belief, a social system, an economic system, a legal system, and the system of formation and administration. It is a system made by Allah [God], far above defect and fault. All the shirk (polytheism) of the jahiliyyah [ignorance] of the pre-Islamic Arabs was their belief in idols as mediators bring them nearer to Allah [God]. If this was their shirk as the Quran 39:3 says,--which description then can rightly be said to suit those who believe that Socialism and democracy bring them nearer to Allah [God]. Islam is Islam. Socialism is Socialism. Democracy is Democracy. There is difference between program made by Man and the program made by Allah [God]who created Man... (Qutb, pg. 164-165)²⁹

In this passage Qutb is addressing the problematic reverence that ideologues on all sides of the political spectrum show towards their man-made creations. Qutb is seemingly presenting Islam as something more than a religion and instead a universal system that encompasses all aspects of human life. This is a politicalization of the virtues in Islam. According to Qutb, Islam appears to become a vehicle that is possible for solving all the world's political, social and economic problems.³⁰

It is evident that the ideological salvation that Qutb found in the Quran led him to the overly simplistic notion that Islam was a seemingly quick fix solution to all the world's complex problems. The tenets of Islam and specifically the Quran appear more frequently in his writings demonstrating how deeply religious discourse became entrenched in Qutb's psyche. However, when faced with the fact that Muslims themselves have failed to implement the tenets of Islam

²⁹ Excerpts of Social Justice in Islam are taken from: Khatab, Sayed, The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb, Routledge, 2006

³⁰ Qutb, Sayyid, Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview, Islamic Publications International, 2005

when it comes to creating an ideal society, Musallam eloquently demonstrates Qutb's belief that the West is truly to blame and states:

“The final overthrow of Islam,” Qutb writes, “took place only in the present age, when Europe conquered the world, and when the dark shadow of colonization spread over the whole Islamic world, East and West alike.” He adds: “Europe mustered its forces to extinguish the spirit of Islam, it revived the inheritance of the Crusaders' hatred, and it employed all the materialistic and intellectual powers at its disposal. With these it sought to break down the internal resistance of the Islamic community and to divorce it gradually over a long period from the teachings and the heritage of its religious faith.” (Musallam, pg. 105)

This attitude of the West versus the East is reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's book The Clash of Civilizations because of the manner in which Qutb believes that Muslim countries are struggling against the bombardment of values from Western civilizations. This passage also raises the interesting point that the growing decline in morality and spirituality can be seen not as a failure of the Muslim community to keep the Islamic traditions alive but rather the result of a sinister ploy by Westerners to utilize a policy of cultural imperialism, whereby their old customs are gradually replaced with Western values. Qutb's belief that Westernization inherently meant de-Islamization of Egyptian society would be more refined and culminate in his most influential work entitled Milestones on the Road.

vi.) Journey to America

Before this paper can truly outline Qutb's writings, it is important to first understand the tremendous impact that Qutb's journey to America had on his psyche and intellectual development. Already there was a notable transformation taking place in Qutb's life when he shifted his attention from the literary academic circles towards nationalism and political concerns. This culminated in him receiving unfavourable recognition from King Farouk who

unsuccessfully attempted to have Qutb imprisoned for his lavish criticism of the Egyptian ruling elites.³¹ Partly due to this growing political pressure and a combination of other factors, the Ministry of Education, where he was employed urged Qutb to study the United States' education system in 1948.

The context of Qutb's most influential work entitled Milestones begins when Qutb visited America to undertake an MA in education at the University of Northern Colorado. This was facilitated in order for Qutb to receive Western educational training at the request from the Egyptian Ministry of Education. Throughout his travels in the United States ranging from New York, Denver, Washington, San Francisco, and San Diego he had numerous experiences that left a deep impression on him as to the nature of American society. He in particular found that in general terms Americans were like herds of huddled masses that scurried about primarily in the pursuit of money and lust.³² The desire for money and materialism from Qutb's point of view distracted Americans from the real pursuit of true spirituality. While American's obsession with sexuality revealed to Qutb their more primitive nature.

Qutb's most frequent concern appeared to be the sexuality of Americans, whom he saw as hungry animals that craved sexual gratification which ultimately distanced their conscious awareness from more important spiritual matters. For Qutb the idealized notion of love that he had involved a spiritual fulfilment through finding a companion that would be able to complement each other's personality. However, what he found in America was the unbridled pursuit of one's lusts in order to satisfy an insatiable sexual desire. Qutb would point to this as

³¹ Berggesen, Albert, The Sayyid Qutb Reader, Routledge, 2008, pg. 3

³² Musallam, Adnan, From Secularism to Jihad, Praeger Publishers, 2005

the roots of an insidious moral corruption that threatened to spread to the whole world via America's growing cultural influence. In a revealing letter written to one of Qutb's friends back in Egypt he wrote:

With this absolute licentiousness—or because of this absolute licentiousness—cheap licensed natural sexual relations no longer satisfy sexual inclinations. So sexual abnormality spread by inclination to the other sex whether in the world of boys or in the world of girls. Alfred Kinsey's report on "Sexual Behavior of Men and Women" contains accurate and amazing statistics on this abnormality. I remember—to the extent allowed by difference and the ethics of writing—a personal observation at one of the hotels of Washington, D.C. An Egyptian colleague of mine and I were lodging at this hotel—two days after our arrival in the United States. The black escalator operator felt at ease with us because we were nearer to his skin color and because we did not despise colored people. So he used to offer his "services" in "entertainment" to us. He used to mention "samples" of this entertainment including the different "abnormalities." During the offer, he told us that often "a pair" of boys or girls are in a room. Then both of them ask him to bring a bottle of Coca Cola to them without changing their posture when he entered the room! We were disgusted and surprised, so we told him: Don't they feel ashamed? In turn he was astonished because of our disgust, amazement and our inquiry about shame. He responded: "Why? They satisfy their private inclinations and enjoy themselves." I knew later—from many observations—that American society does not disapprove of any person's satisfying his pleasure in the way that appeals to him as long as there is not coercion.. and subsequently there is no crime... even in what the law—on paper—still considers a crime. (Musallam, pg. 116)

This along with many other stories that Qutb recounts shocked him as to the true nature of individualism and the pursuit of one's own gratification that seemed to be a plague that was rampant in America. Coming from a conservative Muslim country like Egypt where sexuality is something rarely talked about and mostly kept hidden, this cultural contrast seemed to spark a deep resentment for American culture. The stark contrast of open sexuality that was practised in America had a huge impact on Qutb's once favourable opinion of all things Western.

In addition, Qutb had a great deal to say about the lack of spiritual devotion of Churches, but rather a focus on hymns and singing. He criticized American sports like football, boxing and

wrestling as sports that promote an atmosphere of violence. Qutb also rebukes American music as proliferators of sexual activity and states that “jazz music was created by the negroes to satisfy their primitive inclinations...” (Musallam, pg. 117). Yet, as Robert Siegel points out, Qutb had formulated many of these perceptions of America prior to arriving there. Qutb consciously went about reinforcing the pre-conceived stereotype of America that he already had. Siegel also points out there were numerous factors that would have rubbed Qutb the wrong way, mainly the fact that he was a man of color in a largely segregated country and he was an Arab in a land where public opinion vastly favoured Israel. These two points would have undoubtedly caused Qutb to have a negative perception of American society since he was predisposed by his very character into being negatively treated in 1940’s American society. This was especially true when it came to race since for the most part American society still had entrenched racist beliefs that would permeate the discourse that he would have had with most Caucasians that still held onto beliefs of racial inequality.

To suggest that coming to America was a culture shock does not amply express the tremendous awakening that Qutb underwent. Since his earliest childhood years Qutb held onto these beliefs that Westernization and liberal modernity was going to be the salvation of Egyptian society. Even his greatest intellectual champions such as Al-Aqqad promulgated this pro-Western ideology that Qutb truly wanted to believe. Qutb once saw Westernization as a means of creating a lasting positive change not only for Egyptian society but as a beckoning dream to which the rest of the world could likewise aspire. Yet, as Qutb began to refine his intellectual sensibilities his idealistic dreams had to adjust to the picture of reality that his sensory perceptions presented to him. Moussalli elaborates this point further by stating:

From his book, Amrika Allati Ra'aytu (America that I Saw) one can discern three features, among others, that shocked Qutb and propelled his mind towards further rejection of the West as the model to be emulated. The three features were materialism, racism and sexual permissiveness. "Americans", he proclaimed "are not a people without virtues. But their virtues were those of production, organization, reason and work. Their virtues were neither of social and human leadership nor of manners and emotions". In other words, Qutb contended that the American leadership was that of production and materialistic attainment but not of moral leadership. His contention was motivated by many reasons. Believing that Americans produced for the sake of production itself, he felt that production was not directed at moral and spiritual well-being and was devoid of compassion. As their machines did, the Americans functioned day and night and lived in a circle. But, he asked, where was man? (Moussalli, pg. 25-26)

This passage succinctly summarizes many of the ideological problems Qutb had with the United States, not just in terms of their Western cultural hegemony over the rest of the world but in terms of their humanistic philosophy of the human experience. The cited problems of "materialism, racism and sexual permissiveness" (Ibid) that Qutb remarks upon are not simply problems that can be overlooked but are rather systematic failings of a corrupt system that lacks meaningful social values. Liberal Egyptian society upheld the belief that Westernization meant the potential leadership for human progression into a new age of prosperity, but as Qutb notes, the productive and scientific achievements of modernity only mask the fundamental lack of moral guidance in the form of substantial human virtues.

Even though Qutb recognizes the nobility in the principles of the French Revolution such as liberty, equality and fraternity, Western civilization had failed to champion these ideals as humanity progressed and instead clung to hedonistic ambitions in the form of the worship of wealth and sexual pleasures. Despite the fact that Qutb saw numerous displays of overt religious symbols and faithful worship he believed that America's appeals to faith such as attending churches were more akin to theatrical experiences or social events rather than meaningful religious devotions. Qutb remarked how often there would be dancing between the mixed sexes

or singing of hymns at these churches. These displays played into Qutb's conception of America's religious values as more of something akin to theatrics and something far removed from the issue of spirituality or a deep respect for the sacredness of religion.

When these issues were combined with the entrenched racism he found in American society and the pro-Jewish propaganda that he found in the media, Qutb became more solidified in his conceptual opposition to all things Western. Qutb had grown up willing to conform to the Western ideals that promised him and his people a better life. However, after seeing first-hand the direction that American society was leading the rest of the world towards, Qutb's views became increasingly radical. For Qutb, there could not be compromise in this matter because the fate of Egypt and perhaps the destiny of humanity was at stake.

vii.) Coming to Terms with the American Experience

Moussalli records that upon returning home he became increasingly involved with the Muslim Brotherhood, whom he believed offered a viable political alternative to the current corrupt Egyptian government supported by the West. Qutb believed he had a moral imperative to ensure that the moral decay which he perceived was increasing in Egypt needed to be stopped before the country became more and more like the United States. However, after a failed attempt to assassinate Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, many of the leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood along with radical intellectuals like Qutb were rounded up and imprisoned. While in prison Qutb came face-to-face with the horrific barbarism of the Nasser regime's prisons.

Qutb's health was failing him and he was sent to the Munit University Hospital but the other members of the Brotherhood were forced to break rocks as part of their sentence to hard labour. One day when twenty-one of them refused to report to their daily task they were lined up

and executed. Upon hearing this and many other exceptionally cruel punishments such as whippings and being locked in cages with attack dogs, Qutb began to see the deterioration of the very principles of human rights that was central to the teachings of Islam. He believed that Nasser and those in the government only claimed to be Muslims on the surface, but in the face of the regime's use of torture taken right out of CIA handbooks, Qutb felt in his heart that they were not Muslims. In fact, Qutb understood these cruel actions to be the result of a regression of Egyptian society back to a time before Islam or a state of al-jahiliyyah (a term used to describe the state of ignorance in pre-Islamic pagan Arabian society).

These beliefs would formulate Qutb's most revolutionary book entitled Ma'alim fi al-Tariq or Milestones on the Road [also translated as Signposts along the Road], published in 1964. In this book Qutb paints an epic struggle against the forces of Jahili (pagan) society and that violent jihad was needed to overthrow these societies in order to create an truly Islamic society. In other words the use of violence was justified on the basis of establishing a noble end goal of a ideal Islamic society. This is justified according to Qutb because Jahili societies are in rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth, this included also Muslim countries because Qutb believed even they were regressing back into this state of barbarism and ignorance.

According to Qutb, what was needed was a catalyst to provoke change and this catalyst needed to be a vanguard (tali'ah) of revolutionaries that would follow the 'milestones' or 'signposts' along the way to establishing the ideal Islamic society. This vanguard force would know the milestones by referring back to the Quran constantly. This was needed according to Qutb in order to progress human society forward rather than reverting back into a form of society whereby people are ruled by their primitive animalistic nature. It was a necessary step that would

ensure society would not regress back to a time before Islam, a time of ignorance. Qutb summarizes his main point by writing in Milestones:

jahiliyyah is the worship of some people by others; that is to say, some people become dominant and make laws for others, regardless of whether these laws are against God's injunctions and without caring for the use or misuse of their authority. Islam, on the other hand, is people's worshipping God alone, and deriving concepts and beliefs, laws and regulations and values from the authority of God, and freeing themselves from servitude to God's servants... The struggle between the Believers and their enemies is in essence a struggle of belief, and not in any way of anything else. The enemies are angered only because of their faith, enraged only because of their belief. This was not a political or an economic or a racial struggle; had it been any of these, its settlement would have been easy, the solution of its difficulties would have been simple. But essentially it was a struggle between beliefs—either unbelief or faith, either jahiliyyah or Islam. (Qutb, pg. 41)³³

What this passage clearly evokes is the notion that things according to Qutb are black and white. There cannot, nor should there be any room for ambivalent interpretations in the form of shades of grey. Instead Qutb has set himself up as judge and jury for everyone. Qutb's ideas are a clear embodiment of the 'cosmic warfare' that Mark Juergensmeyer refers to in his book Global Rebellion. For Qutb, his struggle is not merely a political battle but instead he is facing an epic struggle against unbelief. He is attempting to wrestle society away from the hands of those who are steering society in the wrong direction by attempting to show that society is losing its moral compass.

The main point of Juergensmeyer's book is that religious radicals often depict their political struggle in terms of a greater cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. This is inherently problematic because it creates simplistic dichotomies of good and evil that are

³³ Excerpt taken from: Berggesen, Albert, The Sayyid Qutb Reader, Routledge, 2008

created in the minds of those who have become radicalized, when in reality the issues and the people involved are incompatible with simplistic dichotomies. Juergensmeyer says:

At some point in the conflict, however usually at a time of frustration and desperation, the political and ideological contest becomes “religionized.” Then what was primarily a worldly struggle takes on the aura of sacred conflict. This creates a whole new set of problems. (Juergensmeyer, pg. 253)

Sayyid Qutb’s political struggle was a monumental task and it is evident that his political struggle with the Muslim Brotherhood against the Egyptian government was a losing battle. As a result of the Egyptian government’s continued repression, Qutb turned to Islam as an ideological crutch to support his struggle against what he depicted as an evil regime. Religion itself therefore no longer becomes a choice between unbelief and belief but ultimately the religion itself is under threat and must be defended. Islam therefore according to Qutb needs to be protected and restored to its rightful place in society no matter what the cost may be.

viii.) Death, and Criticism

In 1965 following yet another crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb was rearrested and sent to prison. He was charged with plotting to assassinate Nasser and destroy Egyptian infrastructure. In 1966 Qutb would be found guilty of treason and publicly hanged. In the eyes of his followers and sympathizers he would be seen as a martyr for the cause of Islam. However, there was widespread rejection of his revolutionary ideas from the general Muslim community. According to Ismail al-Hudaybi, the individual interpretation of the Quran that Qutb uses ignores the complexities and contextual understandings of the Quran from a scholarly point of view. In addition, al-Hudaybi states:

It is incumbent upon anyone who embarks upon dealing with the Holy Quran and the noble prophetic sayings that he is qualified for this, by fulfilling the conditions put by

God on the one who embarks upon this matter. It is imposed upon him to investigate according to his capacity the ruling of the Holy Quran, the sayings of the Prophet, the ranks of the transmitters, the qualities of the transmitters, and distinguishing between authentic attributed sayings from weak attributed sayings. It is also imposed upon him to learn how to establish the proofs by which he distinguishes between truth and falsity and how to deal with what is apparently conflicting. (Musallam, pg. 178)

In other words, the Quran is a complex book that takes years of scholarly study to understand from a theological point of view. Also in the case of the Hadith the chain of transmission is sometimes considered 'weak' and therefore some Hadiths are considered invalid. Qutb was not a formally-trained Islamic scholar and subsequently he cannot make qualified assertions about the Quran or Hadith since he does not have an in-depth knowledge of its contents or circumstances that brought them about. Much of the Quran according to al-Hudaybi was revealed within a given context in Arabian history and to take it out of context and universalize certain passages is grossly irresponsible. Qutb interprets the Quran based on his individual perception which he would be entitled to do since each individual is responsible for their own faith but he would not be entitled to use it as a means to judge other individuals as believers and nonbelievers.

Also Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi rebukes Qutb for essentially cherry-picking select verses of the Quran that refer to jihad and ignoring other verses that contradict his main points. Qutb according to al-Qaradawi perverted the meaning of the Quran by selectively choosing which verses to be used in which circumstances in order to put forward his radical agenda of a continuous war against all pagan and non-conformist Muslim societies. Al-Qaradawi points out that verses in the Quran in fact obligate Muslims to seek peace and show kindness to even the pagan Arabs who they fought against, for example:

...Quran 8:61: "And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in Allah [God]. Lo! He is the Hearer, the Knower"; Quran 60:8: "Allah [God] forbiddeth you not those who warred against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your

homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! Allah [God] loveth the just dealers”; and Quran 4:90: “So, if they hold aloof from you and wage not war against you and offer you peace, Allah [God] alloweth you no way against them,” (Musallam, pg. 178-179)

This is just a few of the examples of the verses that Qutb wilfully ignored in order to put forward an agenda that was politically motivated in the disguise of Islam. Qutb’s own ideas are largely vague and open to many different interpretations and Islamic radicals like Ayman al-Zawahiri, Omar ‘Abd al Rahman and Osama Bin Laden would later interpret Qutb’s writings in light of their own political struggles.³⁴ What this points to is the devious method in which Islam is utilized not as a religion for spiritual fulfilment, but as a political tool to gather popular support for a radical ideology of intolerance and violence.

Qutb’s life was a journey that took him from an Egyptian rural village into the heartland of American society and back into the forefront of the Egyptian political scene. The resonating effect of the breadth of his knowledge, articulate writings and fiery rhetoric forever gave Qutb a place in the history books. However, looking back on Qutb’s legacy, the determining factor from which he is viewed is primarily a result of one’s own sentiments. Within the Middle East there is no lack of anti-American sentiment, either due to the opposition of American foreign policy or the negative perception of American culture. Qutb would seize upon these issues along with entrenched Islamic ethnocentrism to cultivate an ideology that still reverberates with the militant religious extremists of today. Whatever personal opinions people may hold of Qutb, it is hard to ignore the tremendous effect that Qutb’s legacy has had on the Islamic world.

³⁴ Al-Zayyat, Montasser, The Road to Al-Qaeda, Pluto Press, 2002

Chapter 4: The Writings of Sayyid Qutb

Sayyid Qutb's writings stretch across a plethora of topics but his most influential works revolve around the subject of Islam. One of the common themes of Qutb's writings is based on the natural connection that religion shares with politics. This connection is theoretically derived from the time of the Prophet Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] and the political conditions that took place during his lifetime. According to Qutb this exhibits a type of symbiosis that illustrates how through religion, politics is necessitated and derives its authority. In this context the Quran therefore becomes something much more than a religious text dictating the path to a prosperous life but rather an all-encompassing world view that subsequently outlines the idealistic models of political organization.

The remarkable transformation of a tribal culture into a nation, in Qutb's mind, is a self-evident display of the power of the Quran to restructure society. The concepts of the Quran that had helped the early Muslims grow and prosper were the very thing that Qutb believed was needed in order to lead mankind from the false ambitions of Westernization and shortcomings of humanities vices. Qutb's goal through his writings was to demonstrate that the Quran held the salvation for human ills and that by turning back to the Quran humanity itself would walk towards a better condition of existence. In many ways his writings resonated the 18th century revivalist rhetoric of individuals such as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Qutb sought to illustrate to his readers through a process of reason and logic that Islam offered an infinite potential to rejuvenate society. However, Qutb's ideology was radical in the sense that it called

for the overthrow of the established political order and the assassination of his political opponents.³⁵

i.) The America I Have Seen: In the Scale of Human Values

Sayyid Qutb's collection of writings entitled The America I Have Seen is a lesser known work by Qutb. Yet, it reveals a key nature of Qutb's earlier psychology from the perspective of a socially conscious Egyptian seeking out the soul of America and what lies at the heart of the heavily sought after "American Dream". The book is both paradoxical and blunt in the sense that on the one hand Qutb readily praises America as a land of bountiful natural resources and industrial might. However on the other hand, these notions all play into Qutb's conception of America as a nation that contains many illusions. The projection of American society is in one aspect that of a great culture that should be both admired and mimicked. In another aspect, Qutb is truly trying to examine what is missing in the perfect picture that America is trying to present to the world. In a sense, Qutb is trying to more or less tear down the proverbial silver curtain to reveal the true image of the Great Wizard of Oz. Yet, the real Oz is nothing as powerful as the image that the Wizard of OZ tries to project. Qutb is attempting to challenge the last of his remaining previously held convictions of modernity and Westernization as a positive role model for social change. At this point in Qutb's life, he seems to have discovered the illusion of America and wants to expose this illusion in order to help everyone else to see what he has come to realize. Seen from this perspective it becomes possible to comprehend the mindset through which Qutb's frank and condemning remarks about America emerge.

³⁵ Musallam, Adnan, From Secularism to Jihad, Praeger Publishers, 2005

One of the key points that Qutb raises is the issue of human morality. Qutb begins his serious inquiry by asking pointed and direct questions to the reader by stating: “This great America: What is its worth in the scale of human values?” (Qutb, pg. 3). The question reflects Qutb’s main focus: primarily does all of this material wealth and prestige that America holds contribute to the morality of America? The answer is seemingly predetermined before the book was written but nevertheless Qutb walks the reader through his analysis of American society. The underlying argument that Qutb weaves in this work is that there is a discontinuity between America’s material wealth and the shortcomings of the people’s moral consciousness. This leads into the interesting dynamic that Qutb constructs between measuring the achievements of human civilizations by the yardsticks of human morality and social values. Qutb states this bluntly by saying:

Most of the value of civilizations lay in what universal truths and worldviews they have attained. These achievements elevate feelings, edify consciences, and add depth to man’s perception of the values of all life and human life in particular. They increase the distance between man and animal in feelings and behaviour, through man’s estimation of life and things. (Qutb, pg. 3)

The pursuit of life, according to Qutb, must be seen as a stride towards “universal truths” (Ibid) and elevating human consciousness to new levels. This is a profoundly deep assessment that Qutb makes regarding humanity. This objective that Qutb outlines clearly delineates that civilization should strive towards demonstrating their highest possible potential for human development. A failure to act in accordance with this principle would cause human beings to adopt the primitive nature of animals. It is obvious that Qutb seems unimpressed by the technological advancements that America has achieved and instead focuses on the philosophical moral consciousness that he feels America needs to prioritize as a primary principle of civilization.

On the one hand Qutb acknowledges America for its science and industrial productivity but on the other hand Qutb admonishes Americans for their primitive behaviour. This is in no way a subtle rebuke but part of the paradox that is America. Although America may be a great world superpower, behind the illusion is a morally corrupt and decadent society. Instead of American society being filled with the universal truths of spiritual enlightenment they sought out material comforts that dulled their desires for something more meaningful. This notion of materialism versus the cultivation of the soul is at the heart of Qutb's rebuke of America. Qutb does not appear to be alone in such an assessment. George Bernard Shaw is reported to have said: "America is the only country that went from barbarism to decadence without civilisation in between".³⁶ The theme that both Shaw and Qutb seem to be pointing out is that America is unlike a culture such as the Persians or Chinese that have had their civilization formed over thousands of years. America is about 235 years old, which is just a blip on the historical map of humankind. In this context it is easy to understand that America is a relatively new civilization that is still young when compared to other civilizations on earth. Without allowing a civilization to form over an expanded period of time, there can be no sense of a common heritage or a strong sense of cultural awareness. These things might be contrived perceptions but when formulated over thousands of years they help to solidify a people with a common purpose. For Qutb, this is most evidently displayed among the racial divisions of the 1950's between Blacks and Whites.

The major issue that Qutb is attempting to bring to the reader's attention is the simple fact that America is now in a leadership role within the global community but their values and morals have not had the opportunity to withstand the test of time. To achieve greatness is one thing, to achieve greatness and hold onto this level of accomplishment so as to make a meaningful impact,

³⁶ http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/United_States (accessed on December 21, 2011)

is quite another issue all together. America has managed to achieve its standing in the world based primarily on its technological tools and its opportunity to rebuild Europe and Japan after World War 2. Yet, Qutb is quick to point out that devices like technological tools are easily replaced by other newer innovations and cultures have always risen to power only to later decline, such as the Roman Empire. Instead of placing false merit on America's footing in the world stage, Qutb examines America based on its morality and philosophy in terms of "the scale of human values" (Qutb, pg. 3).

The evidence that Qutb uses to support his hypothesis is derived from the type of cultural focus that Americans indulge in. For Qutb, the unending obsession that the average American holds for things like physical sports is indicative of a culture that is primarily concerned with primitive aspects of life. The attention that athletes are awarded ignores more meaningful principles based on human experiences involving human values, social manners, family life, work ethics, or even economic relationships. Qutb views these athletic competitions, such as football, as a spectacle of not simply entertainment but instead as a display of the primitive tendencies of Americans. Qutb writes:

This primitiveness can be seen in the spectacle of the fans as they follow a game of football, played in the rough American style, which has nothing to do with its name (football), for foot does not take part in the game. Instead, each player attempts to catch the ball with his hands and run with it toward the goal, while the players of the opposing team attempt to tackle him by any means necessary, whether this be a blow to his stomach, or crushing his arms and legs with great violence and ferocity. The sight of the fans as they follow this game, or watch boxing matches or bloody, monstrous wrestling matches... is one of animal excitement born of their love for hardcore violence. Their lack of attention to the rules of sportsmanship to the extent that they are enthralled with the flowing blood and crushed limbs, crying loudly, everyone cheering for his team. Destroy his head. Crush his ribs. Beat him to a pulp. This spectacle leaves no room for doubt as to the primitiveness of the feelings of those who are enamoured with muscular strength and desire it. (Qutb, pg. 7-8)

This passage illustrates succinctly Qutb's alarming observation of American sportsmanship and its zealous fans. The point that Qutb is trying to get across is that despite the material luxuries or the technological innovations that have transformed America into the envy of the world, America and Americans for that matter are still very primitive human beings. Qutb is attempting to shatter the aura of superiority that Americans have tried to project of themselves and expose them as an unrefined culture. Just as the Romans used to have gladiatorial matches that were full of blood and violence, Qutb is remarking upon the fact that despite the thousands of years of differences between them, they are not so different once one looks beyond the surface. According to Qutb, there is a lack of refinement within American culture and without this value to add to the scale of human intellectual development America is only an illusion of the civilization it claims to be.

Qutb also portrays Americans as embodying a warrior culture that is bent on warfare as a means of posturing their power. He postulates this based on America's history of bloodshed. In particular, the first settlers to America fought with the Native Americans in a violent conflict for control over the land. This was then followed up by their war of independence from the British crown, in which Americans waged a brutal conflict in order to solidify their independence. Soon, the Americans found themselves in conflict with their neighbouring states in the North and South. This climaxed in the American Civil War, causing massive destruction and the loss of so many lives. These historical events help bring Qutb to the conclusion that Americans have a tendency towards armed conflict and this is indicative of their violent warrior nature. Qutb contrasts the historical reality with the illusion that outsiders hold of Americans as defenders of justice.

The consequence for Americans having such a fanatical obsession with sports is that the physically strong are elevated in society while the weak are looked down upon. This dichotomy between the weak and the strong allows for Qutb to illustrate the lack of morals or social

conscience that American society has. The point here is that Qutb found first hand examples of people making fun of the sick and dying people in a hospital. This was enough evidence for Qutb to conclude that American culture had certain ways of looking down upon those most fragile in society. For Qutb, this was a defining example of the finer dignity and respect for all members of society that America was lacking. Qutb remarks that even the birds from his childhood in Egypt demonstrated sadness and a sense of loss when one of their own was seen to be dead. Qutb writes on this matter:

The sanctity of death may be a natural instinct. So it is not the primitiveness of feeling that has erased the sanctity of death in the American soul. Rather, it is the drought of sentimental sympathy in their lives, and the foundation of their lives upon monetary and material measures, and sheer physical gratification. (Qutb, pg. 11)

The message that Qutb is trying to convey to the reader in this passage is that in an effort for Americans to obtain prosperity and material goals, they have forsaken the very core values that instinctually make someone human. The ambition to forge a new destiny on the forefront of human innovation has left Americans without the moral values that can support a culture in the long run. These are parts of the blunt assessments that Qutb makes towards American people, and help further underscore why Qutb so vehemently denounced the system of Westernization spreading from America.

The last few points that Qutb touches upon is the social rather than spiritual function the Churches serve and the heightened embrace of human sexuality of Americans. Qutb is very dismissive of American Christian spiritual devotion stemming from the Churches because they mainly act as social events for the intermixing of the sexes. This leads Qutb to infer that the devotional hymns and singing is done more for show and theatrics than legitimate devotional spirituality. The fact that both the males and females congregate in the same area means that

sexual relations are formed via help of the Churches and presiding ministers. The open embrace of America's sexuality is something that Qutb finds alarming, especially considering that Egypt for the most part was still largely a conservative society. The intermixing and freedom of sexuality from moral confines helps further solidify the point that Qutb is attempting to establish with the reader, namely that America is a land with poor moral standards and conduct befitting the animal kingdom instead of the advanced technological society the United States tries to portray itself.

Qutb ultimately questions the role that America has been given in the world. Although Qutb readily acknowledges America's outstanding technological achievements, they are little more than the bare bones of a great society. Without the moral values to act as a glue to hold society together, inevitably the structure falls apart. It is clear from these writings that Qutb is writing for an audience back in Egypt who have very little, if any, firsthand knowledge of American society. Qutb systematically attempts to deconstruct the illusion of America as a developed civilization and asserts what he believes is the factual reality that illustrates the true breadth of his anti-American ideology. Qutb further states:

America has a principal role in this world, in the realm of practical matters and scientific research, and in the field of organization, improvement, production, and management. All that requires mind power and muscle are where American genius shines, and all that requires spirit and emotion are where American naïveté and primitiveness become apparent. For humanity to be able to benefit from American genius they must add great strength to the American strength. But humanity makes the gravest of errors and risks losing its account of morals, if it makes America its example in feelings and manners. All this does not mean that Americans are a nation devoid of virtues, or else, what would have enabled them to live? Rather, it means that America's virtues are the virtues of production and organization, and not those of human and social morals. America's are the virtues of the brain and the hand, not those of taste and sensibility. (Qutb, pg. 20-21)

This quote shows how Qutb is very strategic in his assessment of American society. On the one side Qutb recognises the intellectual and muscular might of America. However, on the other side Qutb denounces America as a land that relies too much on those attributes instead of morals and virtue. The end result is that Qutb is able to explain to Egyptians and those in the Muslim world how America has achieved such prominence on the world stage, but why this is a feeble image that America projects. Qutb sees past this illusion to what he views as the real America, an America that is morally weak on the inside. The real point of this book is to illustrate that America should not be held up as the example of humanity's pinnacle, but rather that humanity is still searching for the beacon of hope in the world. That beacon will hold with it the true virtues and proper moral guidance that will create justice and harmony across the globe.

Qutb's writings display a man who is wrestling to come to grips with the experiences of America that he surely was not ready to understand. The scenes that he depicts for the reader reveal that he is at odds with the idealistic notion of America that he had been exposed to in Egypt and must confront the cold reality that lies in front of him. The book sets the stage for his new revival into the study of Islam and the universal truths that would bring the world away from the false dreams in the form of rampant materialism that America seemed to sell. It would be precisely these new ideas that would cause Qutb to take a more radical move towards politics as a means of establishing a better future for Egyptian society and perhaps the world.

ii.) Social Justice in Islam

The first major theoretical work that Sayyid Qutb wrote was Al-'Adala al-Ijtuma'iyya fi-l-Islam or Social Justice in Islam as it is better known. This literary creation focuses primarily on Qutb's religious social criticism of society. It was published in 1949 during the period that he

spent studying in the West. Social Justice in Islam is the first glimpse of Qutb as an increasingly religiously-oriented intellectual. Within its pages Qutb formulates the foundations of his ideology. One of the frequent motifs in his writings revolves around how Islam is a unified system that aligns earthly and heavenly matters into one spiritual organizational entity.

Qutb attempts to most distinctly elaborate what Islam should mean as a universal theoretical entity. According to Qutb, Islam involves all social aspects and should be seen as an integral part of social life. This would be different from the conceptions of European Christianity that advocates a secular state alongside the existence of churches. Yet, for Qutb this notion is something that is divorced from the principles of Islam, since in Islam there is an entrenched notion that faith delivers social justice. The example he provides is that the poor have a legitimate claim to a portion of the wealth held by the rich, which reduces social inequality. By divorcing Islam from such principles as social justice, Qutb is suggesting that Muslims are in fact being disingenuous to their faith. The book Islam in Transition edited by John Donohue and John Esposito quotes Social Justice in Islam where Qutb states:

The conclusion from this is that we should not put away the social aspect of our faith on the shelf; we should not go to French legislation to derive our laws, or to communist ideals to derive our social order, without first examining what can be supplied from our Islamic legislation which was the foundation of our first form of society. But there is a wide ignorance of the nature of our faith, there is a spiritual and intellectual laziness which is opposed to a return to our former resources; there is a ridiculous servility to the European fashion of divorcing religion from life—a separation necessitated by the nature of their religion, but not by the nature of Islam. For with them there still exists that gulf between religion on the one hand and learning and the state on the other, the product of historical reasons which have no parallel in the history of Islam. (Qutb, pg. 104-105)

This passage demonstrates Qutb's firm conviction that Islam has a prominent role to play in the social affairs of society. The systems of the French and communists are manmade constructions that do not carry the same weight as Islam and should not be seen as equivalent ideological

counterparts. Instead, Islam plays an intimate role in a Muslim's daily life and therefore should take its place within the heart of the social order. Furthermore, Qutb rebukes Muslims for their ignorant and lazy nature that has divorced religion from their lives. This further demonstrates how staunchly Qutb conceives of Islam as so much more than a religion in the traditional sense but in contrast as a complete all-embracing world view.

For Qutb the problems of the world can be addressed through a proper application of Islamic principles. For example, the criticism that he has of Western capitalist society is that it places most of its emphasis on individualism. In an Islamic society, the ideal goal is to balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the community by setting up boundaries that respect mutual responsibility for the rest of society. Communism fails to create an ideal system since the majority of its emphasis is on the prosperity of the society as a collective whole that de-incentivizes individualist ambitions. In contrast, Islamic society places a balance between the competing ideologies of individualism and a collective society. Qutb elaborates this point by stating:

This breadth of vision in the Islamic view of life, together with the fact that it goes beyond merely economic values to those other values on which life depends—these things make the Islamic faith the more powerful to provide equity and justice in society, and to establish justice in the whole of the human sphere. It also frees Islam from the narrow interpretation of justice as understood by Communism. For justice to the Communist is an equality of wages, in order to prevent economic discrimination; but within recent days when theory has come into opposition with practice, Communism has found itself unable to achieve this equality. Justice in Islam is a human equality, envisaging the adjustment of all values, of which the economic is but one. (Qutb, pg. 107)

Through this quote, one can see how Qutb theoretically challenges the notion that Communism is a viable alternative to an Islamic economic model. Qutb strongly believes that there is truly no other social, economic or political alternative that can compete on the same ideological grounds

as Islam. Therefore, Qutb continuously argues that Islam is not only the best alternative but that it holds the keys to a more perfect existence that is better than man-made constructions can compete with. It is the unification of so many diverse aspects of society that recombine to formulate one conceptual aspiration for mankind.

Since Social Justice in Islam was the first major religiously orientated work of Sayyid Qutb, one can see how it lays the ideological foundation for his many other later writings. This book is so much more than merely Qutb's arguments for the superiority of Islam but was rather the solidifying force that finalized Qutb's transition from a secularist writer towards Islamic scholarship. The ideas conceived within its pages would prove to be the launching pad for his conceptualization of Islam as the salvation of Egyptian society and the world as a whole.

iii.) In the Shade of the Quran

Another of Sayyid Qutb's major literary works was Fi Zilal al-Quran or In the Shade of the Quran, as it is better known in English. The book is structured as a commentary on the Quran and was written during the period of 1951-1965. During this time much of its contents were written while Qutb was in prison for his alleged part in the attempted assassination plot of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The book is mainly a refinement of Qutb's earlier ideas and thoughts regarding what Qutb envisions to be the ideal form of Islamic society and state. Like many exegeses on the Quran before it, Qutb attempts to review the verses of the Quran and interpret and elaborate its passages. It is basically the scholarly equivalent of taking a magnifying glass to a painting and trying to decipher the minute aspects of the artist's attention to detail. At times it appears as though it is written as a collective arrangement of personal opinions because it lacks some of the scholarly citation of other Quranic tafsirs [commentaries].

In many regards, In the Shade of the Quran is the Quranic literary basis for his later work Milestones. Although one could argue that In the Shade of the Quran did not have the type of grand audacity that came through in Milestones, it nevertheless has strong literary qualities that brings the reader a greater insight into the mindset of Qutb. Through its pages Qutb weaves together particular themes about Islamic law, jihad and social justice that would have a profound impact on his sensibilities towards the Egyptian political scene. Particularly, Qutb's ideology would have an influential effect on how average Egyptians would view Nasser on his anti-religious sentiments. Qutb is not simply examining the text from a purely academic vantage point but is rather trying to re-experience the verses of the Quran and find a meaningful way of applying its verses to his life.

In Surah [Chapter] 8 entitled Al-Anfal [The Spoils of War], Qutb discusses the pertinent issues of this Surah. Based on a strictly literal interpretation of the text, isolated from other parts of the Quran, Qutb comes up with the belief that jihad should not be limited only for purely defensive reasons. Qutb advocates based upon Surah 8:38-40 that Muslims should fight to liberate themselves from the oppression of human hands. In this instance, a Muslim does not need to abide by the limits of self-defence but rather can proactively seek out their freedom by means of throwing off their shackles through the recognition of God as the only authority. Islam therefore gives mankind the right to affirm their liberation from the hands of tyrants. Thus, Muslims need not wait for them to be attacked in order to justify their proclamation of jihad but merely recognizing their intolerant form of bondage that keeps them oppressed would seemingly be sufficient justification for their advancement of jihad. In the Sayyid Qutb Reader edited by Albert Bergesen, Qutb reiterates this point by writing:

The justification for jihad is inherent in the nature of this faith, its declaration of man's liberation, and its confrontation with existing human situations using adequate and effective means, suitably adapted and renewed for every stage. This justification exists in the first place, even though there may be no threat to the Muslim land or the Muslim community. It is of the essence of the Islamic approach and the nature of the practical obstacles that stand in its way in different communities. Islamic jihad cannot be linked merely to some limited temporary defensive needs. (Qutb, pg. 55)

Here Qutb is illustrating the supposed basic right for Muslims to commit themselves to jihad in order to obtain liberation. It is quite revealing that he believes that "the justification for jihad is inherent in the nature of this faith" but then goes on to state that this justification is not dependent upon any given threat. What this is subsequently advocating is the release of jihad from its restrictions of being defensive, to what Qutb asserts could be an offensive use for jihad in the case of one's desire for liberation. This is important because it plays into Qutb's conception that violence against the Egyptian state or people was justified by the belief that he was attempting to liberate them from the oppression of a jahili system. Therefore, this would stipulate that not only do the ends justify the means but he is ultimately working towards the best interests of everyone.

Although Qutb notably believes he is working towards creating a better Islamic society, his writings reflect a sense of self-righteousness that seems to impair his message. He speaks of Islam as something more than a religion that contains spiritual values but rather as an all-encompassing world view. Islam according to Qutb, is more like a revolutionary concept that proposes a unique way of life that is in harmony with the universe. The goals of Islam from his perspective is to remould the prevailing social order in order to make it conform to his own vision. Jihad is therefore the means that conveys this struggle. Qutb writes:

Like other revolutionary concepts, Islam avoids common words already in currency and opts for a more precise terminology so that its radical aspects stand distinct. As part of

this special terminology, jihad serves a clear purpose. Islam deliberately discards words denoting war. Instead, it uses the word jihad, which is the equivalent of the English word “struggle”. The Arabic word, however, is far more expressive and carries broader connotations, as it stands for exerting one’s utmost endeavour to promote a cause. One may ask why the old words were discarded and new expressions coined? The answer lies in the fact that the word ‘war’ has always been used for armed conflict between nations and empires aiming to achieve personal or national interests, devoid of an ideology or higher principles. Since Islam is not concerned with such mundane considerations, it dropped the old vocabulary altogether. Nor does Islam feel itself bound by a national concern. It has no interest in who occupies a particular piece of land. The only thing that matters for Islam is the well-being of humanity, for which it has its own particular perspective and action plan. Wherever there are governments opposed to its perspective, Islam aims to change them, regardless of where they function and the people they govern. Its ultimate objective is to establish its way of life and to put in place governments that implement its programme. Islam wants space—not a piece of a particular community; on the contrary, it wants to give all humanity spiritual and moral elevation through the implementation of its unique programme. To make it happen, it marshals every bit of manpower and material resource. (Qutb, pg. 60)

In this quote Qutb is outlining exactly what the concept of jihad refers to and how this applies to his greater ideology. The distinction that he makes between the struggle that jihad means and the concept of war is an important aspect of his thought process. Since jihad means something much deeper than what war signifies, Qutb is making a thoughtful point that further elevates the goals of Islam beyond simplistic thinking. However, the clear emphasis that Qutb seems to be deriving from the principles of Islam is an increased focus on the social change that Islam offers rather than spiritual change. One can speculate that it was Qutb’s own political and personal experiences have led him to interpret Islam as a political force, whereas it is first and foremost a religion whose focus is on spiritual matters. Even though Qutb acknowledges that Islam attempts to divorce itself from worldly conflicts involving war, Qutb ties up Islamic principles into Egypt’s political situation through the manner in which he interprets Islam and its religious texts.

Presumably, by making Islam appear as a political force, he was creating a political platform that would legitimate his struggles against a hostile political regime. Islam is primarily a religion not a political system or economic system. The problem with individuals who attempt to turn Islam into a grab bag of every aspect of life is that they must inevitably interpret Islam in a certain manner. However, the facts remain that the Prophet [p.b.u.h.] who was a political leader at the time was in direct contact with God through the Archangel Gabriel. This is not a political system that one can emulate in the modern era, although there were notable aspects by the way he ruled that can be applied to all time frames. These aspects of governing are ideas that must be interpreted and distinguished between the actions taken at his time that were best for his community versus what is pertinent to the modern political environment.

In addition, the first Muslim community utilized slave labour as an important economic driving force. Despite the Prophet's [p.b.u.h.] best efforts to reduce the role of slavery in society it remained deeply entrenched in Islamic society due to the economic value it held and it was ultimately Western civilization that abolished the inhumane practice of slavery. This is only a example of why it is difficult and problematic to suggest that Islam as it was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] can be exactly applied to modern society. There are universal principles that are taught in Islam but how one interprets these principles and applies them is up to each individual's interpretation. Therefore, as noble as Qutb's intentions might have been, they try to simplify complex interpretations without taking into account the more salient features of applying Islamic principles according to the current needs of a Muslim society.

iv.) Milestones

Sayyid Qutb's book entitled Milestones is highly regarded as his most influential literary work. It was first published in 1964, after Qutb faced severe torture at the hands of Nasser's regime. Qutb proved through his poetry to be a highly sensitive and emotional man. It is clear that much of this sensitivity was removed in Milestones and instead replaced with a cold calculated perception of reality. From a third person perspective it is hard to understand how horrific and brutal the experiences of torture would have shaped Qutb's thoughts. However, these dreadful experiences assumedly left a deep impact on Qutb in terms of his ideology and his outlook. His prison experience combined with his other life altering events nonetheless would aid in the conception of this monumental work.

In the book, Qutb clearly draws inspiration from the Islamic scholar Maulana Mawdudi by the way Qutb echoes Mawdudi's ideas about Islam being a complete system for living one's life and how establishing Islamic law is obligatory upon Muslims. Furthermore, the stated purpose of this book was to be a handbook for the so-called "vanguards" that would bring about his vision for a new Islamic revivalist movement. Qutb tells the readers that the world is desperately in need of new leadership and it is up to the true Muslims to lead the way. In an English translation of Milestones edited by A.B. al-Mehri, Qutb states:

Islam cannot fulfil its role except by taking a concrete form in a society, rather, in a nation; for man does not listen, especially in this age, to an abstract theory which is not seen materialized in a living society. From this point of view, we can say that the Muslim community has been extinct for a few centuries, for this Muslim community does not denote the name of a land in which Islam resides, nor is it a people whose forefathers lived under the Islamic system at some earlier time. It is the name of a group of people whose manners, ideas and concepts rules and regulations, values and criteria, are all derived from the Islamic source. The Muslim community with these characteristics vanished at the moment the laws of Allah [God] became suspended on earth. (Qutb, pg. 25)

In this passage Qutb is arguing for the return to Islam as a guiding principle for humanity. In addition, Qutb is stating that Muslims have not been true to the values of Islam and have deviated from God's true path by following values such as Western materialism instead of true spirituality. This quote also encapsulates the core themes that Qutb often reflects upon, namely the need for a reinvigoration of Islamic values in the form of real leadership and a return to the foundational principles of Islam preserved in the Quran. Most importantly, Qutb is directing these comments at those whom he views as the individuals who will carry out this task of revitalizing Islam. Qutb further says: "It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and keeps walking on the path [that he outlines], marching through the vast ocean of jahiliyyah which has encompassed the entire world" (Qutb, pg 27-28). These statements allow for the author to make an impassioned plea with the reader so that they may engage in this struggle for the cause of Islam. There is a urgency in Qutb's message that signifies that Islam is under threat and needs true Muslims to rally to its cause. Moreover, for Muslim readers and especially for the militantly-minded Muslims, Qutb's words evoke an intimate sense that they themselves hold the key towards revitalizing Islam by becoming part of this "vanguard".

Qutb intended this "vanguard" to be the force that would alter society from its state of jahiliyyah back to the righteous path. Through this undertaking, this group would detach itself from the edifice of a jahili society by becoming distinct and independent. The ambitions of these "vanguards" is to preach the truth about Islam and reform society via articulate persuasion. Through these actions the ideas and beliefs of society would be reformed. However, Qutb foresaw that this inevitably would lead to a conflict with the authorities of the jahili system, who rely upon the jahili system as their source of power and wealth. In order to protect their jahili system, Qutb suspected that they would commit any heinous act in order to preserve their

authority. Evidence of this was most assuredly derived from Qutb's first hand experiences at the hands of Egyptian interrogators who maliciously tortured him and his fellow Muslim Brotherhood members. To oppose these forces, Qutb advocated that physical force must be employed in order to overthrow the established jahiliyyah order in the form of jihad or holy war. Despite the fact that some of these leaders claimed to be Muslims, Qutb is convinced that these leaders do not serve the God that they profess to worship. Instead, these leaders are depicted as being morally bankrupt and cling to materialism as their only form of wealth.

Qutb's writings take on an imperative nature that depicts the struggle that he outlines in epic religious terms. The ideological war that he wages in his writings is merely the precursor to what he sees as an inevitable physical struggle that must take place. Yet, Qutb's goal is to ultimately free people who have become unwittingly subservient to this jahili system instead of being servants to God. The principles of Islam have become worn down in society and its leaders have compromised their integrity for worldly gain. Qutb believes that only once this leadership is overthrown through jihad can the people themselves truly find salvation in Islam. However, Qutb recognises that his ideological opponents reject his notions of jihad. Qutb passionately writes in response:

Thus, when they speak about jihad, they speak clumsily and mix up the various stages, distorting the whole concept of jihad and deriving from the Quranic verses final principles and generalities for which there is no justification. This is because they regard every verse of the Quran as if it were the final principle of this religion. This group of thinkers, who are the product of the sorry state of the present Muslim generation, have nothing but the label of Islam and have laid down their spiritual and rational arms in defeat. They say, "Islam has prescribed only defensive war"! and think that they have done some good for their religion by depriving it of its method, which is to abolish all injustice from the earth, to bring people to the worship of God alone, and to bring out of servitude to other into the servants of the Lord. Islam does not force people to accept belief, but it wants to provide a free environment in which they will have the choice of

beliefs. What it wants is to abolish those oppressive political systems under which people are prevented from expressing their freedom to choose whatever beliefs they want, and after that it gives them complete freedom to decide whether they will accept Islam or not. (Qutb, pg. 65)

This quote demonstrates Qutb was aware of his critics' counter-arguments but was still undeterred by their statements. Instead, Qutb fiercely rejects their arguments that Islam advocates "only defensive war" (Ibid) and states that this is just further evidence that supports his conception that Muslims have lost their way. For Qutb, his critics exhibit a defeatist attitude that has given Westernization and the concept of modernity a type of ideological hegemony that reigns supreme. Islam, according to Qutb's writings, should be a system of beliefs that should hold hegemony over all other belief systems. The fact that Islam does not hold its rightful place in society is simply further evidence for Qutb that demonstrates what a completely messed up world he is living in. In Qutb's mind the perception of the world juxtaposed to other people's perception must have been similar to the experience that Galileo underwent trying to convince the Roman Catholic Church that the world was round instead of flat.

Additionally, Qutb believes that this defeatist attitude that has seeped into the Muslim community is precisely the type of mentality that has kept Muslims trapped and subservient to Western domination. His words echo a stubborn attitude but also a notable frustration at the fact that rather than fellow Muslims finding agreement with what he is saying, they are meek in the face of the challenges that the Muslim community is facing. Instead of rising to this challenge and facing it head on, Qutb notably finds Muslims are not willing to rise to the defence of Islam. Qutb believes he is living in a situation where Islam itself is under threat from both the outside forces of the West and the internal forces of Muslims with a pacifist or defeatist attitude.

According to Qutb, this is not only inexcusable but shows just how distorted other Muslim's views on Islam have become. Qutb rhetorically strikes back by stating:

When writers with defeatist and apologetic mentalities write about "jihad in Islam," trying to remove this blot from Islam, then they are mixing up two things: first, that this religion forbids the imposition of its belief by force as, is clear from the verse, "There shall be no compulsion in religion..." while on the other hand it tries to annihilate all those political and material powers which stand between people and Islam, which compel a people to bow before another and prevent them from accepting the sovereignty of Allah [God]. These two principles have no relation to one another nor is there room to mix them. In spite of this, these defeatists-type people try to mix the two aspects and want to confine jihad to what today is called 'defensive war'. The Islamic jihad has no relationship to modern warfare, either in its causes or in the way in which it is conducted. The causes of Islamic jihad should be sought in the very nature of Islam and its role in the world... (Qutb, pg. 66-67)

Qutb in this quote recognizes that Islam cannot be followed via compulsion but he still maintains that Muslims have an obligation to defend Islam when Islam itself is under threat. Here one can see that Qutb's arguments would fall flat due to this one passage from the Quran that negates his call to arms if it were not for the fact that Qutb believes that this should not extend to situations where Islam itself is under siege. The solution Qutb provides to correct this situation whereby Islam has been relegated an inferior role in society is to take up the cause of jihad as a means to struggle against these "political and material powers" (Ibid) that have essentially usurped the role that Islam should hold in society. The world that Qutb envisions is fairly black and white, there is no room to compromise one's principles when the fundamentals of Islam itself are being eroded in society and slowly being replaced with aspects of a jahiliyyah society.

It is important to keep in mind that the texts of the Quran are one thing, but how an individual goes about interpreting its verses is quite another. For Qutb, his life experiences, especially those in prison must have had a profound effect on the way he interpreted the Quran.

There is nothing from his earlier secular literary career that really foreshadowed this conception of Islam under siege but rather this was a later intellectual discovery that Qutb envisioned. Within Qutb's lifetime he undoubtedly had a transformative set of experiences that likewise determined how he perceived Western culture and this combined with his new found interpretation of the Quran evidently proved to supply him with an increasingly radical militant perception on life. From a close reading of Qutb's later writings he is obviously very politically focused but the justification for his political views stem greatly from his conception of Islam. Therefore, it becomes difficult to understand which set of ideological beliefs beget which other beliefs. Whether it was his political beliefs that spurred on his religious renaissance or whether it was his religious renaissance that stirred his political beliefs is a rather perplexing debate that seems to not have a clear answer. Whatever the case may be, Qutb writes about a great need for Muslims to rise up and defend their homeland from those who threaten their Islamic way of life, whether they be domestic or foreign forces. Qutb repeatedly reiterates that it is Islamic jihad that is required and that by failing to act, the very essence of Islam will be washed away by a cascade of Western influences.

The theme of Islamic jihad in Qutb's writings is by far the most controversial topic that he writes about. In addition, he writes about it in a manner that acknowledges a significant degree of criticism. This creates a range of statements that stretch from being rather defensive about his beliefs on the subject to being completely unapologetic to the point of arrogance. The reason why he takes his position on Islamic jihad so seriously could be due to the fact that a great deal of his solution towards creating a new established order rests on his ability to convince his "vanguard" of the need to overthrow the current authorities.

From the position of the Egyptian government this was tantamount to sedition against the state and therefore they believed they were justified in their harsh treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, it appears to be the case based on the references reviewed thus far that Qutb and his other Muslim Brotherhood members believed they were merely following the dictates of the principles of Islam by re-imposing Islam's rightful place in society. To justify his position Qutb quotes the Quran which states: "Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah [God], while those who disbelieve fight in the cause of taghut [false objects of worship]. So fight against the allies of Satan. Indeed, the plot of Satan is ever weak." (Quran, 4:76). This is among several verses where fighting is mentioned in the Quran and allows for Qutb to selectively pick verses that appear to support his calls for jihad. Furthermore, Qutb writes:

The reason for jihad which have been described in the above verses are these: to establish Allah's [God's] authority in the earth; to arrange human affairs according to true guidance provided by Allah [God] Almighty; to abolish all the Satanic forces and Satanic systems of life and to end the lordship of one man over others since all men are creatures of Allah [God] and no one has the authority to make them his servants or to make arbitrary laws for them. These reasons are sufficient for proclaiming jihad. However, one should always keep in mind that there is no compulsion in religion; that is, once the people are free from the lordship of men, the law governing civil affairs will be purely that of Allah [God], while no one will be forced to change his beliefs and accept Islam. (Qutb, pg. 81)

This passage is particularly revealing because of the context that it comes from. In the previous paragraphs Qutb is quoting huge sections of the Quran that deal with fighting and taking them out of their original context from which these Quranic verses were revealed.³⁷ In the time of the Prophet Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] the early Muslim community was at war with the tribes of

³⁷ One of the verses that Qutb references is Quran, Surah 2:191.

Mecca.³⁸ This was due to a plethora of complex issues but Qutb essentially ignores the historical context in which these verses were revealed to deal with specific issues of the Muslim community of the time. Qutb takes these verses and then universalizes them to make it seem as though they apply to his specific situation. Moreover, the noted passage above would indicate that Qutb is not just engaged in a political struggle of power but rather he is battling “Satanic forces and Satanic systems of life” (Ibid). If one truly believes that one is in a struggle against the forces of Satan then obviously jihad becomes justified according to Qutb and it conveniently justifies everything one does in the name of this holy struggle.

The notable issue taking place in Qutb’s writings is how his struggle is a virtuous cause that aims at liberating men from the tyranny of an unjust system. There is truly a sense of a cosmic warfare that is taking place within Qutb’s writings that simply cannot be ignored. Yet, he is continually confronted with this Quranic edict that there is to be no compulsion in religion and must find ideological tools to circumvent this prohibition. Qutb is probably looking to persuade his readers of the imperative nature of his struggle against the “Satanic forces”. He writes passionately about how fellow Muslims need to take up this cause of jihad and does so by trying to play on the readers’ religious sensitivities. Qutb demonstrates a fantastically wild imagination that envisions Qutb’s resistance in the most extreme terms.

For anyone trying to understand Qutb’s mindset, Milestones is a true glimpse into the inner workings of Qutb’s ideology. His frank and open approach will most likely leave many readers polarized. On one side it shows how simplistically Qutb blames much of the moral corruptness on the West and uses rhetoric that appeals to religious fanatics. On the other side,

³⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/396226/Muhammad> (accessed on December 21, 2011)

readers might be polarized by his lack of strong consistent Quranic scholarship or his violent rhetoric. Additionally, he goes so far as to compare the current political dynamic as a continuation of the Crusades by saying: “The truth of the matter is that the latter-day imperialism is but a mask for the crusading spirit...” (Qutb, pg.177). Qutb in many ways is a true idealist, he creates uncompromising ideals of Islam and holds strong to these beliefs. Even in the face of mounting criticism and opposing Quranic verses, Qutb interprets the Quran in a manner that supports his political and ideological ambition.

Yet, to fully understand Qutb, one must be continually reminded of the effects that Egypt’s social dynamic played on Qutb’s conscience. In many ways Qutb could be seen as a logical Islamic reaction to the social experimentation that Gamal Abdel Nasser engaged in with the intent of radically redesigning the traditional face of Egypt. Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi in his book Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World writes:

The Qutbian discourse developed dialectically against the background of Nasserism and its hegemonic proliferation in Egyptian society. Challenged by Nasserism, Qutb, in the words of Yvonne Haddad, “moved from a stance of an observer and interpreter of society, reflecting on its currents of thoughts and goals, to a revolutionary who charted the vision of a new order to which he wanted to lead all people. Having been disillusioned by all other solutions he formulated his own, grounded in the Qur’anic vision yet relevant for the everyday life of Muslims in the Arab world. (Abu-Rabi, pg. 165)

This passage illustrates a key point by describing the type of ideological transformation that Qutb underwent. As the Nasser experiment continued to confine Islamic values to the private sphere from its perceived place in the public sphere of influence, there became a sizable backlash. Qutb was just a small intellectual part of this greater social backlash and Qutb’s writing demonstrates the type of ideological transition that he underwent. Qutb transitioned away from merely observing and diagnosing social ills to becoming a fierce advocate for change. In many ways

Qutb was a visionary that struck out to forge his own path that would create a bright future for Muslims that did not rely upon the West or other false illusions that Nasser attempted to lure people into believing. Through this method, Qutb was able to enlist the disenfranchised and disillusioned Arab masses by creating an Islamic alternative that he deeply believed would be the salvation of not just the Arabs, but of all mankind.

Throughout the writings of Sayyid Qutb that have been analysed thus far, one can find ample evidence of a man who is questing after the truth and finds that truth in the teachings of Islam. Yet, because of his poetry and his other philosophical works he draws conclusions about Islam that few other Islamic scholars have been able to draw. His fertile imagination conceptualized Islam in supreme terms that sought to bring about a true Islamic revitalization of society. By examining first the book Social Justice in Islam, then moving on to In the Shade of the Quran and finally Milestones, one can see how Qutb's ideology developed in stages. Along with Qutb's life altering events and his previous ideological foundations, Qutb wrote Milestones as the culmination of his journey. Qutb was able to eloquently outline his conception of Islam in his own words and demonstrate to the world that he was not afraid to die for his beliefs. Whether he died a martyr or a seditious criminal is ultimately for God to judge but in any regard he has truly had a profound effect on the discourse within Islam.

Chapter 5: Comparing and Contrasting Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb

I.) Comparing Sayyid Qutb's and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's Conception of Jahiliyyah

Both Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab have unique conceptions of jahiliyyah that reflect their own perceptions on where the mindset of members of society were at the time. The concept of jahiliyyah in its basic form is an Islamic theological conception of a time period before the arrival of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula. Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab make references to this conception of jahiliyyah as a sign of the reversion of people from a state of faith to a state of disbelief. This assertion that Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab adhere to is a feature of their ideologies and displays what they feel is a deterioration in the faith of society. Along with the deterioration of faith comes a decay of moral standards and this inevitably results in a loss of social cohesion. The very notion of a reversion back to jahiliyyah is a significant matter because it implies that Muslim societies have begun to forsake the illuminating knowledge of the Quran for the materialism of worldly life. Furthermore, it signifies the abasement of the human soul by choosing ignorance over enlightenment and depravity over dignity. Therefore, both Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab make reference to this idea of jahiliyyah in their writings in order to stir up an emotional reaction in the reader. In addition, they use jahiliyyah as a symbolic metaphor of what society is becoming. It serves as a type of fear mongering that plays on the sensibilities of the faithful by invoking the fear that Islam is being washed away. This is seemingly done with the hope of provoking a powerful counter-reaction in the form of Islamic revivalism.

On the surface the term jahiliyyah that both Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab use appears to be the same. However, there is a significant contextual difference that helps differentiate an alternative perspective that both figures uniquely utilize to their own advantage. In the case of Sayyid Qutb, he utilizes the term jahiliyyah to signify the reversion of Egyptian Muslim society to a state of pre-Islamic ignorance full of materialistic ambitions. Qutb views the West as largely responsible for this reversion back to a state of jahiliyyah because the influences of Westernization and modernity have created a culture that openly embraces all things Western as a means of modernizing the country and society as a whole. This plays along with the notion that Islam is something that is entrenched in traditionalist Egyptian society and that by abandoning it in favour of modernity (which is really that adaptation of Western culture and values) then Egypt can hope to become a prosperous and advanced nation. Yet, Qutb believes that this portrayal of Westernization as a key to Egypt advancement towards a modern state is simply a ploy to deceive people into giving up their faith and reverting back to a state of jahiliyyah.

The conception that Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab has of jahiliyyah is slightly different than that of Qutb because of the different contextual issues that Arabian society was undergoing at the time. Unlike Qutb's Egypt that was faced with growing Western influences, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was living in an Arabian setting that was fairly isolated from foreign influences. The main perception that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had about jahiliyyah was that the Arabs were continually innovating in the field of religion. The Arabs of the time were adding things to the teachings and practice of Islam that were new conceptions that were not revealed by the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) and were at times in direct conflict with the Quranic teachings. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believes that it is through this creation of alternative beliefs that people falsely labelled part of Islam which altered people from a state of belief into a state of jahiliyyah. This transition

was primarily due to the fact that people were abandoning or misplacing emphasis on proper Islamic conduct in exchange for innovations and ignorant practices. Specifically, it was the return to polytheistic worship that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was concerned about since polytheistic worship went against the message of monotheism that Islam had reaffirmed from the Judeo-Christian heritage. It was the worship of many different false gods that symbolized the ignorant practices of the days of jahiliyyah in pre-Islamic times. That is why Ibn Abd al-Wahhab made a concerted effort to root out the practices that were associated with the days of jahiliyyah in order to reform society towards the correct code of conduct.

i.) Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's Conception of Jahiliyyah

The theme of jahiliyyah is an important theme in the writings and ideology of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in part because it explains things about the nature of society that religiously-conscience Arabs of the time would have readily understood. However, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's conception of jahiliyyah is significantly different from the perception that Sayyid Qutb has with regards to the concept. In Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's book Kitab At-Tawheed or as it is sometimes translated in English as "The Book of Oneness of Allah", he elaborates on his thoughts about jihad. This book provides a useful glimpse into the mindset of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and how the idea of jahiliyyah fit into his greater world view. The primary concern that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab has when discussing the concept of jahiliyyah is that he continually draws a parallel between the polytheistic beliefs of pre-Islamic Arabia and the practices of Muslims of his contemporary period. The fact that so many Muslims of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's time engaged in what he believed to be polytheistic forms of worship illustrated that they were ignorant of their own faith. In many ways the ignorant polytheistic worship of the pre-Islamic Arabs was part of the defining characteristics of jahiliyyah. These polytheistic beliefs

also served as a primary focus for early Muslims since the core foundation of Islam was created by God with an emphasis upon a return to strict monotheism.

In Kitab At-Tawheed, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab uses the term jahiliyyah, which is also loosely translated as the “Days of Ignorance”, as a literary device that supports the argument that society is headed in the wrong direction. It serves as a literary device in the sense that it is a touchstone for everything that society should not be. In a way, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab refers back to the period of jahiliyyah as a regrettable period in Arab history when ignorance prevailed over knowledge. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab uses this understanding of the past as a warning for his contemporaries and for future generations to not follow in their footsteps. The theme of jahiliyyah also supports Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s case for social reform by demonstrating that society must enact meaningful reform in order to prevent it from repeating the same errors of the past. The ramifications of going back to a period of jahiliyyah would effectively mean that the message of Islam was brought forward to no great avail. Yet, continually the people practiced beliefs that seemed to blur the lines between Islam and polytheism. This essentially alarmed the social reformers of the 18th century because they feared that people were regressing backwards into a state of ignorance rather than evolving into an enlightened society.

One of the striking differences between the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is the fact that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab stays fairly close to the religious texts when asserting his religious perspective. Qutb in contrast uses the religious texts to support his points but then extrapolates the meaning to make it fit in with his greater ideology. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s methodology of presenting the religious texts displays his scholarly background and firm conviction that his beliefs are deeply rooted in the Islamic texts. For example, in Kitab At-Tawheed, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab reflects upon the Quranic verse that states: “Verily, Ibrahim was

an Ummah [a leader, good and righteous] obedient to Allah [God], Haneefan [worshipping none but Allah (God)], and he was not one of the polytheists” (Quran, Surah 16:120). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab derived from this verse a “rejection of the claim of the Quraish in the Days of Ignorance [jahiliyyah] that in practising their Shirk [associating partners with God], they were not following the religion of Ibrahim [p.b.u.h.]” (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, pg. 16). The issue that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is raising to the reader’s attention is the belief among those that practiced polytheism in pre-Islamic Arabia were following in the footsteps of the Prophet Abraham/Ibrahim [p.b.u.h.]. Yet, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is pushing forward an important point for his contemporary audience since there were notable parallels that could have been drawn between the polytheistic beliefs of the Pre-Islamic Arabs and practices, such as saint veneration, that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab wanted to admonish among his own community. Jahiliyyah in this sense is seen as the actions of non-believers and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is raising these examples to illustrate his point that the Muslim community needs to be consciously aware of the practices they are performing that mimic the time of jahiliyyah as a means of preventing them from slipping back into that condition.

By continually reflecting on jahiliyyah, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is illustrating that Islam was designed to eliminate false beliefs from mankind and reaffirm the eternal truths that were passed down through the generations of mankind. The revelations brought forward in Islam were meant to wash away superstitious beliefs that plagued society with a precarious burden. Yet, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab reflects on a Hadith that acknowledges the fact that aspects of jahiliyyah society were foreseen to remain in Muslim society. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab writes in Kitab At-Tawheed:

It is reported on the authority of Ibn Malik Al-Ash’ari (ra) that the Messenger of Allah (saas) said: “There are four traits remaining from the jahiliyyah to be found in my Ummah [community], which they will not abandon: (i) Pride in the nobility of one’s

ancestors, (ii) defaming the ancestors of others, (iii) seeking rainfall from the stars and excessive mourning and wailing for the dead.” (Narrated by Muslim)... It being the intention of Islam to cut off every connection with the iniquitous customs of jahiliyyah the Messenger of Allah (saas) informs us in this Hadith, in a spirit of censure and rebuke that four customs of the Days of Ignorance will remain in this Ummah... (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, pg. 119)

In this quote, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is making the point that despite the teachings of Islam, the Muslim community will still maintain some aspects of jahiliyyah. This is an acknowledgement on Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s part that there will never be a complete transition away from a state of jahiliyyah. It also serves as a warning by suggesting that those seeking assistance from other sources besides God, are opening the door to other forms of Shirk [association partners with God]. The message that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is providing to the reader is the need to be vigilant about one’s actions and how each of our actions can lead one away from Tawheed [Oneness of God] and towards a state of jahiliyyah.

The key message that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab attempts to instil in the reader is the concept that “ignorance is the cause of all evil” (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, pg. 127). The days of pre-Islamic jahiliyyah signify the problematic immoral behaviour that flourishes when the knowledge of God’s edicts are removed from society. The pervasive acceptance of sinful ways ultimately acts as a burden on society by bringing it to the brink of chaos. This is partly why Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is so firmly convinced that a return to the ways of jahiliyyah would mark the corruption of social values and the deterioration in the wisdom that Islam brought forth. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab clarifies this point when he states:

Allah (swt), Most Glorified, Most High, informs us that He has sent His Messenger, Muhammad (saas) to his Ummah to lead them from the darkness of ignorance and despair, into the light of guidance and certainty, just as he sent to the previous nations, Messengers with Revelation, and that it is the responsibility of the Messenger (saas) to

impart to his people the Message that was revealed to him, even though the disbelievers may reject it and deny Allah's Divine Names or Attributes. (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, pg. 167)

The key term that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab refers to in this passage is the phrase "darkness of ignorance" (Ibid). The term epitomises what jahiliyyah manifests in a society when the "light of guidance" (Ibid) is removed. That is why humanity was consistently given revelations throughout the course of human history in order to steer humanity towards the proper direction that lives in accordance with God's edicts and promotes an atmosphere of social harmony. Yet, when one follows the vices of human nature, one becomes susceptible to the deviant practices of immorality that go against the flow of the universe. God's laws instruct mankind to maintain order but inevitably due to the nature of freewill people will always be able to rebel against these laws. This paradigm helps explain why the theme of jahiliyyah is both prominent and important for Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

For Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the concept of jahiliyyah is also important because it serves as a focal point from which Arabian society emerged. It was a time where many sins were committed out of ignorance or social customs, such as the abhorrent act of female infanticide that is noted in the Quran.³⁹ The issue of jahiliyyah therefore serves a useful tool for Ibn Abd al-Wahhab because it provides an insight into the motivations of his ideology. Due to the fact that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab saw so many of his fellow Arabians engaging in practices that were in direct contradiction to the teachings of Islam, his ideology of social reform became zealously entrenched in his political views and the religious perceptions of his followers. Jahiliyyah served as a useful fear to provoke others into following his goals of social reform by providing a sense that something must be done. Inaction became almost a sin as irrevocable damage could be

³⁹ Surah 81:8-15

inflicted upon society if proper Islamic values were not enforced. The perception that society was slipping back into an age of ignorance would have allowed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to gain the political capital needed for him to assert his message to every willing listener.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's views about jahiliyyah served as a chronological precursor to Sayyid Qutb's thoughts on jahiliyyah. In many ways, Qutb seemingly took Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's ideas about societies return to jahiliyyah and additionally derived his own conclusions based on the texts of the Quran to create his own ideological perspective. The basic fact is that each one of these figures recognized certain features of their contemporary society as mimicking the period of pre-Islamic jahiliyyah and feared that a continuation of the degeneration of morality would inevitably lead back towards a state of ignorance, whereby the truth of Islam would be forgotten or distorted. Both of these men called for drastic social reforms in order to avert what they perceived as an insidious chaos that would ensue as a result of the deviation from God's tenets. However, it would be Qutb that would take this idea of jahiliyyah one step further and conclude that the Western World along with the Egyptian authority were prime perpetrators of the creeping dominance of jahiliyyah. For Qutb, this essentially meant that there could be no compromise in terms of idle talk but that a vanguard should awaken to this reality and overthrow the influences of jahiliyyah in whatever form they may take in order to reassert the preeminent superiority of Islamic values over all of humankind's actions.

ii.) Sayyid Qutb's Conception of Jahiliyyah

The best examples of Qutb's ideas regarding jahiliyyah largely come from his book Milestones. In the book the theme of jahiliyyah is used to reflect the total hostility towards Islam and those that upheld true Islamic principles by those entrusted with authority. Jahiliyyah in this

context represents a system of repression in order to quell the Muslim Brotherhood's attempts at political change, in addition to the general ignorance exhibited by the population at large. In Qutb's mind, there is no difference between the objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood and the doctrines of Islam. This causes Qutb to view Islam as an integral part of the Muslim Brotherhood's creed and motivation. By attacking and ruthlessly suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood, Qutb perceives this as the actions of an insidiously evil force that is hostile to Islam.⁴⁰ The decay of morality had allowed the roots of Islam to erode and to be replaced by an altogether new power that usurped the proper place of Islam.

The notion of jahiliyyah is therefore something that signifies a standard for moral corruption within society. Not only is this notion reminiscent of the plight of early Muslims who had to endure horrific abuses at the hands of the brutal Meccan political establishment but it reveals how there is a fluid spectrum in society of which one must be conscious. In the same manner that societies can be measured on a scale of freedom, countries can be placed on a spectrum of how free they are. The Netherlands is widely considered a free country that protects personal liberties, but North Korea is a strict totalitarian state that heavily restricts personal liberties. In this type of spectrum Qutb demonstrates that jahiliyyah is a type of condition in which society is either getting further away from jahiliyyah and closer to Islamic ideals or becoming closer to jahiliyyah and further away from Islamic ideals. Al-Mehri in the preface to Qutb's book notes:

Sayyid Qutb concluded that the Egyptian government along with all other governments in the Muslim world were strictly comparable to pre-Islamic Arabia in [terms of] its ignorance and disregard for divine precepts and that its state could therefore rightly be designated by the same term—jahiliyyah. Occurring four times in the Qur'an, the term

⁴⁰ Moussalli, Ahmad, Radical Islamic Fundamentalism, American University of Beirut, 1992

jahiliyyah assumed central significance for Sayyid Qutb, encapsulating the utter bleakness of the Muslim predicament and serving as an epistemological device for rejecting all allegiances other than Islam. (Al-Mehri, pg. 11)

This excerpt reveals how Qutb managed to take a few verses of the Quran and build a very elaborate ideological construct from these few sections. In essence the idea of jahiliyyah that the Quran referred to had a tremendous impact on the way Qutb interpreted the events that were occurring in his own life. Jahiliyyah was much more than merely a term that described conditions in pre-Islamic Arabia but became a way for Qutb to intelligibly comprehend an otherwise seemingly incomprehensible world. Qutb was able to finally understand that the corruptness and decadence of those who were leading society was correlated to the conditions that prevailed in pre-Islamic Arabia. Therefore, it was the system itself that needed to change, the very people in power who were influencing public policy needed to be removed in order to save society itself.

The vast challenge of this undertaking is not something that Qutb took lightly and thus Qutb wrote his most influential work entitled Milestones in order to direct and train an entirely new generation to dedicate themselves towards this goal of social reform. Essentially, Qutb takes the term jahiliyyah, that has deep historical roots and develops it into serving his own ideological goals. Furthermore, Qutb's understanding of jahiliyyah provides the crucial perspective that is meant to help provoke a new vanguard of devoted Muslim believers who will use Milestones as a guide towards taking back Egyptian society and replacing it with a proper Islamic state. Through this undertaking, society can be redeemed and new leadership will direct society towards the proper Islamic values that it had previously abandoned.

Part of the problem that Qutb found with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the doctrine that became known as Nasserism was the conviction that Nasser maintained regarding

religion. Nasser had the perception that religion and spirituality were partly responsible for the paralysis of Arabian society.⁴¹ In Nasser's mind, Arab society and particularly Egyptian society was faced with a lack of will to exert its influence. Moreover, Nasser believed that there was a lack of forward and progressive thinking in Egypt and instead people fell into repeating patterns of behaviour that failed to move Egypt forward. As a consequence of this lack of progress, Nasser increasingly blamed both moral corruption and stagnant intellectual thinking as primary sources for this inability of Egypt to progress alongside the rest of the modern world. Religion became something increasingly akin to a relic of the past instead of a valuable asset. Qutb understood the policies of Nasserism as a direct attack upon Islam and viewed the progress that Nasser believed in as a betrayal of the Islamic heritage of Egypt. This was due to the fact that Qutb understood Nasser's direction as a course that would lead society back towards jahiliyyah instead of forward.

The writings of Qutb in America cemented Qutb's understanding of America as a land of illusions that sells a false hope of prosperity at the price of morality. Yet, Nasser's objective was likewise to sell these false hopes of a prosperous Egypt for the similar price of morality. From Qutb's perspective the entire world is saturated with jahiliyyah and it is up to true Muslim believers to stand up for what is right. The very compliance with a jahiliyyah system displays one's open rebellion to God's will. Qutb further remarks:

If we look at the sources and foundations of modern ways of living, it becomes clear that the whole world is steeped in jahiliyyah, and all the marvellous material comforts and high-level inventions do not diminish this ignorance. This jahiliyyah is based on rebellion against Allah's [God's] sovereignty on earth. It transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of Allah [God], namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others. It

⁴¹ Range, Willard, An Interpretation of Nasserism, The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 4, Dec. 1959

is now not in that-simply and primitive form of ancient jahiliyyah, but takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behaviour, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what Allah [God] Almighty has prescribed. The result of this rebellion against the authority of Allah [God] is the oppression of His creatures. Thus the humiliation of the common man under the communist systems and the exploitation of individuals and nations due to greed for wealth and imperialism under the capitalist systems are but a corollary of rebellion against Allah's [God's] authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by Allah [God] Almighty. (Qutb, pg. 26-27)

One of the key points that Qutb makes in this passage is the recognition that jahiliyyah is something that blankets the world. It is important to understand that at the time Qutb was writing this there was an almost mass hysteria in the West, particularly concerning the threat that Communism posed towards dominating the entire world. In Qutb's mind this threat paled in comparison to the threat that this jahiliyyah system posed to the entire world because of its inherently regressive thinking. From Qutb's perspective it was a level of ignorance that challenged the very nature of God's sovereignty over earthly beings. This meant that man had become rebellious towards God's edicts which was completely unacceptable and unsustainable. The continuation of the jahiliyyah system meant more than rebellion to God but also the degradation of mankind into serving false systems of domination. Qutb points out that communism and capitalism are just a few of the facets of servitude that mankind has willingly capitulated into and has served the benefit of a few wealthy elite while degrading the rest of mankind. This passage reveals not only Qutb's disdain for alternative systems that seem to be contrary to God's system but also he illustrates an alarming picture for the reader on the nature of the present day reality. The emphasis that Qutb is ultimately pointing towards is simply how far humanity has fallen from the good graces and the blessings of God's love.

For Qutb, the time of debate and assessment is over, and it is now a time for action. The objective of Qutb is no simple matter of reforming the political authority or challenging religious

orthodoxy. Instead, what is needed is a conscious awakening, a stirring of intellectual cognitive understanding of how dire things truly are in the world. The entire world from Qutb's perspective needs to be set aright through drastic measures. To accomplish this bold feat, Qutb recognizes that it is a journey that must encompass an enlightened vanguard who will step forward towards this sizable challenge and face the insurmountable odds. It is through this vanguard and only through this vanguard does Qutb hope to revive Islam from its blissful slumber. Qutb clearly states:

It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of jahiliyyah which has encompassed the entire world. During its course, it should keep itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing jahiliyyah and should also keep some ties with it. It is necessary that this vanguard should know the landmarks and the milestones of the road toward this goal so that they may recognize the starting place, the nature, the responsibilities and the ultimate purpose of this long journey. Not only this, but they ought to be aware of their position vis-a-vis this jahiliyyah, which has struck its stakes throughout the earth: when to cooperate with others and when to separate from them: what characteristics and qualities they should cultivate, and with that characteristics and qualities the jahiliyyah immediately surrounding them is armed; how to address the people of jahiliyyah in the language of Islam, and what topics and problems ought to be discussed; and where and how to obtain guidance in all these matters. (Qutb, pg. 27-28)

According to this paragraph, Qutb is instructing the future vanguard towards how they must confront this "vast ocean of jahiliyyah" (Ibid). An interesting point that Qutb raises is how the vanguard must essentially limit their contact from the world that is filled with jahiliyyah. It is as though there is an insidious corruption that has viral like qualities and the vanguard must be constantly vigilant in order to ensure that their sanctity is preserved. One can see through this excerpt that Qutb is revealing that a future vanguard must be the guardians and the last bastion of hope by embodying the principles of Islam. They must then use their upright moral characters to change and reform the jahiliyyah system without being seduced by its power and influence. This

notion of jahiliyyah that Qutb has constructed demonstrates that jahiliyyah is so much more than a term used to describe pre-Islamic Arabia but an active state of being. Jahiliyyah is a state of mind that threatens society with disillusion. Jahiliyyah takes mankind away from harmony with the universe and into a state of blindness and despair. That is why Qutb urgently feels the need to instruct his ideology to a new generation of morally enlightened individuals to take up the banner of Islam as the vanguards for a new Islamic revivalist movement.

It is interesting to note that unlike Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's notion of Islamic revivalism that centers around a reinterpretation of the Hadith and to a lesser extent the Quran, Qutb focuses primarily on the removal of jahiliyyah as the source for an Islamic revivalism. In Qutb's perception, everything that is wrong with society can be attributed to the state of jahiliyyah that people reside in. The issue then becomes a matter of weeding out the false influences and erroneous values that society holds in order to allow the flowers of Islam to blossom. By designating society's ills as a compliance with this jahiliyyah system, Qutb is using a powerful point by infusing his arguments with religious rhetoric in order to help polarize the reader. In the context of Qutb's writings, this form of argumentation allows Qutb to simplify complex social problems and prescribe his version of Islamic revivalism as the most feasible solution. An illustration of this can be seen when Qutb states:

We are surrounded by jahiliyyah today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws is jahiliyyah, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought are also constructs of jahiliyyah. This is why true Islamic values never enter our hearts, why our minds are never illuminated by Islamic concepts, and why no group of people arises among us who are of the calibre of the first generation of Islam... We must also free ourselves from the clutches of Jahili society, Jahili concepts, Jahili traditions and Jahili leadership. Our mission is not to compromise with the practices of Jahili society, nor can we be loyal to it. Jahili society, because of its Jahili characteristics, is not worthy to be

compromised with. Our aim is first to change ourselves so that we may later change the society. (Qutb, pg. 34-35)

Through this quote one can understand Qutb's ideological perspective of jahiliyyah being the root cause of so many of society's ills. Even things considered "Islamic" are not spared from the blame of corrupting society by being contributing aspects of this jahiliyyah system. The utility that jahiliyyah serves in terms of explanatory value is quite enormous and useful for Qutb. By delineating a single source that has brought about a false set of virtues, Islam and thus humanity's course has been altered away from its divine harmony with the universe. For Qutb, the reason why Islam continues to fail at opening minds and illuminating hearts is due to the fact that people have been deprived of true Islam and only cheap imitations that mimic Islam have been created in this jahiliyyah world in order to delude people into false beliefs. That is why Qutb's message appears so appealing because at its core is a plea for individuals to change themselves in order for them to later change society. This is how he hopes the vanguard will arise, once people accept his ideology and manage to change themselves. After these things have occurred, then these individuals will be ready to change society.

The heavy emphasis on jahiliyyah in Qutb's writings is a key theme that appears continually in Qutb's later writings as a reminder of where society is in the current day and age. Qutb's vision of a world filled to the brim with jahiliyyah characteristics demonstrates his conviction that drastic action must be taken by the faithful. Furthermore, this continual reference towards jahiliyyah is a sign that there can be no indifference towards this matter. The use of jahiliyyah as a term and concept innately polarizes the dialogue into a set of black and white arguments. For those who may be religiously-minded, Qutb is appealing to their religious sensibilities towards taking a side and then making a stand. It is easy from this perspective to understand how Qutb's writings proved to be so powerful for Islamic militants who understood

Qutb's writings as a call to arms. However, from the perspective of the Egyptian authority, these writings were a dangerous cocktail that threatened not only their hold on power but their very lives as well.

Through Qutb's reliance on a Quranic term such as jahiliyyah to support his set of arguments, Qutb is recognizably using the rhetoric of the Quran to primarily understand the world and the context of social dynamics. Yet, through a close examination of Milestones, one can see how Qutb either intentionally or unintentionally is wrapping up his political views in terms of religious rhetoric. Perhaps this is due to Qutb's strong conviction that this is in fact how reality exists or it might be that Qutb hopes to make a more impassioned plea to the reader by playing upon their religious sensibilities in order to stir them into action. Whatever the case may be, Qutb nonetheless demonstrates an entirely unique perspective regarding jahiliyyah when compared to a figure such as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

II.) Context

Today Islam faces not only enormous social issues but also an image crises that paints Islam as a backwards and primitive religion. The ideological justifications for jihad that Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab helped create have allowed for militant religious extremists to hijack the image of Islam and pervert its message to suit their own political ambitions. The violent rhetoric and actions of these militants have garnered the most attention and presented a pervasive image of Islam that has been hard to negate. Their stubborn intolerant ideology has lead to divisions and bloodshed within the Muslims community that is multiple times more damaging than anything that Qutb or Ibn Abd al-Wahhab were trying to reform during their time. In today's age, some Muslim perspectives are badly in need of reform but not due to Western jahiliyyah

influences or the veneration of saints. Muslims must strive to reform the types of violent behaviour done in the name of jihad for which these figures advocated.

This is not to suggest that politics, economics or social matters have no place within Islamic debates but that these issues should not become convoluted with religious rhetoric. Islamic scholars within any society are seen as knowledgeable individuals about the teachings of Islam and therefore should not take their positions lightly. However, when Islamic scholars such as Sayyid Qutb or Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab make edicts and advocate certain political positions based on Islam they do so in a manner that seeks to pressure individuals in society into accepting their edicts based on their religious knowledge. When these figures advocate an ideological position they do not do so in a manner that is merely their way of suggesting what is correct in the light of Islamic teachings but in juxtaposition they attempt to play off individual devotions to Islam. They suggest and advocate ideological positions that stretch the interpretation of Islam to the limits of perversion, if not outright crossing that theological boundary as a means of utilizing religion to demand certain political responses. The issue here is that Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings demonstrate that they do not remind the reader to take religious edicts as good advice instead of as an obligatory action. Whether intentionally or unintentionally Qutb's and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings attempt to deceive people into accepting political policies based on religious doctrines. This ultimately causes individuals who are poor, uneducated or inclined to violence into accepting their principles because they do not know any better or because they are already prone to violent behaviour.

It has traditionally been the theological position within Islam that the use of jihad as a form of 'holy war' is rigorously restricted to a select number of instances involving defensive wars or wars to protect people against oppressors. Yet, the writings of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-

Wahhab seek to distort this idea of a defensive war to apply to situations whereby they view Islam to be under threat. In Qutb's case he saw the leadership of Egypt as part of a jahili system and the people of Egypt being oppressed by this system, along with the role of Islam being diminished in society. In a similar fashion, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed that his fellow Arabs were adopting systems of belief that negated their Islamic faith and wanted to force people into submitting to his version of Islamic doctrines. However, in Qutb's case he went so far at times as to advocate offensive jihad. Kai Hafez in the book Radicalism and Political Reform in the Islamic and Western Worlds states:

It is primarily the thinkers Sayyid Qutb and Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, popular among extremist Islamic fundamentalists, who have pushed for an offensive 'holy war' (Bennet 2005, 198 ff.). In this view, the Dar al-Islam is in a permanent state of war with the Dar al-Kufr, the territory of the 'unbelievers'. Peace will be granted only in the beyond. Extremists sometimes make a historical connection between themselves and the caliphs, the successors to Muhammad [p.b.u.h.] who actively expanded Arab territory and ushered in the Islamic imperial period. Today, this interpretation is the preserve of a small terrorist minority which as, we have seen is referred to as Jihadist, though the irredentist Jihadists (Hamas among others) essentially represent the intersection of moderate and radical views. (Hafez, pg. 196)

Here one can get a glimpse of how the religion of Islam according to extremist Islamic fundamentalists is based on a constant struggle against unbelievers. The words of Qutb have taken on a life of their own and have become the support for a new generation of radicals who seek to expand their sphere of influence through violent means. Additionally, Hafez notes: "Jihadists such as Osama Bin Laden have clearly taken their lead from the extremist teachings of Sayyid Qutb" (Ibid), which demonstrates how members of the so-called Al-Qaeda group have latched on to Qutb's ideology. Jihadists such as Bin Laden undoubtedly view themselves to be the type of vanguard that Qutb wrote about in Milestones and therefore use his writings as justification for their actions.

The notion that violence is a pre-requisite to create meaningful change in the world has been repeatedly proven to be historically false. There are clear lessons from the case of Mohandas Gandhi's struggle against the British Empire that demonstrates the force of civil disobedience.⁴² Gandhi was able to achieve his objective of Indian independence from the colonial forces of Great Britain by using nonviolence and noncooperation with the British government to liberate the whole of India from the imperialist grip of the British Empire. Likewise, it was Gandhi's inspiration that led to the utilization of nonviolent civil disobedience by Martin Luther King Jr. who was able to achieve monumental civil rights changes for African Americans.⁴³⁴⁴ In more recent times, the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have shown the power of people to rise up and overthrow their corrupt leaders through nonviolence and civil disobedience. These are just a few of the many examples that have occurred throughout history that demonstrate the success of peaceful nonviolence towards creating effective political changes. This should be seen as ample evidence that calls for jihad to be only defensive is not a "defeatist" attitude as Qutb would suggest but rather it provides a helpful incentive to search out peaceful alternatives.

This further dispels the notion that only through violent revolution or violent conquest can the goals of Islam be achieved. What is needed is for people to search their own souls and actively search out what is true from what is fiction. Through this soul searching mission

⁴² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/225216/Mohandas-Karamchand-Gandhi> (accessed on December 21, 2011)

⁴³ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/318311/Martin-Luther-King-Jr> (accessed on December 21, 2011)

⁴⁴ The Quranic verses 4:9; 4:63; 4:5; 4:8; 17:23 and 20:43-44 demonstrate the value in speaking words of justice and words that speak to the very core of the soul. These are the types of virtuous speeches that Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. were able deliver towards mobilizing the masses in order to create constructive social change.

individuals will be able to decide for themselves what is the best life to live. This is a quest that each individual must undertake in order to find peace and prosperity. If one makes bad decisions in their life that only affects their life then it will be up to God to judge them. So long as that individual's choice only affects their life then their choices should not be judged by society. Instead, Muslims ought to understand the Quran when it says:

For each (such person) there are (angels) in succession, before and behind him; they guard him by command of Allah [God]. Verily never will Allah [God] change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves but when (once) Allah [God] willeth a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, besides Him, any to protect [them]. (Quran, 13:11)

This verse explicitly acknowledges that God will only create better conditions for a society when they alter what is inside their hearts. Furthermore, this would suggest that despite the best intentions of people like Qutb or Ibn Abd al-Wahhab their success in creating a more prosperous society is limited by the degree to which individuals in society are open towards changing themselves. If this verse were taken to its conceptual limits this would infer that if people were perfect then society would be perfect. However, people are rather imperfect beings full of irrational behaviours and less than virtuous attributes. Yet, through continued efforts made by people to transform their behaviour they would provide a collective transformation of society by upholding higher social values. This would then theoretically be rewarded by God with an increased level of social prosperity and lasting happiness.

It is admirable that both Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab felt passionately about reforming society. They were men of deep religious convictions and tremendous insights into the human condition. However, it must be noted that their methodology and ideology for enacting social reforms had a controversial legacy that must be addressed rather than ignored. It is only once the beneficial aspects of their scholarship is recognised and discerned from the harmful aspects of

their scholarship can these figures prove to be a valuable asset to Islamic scholarship instead of a hindrance. To further demonstrate how the effects of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab effected later generations of Muslims, the figure of Abdullah Yusuf Azzam will be analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The Influence of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab on Abdullah Yusuf Azzam

The influential ideas of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab are not relics of the past but have continued to provoke thoughtful debate, constructive social analysis and tragic acts of violence. From a scholarly perspective Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab stand out in the field of Islamic scholarship due to their wide-reaching effects and their fervent supporters. Their writings stand as a testament to their ability to stay relevant after so many years since they last drew breath. The figure of Dr. Sheikh Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was a man who in many ways incorporated the principles and ideas of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Qutb into his own struggles in Palestine and later Afghanistan.⁴⁵ Azzam understood the ideas of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Qutb as a way to comprehend his own social context and finally push for a type of political Islam that heavily emphasized jihad. He would help the Afghan Mujahedeen fighters defeat the superior military capabilities of the Soviet Union.

Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was born in the Palestinian village of As-Ba'ah Al-Hartiyeh in 1941. He would obtain his B.A. Degree in Islamic Law from the University of Damascus in 1966. Later, he would go on to finish his Master's degree and Ph.D. in Islamic Law. in the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence. This scholarly background in the field of Islamic studies provided the intellectual framework for his strong conviction towards furthering the principles of Islam. Part of this personal development involved supporting the jihad to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation. Yet, just as Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab recognized the lack of spiritual devotion among their fellow Muslims, Azzam became increasingly frustrated with the weak convictions his brothers in faith held towards the religion of Islam. In Azzam's mind, jihad was a sacred duty

⁴⁵ Miller, Frederic, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, Alphascript Publishing, 2010

that should be carried out with the utmost religious sincerity, but what he saw instead was men who would spend their free time playing cards instead of listening to spiritual lectures or listening to music instead of hearing recitations of the Quran. The Palestinians according to Azzam's experience were waging a resistance under the false facade of jihad but their intentions were not aligned with a spiritual goal. Azzam would consistently witness that when the call to prayer was given for obligatory prayers, only a handful of men would congregate out of thousands of men present. After persistently struggling to instruct the resistance fighters about proper Islamic conduct, Azzam withdrew from the conflict out of the frustrating lack of spiritual direction that his compatriots demonstrated. Azzam reluctantly decided to go to Saudi Arabia and to teach Islamic studies at the universities where he believed he could make a greater contribution to the Muslim community than he was achieving in Palestine.

Prima facia, it is clear to see how during this stage of Azzam's life how much he had in common with the thoughts and ideas of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. These figures both saw a situation in which their societies had forgotten and stopped following the true principles of Islam but instead they witnessed societies that seemingly went through the motions of religious belief. However, for Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab the true meaning of religious devotion was allowing the very principles of the faith to penetrate one's heart and allow one's soul to embody the message of the religion. The failure of the majority of the Mujahedeen resistance fighters to embody the principles of performing jihad appeared to demonstrate to Azzam the true intention of social reforms that Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab desired to enact within society. On this level, it would be foreseeable that through Azzam's continued educational career that he would be able to relate to the ideas of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

Azzam's beliefs about jihad were quite similar to those of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab before him. Azzam adopted the belief that negotiations and reasonable arguments were not as productive in certain situations as warfare. The invasion of Afghanistan by the communist USSR proved to be a pivotal moment in Azzam's life and he seized upon it with vigorous energy. The context of fighting a defensive war in order to aid the Muslims of Afghanistan provided Azzam with precisely the struggle he thought he had found in Palestine. In 1979, when word reached him about the conflict in Afghanistan, Azzam left his professor post at the King Abdul-Aziz University for Pakistan. Once in Pakistan, he setup a support network under the title of the "Alkifah Refugee Center" but this was very loosely translated from the Arabic title of "The Office of Services to the Holy Warriors". The clear motivation that Azzam was driven by was a desire to defend Afghanistan from foreign occupation. However, there were other smaller but noticeable motivations.

The ideology that Qutb left behind helped Azzam to understand the Western world through Qutb's critique of America. The depictions of American society helped Azzam understand that inevitably there would be a type of confrontation between the Islamic world and the Western world. Qutb's ideology demonstrated that inevitably secular governments should ultimately fall since they are feebly contrived entities that flow against the design of the Creator. Qutb passionately argued in favour of establishing Islamic states in order to replace the faulty illusions that secular governments embodied. Azzam's actions demonstrate that he did not only understand Qutb's ideology about creating a vanguard to protect Islamic culture but Azzam actively took proactive steps towards making it a reality.

The theme of jihad, specifically in the case of armed struggle, is a strong focus for Azzam just as it was for Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The main reason why Azzam is particularly

focused on jihad in terms of an armed struggle is due to the context in which he was living. Taking notes from the writings of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, jihad becomes a way for Azzam to elevate his moral standings through demonstrating the outward actions of an individual who is spiritually motivated to defend Afghanistan from foreign invaders. In an article that Azzam wrote entitled “What jihad Taught Me”, Azzam relays his ideological understanding of jihad to the reader.⁴⁶ Azzam boldly states:

Jihad taught me that the believer who is engaged in jihad is the most honoured creature on earth because he risks his soul, which is the most precious thing he possesses, and each day he offers it to its Creator to take away. So, how is it possible for such a person to accept the rule of another human being? (Azzam, pg. 43)

This passage is quite striking in the context of the writings of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab due to the fact that both of these figures heavily emphasized the glory of armed struggle as well. For Azzam, faith must be followed up with action and the actions of jihad are of the highest virtue because they test one’s commitment and belief. In this manner, Azzam mimics the sentiments of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab by illustrating that one’s moral convictions must be supported with the dedications of jihad. Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab likewise demonstrated this ideology through their writings by outlining how drastic social change must at times take the form of armed conflict against those who resist or oppose faith.

One key understanding in Azzam’s writings is that he was morally justified to support the defence of Afghanistan from outside invaders. Any country that is being invaded should have the legitimate right to defend itself from occupation no matter who that occupier is. However, Azzam’s writings demonstrate a type of zealous attitude towards violence that appears to be more of a type of bloodlust than something of spiritual merit. At one point Azzam writes:

⁴⁶ Article found in: Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim, The Contemporary Arab Reader On Political Islam, Pluto Press, 2010

Jihad has taught me that Islam is like a tree that is nourished by blood only. If the supply of blood were to dry up, then the veins of this religion would wither away and Islam would disintegrate... Jihad is an essential component of the contemporary Islamic movement, and the fire of jihad can be lit only by the Islamic movement. Furthermore, the Muslim masses constitute the fuel of jihad. If the Islamic movement does not strive to achieve its goals of jihad, then it will decline and be subject to sedition and be afflicted by internal conflict and polarization. (Azzam, pg. 44)

The idea that Islam is inclined to wage perpetual jihad is a contrived notion by Azzam and individuals like him, although it is understandable how Azzam managed to take the ideas of Qutb to twist them into this reality. Islam from Azzam's perspective must then become a religion that must seek out armed conflicts in order to engage the Muslim community in a dire struggle. Azzam is seemingly entranced by the idea that once Muslims are able to find a common enemy they will be able to become unified towards defeating that enemy. Once one enemy is defeated then another enemy must be found in order to perpetuate the cycle. Otherwise, Azzam fears that if this Islamic movement that he is helping to forge does not continue "then it will decline and be subject to sedition and be afflicted by internal conflict and polarization" (Ibid). This ideology is seemingly the precursor to a type of global jihad that individuals such as Osama Bin Laden advocated.

It is interesting to note that the idea of jihad in the writings of Azzam, Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab appear to be frequently removed from religiously-sanctioned motivations such as self-defence and often towards political motivations of social change. Azzam had a tremendous effect on Osama Bin Laden by helping to recruit him and ignite a passion for jihad inside him. However, in the book The Road to Al-Qaeda, the author Montasser Al-Zayyat notes:

Azzam used bin Laden's financial help to provide relief services to the Mujahedeen in their war against the Soviets. Azzam was not interested in clashing with the Arab governments that supported him. (Al-Zayyat, pg. 69)

Here one can see that Osama Bin Laden was a useful individual to Azzam, but there were notable disagreements between the two when it came to the breadth of jihad. Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi elaborates this point further in the book The Contemporary Arab Reader On Political Islam by noting: “He [Azzam] is also famous as a teacher and mentor of Osama Bin Laden who persuaded Bin Laden to come to Afghanistan and help the jihad, although the two differed as to where the next front in global jihad should be after the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan” (Abu-Rabi, pg. 303). With Azzam’s death in 1989, Osama Bin Laden would take the reins of this fledgling globalist jihad movement and steer it towards a greater scope of armed conflict than anything Azzam desired to participate towards. The core issue that remains here is the stepping stones that started with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab then Qutb, helped Azzam initiate a globalist jihad movement that finally came to rest with Osama Bin Laden and the senseless violence that he endorsed.

Azzam like Osama Bin Laden and his right hand man Ayman Al-Zawahiri were very much students of scholars like Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. They took these scholar’s ideas and interpreted them in their own context. They had their own political goals and objectives and utilized a pragmatic interpretation of Islam to interject their own political views interspersed with a certain religious ideology that was derived from Islam. In the end, Azzam and Osama Bin Laden envisioned a state of perpetual global jihad that was seemingly without end. Yet, the objective was not simply to defeat one foe or another but rather to create a social movement of sweeping change that would create social cohesion amongst the Muslim factions in order to cement a fragmented religious community. In turn this would restructure society to place Islamic values back at the forefront of any future social agenda. This is just a small fraction of the controversial legacy that Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would leave behind.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has been a contextual analysis of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. At this point it should be self-evident that the time period and life experiences of each of these individuals greatly affected the way they viewed society, politics and most importantly, the religion of Islam. Each of these individuals was profoundly knowledgeable about Islam and are influential scholars in Islam despite the controversies surrounding them. That is why it is important to understand these figures and how their ideological construction of the tenets of Islam has had a lasting effect on the way Muslims practice their faith and the way non-Muslims perceive the faith of Islam. Both Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab attempted to reform their Islamic societies. Through historical analysis, one can witness how these figures managed to create an on going legacy of violence and intolerance. It has left a stain on the image of Islam and has corrupted the minds of impressionable religious fanatics that are zealous about their faith.

In the case of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, he was a man who came from a very modest background. Growing up in Najd, he was the descendent of a strong traditional Hanbali school of jurisprudence. Yet, he yearned for something more than being a mere legal scholar. He deeply desired to change the world around him and became swept up in the revivalist movement of the 18th century. It was through this transformative stage that he began to fully understand the gap between what Islam truly was compared to what people practiced, so he became intent on reconciling the conceptual theory of Islam with the shortcomings of his society. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab set out to teach people the proper code of conduct in Islam by preaching to them in terms of reason and logic. When this failed to achieve the desired effect that he had envisioned, he turned to political alliances as a means of securing his own safety from his critics and as a means of achieving a broader base of support. However, his alliance with Ibn Saud proved to be

more than he could control since Ibn Saud was more concerned with material gains than the propagation of religious ideals. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab became a willing pawn in Ibn Saud's quest for power and failed to achieve the religious transformation of society that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed was possible through his political alliance. Although Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had limited success in reforming the conduct of some members of society, it came at a huge cost in terms of the lives of his fellow Muslims that he labelled as infidel or apostate. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab began his mission to reform society with such high ambitions but near the end of his life he seemingly became disillusioned by what all his efforts amounted to.

In the case of Sayyid Qutb, he was an individual who had a strong early Islamic upbringing but unlike other Islamic scholars that went before him, he chose a secularist literary career. This demonstrates that Qutb's strong religious devotion was a later development that came after Qutb had realized that the Westernization and modernization that Egypt had been importing was a false dream compared to the real utopian conception of reality that Qutb idealized Islam to be. Once he became more aware of the hollow materialism that the liberal elites of Egyptian society coveted, he began his journey towards finding a deeper truth to reality. Qutb's experiences in America proved to be a pivotal turning point in his life because he saw that beneath the promises of the prosperity that America enjoyed was a form of moral corruption. It was this idea of moral corruption that Qutb believed was arriving in Egypt under the guise of modernity. It was this same modernity that political leaders like Nasser praised as a promise for a better life for Egyptians. It was this perception of reality that forced Qutb into accepting the belief that Muslim society was not moving forward towards a better cognitive enactment of the virtues of Islam, but rather society was regressing through moral decay to a time before Islam, known as the time of jahiliyyah. Qutb became more political and joined the Muslim Brotherhood.

Due to the Brotherhood's attempted assassination of Nasser, members of the organization, including Qutb, were forced to endure cruel torture at the hands of Egyptian security forces. These experiences further radicalized Qutb into calling for an all-out offensive war against the government officials who were viewed as apostates of Islam. This led to Qutb being tried and sentenced to death for seditious activities against the state.

It should be obvious at this point that it is nearly impossible to divorce the writings of Qutb or Ibn Abd al-Wahhab from the period from which they were writing. Their political struggles appeared legitimated in their minds and in the minds of their followers. In part their legitimation seemed justified because they used the religious texts of Islam as justification for their actions and because of their perception of the political reality of the time. Qutb, specifically selectively chose which passages of the Quran to follow while simultaneously ignoring passages that may have negated the points he was trying to make. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was notably more scholarly and more careful about his approach towards attempting to reform society than Qutb was. However, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was at times a political pragmatist who on occasion legitimated jihad or 'holy war' against people he perceived as having practices that conflicted with the teachings of Islam such as saint veneration. It is hard to gauge to what degree these decisions were politically motivated versus what Ibn Abd al-Wahhab felt was motivated by religious devotion. However, the notion that either Qutb or Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had any legitimate right to accuse another Muslim of apostasy and therefore could legitimately be killed goes against the very teachings of the Quran.

This thesis has previously noted verses in the Quran where it states that there is no compulsion to comply with the tenets of Islam. Therefore, no one should have the authority to tell another person how they may or may not practice their faith. That responsibility falls to God

and God alone. Furthermore, if one misjudges another's faith the punishment for killing a believer according to the Quran is recompensed with the punishment of Hell. It is morally reprehensible that knowledgeable Islamic scholars such as Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab were unable to recognize the severity of their ideology and did not take ample steps to tone down their fiery rhetoric. However, that is not to suggest that it is not understandable since when one merges politics and religion, it has the possibility of blinding one to the actual truth versus what one desires to be true.

Mark Jurgensmeyer's research is quite profound with regard to Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab because it demonstrates what a tangled web religion becomes when one attempts to put forward a political agenda based on religious justification. The cosmic warfare model that Jurgensmeyer notes is illustrated by the doctrines of Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab since both figures attempt to portray their political struggle in religious terms. They utilize religion as a cloak to stir up support for their political agenda. These individuals attempted to demonize opponents and demonstrate how their political struggles took on aspects of being a sacred warfare.

These figures notably had good intentions to create an ideal Islamic civilization but somewhere along their life journey they tried to force change on society. In contrast, the Quran teaches one that change must occur within the hearts of believers and then and only then will God change the condition of a people.⁴⁷ What this theoretically means is that people have to want to change, they have to have the desire to live up to their full potential and be willing to take the necessary steps to make that dream a reality. This cannot come about through violence

⁴⁷ Quran; Surah 8:53 and Surah 13:11. Surah 13:11 says: "Verily never will Allah [God] change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves..."

or the threat of violence but instead it has to be a free choice that individuals in a society accept. Jihad in the case of armed struggle should only be used in self-defence and to oppose oppressors. Those who suggest otherwise are either politically desperate or ideologically bankrupt.

Mohandas Gandhi once said that we must “be the change you want to see in the world”.⁴⁸ These are words of wisdom that will always hold an eternal truth for humanity. This is due to the fact that people lead through example and if someone truly believes that their religion or philosophy is better than anything else the world has to offer then all they have to do is live that life in order to change the world. Religions teach the ideals that human kind needs in order to live to our highest self-actualization and through these ideals one is able to change the world by demonstrating the key tools that allows one to be successful in life. Once people stop trying to enforce a self-righteous mindset and start achieving their highest potential then society will find the leadership it needs to create a lasting self-perpetuating prosperity full of the blessings and bounty that God has to offer.

⁴⁸ http://thinkexist.com/quotation/be_the_change_you_want_to_see_in_the_world/148490.html (accessed on December 21, 2011)

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