Ideologies of radical islam explained assignment

Introduction: This essay concerns itself with exploring the Islamic and political orientation of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), an Egyptian civil servant turned political and religious activist, inspired by fundamentalist Islam. To gain an understanding of what influenced and formulated Qutb's ideas it has been necessary to provide some background information relating the history of modern day Egypt and the emergence of reformist and fundamentalist Islam, from the 19th century until Qutb's time.

The essay also seeks to give some biographical information in order to provide a fuller picture of Qutb the man. Qutb's involvement with Egyptian religious politics caused him to come into conflict with the Nasser government of 1950s' Egypt and Qutb spent a decade in prison. It was during this period he produced many of his seminal writings on the establishment of a truly Islamic society.

By drawing on early Islamic thinkers and on direct interpretation of the Qur'an, Qutb advocated violence in establishing an Islamic state. The thinking behind and the implications of these interpretations are discussed at length in this essay to demonstrate how they have informed the belief of many Islamic fundamentalists, especially with regard to the use of violence to achieve their aims. The latter part of the essay focuses on the legacy of Qutb's ideas and how these have been manifest in various fundamentalist groups.

However, because academic literature is often a few paces behind the present it has not been possible to explore some recent developmenst of Islam inspired violence in any detail, namely the emergence of

fundamentalist groups within the Muslim diaspora of the West. The rise of fundamentalist Islam, especially when it has occasioned violence, has been the subject of much academic and political discussion.

Esposito suggests three ideologues have been most influential in the development of radical or fundamentalist Islam, Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-1979) and Sayyid Qutb (Esposito 2002: 50). The latter is the focus of this essay, however he cannot be discussed without some understanding of the historical and political background to the tensions which are now evident between some aspects of Islamic and Western thought. Yet the designation ' fundamentalist' also deserves brief consideration.

For the purpose of this essay the term refers to Muslims who believe it is necessary to return to the fundamentals of Islamic belief in order to express ' true' Islam; this necessitates a narrow interpretation of Qur'anic texts and tradition. The term is problematic in that it is drawn into the conflicting territory of description and taxonomy, especially when, as is often the case, fundamentalism blurs the division between religion and politics. Is fundamentalism religion in the service of political ideology or ideology veiled as religion? (Moussalli (ed) 1998: 1, 27-28).

A detailed discussion of these issues is not possible here, however discussing the political and religious views of Sayyid Qutb may be of assistance in discerning the political and religious dimensions of fundamentalism. Islam, during its early years, was a dynamic force engendering rapid social change in the Arabian peninsula and its environs during the 6th and 7th centuries,

therefore its impotence against the incursion of Western influence from the late 18th century onwards has been a source of perplexity and concern among various Muslim thinkers; not least those mentioned above (Esposito 2002: 49-51).

Islamic reformers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Mohammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1869-1935), looked for a via media whereby Islamic society could benefit from its relationship with the West and yet retain its independent identity and regain its lost dynamism. They believed this could be achieved by a mitigated inclusion of Western scientific, technological and educational ideas in Islamic society.

They concluded the reason the latter had become ' backward' when compared with Europe was because its observance of Islam itself had become stale and its true dynamism had been obscured by the accumulation of superstitious or groundless customs and dogma (Demant 2006: 23-5). By the beginning of the 20th century Rida grew wary of Western thinking, he believed Islam alone provided the way forward for Islamic culture and although some European scientific innovations could be usefully assimilated into Islamic society, there was no place for a European styled, secular political state (Hourani 1983: 229).

As the 20thcentury advanced, direct colonial power waned; Egypt was granted independence in 1936. Like other newly created states Egypt was faced with the problem of how to govern itself; what systems of political administration to adopt and how to define its national identity. Ataturk's Turkey had drawn a clear division between religion and the state, Egypt

likewise chose nationalism as opposed to Islam as its means of expressing its nationhood.

Rida's concern with Islamic national governance became a salient issue for many Islamic thinkers and activists as colonialism gave way to nation states. The emergence of The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (1928) and Jamaat-e-Islami (1941) in Pakistan were a political and social response to the notion of secular government and what these movements perceived as the neglect of its citizens' religious welfare. Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood and Mawlana Mawdudi Jamaat-e-Islami.

Both organisations combined social welfare and religious education with political activity; they aimed to provide what the state did not: an Islam centred society. However the concern of their founders was wider ranging, what was at stake, they believed, was the actual ontological expression of Islam: in a secular state Islam would lose its place as both law giver (i. e. sharia) and as the socio-cultural manifestation of society.

For Al Banna the ills of Egyptian society were the result of Western Imperialism coupled with a government of Westernised Muslim rulers (Esposito 2002: 51). Mawdudi and Al Banna agreed Islam provided a viable alternative to Western capitalism or Marxist communism, thus suggesting Islam is not mere religion, but a cohesive social system where the Qur'an and the hadith and Sunna (example, life and saying of The Prophet) provided the law and constitution of an Islamic country. This idea was to be developed and strengthened by Qutb.

Membership of the brotherhoods tended to be made up of men from mainly lower middle to middle-class backgrounds, who were educated and often working in local government or Educational institutions (cf. Esposito 1984: 203). These were, it could be argued, the very people best suited for adapting to a secular, westernised society and would also be the ones who could gain the most from such a society. Yet they seemed unable, via the legitimate access to power available to them, to gain a political voice in their countries' official government.

Though this could have more to do with the existing political systems; e. g. in Egypt the military coup of 1952 brought Nasser to power and with him the imposition of a one-party nationalist, socialist government. Although the Brotherhood were in favour of the coup, they soon found themselves out of favour with Nasser (Lawrence 1998: 64). Sayyid Qutb himself fulfils the above profile of a Brotherhood member, he was an educated, middle-class professional man, yet for much of his early life he, unlike many of the Muslim Brotherhood, admired the West and had an appreciation of European culture (Esposito 2002: 56).

Given Qutb would later be celebrated as one of The Muslim Brotherhood's most influential ideologues and martyrs, it is obvious there was a serious change of heart at some point in his life. This occurred when Qutb was already middle-aged and was prompted by firsthand experience of American culture. However some detail needs to be sketched of his life and his journey to America to understand Qutb's changed view. (Much of the following is taken from Bergesen 2008: 3-8). Qutb was born in 1906, he was the oldest of five children, two boys and three girls.

Two of his sisters and his brother Muhammad Qutb, who himself became an influential Islamic writer and teacher, were involved in Islamic politics as was their father. Qutb appears to have been a gifted student and memorised the Qur'an by the age of ten. The family moved from the small town of Musha, in Middle Egypt, to Cairo when Qutb was thirteen. He trained as a teacher and went to work for the Ministry of Public Instruction, where he eventually worked as an inspector from 1940-1948.

Qutb never married, something Bergesen suggests was because he had suffered a ' deep disappointment in love' in his youth and had become a ' dedicated bachelor' as a result (Bergesen 2008: 3) (on occasion Bergesen 2008 does have the flavour of a hagiography of Qutb and offers no analysis of the possible effects of Qutb's singleness upon the formulation of the views he came to hold). In 1948 Qutb went to America to study its education systems at the University of North Carolina. Qutb was shocked by American culture which he found ermissive, promiscuous, money centred and racist; this ' culture shock' caused a deepening of Qutb's religious belief and practice (Esposito 2002: 57). The establishment of the State of Israel took place while Qutb was in America and Qutb was perturbed by the pro-Israeli/anti-Arab agenda of much of the media. On his return to Egypt Qutb joined The Muslim Brotherhood in 1951 where his considerable skills as an educator and writer were put to use; he became head of the Brotherhood's propaganda department.

The military coup of 1952 brought Nasser to power, deposing King Farouk I who was seen to be nothing more than a puppet of Britain which still maintained a considerable military presence in Egypt at that time. The

Muslim Brotherhood had hoped a coup would further the progress of an Islamic state however this was not Nasser's agenda, he instituted a secular, socialist government (Lawrence 1998: 63-5). By 1954 the Brotherhood became an outlawed organisation and in 1955 a member of the Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser, this resulted in retribution on the part of Nasser; many of the brethren were rounded up and imprisoned.

Qutb was one of their number, implicated in the assassination attempt and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison where he was to remain until 1964 (Bergesen 2008: 4). Qutb was tortured in prison and witnessed the events which led to the massacre of many of his fellow Brethren at the hands of the Egyptian authorities, which probably impacted upon his view of state authorities and political systems (Bergesen 2008: 4-5). In 1964, at the intervention of the President of Iraq, Qutb was released from prison only to be re-arrested in 1965 and charged with armed revolt and terrorism, found guilty and on the 29th August 1966 he was hanged.

Despite the elapse of forty-two years since Qutb's execution, his ideas shape present day manifestations of radical, fundamentalist Islam and are evident in the thinking of Khomeini and Osama Bin Laden (Esposito 2002: 57-8). Qutb's legacy is not for his fame as a speaker or a party activist but rather for his canon of written work, much of which was completed while he was in prison. Prior to joining The Muslim Brotherhood Qutb had established himself as a writer of poetry and had produced several novels, hence it is apparent he had literary ability and his time overseeing The Brotherhood's roduction of propaganda could have only honed his skills, particularly in articulating a political discourse. While in prison Qutb (not being a man of robust health)

spent much of his time in the prison's infirmary; it was here Qutb came to write some forty pieces of work, In the Shade of the Qur'an being the longest; the most influential being Milestones, which was published soon after his release from prison in 1964 (Bergesen 2008: 4).

As an example of the influence of Qutb's writings, Milestones was cited as evidence of his seditious intent at his trial in 1965 and just to possess a copy of the work was deemed an arrestable offence by the Egyptian authorities (ibid.). Therefore it is evident Qutb's ideas were seen, by the Egyptian authorities, as a threat to the power of the state.

Yet this is not surprising as, has already been discussed, nationalism was viewed by The Muslim Brotherhood as an enemy of Islam, because it advanced national rather than religious notions of societal identity; but more than this, nationalism belied what The Brotherhood perceived as the very purpose of society: that it should be an expression of divine order. Part of Qutb's legacy is the vivid and concise manner in which he was able to articulate this belief. It is this belief which is so central to understanding what fundamentalist Islam is seeking to achieve.

Fundamentalism is not merely an aspect of an adherent's life, it is ontological in its dimension and thus requires all facets of human life (both personal and at the level of social organisation and polity) should be lived through its precepts (cf. Ruthven 2004: 8). Lawrence suggests Qutb presents a ' Manichaean' dualism by drawing on Islamic theology to articulate this divide, using the notion of hakimiyya, that is divine lordship manifest as '

correct government', government by the precepts and in the spirit of Qur'anic justice (Lawrence 1998: 22).

Opposite this virtuous government is nationalism or it would seem any '... ism' which Qutb deemed jahiliyya or wilful, pagan, idolatrous ignorance. ' Jahiliyya' occurs several times in the Qur'an to describe those who were in a state of ignorance before the message of the Prophet was proclaimed. The use of the word was changed by the medieval revivalist Ibn Taymiyyah (1268-1328) to describe those who claimed to be Muslims, but did not live by Qur'anic or sharia law (Esposito 2002: 45). Qutb likewise applies the term to non-Muslims and those ho call themselves Muslims but are not Muslims (by Qutb's understanding of Islam). The significance of Qutb's use of the term is that it initiates a discourse of condemnation; secular government or political theories are not just expressions of ignorance or unbelief but a wilful rejection of God's precepts and therefore, because the members of a secular government or adherents of secular or non-Muslim political theories have rejected God's divine law, they, in Qutb's view, deserve punishment.

Qutb accepted only one form of nationalism ' nationalism will be recognised as belief, homeland as Dar al-Islam [home or abode of Islam], the ruler as God and the constitution as the Qur'an' (quoted in Lawrence 1998: 22-3). This notion of there being no division between the political and the religious is a major theme of Qutb's; his condemnation of the West is rooted in his understanding of the oneness of Muslim society. Western societies, according to Qutb, had eschewed this unity.

Qutb built upon this idea and placed it within an intellectual discourse which assumes the qualities of both theology and political ideology (cf. Bergesen 2008: 16). He begins with the history of religion and comes to similar conclusions as many Western social scientists who embarked upon the same task (e. g. Burnett-Taylor's theory of religion progressing from animism, to polytheism, to monotheism (Bowie 2007: 13)). However Qutb's marked variance is that his analysis comes from within an Islamic paradigm.

The manner in which Europe accepted the message of Jesus, that is Christianity, is viewed by Qutb as a seminal reason for Europe's failure to embrace Islam, indeed it is the reason for Islam coming into being. In Qutb's estimation Christianity, from its acceptance by Constantine the Great (circa 272-337), lost its concept of the oneness of God, devising for itself, in the First Council of Nicaea (325), a division between God the spiritual and Jesus as God incarnate which gave rise to an irreconcilable schism between the temporal and the spiritual.

This Qutb, maintained, provided a heritage for the West of a divided worldview which from religion devolved, via the Enlightenment, into philosophy and scientific knowledge leaving Western knowledge forever tainted with an identity crisis (Bergesen 2008: 16-21). Qutb's logical conclusion to this analysis is that all forms of social organisation which are of Western origin, the most salient to his argument being nationalism and democracy, are in error as they do not fulfil God's design for human society (Demant 2006: 100).

The remedy for this error is the Message of Islam, proclaimed by God's Prophet, Mohammad. The basic premise of this message is that God has a plan for mankind, which has been revealed through Mohammad, and this message has not been corrupted, as happened with earlier monotheistic religions (Christianity and Judaism). Secondly '[this]… testimony to faith should be manifest in behavioural action to change society and bring it in accord with God's plan, rules or laws… to return mankind to God's plan is a world revolutionary project. ' (Bergesen 2008: 22).

Qutb's own words reveal the scope of his agenda: '[living by the precepts of Islam, Muslims] can offer the whole world something possessed by no other religion, ideology, system, constitution or philosophy. This is the grand opportunity for them to play a great and significant role in transforming the entire world. ' (Qutb in Bergesen 2008: 22). These are not the sentiments of a theological apologist but those of a revolutionary (cf. Esposito 2002: 58). Like many revolutionaries, Qutb's envisaged new world order could only be achieved by the removal of certain obstacles; for Qutb these obstacles are jahiliyya (Bergesen 2008: 21).

For Qutb the world is forever and irreconcilably divided between the divinely ordained and ordered society of Islam and that of jahiliyya, which in Qutb's use of the terms means anything and everything that is not explicitly Islamic, or can be used without reference to Qur'anic or Sunna interpretation (Bergesen 2008: 21-2). As a middle-aged man of some academic, literary and professional standing, it is evident he brought with him, when he chose to join himself to the Brotherhood's cause, an intimate knowledge of the Islamic and Western world.

Thus he was able, with the distant objectivity of one incarcerated, to create a specific worldview from the symbolic and ideological universe afforded him by his knowledge of Islam and the secular world. Given this worldview is accessible for anyone who has an understanding of Islam, since it would be impossible to live in a society without some knowledge and experience of the secular and the religious, it is not surprising Qutb's ideas are still resonant today. '… ighting for God's cause with the aim of making His word supreme, killing those who stand in opposition to God's message or falling as martyrs in the continuing battle between the truth and falsehood, Islam and jahiliyya, God's law and tyranny, divine guidance and error. ' (Qutb in Bergesen 2008: 124). In Signposts and World Peace and Islam Qutb challenges the world order from the above perspective, suggesting only Islam can save humanity and that this salvation requires the wholesale adoption of hakimiyya.

This concept, since the 1970s, has been incorporated into political Islam as nizam Islami (Islamic System), an alternative to the secular state (Turner & Ahmed 2003: 150). It has also become a tenet of various fundamentalist groups, not least Al Qaeda by way of Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian surgeon who became involved with The Muslim Brotherhood at an early age and was much influenced by Qutb (Rabasa et el 2006: 18).

Qutb's emphasis for fulfilling his vision of the world was by violent revolt against political authorities, whether they are Muslim or not, because if they do not rule by sharia then they are not true Muslims. The overcoming of jahiliyya was a central theme in Qutb's understanding of jihad. Jihad now has its own discourse because of a putative understanding of the word derived from Western media's and radical Islam's annexation of the word.

Jihad has become a metonym for Islamic fundamentalist violence and the word is burdened with a belief that Islam begets violence; a notion which is part of a general Western Islamophobic discourse (Aldridge 2007: 140-1). At its simplest jihad can be understood as a spiritual ' struggle' to lead a devout life and when used in this context is sometimes referred to as ' greater jihad' (Esposito 2002: 51). Rida's use of the word appears to reflect this notion as he perceived living by the true precepts of Islam could only be achieved by an applied effort (Bergesen 2008: 9).

However al-Banna questioned whether the greater jihad was sufficient to meet the needs of Muslims in Egypt with its social ills of high unemployment, poverty, corruption and the continued British military presence. Al-Banna proposed that as Muslim lands (specifically the establishment of Israel in what had been Islamic Palestine) had suffered invasion by non-Muslims and Egyptians were being governed by leaders who opposed the establishment of an Islamic State, that the time had come to adopt the lesser or military jihad (Esposito 2002: 51).

Qutb developed this notion of jihad as a manifestation in time and space of the symbolic war between jahiliyya and Islam, truth and falsehood, the latter being evident by what he believed to be the satanic agents within the Egyptian government of Qutb's day (Juergensmeyer 2003: 83). Again this involved the use of Qutb's intellectual abilities, in that he interpreted Qur'anic texts and the writings of later Islamic scholars, particularly those of Ibn al-Qayyim (1292-1350) in a manner that advocated militant jihad (Bergesen 2008: 27).

In Milestones (abridged in Bergesen 2008: 35-42) he discusses the concept and interpretation of jihad at length. Qutb asserts the concept of jihad had been distorted by Muslims who did not understand its meaning, confining it to defensive warfare only. Whereas Qutb interprets the word as the overcoming of jahiliyya, by which he means the reordering of society by the use of ' fighting' if necessary (jihad bis saif ??? striving through fighting).

Qutb stated that the Qur'an itself advocates aggressive or pro-active jihad; Mohammad took flight from Mecca to Medina, however once in Medina he was allowed to defend himself and ' later he was commanded to fight the polytheists [jahiliyya] until God's religion was fully established. ' (Qutb in Bergesen 2008: 27). Qutb suggested modern day polytheism is not necessarily the religion of worshiping idols, as was the case in pre-Islamic Arabia, but means anyone ' who submits to multiple sources of authority', that is not the authority of the Qur'an and sharia; hence a secular state (Bergesen 2008: 21).

Weber describes the prophet figure in religion as an individual who is able to combine and rationalise the social present with religious belief (Weber 1963: 46). It is evident Qutb fulfils this description: the social present, for Qutb, being the success of Western inspired and supported nationalism, the proliferation of nominal Islam (or what Qutb sees as nominal Islam) and his own and his fellow Brethren's persecution and incarceration.

The cosmic/religious dimension of ' true' Islam's struggle with jahiliyya ??? ' truth vs. falsehood' ??? is verified by Qutb's interpretation of religious texts which he places within the context of jihad. In the light of what has been

discussed so far, it is apparent that for Qutb, and those who accept his conclusions, fundamentalist Islam is indeed truly ontological: it is a ' way of being' (Ruthven 2004: 8), a means of comprehending the world, a discourse of consciousness.

Hence although Qutb's legacy could be seen as martyrdom or a canon of edifying writings, it is much more; it is the provision of a worldview, a synthesis of the historical, the social and the political with the religious which has provided an ideological heritage or vocabulary for various radical and fundamentalist movements. Lawrence suggests that the strength of fundamentalist Islam is created by its failures (Lawrence 1998: 52), implying its persecution and political failure only reinforces its worldview.

This does intimate a degree of mysticism exists within fundamentalist belief, which appears to be true of Qutb's thinking (Roy 2004: 60); he implies that there is a mystical connection between those who struggle or practice jihad against jahiliyya, and the first companions of The Prophet (Esposito 2002: 59). By accepting Qutb's understanding of both jihad and jahiliyya the adherent gains an immediacy with the salafi era, the Golden Age of Islam; the intervening centuries fall away and the adherent becomes one with Mohammad's companions at Medina, ready to ' fight the polytheists until God's religion [is] fully established. (Qutb in Bergesen 2008: 27). This has a resemblance to ideology , created in consciousness by language and discourse, it is, as fundamentalism has been described, ahistorical and despite all claims of Qutb's notion of jihad being purely religious, in practice it assumes a political nature because the battle will always revert to one of fundamentalists vs. the nation state (Roy 2004: 58). The immediate legacy

of Qutb is that of division as his ideas divide society into ' good' and ' bad' Muslims (Esposito 2002: 59-60).

However Qutb's influence is far reaching, especially in how his ideas have been used by fundamentalist groups. As already mentioned, Qutb's ideas have influenced Al-Qaeda via Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Osama Bin Laden was a student of Muhammad Qutb, Sayyid's brother (Esposito 2002: 8). Esposito notes that it would be difficult to ' overestimate' Qutb's influence in the assertion of militant jihad and Islamic extremist movements the world over. However perhaps part of Qutb's success is in the very vagueness of detail. There is little mention of just exactly how an Islamic society would be governed.

Like many with a salafi inclination he upholds the idea of the umma, the community of believers and sees the only real divisions of humanity to be religious (Juergensmeyer 2003: 82-3). The umma itself he describes in rather idealistic terms of a community of every race in perfect harmony (Esposito 2002: 40). For Qutb, the establishment of an Islamic society governed by sharia would be sufficient, this suggests a certain degree of naivety and is perhaps part of the ahistorical nature of a fundamentalist worldview: the contradictions of history are conveniently ignored.

If Islam was perfect and complete at its inception and establishment then why did it fail to stem the tide of inertia and eventual subservience to the West? As has been suggested, the pathology of jihaliyya provides a means of explanation, though it cannot obscure the inconsistency of Qutb's argument. Yet the present day legacy of Qutb appears a little more parochial than his

vision of the establishment of Islam throughout the world. Roy notes that fundamentalist groups are more concerned with local politics and the establishment of national Islamic government than world jihad (Roy 2004: 58).

Though this could be the result of the world (or more strictly the West and the UN) moving the theatre for jihad to Islamic countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan etc. However with the Muslim diaspora and globalisation this now means that the West is part of the Muslim world, hence the ' home grown' variety of jihadists. Roy also notes that Qutb's notion of social justice has disappeared from the agenda of present day Egyptian fundamentalist groups. Whatever his influence and legacy in Egypt, his thinking is still a major influence of fundamentalist Islam, a Google search produces 175, 000 sites which mention his name.

His ideas are disseminated via the internet but also on university campuses and within Islamic centres of education (Juergensmeyer 2003: 83). He is not the only advocate of jihad and his ideas have been built on by some (e. g. Egypt's Faraj (Juergensmeyer 2003: 82)) and disagreed with by others. An example being the rejection of Qutb's views by the dominant Saudi Wahhabi ulama (religious authority), which can be seen as meeting the political needs of the state. There is irony in the world's most outwardly Islamic state rejecting the Islamic state's most vocal advocate.

However as Al-Rasheed has demonstrated the Saudi's Islamic state is more an ideological construction: religion and the state are divided. Yet because of the emphasis of the outward signs of Islamic piety, a discourse is initiated

which blends the two into one for the casual observer. Qutb's ideas, via the Sahwis (non-Wahhabi Islamic scholars and intellectuals (often possessing an additionally broad secular education)) strike at the root of the Saudi/Wahhabi religious discourse (Al Rasheed 2007: 66-70; Roy 2004: 250). Hence Wahhabism's need to refute Qutb's ideas concerning the establishment of an Islamic state.

To return to the question posed at the beginning of this essay: Is fundamentalism religion in the service of political ideology or ideology veiled as religion? The answer, with regard to Sayyid Qutb, is neither: for Qutb ideology is not a concept he concerned himself with, he advocated the adoption of Islam as the world's salvation and justified jihad as a means of bringing it about. Perhaps this is where the West and Islam are forever divided, for the majority of secular or nominally religious Westerners religion is a life-style choice, but for Qutb and many fundamentalists it is vividly ontological.

From the outside jihad against jahiliyya, the return to the salafi era, the establishment of an Islamic state have a flavour of ideology about them and certainly fundamentalism is political and tinged with the red (or in this case green) of revolution (Roy 2004: 60); yet for Qutb and many fundamentalists the boundaries between the political, the ideological and the religious are Western impositions, fundamentalist Islam may be all three, but to fundamentalists it is all one. Conclusion: Qutb was born at a time when Egypt had suffered several centuries of servitude to imperial and colonial masters (Ottoman, French and British).

When Egypt became a nation state diverse ways and means were proffered by Islamic reformers and political leaders alike as how best Egypt could assert both an independent identity and political autonomy, e. g. the extremes of Al-Banna's Islamic and Nasser's secular, socialist state. Qutb chose to leave the safety of the public sector employed, middle-class and enter the perilous world (as it transpired) of political and religious activism. His aim was the establishing of a truly Islamic society; it was a choice which led to years of incarceration and ultimately his death.

However it was during his years in prison that Qutb wrote much of his influential texts; these sought, by the use of Qur'anic exposition, to formulate a coherent worldview, demonstrating Islam's place as the world's salvation and prescribing the means of its achievement, namely to overcome unbelief, jahiliyya, by jihad bis saif, striving through fighting. It was for these writings he was to become known and they were to inform the political and religious beliefs of fundamentalist Islam which has used Qutb's ideas (often in conjunction with other fundamentalist thinkers) to justify religious violence.

The potency of these ideas is illustrated by the Egyptian government's trial and execution of Qutb. However, as if often the case with those who are deemed martyrs, his death only served to reinforce the very worldview Qutb promoted in his writings as he had proclaimed that in overcoming jahiliyya ['true' Muslims would fall] ' as martyrs in the continuing battle between the truth and falsehood, Islam and jahiliyya'. As with all ideologues, Qutb's legacy is only of value while the social and political circumstances which informed his thinking are still evident.

As Western or non-Muslim influence is still keenly felt within the Islamic world, it is hardly surprising his ideas remain resonant with many anti-Western fundamentalists. However secular nationalism has not fared as well as might have been predicted in Qutb's day; though the truly Islamic state Qutb imagined remains imaginary rather than an actuality (neither Iran nor Afghanistan, the most likely contenders, can be said to be wholly Islamic, they are politically and not sharia governed societies).

Yet this failure is perhaps fundamentalism's strength, therefore it is likely Qutb's influence is set to endure for the present. Bibliography Al Rasheed, M. (2007) Contesting the Saudi State. New York: Cambridge University Press [my tutor!] Aldridge, A. (2007) Religion in the Contemporary World. Cambridge: Polity Press Bergesen, A. J. (2008) The Sayyid Qutb Reader. New York: Routledge Coward, R. & Ellis, J. (1977) Language and Materialism. London: Routledge Demant, A. (2006) Islam Vs. Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World.

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