

William E. Shepard

SAYYID QUTB'S DOCTRINE OF *JĀHILIYYA*

This article focuses on one of the most striking ideas to come out of the radical Islamist movements of recent decades: the doctrine of *jāhiliyya* presented by the Egyptian activist Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) in his latest writings.

Qutb is important and interesting for more than one reason. In his last years he penned several widely read works calling in effect for an Islamic revolution and was executed on the grounds that he was plotting to overthrow the Egyptian government, becoming thereby a martyr.¹ Both as a writer and as a martyr he has been a major influence on the Islamic “resurgence,” which began shortly after his death. He is interesting also because of his own pilgrimage in life, which to a degree parallels developments in the Muslim world as a whole. For about half of his adult life he was an educator, poet, essayist, and literary critic of secular views. Only in 1948 did he begin to write Islamist works, and these were comparatively moderate at first. In the early 1950s, after a two-year visit to the United States, he joined the Muslim Brothers. In 1954 he was put in prison, as were many of the Brothers, remaining there for most of the rest of his life. He was released briefly in 1964–65 and then re-arrested, tried, and executed. It was in prison, particularly after 1957, that he developed his most radical ideas.²

One of these ideas, and the one that this article explores, is his claim that the whole world, including that part of it that calls itself Muslim, is in a state of *jāhiliyya*. *Jāhiliyya* has been described as the “cornerstone” on which Qutb’s most radical thinking rests, and Qutb has been called “the exponent of *jāhiliyya par excellence*.”³ This idea may be one of the most original ideas to appear among Islamic ideologues in the past century, as original if not as influential as Khomeini’s *vilāyat-i faqih*.⁴

The primary focus here is on the doctrine of *jāhiliyya* itself as Qutb presented it and understood it. Although most writers on Qutb deal with the doctrine to some extent, I believe there is much yet to be said about its precise content and the course of its development over time in Qutb’s writings, and this is the task I undertake here. My comments on the social and political significance of the doctrine will therefore be limited and tentative. I am convinced that investigation of these matters must follow and be founded on a good understanding of the doctrine on its own terms.⁵ Fur-

William E. Shepard is Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Retired, at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand; e-mail: w.shepard@ext.canterbury.ac.nz.

thermore, I believe that this doctrine is sufficiently novel and interesting that it is worth investigating in its own right, apart from its social or political effects.

The primary context for this discussion of Qutb's developed *jāhiliyya* doctrine is the idea of *jāhiliyya* as it appears elsewhere in the Islamic tradition and elsewhere in Qutb's own writings. Among other things, this will show that Qutb's doctrine is not as much of an innovation as is sometimes thought and will show just where the innovation lies. We will also see that it developed later in his career than is usually recognized. I will therefore begin with a consideration of the use of the term *jāhiliyya* prior to his time. This will be followed by a detailed presentation of the doctrine in its latest and most developed form. Then I will trace the development of the doctrine through Qutb's earlier writings. Finally, I will consider in a provisional manner the presence or absence of the doctrine in some of the later radical movements. Regrettably, time and space do not permit me to do the same for more moderate forms of Islamism.

THE TERM *JĀHILIYYA* IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

In English, the word *jāhiliyya* is conventionally translated "the Age of Ignorance"⁶ and taken to refer to the Arabian society of the century or so prior to Muhammad's mission. This also reflects much Arabic usage. In pre-Islamic literature, and to a considerable degree in the Qur'an, however, words from the root *j-h-l* mean primarily not "ignorance" but something like "barbarism," specifically a tendency to go to extremes of behavior.⁷ The form *jāhiliyya* appears four times in the Qur'an, never in the sense of simple ignorance. The sense of extreme behavior is evident in Qur'an 33:33, "do not make a display of yourselves in the manner of the first *jāhiliyya*," and even more so in Qur'an 48:26, "the fierce arrogance of *jāhiliyya* (*hamiyyat al-jāhiliyya*)."⁸ Toshihiko Izutsu interprets the second phrase as referring to "the staunch pride so characteristic of the old pagan Arabs, the spirit of stubborn resistance against all that shows the slightest sign of injuring their sense of honor and destroying the traditional way of life."⁸ He states further that "in the specifically Qur'anic situation the word refers to the peculiar attitude of hostility and aggressiveness against the monotheistic belief of Islam."⁹ This understanding is supported by Qur'an 5:50, "Do they seek a *jāhiliyya* judgment (*ḥukm al-jāhiliyya*), but who can give better judgment than God?" a passage very important for Qutb's interpretation. It is also supported by Qur'an 3:154, "a band anxious for themselves, wrongly suspicious of God with a *jāhiliyya* suspicion (*ẓann al-jāhiliyya*)," which refers to lack of faith in God. As to *jāhiliyya*'s temporal reference, it seems unlikely that it would have meant a historical epoch to the first Muslims, as it was too much a living reality for them. Nevertheless, "the first *jāhiliyya* (*al-jāhiliyya al-ūlā*)" in Qur'an 33:33 may refer to an epoch and certainly has been taken in this sense by later interpreters.

After the Qur'anic period, however, the word seems to have come fairly quickly to refer primarily to a historical epoch and to ignorance as that epoch's characteristic. It is usually thus in al-Bukhari's hadith collection—for example, "The Quraysh used to fast Ashura in the *jāhiliyya*" and "The best people in the *jāhiliyya* are the best in Islam, if they have understanding."¹⁰ The same is generally true of the classical Arabic dictionaries.¹¹ The earlier sense of *jāhiliyya* was never completely lost, however. In a

hadith Muhammad says to a follower, “Within you is *jāhiliyya*,” and when asked whether “*jāhiliyyat al-kufr* or *jāhiliyyat al-islām*,” says, “*jāhiliyyat al-kufr*.”¹² *Lisān al-‘Arab* says that *jāhiliyya* here includes “ignorance of God of his Messenger and of the rites of religion, boasting of ancestry, pride and tyranny.”¹³ For Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), the pre-Islamic customs continuing among Muslims of his time constituted a “*jāhiliyya* in a restricted sense,” although in the absolute sense it had ended with Muhammad’s mission.¹⁴ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th-century Arabian reformer, saw the condition of other Muslims, either throughout the world or in the Arabian peninsula, as *jāhiliyya*, and his follower, Husayn ibn Ghannam (d. 1811), used the term explicitly.¹⁵

The early-20th-century reformist *Manar* commentary of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida compares tendencies found in their society with aspects of *jāhiliyya* and states, for example, that “some geographical Muslims in this age” are “more corrupt in their religion and morals than those concerning whom these verses were revealed.”¹⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, author of the well-known translation of the Qur’an and a reformist in his commentary, comments on text, “Do they then seek after a *ḥukm al-jāhiliyya*?” (5:50): “The Days of Ignorance were the days of tribalism, feuds, and selfish accentuation of differences in man. Those days are not really yet over. It is the mission of Islam to take us away from that false mental attitude.”¹⁷

In a more revivalist vein, Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–79) and Abul Hasan Nadwi from the Indian Subcontinent have written of the modern world as *jāhiliyya*. They have found *jāhiliyya* in both the Western and the communist worlds but have not applied the label to the Islamic world in the radical way Sayyid Qutb did. Mawdudi defines *jāhiliyya* as “every such conduct which goes against Islamic culture, morality and the Islamic way of thinking and behaving,” and sees the Muslim world since the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs as a mixture of *jāhiliyya* and Islam.¹⁸ Nadwi, in his influential book *Mādhā khasira al-‘ālam bi-inḥitāt al-muslimīn* (What the World Has Lost by the Decline of the Muslims),¹⁹ sees the *jāhiliyya* of ancient Greece and Rome resurrected in modern Europe and asserts that the Muslims in many places have become its allies and camp followers but have resisted being turned completely into a *jāhili* community.²⁰ Another writer who may be appropriately mentioned here is the Palestinian Taqī al-Dīn al-Nabhāni (1909–77), founder of the Hizb al-Tahrir. In his view, all so-called Muslim countries were *dār al-kufr* (abode of unbelief) because their rulers were not governing exclusively according to the shari‘a, but he appears not to have used the term *jāhiliyya* in this connection.²¹ The same year in which Sayyid Qutb published his most radical work, 1964, his brother, Muhammad Qutb, published a book entitled *Jāhiliyyat al-qarn al-‘ishrin* (The Jahiliyya of the Twentieth Century). In it he claimed that the whole world was in a state of *jāhiliyya*. By far the largest part of the book, however, is devoted to an analysis of *jāhiliyya* in its European form. Although he says that this *jāhiliyya* has swept over the Muslim world, he draws much less confrontational conclusions from this than does his brother, leaving the initiative in changing the situation more exclusively to God.²² References to the writings of Mawdudi, Nadwi, and Muhammad Qutb appear in the footnotes of Sayyid Qutb’s works, and Qutb in fact wrote an introduction to the second edition of Nadwi’s book.²³ Thus, the idea of *jāhiliyya* as a contemporary condition found among Muslims

did not originate with Qutb, as is sometimes suggested. It has always been present in the tradition and has received increased attention in modern times. What Qutb did was to take it further than others have done.

SAYYID QUTB ON JĀHILIYYA, THE FINAL DOCTRINE

Here we will consider the doctrine in its final and most radical form, as it appears in Qutb's writings mostly published in 1964 or later. The locus classicus is *Ma'ālim fī al-ṭarīq* (Milestones), published in 1964,²⁴ but the same views appear in the last edition of *Al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtimāʿiyya fī al-Islām* (Social Justice in Islam), also published in 1964,²⁵ in the later parts of his Qur'an commentary, *Fī ṣilāl al-Qurʾān* (In the Shadow of the Qur'an),²⁶ and in *Muqawwimāt al-taṣawwur al-islāmī* (Components of the Islamic Conception) published posthumously.²⁷ I shall also make brief reference to *Limādhā a'damūnī?* (Why Did They Execute Me?) a version of his statement to his interrogators in 1965,²⁸ and to the earlier book *Hādhā al-Dīn* (This Religion).²⁹

The main points appear concisely and clearly in the commentary on Qur'an 5:50 in *Fī ṣilāl*:

The meaning of *jāhiliyya* is defined by this text. *Jāhiliyya*—as God describes it and His Qur'an defines it—is the rule of humans by humans because it involves making some humans servants of others, rebelling against service to God, rejecting God's divinity (*ulūhiyya*) and, in view of this rejection, ascribing divinity to some humans and serving them apart from God. *Jāhiliyya*—in the light of this text—is not a period of time but a condition, a condition which existed yesterday, exists today, and will exist tomorrow. It takes the form of *jāhiliyya*, which stands over against Islam and contradicts it. People—in any time and any place—are either governed by God's shari'a—entirely, without any reservations—accepting it and submitting to it, in which case they are following God's religion, or they are governed by a shari'a invented by humans, in whatever form, and accept it. In that case they are in *jāhiliyya* and are following the religion of those who govern by that shari'a, and are by no means following the religion of God. Whoever does not desire the rule (*ḥukm*) of God desires the rule of *jāhiliyya*, and whoever rejects the shari'a of God accepts the shari'a of *jāhiliyya* and lives in *jāhiliyya*.³⁰

First and foremost, as we see here, the defining characteristic of *jāhiliyya* is that it rejects divine authority for human authority. As corollaries, it involves serving (or worshipping³¹) humans in place of God and thus deifying humans. According to Qutb, one of the essential characteristics of deity (*ulūhiyya*) is sovereignty (*ḥākimiyya*), so that to ascribe sovereignty to any person or institution is to ascribe divinity to him or it, even if one does not say so and does not ascribe other aspects of divinity to him or it. He uses the hadith about Adi ibn Hatim as a proof text for this. Adi, who had become a Christian, came to Medina and heard the Prophet reciting, "They have taken their rabbis and priests as lords apart from God." Adi said, "They do not worship them," but the Prophet replied, "O yes! They forbid what is permissible and permit what is forbidden, and the people obey them, and in that way they worship them."³² Qutb comments, "This text shows conclusively that obedience in shari'a or judgment is worship."³³ Elsewhere he says that the contemporary *jāhiliyya* "is based on an attack against God's authority on earth and against the most distinctive characteristic of divinity (*ulūhiyya*), sovereignty (*ḥākimiyya*), ascribing sovereignty to humans and making some people lords over others."³⁴ We note here the relationship of *jāhiliyya*

to another of Qutb's key terms, *ḥākimiyya*.³⁵ *Jāhiliyya* is the *ḥākimiyya* of humans; Islam is the *ḥākimiyya* of God.

Second, *jāhiliyya* does not refer primarily to a period of past time or to any particular geographical area. It is a social and spiritual condition of society that can exist at any time and in any place. The word may be used to refer to one or more periods appearing regularly throughout history. The period of *jāhiliyya* just prior to Muhammad's mission is called the Arab *jāhiliyya*. Qutb's main concern, of course, is the present and the fact that the present is a time of *jāhiliyya*. There are, to be sure, some places where the word appears in the conventional historical meaning, but these are relatively infrequent and not determinative for his thinking. Often they represent hold-overs from his earlier usage.³⁶

Third, Qutb posits a stark contrast between Islam and *jāhiliyya*. All societies are either one or the other, and none is both. In *Ma'ālim* he defines the *jāhili* society as "every other society than the Muslim society."³⁷ *Jāhili* societies may be anti-religious or religious in diverse ways, but the only thing that really matters is what they have in common—that they are *jāhili*.³⁸ Likewise ethically, "There are no agrarian ethics and no industrial ethics. . . . There are no capitalist ethics or socialist ethics. There are only Islamic ethics and *jāhili* ethics."³⁹ In contrast to Mawdudi's view of the Muslim world as a mixture of *jāhiliyya* and Islam, for Qutb here can be no compromise, no halfway situation.⁴⁰ "There is no Islam in a land where Islam does not govern. . . . [B]esides faith there is only unbelief (*kufr*); apart from Islam there is only *jāhiliyya*; other than truth there is only error."⁴¹

Admittedly there may be some points of detail where *jāhili* ideas and practices resemble Islamic ones, but these are mere coincidences and are rooted in completely different principles and foundations.⁴² They have no ideological significance. In fact, however, though Qutb's rhetoric usually obscures the fact, there are points of overlap between Islam and *jāhiliyya* worth noting. An important one is science—or, more specifically, what he calls the "pure sciences" (*al-ʿulūm al-baḥtata*), such as chemistry, physics, and biology (but not Darwinism), "in their strictly technical and administrative aspects." He even gives them a measure of Islamic legitimacy by insisting that they are historically rooted in Islamic civilization.⁴³ This, we may note, is a strategy commonly associated with an apologetic reformism that he usually considers "defeatist."⁴⁴ Here, though, it serves his purpose.

There is a different kind of overlap between Islam and *jāhiliyya* in that there may be traces of *jāhili* ideas and practices in an Islamic system and there may be individual Muslims living in a *jāhili* system. The systems as such, however, are either Islamic or *jāhili*. In the former case, a vigorous Islamic society will be in the process of eliminating the leftovers of *jāhiliyya*, while a less vigorous one is in danger of being weakened and even destroyed by them, as has happened in recent history. Also, an Islamic society can tolerate within it non-Muslims who accept *dhimmī* status. Such people are *jāhili*, to be sure, but the conditions of the *dhimma* ensure that they are not a threat to the Islamic society and its mission. These points can be understood in terms of an organic picture of society, which Qutb often presents. A strong body can tolerate some disease germs that would destroy a weaker body. Likewise it may tolerate foreign substances if they are properly controlled and isolated. It is to be noted that the idea of Islam as a "system," which is very typical of Qutb's thinking,⁴⁵ permits

him to allow for overlap between *jāhiliyya* and Islam without violating the fundamental dichotomy.

In the case of Muslims in a *jāhili* society, *jāhiliyya*, too, is an organic entity. Individual Muslims cannot function effectively as Muslims within it, because as members of it they will be constrained to contribute to its survival, just as individual cells contribute to the survival of a body.⁴⁶ Here the dichotomy becomes intensified, because *jāhiliyya* in fact is not merely other than Islam but something actively opposed to it. A *jāhili* system is a positive and dynamic entity, having most or all of the formal characteristics of a religion, such as basic conceptions of the universe and life, ethical values, and institutions enshrining these.⁴⁷ “This *jāhiliyya* . . . has always taken the form of a dynamic social grouping, a society, subject to the leadership of this society, and subject to its conceptions, values, ideas, feelings, traditions, and customs. It has been an organic society whose individuals relate to each other, support each other and cooperate together. Therefore it has actively sought to preserve and defend its existence, consciously or unconsciously, and to destroy any dangerous elements which threaten that existence in any way.”⁴⁸ Islam is such a “dangerous element.” By its very nature it is dedicated to destroying what is essential to *jāhiliyya*: the servitude of human to human. Sooner or later, *jāhili* society must fight it.⁴⁹

From these basics—its rejection of divine sovereignty, its universality, and its stark contrast with Islam, but particularly from the first⁵⁰—flow the other characteristics of *jāhiliyya*. Rejecting divine sovereignty, it is out of tune with the divinely ordained cosmic harmony of which the shari‘a is a part and clashes with true human nature (*fiṭra*).⁵¹ Therefore it is intellectually and morally confused and out of control. “*Jāhiliyya* is entirely darkness: the darkness of false opinions, myths, superstitions, and misconceptions; the darkness of uncontrolled passions and desires; the darkness of doubt, worry, lack of guidance, alienation, and insecurity; the darkness of confused values and shattered moral standards.”⁵² On the surface it may appear overwhelmingly strong, but the eye of faith can see that it ultimately has little substance. It is characterized by “bluster (*ja‘ā’a*),” “pretense (*intifāsh*),” and “conceit (*ghurūr*).”⁵³ It is like “bubbles” that burst “however large and bright they may seem.”⁵⁴

Ethically, *jāhiliyya* lacks what in Arabic is called *insāniyya*—which includes humanness as opposed to cruelty, what is human as opposed to what is sub-human or animal, and what is universally human as opposed to what is merely ethnic or class-based. Only when the highest sovereignty in society is given to God and not to humans can there be true freedom and dignity for the individual human as human. Only in this case can there be a truly inter-racial and international civilization. All *jāhili* societies are based on considerations such as race and class. Ancient Rome was both class-based and race-based. Modern European empires have been based on an exploitative nationalism. Communism is based on class in reverse. In all these cases, the social links are based on aspects of human nature that we share with animals. Only in the case of Islamic society is the link based on creed—that is, on a higher human capacity that we do not share with animals. Only with Islam can there be a humane civilization (*haḍāra insāniyya*). Only Islam has brought together diverse races and nationalities on the basis of love and a sense of unity.⁵⁵ Every previous *jāhiliyya* has violated the rights of the weak in general and orphans in particular, and “we see the same in the cities and towns of our present *jāhiliyya* when the property of orphans is still devoured

in various ways.”⁵⁶ Not only in this respect but in others the lack of social justice is rooted in the rejection of divine *ḥākimiyya*, and a prime symbol of this is *ṭāghūt* (tyrant), a word that combines the idea of an idol (receiving worship due to God) and tyranny.⁵⁷

Jāhili societies also put material concerns above all others, whether in a theoretical way, as the Marxists do, limiting the fundamental needs of humans to “food, shelter, and sex,” or in a practical way, as the Americans and others do with their consumerism. They are also characterized by uncontrolled sexual expression, a point illustrated for ancient Arabia by ‘A’isha’s description of the four kinds of “marriage” in the Arab *jāhiliyya*⁵⁸ and for the modern West by the Profumo affair in England in 1963 and comparable events in the United States including open encouragement of “free” love. This is not to say that *jāhiliyya* does not have its own moral standards. Profumo was not condemned for violating sexual ethics but because his actions threatened state security, while for many the justification for sexual activity is the sincere feeling of love, whatever the marital status.⁵⁹ But these are not God’s standards. Contemporary *jāhiliyya* encourages or even compels women to abandon their families and their children for jobs and thus to put material production above “human production.”⁶⁰ “The line of human progress proceeds in the direction of controlling animal tendencies and restricting them to the sphere of the family and placing them on the basis of duty so as to accomplish a human task.”⁶¹

Such a society is backward. “Societies that are dominated by animalistic values and tendencies in this respect cannot possibly be civilized societies, however great their industrial, economic, and scientific achievements.”⁶² In fact, no matter how advanced they seem to be, *jāhili* societies are inevitably backward. *Jāhili*, indeed, is the Islamic term for “backward.”⁶³ Only an Islamic society can properly be said to be “civilized.” Thus, Qutb inverts the usual Western judgment on the Islamic world. However great the moral failings of *jāhiliyya*, the emphasis in Qutb’s latest writings falls squarely on the rejection of God’s sovereignty. By contrast, in his earlier writings moral success or failure has greater importance in its own right.⁶⁴

Although Qutb mainly emphasizes the similarities among *jāhiliyyas*, there is one important difference. The present-day *jāhiliyya* is more sophisticated and thoroughgoing than earlier ones. It deceives people with its science, which it borrowed from Islam and perverted by removing it from its divine foundations.⁶⁵ Early in *Ma‘ālim* he contrasts the “primitive and simple form” of the first *jāhiliyya* with the present one, which “claims the right to invent conceptions and values, laws and ordinances, systems and institutions.”⁶⁶ The present *jāhiliyya* is one of the few that has presumed to deny the existence of God, not merely to pervert the understanding and service of Him, while its material success tends to obscure its failings. In fact, though, its creative period is over, and it “stands on the edge of the abyss.”⁶⁷

One of the worst things about modern *jāhiliyya* is that it often masquerades as Islam. In a dramatic and well-known passage in *Ma‘ālim*, Qutb insists that all existing societies are *jāhili*. Communist societies are obviously *jāhili* because they deny the existence of God and make people serve the party. So, too, are pagan societies such as India, Japan, and others, because they worship beings other than God. Christian and Jewish societies are *jāhili* because of their wrong conceptions of divinity and worship and the authority they give to human institutions. Finally, “those societies

that call themselves Muslim” are *jāhili*. Although they do not formally worship beings other than God, in practice they give political and social authority to others than God. Some openly embrace “secularism” in place of religion; some “respect” religion but give it no authority in social life; some legislate as they choose and claim that they are following the shari‘a. Some give authority to “the people” or “the party.” Although Qutb does not quite name names, he clearly has the Egypt of Gamal Abdel Nasser in mind, as well as other contemporary Muslim countries.⁶⁸ Here he succinctly outlines the main secularist and modernist options followed by Westernizing Muslims. Those who “respect” religion or claim to follow the shari‘a are particularly dangerous, for they “put Islamic signs over the camps of depravity and decay.”⁶⁹ The situation is such that “even much of what we call Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought is the product of this [present] *jāhiliyya*.” As a result “the Islamic world-view is not clear in our minds,” and we do not produce a generation like that of the first days of Islam.⁷⁰ In other words, *jāhiliyya* has so colonized our minds that we fail to conceive of its alternative, much less create it. An important cause of this is Western Orientalism, which has deceived Muslims. Wilfred Cantwell Smith in particular is criticized for declaring Atatürk’s Turkey Islamic in his book *Islam in the Modern World*.⁷¹ Although Qutb is notorious for locating *jāhiliyya* in the Muslim world, we see that to a considerable degree the West is still the driving force.

Qutb sometimes goes so far as to say that Islam does not “exist” anymore. The eighth chapter of the last edition of *Al-‘Adāla* begins as follows: “We call for the restoration of Islamic life in an Islamic society governed by the Islamic creed and the Islamic conception as well as by the Islamic shari‘a and the Islamic order. We know that Islamic life—in this sense—stopped a long time ago in all parts of the world and that the “existence” (*wujūd*) of Islam itself has therefore stopped. And we state this last fact openly, in spite of the shock, alarm, and loss of hope it may cause to many who like to think of themselves as ‘Muslims’!”⁷² The main point is clear: Islam is not Islam unless it governs society. Earlier editions manifest this concern, “The present Islamic society is by no means Islamic,”⁷³ but also say, “If the spread of the Islamic spirit had stopped in governing circles—indeed in some of these circles but not others—it continued operative in other aspects of the life of society and individuals . . . right up to the present hour.”⁷⁴ In now denying the “existence” of Islam, Qutb is in part employing a forceful rhetorical device to underline his point. Denying the “existence” of Islam effectively symbolizes both his social emphasis and the highly dichotomous character of his later thought.

How literally should we take him on this? Perhaps the best way to understand this “non-existence” of Islam is through the analogy of Islam as a tree, one he uses in several contexts. The roots are its doctrine and the branches its social order.⁷⁵ At present it is cut off at ground level. It does not exist. But the roots still exist, and from them the tree can grow again.⁷⁶ In fact, Islam must now exist to some extent even in Qutb’s terms. In *Ma‘ālim* he tells us that when the number of believers reaches three, a Muslim society comes into existence,⁷⁷ and this must have been the case at the time he was writing that Islam did not “exist.” This vanguard would presumably be the only true Muslims at the time but in them Islam would exist.⁷⁸ What about the others “who like to think of themselves as ‘Muslims’”? They hardly qualify as a Muslims by Qutb’s criteria, and, in fact, in the last edition of *‘Adāla* he removes the

label “Muslim” from the apologists he calls “defeatists.”⁷⁹ Still, he also avoids labeling “so-called Muslims” individually as *kāfirs*.⁸⁰ This may well have been for practical reasons, because some of these were potential recruits for the vanguard and needed to be shocked into awareness but not overly discouraged. This also may reflect Qutb’s view of Islam as a “practical” religion (see later). One does not label people *kāfirs* before one is in a position to execute the appropriate judgment against them.⁸¹ By that time, Qutb may have assumed, the majority of people would have declared themselves true Muslims, and the government would accept this, even as Muhammad himself had done when he took charge in Mecca. There is also evidence that Qutb viewed the nominal Muslims as occupying a similar position to that of the People of the Book in Muhammad’s time.⁸² In any case, Qutb’s primary focus here is on society, not on the individuals in it. This is perhaps why *jāhiliyya* rather than *kufr* is the central term. Although he often appears to equate the two words, I think there is a subtle difference between them that makes *jāhiliyya* more appropriate for his intentions. *Kufr*, as I understand, applies in the first instance to individuals and only by extension to larger groups. *Jāhiliyya*, by contrast, applies in the first instance to societies, and then the adjective, *jāhilt*, is applied to individuals connected with that society.

How have we come to this pass? The picture of human history prior to Muhammad that Qutb paints is one of almost universal *jāhiliyya*, briefly punctuated from time to time by prophetic missions and the Islamic movements associated with them. By Muhammad’s time the positive traces of these previous missions had been almost obliterated.⁸³ With the mission of Muhammad and the “unique Qur’anic generation,”⁸⁴ Islam not only reappeared but quickly reached its highest and fullest expression. It spread and created an impressive international society noted for both its tolerance and its learning but declined from its spiritual heights and eventually fell back into *jāhiliyya*. “This [religion of truth] became a reality this time at the hands of the Messenger of God (SAAS), the Caliphs, and their successors, for a long period of time, when the Religion of Truth was dominant. . . . Then its followers gradually abandoned it under the influence of factors internal to the Muslim societies on one hand and the long war in various forms which its pagan and Jewish and Christian enemies waged against it on the other.”⁸⁵ The internal causes are described in *Hādihā al-Dīn* as “the residues of *jāhiliyya* in the souls of the masses of people,” who had not been part of that “select group” of the earliest Muslims, which began to drag the community down.⁸⁶ They are also seen in the Islamic philosophers and theologians who mixed pagan Greek ideas with Islamic ones.⁸⁷ The external causes are found in contemporary Zionism and “Crusaderism”—that is, Western imperialism. How long did this process take? Qutb is not completely clear on this, and some think that he believed that the return to *jāhiliyya* came at the end of the Rightly Guided Caliphate. This would seem to find some support in his assertion, quoted earlier, that Islamic life stopped “a long time ago (*mundhu fitra tawīla*)” and also in a statement early in *Ma’ālim* that the “existence of the Muslim ummah” has been cut off for “many centuries.”⁸⁸ Most of his statements, however, indicate that he saw this as happening only with the full onslaught of Western imperialism in the 19th century. In *Hādihā al-Dīn*, he suggests that the community was at its highest level for 50 years, and then at lower levels for 1,000 or more.⁸⁹ Later in *Ma’ālim*, he speaks of the Islamic world distancing itself gradually from Islam and stagnating, and in the last edition of *Adāla* and in *Muqawwimāt* he says that

Islam existed for about twelve centuries."⁹⁰ This is consistent with Qutb's dichotomous view of *jāhiliyya* and Islam. Where Mawdudi can see most of Muslim history as a mixture of Islam and *jāhiliyya*, for Qutb most of Islamic history is Islam, though at "lower levels." *Jāhiliyya* comes only with European imperialism and Muslim capitulation to European values.

If Qutb accepts 1,000 years of Islamic history as genuine Islam, his standards for an Islamic society are not as purist as might sometimes appear. Speaking of the victory of the Umayyads, he says: "the road was open to corruption." But he does not say that society ceased to be Islamic.⁹¹ What is evidently required is a sincere commitment to follow divine guidance, but not total success in doing so. A Muslim society, he tells us, is "a society that fundamentally recognizes the authority of God and appeals to His shari'a, even if it suffers from political oppression or widespread sin at times. Thus we find the statement of the Messenger [SAWS], 'The best form of *jihād* is speaking the truth to an unjust *imām*,' now he is called *imām*, but he would not be an *imām* if he did not fundamentally recognize the authority of God and his *shari'a*."⁹² This is not, of course, to justify such a situation. In context the point is that a Muslim society, in contrast to a *jāhili* one, does not ignore corruption and oppression but acts to end it.⁹³ One might ask at this point precisely how one distinguishes a *jāhili* society from a Muslim society when the former claims to be Muslim. To my knowledge, Qutb does not address this question in these terms. For him it was presumably not necessary. The Egypt of his day was obviously tyrannical (in the sense of *tāghūt*) and its Muslim apologetic transparently false. Saudi Arabia, the country laying perhaps the strongest claim at the time to govern by the shari'a, would have been patently *jāhili* by virtue of its alliance with America.

What are the implications of all of this for action? The answer is that we must begin where the Prophet began, with a small group (*jamā'a* or *'iṣba*) of people who have committed themselves to serve God and God alone in all aspects of life.⁹⁴ The basic creed "no god but God" must be their only motive and their whole message. They must not mix in any other message, such as national liberation or social reform,⁹⁵ and they must not try to justify it at the bar of *jāhili* values.⁹⁶ They must also separate themselves from the *jāhili* society to escape its powerful hold over their minds. This separation is not physical but involves "mixing while keeping distinct (*mukhālata ma'a tamayyuz*)" and "emotional separation (*'uzla shu'uriyya*)."⁹⁷ This period of preparation and purification is absolutely essential and may take some time. Qutb points out that the Prophet Muhammad spent thirteen years training the "unique Qur'anic generation" in the basic creed⁹⁸ before providing any social legislation or attempting to set up a society. During this period, individuals and groups who wish to make the same commitment will join them. At this point a new, truly Islamic, society is born; it splits off from and confronts the old *jāhili* society. Continuing in Qutb's own words: "Then the old *jāhili* society in its entirety may choose to join the new Muslim society or it may not, or it may make a truce with the new Muslim society or it may fight against it. But the rule has been that the *jāhili* society wages relentless war, both against the vanguard of this society in its earliest stage—when it consists of individuals and groups—and against this society itself after it has actually been established, as has happened without exception in the history of the preaching of Islam, from the prophet Noah (AS) to Muhammad (SAAS)."⁹⁹

This is Qutb's version of jihad. It is consciously patterned after the actions of Muhammad and his early followers, but it also suggests the pattern of a modern revolution, particularly the communist revolution in Russia. It seems in line with the point that Mawdudi makes more explicitly: "Islam is a revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social order of the whole world . . . and 'jihad' refers to that revolutionary struggle . . . to achieve this objective."¹⁰⁰ Although Qutb here suggests that it is *jāhiliyya* that initiates hostilities, the fact that Islam is committed to destroying *jāhiliyya* and that Islam will fight when necessary to convey its message would seem to make these hostilities inevitable. He rejects the idea, common in contemporary apologetics, that jihad is purely defensive.¹⁰¹ Although Qutb does not use the word "revolution" here, or very often elsewhere, it does seem fair to describe his jihad as a revolutionary struggle and this passage as a call to Islamic revolution.¹⁰²

We must underline the doctrinal focus of Qutb's activism. A Muslim living in a *jāhiliyya* society must not waste time in efforts to correct specific moral or social ills. All such ills are rooted in the more fundamental failure to accept the sovereignty of God. It is to change this, and nothing less, that the Muslim activist must work.¹⁰³ For this reason, Muslims at this stage must not get involved in discussion of theoretical matters or the details of *fiqh*. The time for this comes only when an Islamic society is started that has the actual power to legislate. Islam is a "practical" religion that deals with theoretical matters only as they have a direct influence on action.¹⁰⁴ Qutb therefore does not seek to depict the ideal society he aims for. The focus here as elsewhere is not on the ethical and social goals but on what we may call the "theological" underpinnings.

In assessing the question of whether Qutb was calling for violence, we must bear in mind that the Qutbian revolution falls into two fairly distinct stages, paralleling the Meccan and Medinan phases of Muhammad's career. The first of these is non-violent, but the second is probably violent. Insofar as we focus on the first stage, which Qutb clearly saw as the relevant one in his time, he can be presented as non-violent, as he himself does in his statement to his interrogators.¹⁰⁵ As to whether he was engaged in a plot to overthrow the Egyptian government at the time of his last arrest, the evidence of his writings suggests that he would have considered this quite premature but would not have eschewed violence when the time came.¹⁰⁶ He gives no clear indication, however, of when the revolution would come, and indeed early in *Ma'ālim* he says that the West can be expected to be ahead of the Muslim world in science and technology "for number of centuries at least."¹⁰⁷ In fact, very little in Qutb's description of his "revolution" is specific. There is no indication of its precise circumstances; of how the revolutionary vanguard would be recruited, led, or organized; or what tactics it would use. All of this would presumably be dealt with when the time came (or was being dealt with but not written about). This, of course, makes possible a considerable diversity of interpretation of his legacy, some of which we will see later.

THE EARLIER DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF JĀHILIYYA IN QUTB'S THOUGHT

While the extreme *jāhiliyya* doctrine appears clearly only in Qutb's latest writings, a path of development toward it can be traced earlier. As far as I have been able to

determine, he rarely mentioned *jāhiliyya* in his secularist period, and when he did, he used it in the conventional sense. For example, in his book *The Task of the Poet* (1932), he mentions “*jāhili* poetry” in this sense, more or less connecting it with bedouin poetry.¹⁰⁸ In an article published in 1933, however, he complains that the world is moving at too fast a pace, like an ignorant (*jāhil*) driver, and without direction; rather than copying the West in this, the East should find its own mission and retain its sense of certainty, its depth, and its breadth, active but not hurried.¹⁰⁹ Here we see in moderate terms the kinds of comments he will later make about the Western *jāhiliyya*; indeed, the distinction East–West is a kind of precursor to the distinction Islam–*jāhiliyya*, though with many different implications. Three articles in 1941 depict the world of art, literature, and music in Egypt as gone mad and particularly deplore what he calls the sick quality of popular music, though he has something positive to say about “animal feeling” in music that one would not expect later.¹¹⁰ Articles in the immediate post-war period, when he was vocally critical of the ills of Egyptian society and the machinations of Western imperialists, complain about the debased sexual morals of Egyptian society and describe such a condition as “backward.”¹¹¹ France and Britain are described as “barbarous” for their actions in the Middle East, and those in Egypt who praise them are called slaves.¹¹² The Americans with their materialism are no better; the struggle now is between the rising East and the savage West, between “the shari‘a of God and the shari‘a of the jungle.”¹¹³ Other articles call for a comprehensive program, a new mentality to renew society, and for a new spiritual leadership.¹¹⁴ Here we see in secular terms some of the “ingredients” that will go into his later *jāhiliyya* doctrine.

His earlier Islamist writings also have little about *jāhiliyya*. In the pre–1964 editions of *‘Adāla*, all but one of the references to *jāhiliyya* involve conventional uses of the term—usually the historical sense, though more often with a connotation of “barbarism” than “ignorance.”¹¹⁵ The one exception is a reference in the 1958 edition to “the *jāhili* pollution that floods the face of the whole earth.”¹¹⁶ All other references to full *jāhiliyya* doctrine are in the 1964 edition. The full idea of *jāhiliyya* also does not appear in any of the articles from before his imprisonment in 1954 that I have been able to consult. The prominent idea at this stage is that an “Islamic bloc,” strengthened by newly independent countries such as Pakistan and Indonesia, is taking shape as a counter to the capitalist and communist blocs. He also believes that America, because of its materialism, will eventually go communist.¹¹⁷ In three articles based on his experience in America in 1948–50 he forcefully criticizes American materialism and lax sexual mores.¹¹⁸ The stand-off between Islam and materialism in these writings could be said to foreshadow the stand-off between Islam and *jāhiliyya* later on,¹¹⁹ but at this stage he is clearly far from considering the Islamic world as *jāhili*. Rather, as we have seen, the “stopping” of the spread of the Islamic spirit “has been only partial.”¹²⁰ He thinks the lowest point has been passed and that Islam is on the rise again.¹²¹

One does at this stage find the kind of totalistic and dichotomous thinking that characterizes his later *jāhiliyya* theory, though without the term. For example, in a 1952 article he states that Islam is *‘aqīda* and shari‘a, and as shari‘a deals with all areas political, social, and economic, one is either a Muslim and accepts all this or is not a Muslim, and there is no middle term.¹²² Likewise, in a part of his Qur’an com-

mentary dating probably to the mid-1950s, he states that across the ages there are just two parties—the party of God, based purely on creed, not blood or nation, and the party of Satan.¹²³

The first reference to the term *jāhiliyya* in something like the sense it was going to have, to my knowledge, is in Qutb's introduction to the second (1951) Arabic edition of Nadwi's *What the World Has Lost by the Decline of the Muslims*. Here Qutb notes with approval the author's use of the term *jāhiliyya* to describe the situation of spiritual and moral relapse the world has suffered since the Muslims lost their leadership of it, and he goes on to comment that "*jāhiliyya* is not a limited period of time but a specific spiritual and intellectual condition" that arises when false values replace those that God wants.¹²⁴ This is the first element in his later doctrine that he appears to have accepted. That Muslims suffer to some extent from this *jāhiliyya* he was presumably also learning from Nadwi and from Mawdudi, whose works were becoming available in Arabic about the same time.

Qutb, of course, deals with *jāhiliyya* in the earlier edition of *Fī zilāl al-Qurʾān* (1953–c. 1958) when commenting on the Qurʾanic passages that contain the word. The commentary to Qurʾan 5:50, "Do they seek a *jāhiliyya* judgment?" tells us that *jāhiliyya* may occur in any historical period and involves human legislation replacing divine legislation, but the latter is not here described as a rejection of God's divinity and the stress is on a specific moral aspect of *jāhiliyya*, the partiality of all human legislation in individual, class, or national interests as contrasted with the impartiality of God.¹²⁵ Much the same can be said of the commentaries to the other passages.¹²⁶ Here, as elsewhere in this period, the focus is more on specific social and ethical concerns than the underlying but abstract theological basis.¹²⁷ We might say that in both the earlier and later writings he perceives the sickness of *jāhiliyya*, but in the earlier ones he wants to treat the symptoms and the basic cause together, whereas in the later ones his attention is entirely on the basic cause.

In the writings of the early 1960s the idea of *jāhiliyya* appears more or less prominently, but still not fully developed. There is some reference to *jāhiliyya* in *Hādihā al-Dīn* (1961), as we have seen. Through most of this book the main point is that the first "wave" of Islam has receded but has left "traces" that can be found even in the West—for example, in the idea of a single humanity and the development of international law, a point that can also be found in his writings during the 1950s.¹²⁸ Hence, the task should not be quite so difficult in the "second wave" as it was in the first, because the first had to work purely from the resources of human nature (*fiṭra*) whereas the second also has the resources of these "traces."¹²⁹ In the last chapter, however, he warns activists not to become overconfident because of this, for in many respects the present *jāhiliyya* is worse than the first, being more complex and based on science. Humanity is in general farther from God than before. Most are still dazzled by a godless science, and "this century may end" before they get over this.¹³⁰ The concept of *jāhiliyya* here seems similar to that in the later writings, but it comes at the end of a book that is on the whole rather more optimistic.

Two books published probably in 1962, *Al-Mustaqbal li-Hādihā al-Dīn* (The Future Belongs to This Religion)¹³¹ and *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-taṣawwūr al-Islāmī* (Characteristics of the Islamic Conception),¹³² are mainly concerned with showing the weakness of Western developments and refuting Western thought. The word *jāhiliyya* appears only a few

times in them. In *Khaṣā'is al-taṣawwur* there is a forceful description of contemporary society as having characteristics that are, in effect, *jāhili*, though without the name.¹³³ At the end of *Mustaqbal* we are told that “with all of the *jāhiliyya* around us” we are in a similar position to the Prophet Muhammad and that the struggle will be bitter, but this is followed by the point that we must come to know contemporary civilization well enough to know what to choose from it.¹³⁴ In all of these books, *jāhiliyya* is still seen mainly as Western, for all the effect it has on the Muslim world.

To sum up, the sense that what he was later to call *jāhiliyya* consists of immoral and excessive behavior, not mere ignorance, was already strongly present even before his Islamist period. The sense of *jāhiliyya* as the definitional opposite of Islam, as a trans-historical reality, and as a reality found among Muslims, he appears to have gotten from Nadwi and Mawdudi in the early 1950s. The strong sense of dichotomy between truth and falsehood, good and evil is present in his early Islamist writings—indeed, even before—but is not usually attached to the idea of *jāhiliyya*. Only in the latest writings, published in 1964 or after, though some are probably available from about 1962,¹³⁵ do we find the shift of focus from the moral to the theological, the extreme dichotomizing which excludes any mixture of Islam and *jāhiliyya*, and the idea that *jāhiliyya* has become so omnipresent that Islam no longer “exists.” It is also only in these writings that *jāhiliyya* becomes a central category of Qutb’s thinking, a forceful symbol that pulls the various strands of this thinking together. These are precisely the novel elements in his theory. I have seen little awareness in the literature on Qutb of just how late in his career all this happened.¹³⁶

I do not wish to speculate here at any length on the factors that led Qutb to this position, but a few words are in order. One obvious factor is the brutality he and his fellow Muslim Brothers experienced in prison in a supposedly Muslim society. Also important would have been the isolation of prison life. Qutb suffered from the brutality of the prison guards and engaged in intense discussion with like-minded inmates but had little opportunity for the more ambiguous experiences of normal life. This would go some way toward accounting for the abstract character of his late work and its highly dichotomized view of the world.¹³⁷ Even more important, perhaps, was his disappointment with Nasser’s regime. Initially, Qutb, like many others, had had high hopes for this regime; when it turned persecuter, the shock was all the greater. Moreover, this regime undertook many of the social reforms for which Qutb had called. Obviously, the reforms themselves were not enough if they were not rooted in properly Islamic conceptions and intentions—hence, Qutb’s shift from the moral to the theological dimension. Not only Egypt but also the newly independent Muslim countries, in which Qutb had expressed hope in the early 1950s, had not achieved a particularly good social record and had moved in a secular rather than an Islamist direction. Moreover, America’s strength was greater than he had foreseen; it was not going to go communist, and its moral and political influence was spreading. Under these conditions, the seeds of the *jāhiliyya* doctrine, planted by Mawdudi and Nadwi, grew into their final, hard-line form. Hamid Algar rightly sees Qutb’s *jāhiliyya* doctrine as “encapsulating the utter bleakness of the Muslim predicament.”¹³⁸

From another angle, the *jāhiliyya* doctrine can be seen as an extreme logical extension of Qutb’s earlier ideas: his dichotomous thinking, his stress on the comprehensiveness of Islam, and his insistence on its social and political application. But it took

the circumstances of his life to push them to this extreme. We must also give some "credit" to the Marxists for the form, if not the content, of his doctrine. Undoubtedly, his characterization of the struggle between Islam and *jāhiliyya* owes something to their ideas about the revolutionary struggle between communism and capitalism.

At a different level, the modern state itself, as it has developed in Egypt and elsewhere over the past century, is a major factor. Qutb's totalistic and systemic view of Islam and *jāhiliyya* undoubtedly reflects the increasing control of the state over society and the totalistic claims of many modern ideologies. The fact that in his earlier writings Qutb finds Islam operative outside of the "governing circles" but later finds that Islam no longer "exists" may reflect the increasing control over society wielded by the Nasserist state. Gilles Kepel states that "the totalitarian state now represented the model of *jāhiliyya*."¹³⁹ Still, the state as such is not the focus of the *jāhiliyya* doctrine. It is not just the state but the whole of society that is *jāhili*. It is not enough to topple an unbelieving (*kāfir*) ruler; society must be profoundly reoriented. Qutb hardly gives us the details of this, but presumably the most a putsch could do would be to start a long process of change. If this were not carried out, society would quickly revert to *jāhiliyya*.¹⁴⁰

At still another level, we must mention the Qur'an itself, in whose "shadows" Qutb spent so much of his later life and whose authority he claims. Like the Qur'an, Qutb sees *jāhiliyya* not as a past epoch but as a present reality. Like the Qur'an, Qutb's *jāhiliyya* is closer to "savagery" than to "ignorance," although ignorance does seem to play somewhat more of a role for Qutb than for the Qur'an itself, given the place of science and the presence of atheism in the present *jāhiliyya*. If, following Izutsu's view, we say that the implicit opposite of *jāhiliyya* in the Qur'an is Islam, then Qutb follows this but makes it very explicit and elaborates it further. He gives it a "systemic" character that it hardly has in the Qur'an. Also, the term *jāhiliyya* is more central for Qutb in his last stage than it is in the Qur'an, where it appears only four times. It would seem that Mawdudi's mixture of *jāhiliyya* and Islam could be equally well derived from the Qur'an and better accords with the hadith "Within you is *jāhiliyya*." In all, we can say that Qutb has sharpened and updated the Qur'anic concept and developed it in a particular direction. His view can be said to be *one* legitimate interpretation, though not the only one. Here Qutb is a good example of what "fundamentalism," in the sense of the effort to draw guidance directly from the scripture, is and can be.

SINCE SAYYID QUTB

It is not possible here to investigate adequately the extent to which others have followed, developed, or criticized Qutb's doctrine of *jāhiliyya*. I shall, however, make a few comments about some of the better-known radical groups and movements. Qutb is generally agreed to have had a major influence on the radical groups in Egypt in the years following his death. The best known of these are the so-called Takfir wa-Hijra (roughly, "Excommunication and Emigration"), which kidnapped and killed a former minister of *awqaf* in 1977; the so-called Military Academy Group, which attempted a coup in 1974; the Jihad group, which assassinated Anwar Sadat in 1981; and the Jama'a al-Islamiyya, whose activities caused so much turmoil in the 1990s.¹⁴¹

For only the first of these groups does the idea of *jāhiliyya* appear to have been significant. Shukri Mustafa, the leader of Takfir wa-Hijra, had been arrested in 1965 in the same wave of arrests as Sayyid Qutb and spent much of his time in prison reading Qutb and Mawdudi. He founded the group after his release in 1971, and it continued until repressed by the government in 1977. This group explicitly described the society around it as *jāhiliyya* and withdrew physically as well as mentally from it as much as possible.¹⁴² As with Qutb, their strategy was a long-term one, but circumstances and miscalculation led them into a premature confrontation with the state. They followed the main lines of Qutb's ideas, with two or three major exceptions. The degree of withdrawal was greater than what Qutb seems to have intended, as was the high degree of control wielded by Shukri Mustafa. Also, the group's view that defectors were apostates who should be punished and even killed goes beyond anything Qutb wrote. However, Shukri's view that Friday *ṣalāt* is illicit in a *jāhiliyya* society goes beyond what Qutb explicitly says but could perhaps be derived from it.¹⁴³ These things give the group a "cult" appearance¹⁴⁴ that does not seem to fit Qutb's thinking, but Qutb's vagueness in details makes it hard to rule them out as *one* legitimate interpretation of his ideas, just as his own concept of *jāhiliyya* cannot be ruled out as *one* interpretation of the Qur'an.

None of the other three groups appears to have made much of the term *jāhiliyya*, and their actions indicate that they did not accept Qutb's conception of *jāhiliyya* or his analysis of the situation posed by it. For them the problem was not with society as a whole, which was fundamentally religious and Islamic, but with the anti-Islamic rulers. Hence, activities directed at removing these rulers made sense. The founder of the Military Academy Group had probably been a member of Nabhani's Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami, and his conception of the situation accords with Nabhani's.¹⁴⁵ Members of the group believed that Egyptians "are basically the most religious of all Islamic peoples" but betrayed by "God-fearless" leaders. Therefore, with the right leadership they would be in the best place to start a worldwide Islamic revival.¹⁴⁶ The members of the Jihad group appear to have had essentially the same analysis of the spiritual and political situation. In fact, they expected the assassination of Sadat to spark a popular revolution.¹⁴⁷ The booklet *Al-Farīda al-Ghā'iba* (The Neglected Duty), which is the best-known statement of their position, does make a point similar to one of Qutb's when it criticizes those who think the proper approach is to establish benevolent societies or political parties, or gain important positions, on the grounds that they would be subject to and in effect supporting the unbelieving state.¹⁴⁸ Qutb, as we have seen, says that as members of *jāhiliyya*, Muslims will contribute to its survival just as individual cells contribute to the survival of a body. The booklet, however, contains only a few instances of the word *jāhiliyya* and most of these are in quotations from the Qur'an, the hadith, or medieval scholars.¹⁴⁹ I have had little opportunity to study the statements of the Jama'a al-Islamiyya, but the literature on the group suggests a similar approach.¹⁵⁰ What these groups seem to get from Qutb is the idea that the most immediate danger comes from within Islamic society, not from without, but their analyses and solutions are much more simplistic than his, and their discourse is that of *kufr*, not *jāhiliyya*.

By the time of Sadat's assassination, of course, there had been a popular Islamic revolution in Iran, which had undoubtedly influenced the hopes of the Egyptian radi-

cals. Certainly, those who made the Iranian Revolution had a high opinion of Qutb, but I have seen no evidence that his concept of *jāhiliyya* played a significant role in their discourse either during the revolution or in the years before it.¹⁵¹ Khomeini seems hardly to have used the term, and the revolution could be said to have demonstrated the absence of *jāhiliyya* among the people, because it was they who mounted it.¹⁵² Iran since the revolution would seem to fulfill Qutb's primary requirement for an Islamic society: not perfection by Islamic moral standards but a sincere and credible commitment on the part of its leaders to rule by the shari'a, although he certainly would have had problems with some of the distinctively Shi'i aspects of the revolution, as have many Sunni Islamists—in particular the doctrine of *vilāyat-i faqīh*.¹⁵³ Still, the fact that there are regimes that claim to govern by the shari'a—whether Iran or, more recently, the Sunni Islamist regimes such as Pakistan under Zia al-Haqq, Sudan since 1991, and Afghanistan under the Mujahidin and the Taliban—must affect any discourse about *jāhiliyya*.

In view of recent events, it seems appropriate to make a few comments about Hamas in Palestine and Usama bin Laden. The position of Hamas seems to be similar to that of the three Egyptian groups discussed earlier, with the difference that, however tense their relationship with the secularist Palestine Liberation Organization, the main enemy is clearly external: the State of Israel. The Hamas Covenant does perhaps echo Qutb, however, when it says that the movement finds itself “in a time when Islam has disappeared from practical life” and all values have been overturned while oppression and injustice prevail.¹⁵⁴ The only appearance of the word *jāhili* or *jāhiliyya* is, interestingly, in a contrast between Islamic art and *jāhili* art.¹⁵⁵

Although Bin Laden has been reported as claiming that Afghanistan under the Taliban was the only Islamic state, his criticisms are directed principally at Saudi Arabia, and the main enemy is external to the Muslim world: the United States.¹⁵⁶ In fact, Bin Laden virtually reverses the argument in *Al-Farida al-Gha'iba*. There it is the enemy near at hand—that is, the rulers of Egypt—who must be dealt with before the enemy further away (Israel). Bin Laden states that the greater enemy, the United States, must be dealt with before the lesser enemy, dissention and corruption among Muslims. The term *jāhiliyya* hardly appears in the sources available to me. In the one place where it is clearly present, it is used in the traditional historical sense, and the section conveys a strong sense of tribal pride:

I say to you, William [Perry, American Secretary of Defense], that: These youths love death as you love life. They inherit dignity, pride, courage, generosity, truthfulness and sacrifice from father to father. They are most delivering and steadfast at war. They inherit these values from their ancestors (even from the time of the *Jāhiliyya*, before Islam). These values were approved and completed by the arriving Islam as stated by the Messenger of God (God's Blessings and Salutations be upon him): “I have been sent to perfect the good values” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Jāmi' al-Saghir*).

“When the pagan King 'Amr ibn Hind tried to humiliate the pagan 'Amr ibn Kulthum, the latter cut off the head of the king with his sword rejecting aggression, humiliation and indignation.

“If the king oppresses the people excessively, we refuse to submit to humiliation.

“By which legitimacy (or command) O 'Amr ibn Hind, do you want us to be degraded?!

“By which legitimacy (or command) O 'Amr ibn Hind do you listen to our foes and disrespect us?!

“Our toughness has, O 'Amr, tired the enemies before you, never giving in!”¹⁵⁷

Here if anywhere is fodder for those such as Muhammad al-‘Ashmawi, who claim that the extremists themselves are *jāhili!*¹⁵⁸

This admittedly sketchy survey suggests that these radicals share with Qutb a strongly dichotomous sense of a struggle between extreme good and extreme evil and a sense of the “other” as a powerful, almost all-pervasive force that must be fought with extreme measures and extreme commitment, but that they mostly have not accepted his doctrine of *jāhiliyya*. Perhaps this is because the doctrine is too pessimistic. Activists prepared to risk or sacrifice their lives in the cause look, I think, for more immediate returns than Qutb’s doctrine offers them. They want to believe that killing the *kāfir* ruler or toppling the *kāfir* regime will bring in the Islamic society in short order. The *jāhiliyya* doctrine promises them a much longer struggle. Many radicals have undoubtedly hoped that the imposing *jāhili* society could be toppled with one blow, as the Twin Towers were. The *jāhiliyya* doctrine would remind them that, although the Twin Towers may symbolize the ultimate weakness of *jāhiliyya*, the actual *jāhiliyya* has been provoked but not really weakened by the destruction of this symbol. Qutb came to his *jāhiliyya* doctrine only after the failure of Islamism in the early 1950s. It may be that only if and when the current wave of violent activism fails some of the radicals will turn to Qutb’s doctrine for the more profound, if starker, guidance that it offers. Meanwhile, those Islamists who do not follow the radical path may find uses for the doctrine that are beyond the scope of this article to speculate on. As long as Qutb’s works are read, the doctrine has the possibility of appearing in as yet unpredictable ways.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: THE *JĀHILIYYA* DOCTRINE AS FAITH

Almost fifty years ago, Wilfred Cantwell Smith penned the following words, which have not lost their validity:

The fundamental malaise of modern Islam is a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The fundamental problem of modern Muslims is how to rehabilitate that history, to get it going again in full vigour, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely guided society should and must. The fundamental spiritual crisis of Islam in the twentieth century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls.¹⁵⁹

All of the figures and ideas discussed here manifest this malaise and crisis in one way or another, but Qutb’s *jāhiliyya* doctrine manifests it in a particularly profound, radical, and systematic form. As mentioned earlier, it underlines the “utter bleakness of the Muslim predicament.” At the same time, it involves an extreme form of faith in God. Other doctrines, including Qutb’s earlier views, rely on faith but also find more tangible reasons for hope. They discern specific weaknesses in the regime, evidences of support among the people, signs of an “Islamic bloc” internationally, or “traces” of Islam in *jāhiliyya*. Qutb’s late doctrine has little of this. Its main pillars of hope besides God are essential human nature (*fiṭra*) and the weaknesses of *jāhiliyya*. But *fiṭra* is almost as much a matter of faith as God, and it is only faith in God and *fiṭra* that permit one to believe that the weaknesses of *jāhiliyya* are greater than its

strengths. Ultimately, it is a matter of faith in God alone—*sola fide*—though not quite in Luther's sense. Such a faith perhaps takes fullest measure of the crisis, but such a faith is for only the few. This is part of the doctrine's originality, but this also limits its appeal to those made impatient by the crisis.

NOTES

Author's note: An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at the annual conference of the American Research Center in Egypt, Chicago, 23–25 April 1999. I am grateful to the editor and the unnamed referees whose critical comments have stimulated and clarified my thinking on this subject.

¹See Yvonne Haddad "The Qur'anic Justification for an Islamic Revolution: The View of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle East Journal* 37 (1983): 14–29, and idem, "Sayyid Qutb, Ideologue of Islamic Revival," *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), chap. 4. Olivier Carré, *Mysticism and Politics: A Critical Reading of "Fi Zilal al-Qur'an" by Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966)*, trans. from French by Carol Artigues (Leiden and Boston: Leiden, 2003), a major study of Qutb's Qur'an commentary.

²For biographical material see, among others, *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3:400–404, s.v. "Qutb, Sayyid" (Sharough Akhavi); Charles Tripp, "Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahmena (London: Zed, 1994), chap. 7; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh*, trans. J. Rothschild (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), chap. 2; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, enlarged ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), chap. 2; Ahmed S. Mousalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), chap. 1. The best-known Arabic biography is Salah 'Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi, *Sayyid Qutb, Al-Shahīd al-Hayy* (Amman: Maktabat al-Aqsa, 1981). See also 'Adil Hamuda, *Sayyid Qutb, Min al-Qarya ilā al-Misnaqa: Tahqiq wāthā'iqī*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Sina li-l-Nashr, 1990); and Sharif Yunus, *Sayyid Qutb wa-al-uṣūliyya al-islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Dar Tibah, 1995).

³Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 46; Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990), 123.

⁴Of course, neither Qutb nor Khomeini would recognize his doctrine as novel. In both cases, they take terms and ideas already existent in the tradition and extend them in ways that they consider a return to the true meaning of the texts but others perceive as new. Khomeini's innovation was to include political power within the scope of the idea (see, e.g., Olivier Roy, "Islamists in Power," in *The Islamism Debate*, ed. Martin S. Kramer [Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies and African Studies, 1997], 72).

⁵The different approaches are complementary, but I believe that religion should be studied first from the inside, and then from the outside. Roxanne Euben appropriately calls for "interpretations . . . that . . . make central the explication of the subjects' meanings without concluding that there is no perspective adequately distant from them from which to criticize the actors' account of their own experience." See Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 45.

⁶"The Age of Ignorance" is the title of my article on this subject in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001), 1:37–40. See this article for further discussion of *jāhiliyya*.

⁷I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. 1 (Halle 1889–90), trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967). T. Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Quran* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966).

⁸*Ethico-religious Concepts*, 31.

⁹*Ibid.*, 35. The words *jāhiliyya* and *islām* are not specifically set against each other in the Qur'an.

¹⁰M. M. Kahn, trans., *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 3rd rev. ed., 9 vols. (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1976–79), 3: 65, 4:461.

¹¹The first definition of *jahl* in *Lisān al-ʿArab* is "the opposite of 'ilm," and its first definition of *jāhiliyya* is "the time of the *fatra*" (usually the period between the prophets Jesus and Muhammad). Later, the earlier meanings or usages are mentioned or at least suggested: Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzur (d. 711 H), *Lisān al-ʿArab*, (Beirut, 1966), 11:129–30.

¹²See, for example, Tabari on Qur'an 33:33: Al-Tabari, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an tāwīl al-Qur'an*, 3rd ed. (Cairo, 1954–68), 22:5.

¹³Manzur, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 11:130.

¹⁴Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb Iqtidā' širāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jahīm*, in M. A. Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 145–46.

¹⁵Esther Peskes, *Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92) im Widerstreit. Untersuchungen zur Rekonstruktion der Frühgeschichte der Wahhabiya* (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 369–84 (English summary).

¹⁶Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-ḥakīm*, repr. ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1947–54 [1907]), 6:422.

¹⁷Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, Commentary*, 3rd ed., (United States: McGreggor and Werner, n.d.), 259.

¹⁸For the quote, see Abul Ala Mawdudi: *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, ed. A. A. Kamal, trans. Ch. Muhammad Akbar (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1975), 10:106 (comment on Qur'an 33:33). In *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam* (English trans. [Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1972]), Mawdudi writes of *jāhiliyya* re-entering Islam after the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, but it never completely overpowered Islam, and “Muslim people all over the world have always been morally superior to non-Muslim communities” (ibid., 31; cf. 5–27, 30, 53, 78, 90). He also writes of the “getting together of Islam and un-Islam in the same body politic” (ibid., 27).

¹⁹Abul Hasan Nadwi, *Mādhā khasira al-alam bi-inḥitāt al-muslimīn* (What the World Has Lost by the Decline of the Muslims), 2nd ed. (Cairo: Matba'at Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1951); The full copy available to me is the 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1982). See also the English translation by Muhammad Asaf Qidwai, *Islam and the World* (Lahore: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1961).

²⁰See esp. Nadwi, *Mādhā khasira*, 263–77; Qidwai, *Islam*, 180–94.

²¹See Suha Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate* (London: Grey Seal, 1996), chaps. 1 and 3.

²²Muhammad Qutb, *Jāhiliyyat al-qarn al-ʿishrīn* (The Jahiliyya of the Twentieth Century), 1st ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1964).

²³Nadwi, *Mādhā khasira*, 8–11; pp.12–16 in the 7th ed.

²⁴Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'ālim fī al-tariq* (Milestones) (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1964) and later reprintings. The edition available to me is ibid. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1973). Hereafter, this edition is cited as *Ma'ālim*. See also Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1978). Hereafter, this translation is cited as *Milestones*.

²⁵Idem, *Al-Adālah al-ijtimā'iyyah fī al-Islām* (Social Justice in Islam), 6th ed. (Cairo: Matba'at Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1964). The reprints by Dar al-Shuruq are of this edition, and hereafter the Dar al-Shuruq printing of 1974 is cited as *Adāla*. See also William Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of "Social Justice in Islam" (Al-Adālah al-ijtimā'iyyah fī al-islām)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996). This translation also gives the readings of the previous editions (1949–58) where they differ from the last, as they often do on *jāhiliyya*. Hereafter, this work is cited as *Social Justice*, with chapter and paragraph numbers. Only this translation is given for citations of earlier editions.

²⁶Sayyid Qutb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur'an* (In the Shadow of the Qur'an), 6 vols., 10th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1982). The commentary was published beginning in 1953. After completing it, the author revised the first thirteen parts and one sura in the fourteenth (out of thirty parts). All of the material from *Zilāl* in this article illustrating the final form of the doctrine is drawn from the revised parts. Some of these were published before 1964, but I do not know the precise dates. It is worth noting that, of the passages quoted in this article, the commentary to Qur'an 5:5 (vol. 2, pt. 6, 904) is the first to present the full doctrine. As I have not yet had the opportunity to study all of *Zilāl*, I cannot be certain that this is the first appearance of the full doctrine.

²⁷Idem, *Muqawwimāt al-taṣawwūr al-islāmī* (Components of the Islamic Conception), 4th ed. (Beirut and Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1988).

²⁸Idem, *Limādhā a'damūt?* (Why Did They Execute Me?) (Al-sharikah al-sa'ūdiyyah li-l-abhath wa-l-taswiq, n.d). At the end of the text appears “Military Prison, 22 October 1965.” Sharif Yunus states that this text is supposed to be Qutb's statement to the military court on his arrest in 1965, but it is not found in his government file: Yunus, *Sayyid Qutb*, p. 154, fn. 5.

²⁹Sayyid Qutb, *Hādihā al-Dīn* (This Religion) (Dar al-Qalam, 1961). To my knowledge, this is the first edition. The versions available to me are ibid. (Beirut: Al-Ittihād al-Islāmī al-Ālamī, 1978) and the English

translation *This Religion of Islam* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, n.d.).

³⁰*Zilāl*, 2:904. For a slightly different translation of this passage, see Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 23–24.

³¹*Ubūdiyya* in Qutb's usage means both service and worship; cf. the biblical usage, "serving" God, or other gods, or kings or other humans.

³²*Ma'ālim*, 62–63; *Milestones*, 107–108.

³³*Ma'ālim*, 63.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 8, *Milestones*, 15.

³⁵Unlike *jāhiliyya*, *ḥākimiyya* is a neologism. It is commonly said that Qutb got the term from Mawdudi, but in fact the term appears to have been coined by Mawdudi's Arabic translator. See Sharough Akhavi, "The Dialectic in Contemporary Egyptian Social Thought," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 396, n. 7.

³⁶For example, *Ma'ālim*, 27; *Milestones*, 47; *Adāla*, 190, 200, 224 (the latter two of these are in passages unchanged from earlier editions).

³⁷*Ma'ālim*, 88; *Milestones*, 148.

³⁸*Zilāl*, 4:1945; *Milestones*, 173–75; *Ma'ālim*, 105–106.

³⁹*Adāla*, 268; *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 145 (translation modified).

⁴⁰*Ma'ālim*, 149–50; *Milestones*, 242–44. Contrast Mawdudi's view given earlier and in n. 18.

⁴¹*Ma'ālim*, 147; *Milestones*, 239.

⁴²*Ma'ālim*, 148, 151–152.

⁴³*Ma'ālim*, 126–31; *Milestones*, 203–10; cf. *Adāla*, 270–74, *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 152–65.

⁴⁴*Adāla*, 94–95; *Social Justice*, chap. 5, para. 5, 8.

⁴⁵See William Shepard, "Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25 (1989): 31–50.

⁴⁶*Ma'ālim*, 49–50; cf. *Milestones*, 84. (This translation lacks two paragraphs found in the Arabic text and referred to here.)

⁴⁷A religion in Qutb's later writing has the structure of *taṣawwur*, *manhaj*, and *niẓām* (Shepard, "Islam as a 'System'"). *Jāhiliyyah* systems also seem to have such a structure, though it is not stated quite so clearly—for example, *taṣawwur* (in the plural, "conceptions") in the following quotation, *manāhij shayṭāniyya* (satanic methods) in *Ma'ālim*, 75; *Milestones*, 127.

⁴⁸*Ma'ālim*, 47–48; *Milestones*, 82. Cf. *Zilāl*, 3:1559.

⁴⁹*Ma'ālim*, 77–78; *Milestones*, 132–33.

⁵⁰*Zilāl*, 2:950.

⁵¹*Ma'ālim*, chap. on *sharī'a kawniyya*; *Milestones*, chap. 6.

⁵²*Zilāl*, 2:863.

⁵³*Ma'ālim*, 131; *Milestones*, 211.

⁵⁴*Adāla*, 247, 256; *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 48, 77.

⁵⁵*Ma'ālim*, 51–54; *Milestones*, 86–92; *Ma'ālim*, 107–108, *Milestones*, 176–78; cf. *Ma'ālim*, 52, 111, 145; *Milestones*, 87, 181–82, 236.

⁵⁶*Zilāl*, 1:576.

⁵⁷For example, *Zilāl*, 3:1330–31. Ellis Goldberg has a good discussion of Taghut in "Smashing Idols and the State: The Protestant Ethic and Egyptian Sunni Radicalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 (1991): 3–35, esp. 15–18.

⁵⁸*Ma'ālim*, 27–28; *Milestones*, 48–49. These four were: (1) a man asks a woman's guardian for her hand in marriage and provides a *mahr*, the kind that became standard among Muslims; (2) a husband arranged for his wife to become pregnant by a man of good lineage; (3) a group of men had intercourse with the same woman and after she gave birth she would state who was the father; (4) many men would frequent a prostitute, and if she gave birth, an expert in determining resemblances would decide who was the father. Qutb gives the source as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Kitāb al-Nikah*.

⁵⁹*Ma'ālim*, 113–14; *Milestones*, 184–85. John Profumo, who was secretary of state for war, a non-cabinet position, got involved sexually with Christine Keeler, who was also involved with the naval attaché at the Russian Embassy. When rumors began to circulate, he first denied them but then confessed and resigned his seat in Parliament in June 1963. This raised doubts about security service and almost caused the fall of the government.

⁶⁰*Ma'ālim*, 112; *Milestones*, 183; cf. *Zilāl*, 1:235 ff.

⁶¹*Ma'ālim*, 114; *Milestones*, 185.

⁶²*Ma'ālim*, 113; *Milestones*, 184.

⁶³*Ma'ālim*, 54, 108–12; *Milestones*, 91, 178–82.

⁶⁴Shepard notes the “increased theocentrism” of the last edition of *ʿAdāla* (*Social Justice*, xxiv–xxxii.)

⁶⁵*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 94; *This Religion*, 97.

⁶⁶*Ma'ālim*, 8; *Milestones*, 15. Cf. *Hādihā al-Dīn*, 92–93; *This Religion*, 95–96.

⁶⁷*Ma'ālim*, 3–4.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 89–93; *Milestones*, 148–55; cf. *Zīlāl*, 4, 1945–47. In his statement to his interrogators, he moderates his position slightly: “[s]ocieties in Muslim lands find themselves in a condition very similar to the condition of the *jāhīlī* societies at the coming of Islam”: *Limādihā*, 33.

⁶⁹*Adāla*, 297; *Social Justice*, 353 (last edition only).

⁷⁰*Ma'ālim*, 17–18; *Milestones*, 32.

⁷¹*Adāla*, 248, 293; *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 46; chap. 9, para. 25, 27 (last edition only).

⁷²*Adāla*, 244; *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 32.

⁷³*Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 5; cf. chap. 7, para. 343.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, chap. 8, para. 22, cf. para. 9, “The stopping [of the Islamic spirit] has only been partial; it never has been complete.”

⁷⁵*Ma'ālim*, 31–32; *Milestones*, 55. Cf. *Hādihā al-Dīn*, 36–37; *This Religion*, 36–37.

⁷⁶For example, “The *jāhīliyya* of the twentieth century which undertakes to crush the remaining roots of this religion”: *Zīlāl*, 3:1649. Cf. *Hādihā al-Dīn*, 37; *This Religion*, 37.

⁷⁷*Ma'ālim*, 118; *Milestones*, 191.

⁷⁸This would seem to be the answer to Kepel’s question, “Qutb had left his definition of *jāhīliyya* open-ended. Were the iniquitous prince and his bureaucracy its sole representatives, or was the entire society thus condemned? In other words, could any individual still be considered a Muslim?”: Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 57.

⁷⁹“Some Muslims” becomes “Some,” and “Muslims” becomes “defeatists”: *Social Justice*, chap. 5, paras. 4, 8.

⁸⁰In his statement to his interrogators, Qutb says, “We did not declare people *kāfir*s, as this would be slanderous, but we say that they have become ignorant of the true meaning of the creed”: *Limādihā*, 37. See also Muhammad Qutb in *Muqawwimāt*, 13 (editor’s introduction), and Yunus, *Sayyid Qutb*, 221.

⁸¹Yunus, *Sayyid Qutb*, 271–72.

⁸²For example, Qutb makes explicit comparisons with Muslims who seek devices to get around the commands of religion with Jews who did so in Muhammad’s time: *Zīlāl*, 2:892. These comparisons are not in the earlier edition: *Fī zīlāl al-Qurʿān*, 1st ed., (Cairo: ʿIsa al-Babi al-Halabi, n.d. [1953–58?], pt 6, 62). Qutb told his followers that they should consider meat slaughtered by nominal Muslims as meat slaughtered by people of the Book: (Yunus, *Sayyid Qutb*, 269, citing ʿAli ʿAshmawi, “Ana wa-l-ikhwan wa-l-nizam al-khass”, *Al-Musawwar*, 14 May 1993, Al-halqah al-sadisah, no. 3578.

⁸³*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 65; *This Religion*, 67; cf. *Muqawwimāt*, 25–26, 99.

⁸⁴The title is a chapter of *Ma'ālim*.

⁸⁵*Zīlāl*, 3:1644; cf. *Ma'ālim*, 160; *Milestones*, 208.

⁸⁶*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 64; *This Religion*, 66.

⁸⁷For example, *Ma'ālim*, 14; *Milestones*, 26.

⁸⁸*Adāla*, 248; *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 31. *Ma'ālim*, 5; *Milestones*, 11. Cf. “The Muslim umma has vanished from existence . . . for a long period (*dahrān ṭawīlan*): *Ma'ālim*, 6; *Milestones*, 12. Akhavi, “The Dialectic,” 381–82, n. 26, adduces *Ma'ālim*, 5, as well as a statement of Muhammad ʿAmara to claim that Qutb sees everything since 661 as *jāhīlī*. This leads him to find contradictions in Qutb’s writing that are not there if the period of Islam is longer.

⁸⁹*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 37, 46, 64; *This Religion*, 37, 47, 66; cf. *Zīlāl*, 209.

⁹⁰*Ma'ālim*, 129–30; *Milestones*, 208; *Muqawwimāt*, 62; *Adāla*, 247–48, *Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 49.

⁹¹*Adāla*, 218; *Social Justice*, chap. 7, para. 234; cf. paras. 188, 219. By contrast, the earlier editions (1949–58) describe the victory of the Umayyads as “the disaster that broke the back of Islam”: *ibid.*, chap. 7, para. 235, fn. to para. 234. In the earlier editions, however, there is no return to *jāhīliyya*, and Islam still exists today: for example, *ibid.*, chap. 8, para. 9.

⁹²*Zīlāl*, 2:949.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 2:948–49. Cf. *Adāla*, 185–86; *Social Justice*, chap. 7, para. 88.

⁹⁴*Ma'ālim*, 86–87; cf. *Milestones*, 145 (but part of the Arabic text is missing from the English translation) where the term *jamā'a* is used; cf. *Zilāl*, 3:1644, where *'iṣbah* appears.

⁹⁵*Ma'ālim*, 23–31; *Milestones*, 42–54.

⁹⁶*Ma'ālim*, 159–61; *Milestones*, 259–62.

⁹⁷*Ma'ālim*, 161; *Milestones*, 263, and *Ma'ālim*, 17; *Milestones*, 31.

⁹⁸*Ma'ālim*, chap. on *Ṭabr'at al-manhaj al-Qur'ānī*; *Milestones*, chap. 2.

⁹⁹*Ma'ālim*, 88 (my translation, cf. *Milestones*, 147).

¹⁰⁰Abul Ala Mawdudi, *Jihad in Islam* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1981), 5.

¹⁰¹*Ma'ālim*, 55–82; *Milestones*, 93–140.

¹⁰²He does use *thawra* for Muhammad's movement in *Ma'ālim*, 22–23; *Milestones*, 41; cf. *Zilāl*, 2:1005.

¹⁰³*Zilāl*, 2:950–51.

¹⁰⁴*Ma'ālim*, 38–45; *Milestones*, 66–77.

¹⁰⁵*Limādihā*, 46.

¹⁰⁶Versions of the events vary, as Kepel mentions (*Muslim Extremism*, 31). Hamuda (*Sayyid Qutb*, 176–77) and Yunus (*Sayyid Qutb*, 256–59) state that the secret organization Qutb was leading was preparing for violence in self-defense, but this could include assassinating political leaders and destroying installations.

¹⁰⁷*Ma'ālim*, 7; *Milestones*, 12. In *Hadha al-Din* he speaks of the end of the century (93, 94; *This Religion*, 96, 97). See n. 130.

¹⁰⁸Sayyid Qutb, *Muhimmat al-Sha'ir ft al-Hayah wa-Shi'r al-Jil al-Hadiih* (The Task of the Poet) (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, n.d.), 62–63. The original edition was published in Cairo by Matba'at al-Talabah in 1932.

¹⁰⁹“Al-'alam yajri” (The World Runs), *Al-Risalah* 2 (15 September 1933), 12–14.

¹¹⁰“Al-dhawq al fannī fi miṣr wa-usturat nahār al-junūn,” *Al-Risalah* 9, 393 (13 January 1941), 37–38; “Firaq li-mukāfiḥat āl-ghina' al-marid,” *ibid.* 9, 395 (27 January 1941), 94–96; “Al-funūn wa-ḍamā'ir al-shu'ub,” *ibid.*, 9, 399 (24 February 1941), 211–12.

¹¹¹“Suwar min al-jil al-jadid,” *ibid.*, 13, 622 (3 June 1945), 1309–10; “Ṣarāṣī . . . !” *ibid.* 14, 683 (5 August 1946), 856–58; “Suq al-raqīq,” *ibid.*, 14, 685 (19 August 1946), 911–13.

¹¹²“Hādhihi hiya faransa,” *ibid.*, 13, 624 (18 June 1945), 632–33; “Lughat al-'abid,” *ibid.*, 15, 709 (3 February 1947), 134–36.

¹¹³“Al-ḍamīr al-amrikānī” *ibid.*, 14, 694 (21 October 1946), 1155–57.

¹¹⁴“Adalū barāmiḥakum aw insahabū qabl fawāt al-awān,” *ibid.*, 13, 627 (9 July 1945), 723–24; “Qiyādātina al-ruḥiyyah,” *ibid.*, 15, 705 (6 January 1947), 27–29.

¹¹⁵See *Social Justice*, chap. 1, para. 27; chap. 6, para. 112; chap. 7, paras. 67, 160, 172, 179, 234 for the occurrences in the first four editions, to 1954. All of these refer to *jāhiliyya* as a historical period except chap. 6, para. 112 (“ignorant”), and chap. 7, para. 67 (translated “barbarous”, but the historical reference is implicit). Occurrences added in the 1958 edition are found at chap. 8, paras. 180, 223.

¹¹⁶*Social Justice*, chap. 8, paras. 180, 308.

¹¹⁷Sayyid Qutb, *Naḥw Muḥtama' Islāmī*, 6th ed. (Cairo and Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1983), 17–45; *Social Justice*, chap. 9, paras. 12–20. See also some of his articles in the Cairo literary magazine *Al-Risāla*, including “Al-kutlah al-Islāmiyya ft al-mīzān al-duwālī” (19, 949 [1 September 1951], 1021–24); “Al-ṭarīq ilā al-kutla al-thālitha” (20, 976 [17 March 1952], 293–95); “Ghūbār ḥawla al-kutlah al-islāmiyyah” (20, 981 [21 April 1952], 433–35); “Al-'alam al-islāmī ḥaqīqah waqī'ah” (20, 966 [7 January 1952], 10–12).

¹¹⁸“Amrīka alladhī ra'ayt: Ft mīzān al-qiyām al-insāniyyah,” *Al-Risāla*, 19, 957 (5 November 1951), 1245–47; *ibid.*, 19, 959 (19 November 1951), 1301–306; *ibid.*, 19, 961 (3 December 1951), 1357–60. These are reprinted in Salah 'Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidī, *Amrīka min al-Dakhil bi-manzar Sayyid Qutb* (Mansura: Dar al-Wafa' and Jedda: Dar al-Manara, 1987), 97–123.

¹¹⁹Cf. *Adāla*, 292; *Social Justice*, chap. 9, para. 12.

¹²⁰*Social Justice*, chap. 8, para. 19 (1949–58 eds.).

¹²¹See “Al-quwwa al-kāmina ft al-islām.” *Al-Risāla* 19, 963 (17 December 1951), 1413–14; “Al-'alam al-islāmī ḥaqīqa waqī'a,” *ibid.*, 20, 966 (7 January 1952), 10–12.

¹²²“Al-shu'ub al-islāmiyyah tazḥaf,” *ibid.*, 20, 979 (7 April 1952), 377–79.

¹²³On Qur'an 29:46–47, see *Zilāl*, pt. 5, 2745 ff. (This part was not revised; cf. n. 26.)

¹²⁴Nadwi, *Mādihā khasira*, 9–10.

¹²⁵*Zilāl*, 1st ed., pt. 6, 67–68.

¹²⁶See *Zilāl*, 5:2860–61, on Qur'an 33:33; *Zilāl*, 6:3329, on Qur'an 48:26. Neither the commentary on

Qur'an 3:154 in the earlier edition (*Zilāl*, 1st ed., pt. 4, 51–52) nor that in the later edition (*Zilāl*, 2nd ed., 1:495–97) shows all of the distinctive characteristics of the later doctrine.

¹²⁷This point is also illustrated by the fact that the earlier editions of *ʿAdāla* have material on the specifics of social legislation that are eliminated from the last edition: *Social Justice*, 1–li, chap. 8, paras. 270–318.

¹²⁸*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 90; *This Religion*, 92; cf. Nahw, 42–43.

¹²⁹*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 36–38, 42–47, 61–62, 74–91; *This Religion*, 37–39, 44–48, 63, 76–93.

¹³⁰*Hādihā al-Dīn*, 93, 94; *This Religion*, 96–97. See n. 107.

¹³¹My copy was published in Beirut by Al-Ittihād al-Islāmī al-ʿĀlami in 1978. The English translation is *Islam: The Religion of the Future* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, n.d.).

¹³²Originally published under the title *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa-Muqawwimātuh* (Characteristics and Components of the Islamic Conception), 1st ed., pt. 1 (Dar Ihyaʾ al-Kutub al-Arabiyya, 1962). My copy is the 8th ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1983). The English translation is *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, trans. Mohammed M. Siddiqui (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1991). This is now known as *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-taṣawwur al-islāmī*, because the second part was published as *Muqawwimātuh al-taṣawwur al-islāmī* (Components of the Islamic Conception) posthumously.

¹³³*Khaṣāʾiṣ al-taṣawwur* 77–78; *Islamic Concept*, 72–73. For other appearances of the word *jāhiliyya* in *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-taṣawwur*, see 7, 24, 39, 85.

¹³⁴*Mustaqbal*, 116–18; *Future*, 125–27. For appearances of the word *jāhiliyya*, see also *Mustaqbal*, 9, 21, 23, 115; *Future*, 11, 25, 29, 124.

¹³⁵The passage in *Zilāl* quoted earlier (see n. 26) as a prime example of the late doctrine may have been published around 1962. According to Sivan and Kepel, parts of *Milestones* were circulated in unpublished form after 1962: Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 26; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 30.

¹³⁶An extreme example would be the statement that Qutb began to develop the *jāhiliyya* theory in the late 1940s in the article titled “*Jāhiliyya*” in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2, 353.

¹³⁷Sivan, *Radical Islam*, 25–27; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 28–29. Hamuda, *Sayyid Qutb*, chap. 6, esp. 130–31; Mousalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism*, 36.

¹³⁸Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, trans. John B. Hardie, rev. trans. and intro. Hamid Algar (Oneonta, N.Y.: Islamic Publications International, 2000), 8.

¹³⁹Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 46.

¹⁴⁰Ellis Goldberg (“Smashing Idols”) argues that political power and the state have been central concerns of both Puritans and Islamists. To his question, “Is Sunni radicalism an argument about the state, rather than merely a response to a particular set of social conditions?” (p. 33), I would say that Qutb’s *jāhiliyya* doctrine is a response to a particular set of social conditions rather than merely an argument about the state, but that the state is an extremely important part of these conditions.

¹⁴¹For these groups I have relied, among others, on Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, chaps. 3, 5, 7; Sivan, *Radical Islam*, chap. 4; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “Anatomy of Egypt’s Militant Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 (1980): 423–53; idem, “Egypt’s Islamic Militants,” *MERIP Reports* 103 (1982): 5–14; and *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, s.v. “Takfir wa al-Hijrah, Jamāʾat al-” (J. J. J. Jansen; 4:179–80); “Jamāʾat Islāmiyah” (Ibrahim Ibrahim; 2:354–56); “Jihad Organizations” (Asʿad Abu Khalil; 2:375). Takfir wa-Hijra is the name popularly given to the group that called itself Jamāʾat al-Muslimīn. *Takfir* refers to the fact that the group considered society to be *kāfir*, and *hijra* refers to their withdrawing from society following the model of the Prophet’s *hijra*. The Military Academy Group (Jamāʾat al-ʿAskariyya al-Faniyya) called itself *Munazzamat al-Taḥrīr al-Islāmī* (Islamic Liberation Organization). *Jihād* and the *Jamāʾa al-Islāmiyya* are closely related and come out of the matrix of the *Jamāʾat al-Islāmiyya*, a term referring to a number of groups, initially on university campuses in the 1970s.

¹⁴²See the quote from Shukri Mustafa in Abdel Aziz Ramadan, “Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups,” in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, ed. M. Marty and R. S. Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 158.

¹⁴³Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 74–76.

¹⁴⁴Jansen describes the group as “a case of cult formation”: *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, 4:179–80.

¹⁴⁵Ibrahim, “Anatomy,” 435; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 93; Taji-Farouki, *Fundamental Quest*, chap. 1.

¹⁴⁶Ibrahim, "Anatomy," 431; cf. 442, also 435 and passim. Kepel states that his disciples did not agree that all society represented *jāhiliyya*, but that "the iniquitous prince alone blocked the spread of an Islamic mode of society" (ibid., 93).

¹⁴⁷Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, chap. 7.

¹⁴⁸Translated in J. J. G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 183–85. My Arabic text lacks publication information and is probably a copy of the Amman text mentioned by Jansen at the top of p. 3.

¹⁴⁹*The Neglected Duty*. I have located six instances of the word *jāhiliyya*, two from the Qur'an, two from hadith, and one each from Ibn Kathir and Ibn Taymiyyah (corresponding to pp. 166, 167, 172, 174, 175, 197 in Jansen's translation).

¹⁵⁰In an issue of their newssheet, of which I have a copy, the writer says the people of Egypt would vote for Islam if Mubarak gave them the chance: "Al-jazā'ir bayn zayf al-dīmuqrāṭiyya wa-l-'adā' li-l-islām," *Al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya*, Sha'bān 1412.

¹⁵¹Sivan states that it is Qutb's earlier Islamist thought that has had influence in Iran: Emmanuel Sivan, "Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21 (1989): 1. This accords with what I know of the matter.

¹⁵²The index to Algar's collection of his writings and statements, however, gives only one instance of the word *jāhiliyya*, and the meaning here is traditional: R. M. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. H. Algar (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1981), 333.

¹⁵³See Sivan, *Radical Islam*, chap. 7, for a discussion of the problems between Sunni and Shi'i radical Islamists. See also his "Sunni Radicalism."

¹⁵⁴*Mithāq Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah—Filastīn (Hamas)/Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement—Palestine (HAMAS)*, Palestine, 18 August 1988/1 Muharram 1409, n.p., art. 9. The statement in Article 12 that "patriotism (*waṭaniyya*) . . . is part of the religious creed" would hardly seem to accord with Qutb's late thinking.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., art. 19. In her study of Hamas's ideology, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas* [Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998], Andrea Nüsse makes a number of references to Qutb's *jāhiliyya* but also indicates that Hamas has not yet followed it (p. 173).

¹⁵⁶My sources for Bin Ladin are quite limited. The following comments are based on his "Declaration of War," 12–14 October 1996; available from: <http://msanews.mynet.net/scholars/laden>; his "fatwa," the "World Islamic Front's Statement Urging Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders," 23 February 1998; available in Arabic from <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/fatw2.htm> and in English from <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/wif.htm>; and various media reports. The statement that the Taliban has the only Islamic state is made in an interview with Hamid Mir on 9 November 2001, published in *Dawn* (Karachi) and reprinted in the *Christchurch Press*, 12 November 2001.

¹⁵⁷"Declaration of War," pt. 2, with some corrections in spelling and wording. 'Amr ibn Kulthum, in fact, has left us one of the most striking examples of the pre-Islamic use of the root *j-h-l*: "Let no one act fiercely (*yajhalanna*) against us, for we shall be fiercer than the fierce (*fa-najhalu fawqa jahli al-jāhiltma*)." See Al-Zamakshari, *Al-Kashshaf 'an haqā'iq al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-tawīl*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1966), 99.

¹⁵⁸*Ma'ālīm al-islām* (Cairo: Sina li-l-Nashr, 1989), 17–19, 79–82. Ashmawi and many others have labeled the extremists Khawarij.

¹⁵⁹Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 47–48.

