Striving in the Path of Allah:
A Fundamentalist Interpretation of *Jihad* in Egypt[1]

by
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Outburst of violence in the Middle East are often associated with the Muslim doctrine of *jihad*, which is usually translated "holy war." Like many religious terms which connote violence, for example, sacrifice, victim, retribution, divine wrath, and the like, jihad must be understood in the broader semiotic context of Islamic discourse and world views from which it derives its primary meanings. The historical contexts in which the call for jihad has been efficacious provide case studies for the analysis of religious discourse on violence.

A well-known case of religious and political violence — one in which specific interpretations of jihad formed a discourse of power leading up to the event — was the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, President of Egypt, in October 1981. Viewed widely during the aftermath and explained since as the work of militant Muslim extremists, Sadat's murder has been assessed primarily in terms of its impact upon Western political interests and the implications for further violence. Attempts to understand its significance within the context of Muslim world views in Egypt have received less attention.[2] A recent study of the background to the Sadat assassination and other contemporaneous acts of violence between Muslims and Coptic Christians in Egypt has been published by Gilles Kepel.[3] Kepel traces the development of a discourse on power, including the role of jihad, within the Muslim Brotherhood, as conceived principally by Sayyid Qutb, with later variations among ideologues and activists in different socio-cultural contexts in Cairo and in Middle Egypt, centred in the city of Asyut. In order to understand better how the violence against Sadat and the Copts was justified within the framework of religious world views by some Egyptians, yet abhorred by others on similar grounds, it will be helpful to review the general doctrine of jihad in terms of the semiotics of Muslim world views.

THE QURANIC BACKGROUND TO MUSLIM NOTIONS OF JIHAD

The Muslim term *jihad* invokes a large semantic field which connotes *inter alia* "holy war"[4] but is more broadly understood by the notion of "striving in the path of God." The Qur'an contains this and related phrases concerning the path or way of God *(sabil allah)* in about 180 verses, clearly a major theme. Striving in the path of God, in turn, is a particular instance of a basic principle implicit in Quranic cosmology. Therefore, understanding *jihad* must begin with a brief assessment of the cosmography of the Qur'an, which may be taken to mean the textual expressions of the structure of the cosmos, the main actors within it, and their dynamic interaction and communication, which are presented in the Qur'an, the canonical scripture of Muslims.

The Qur'an is a text, meant to be recited aloud following carefully

learned and practiced rules. For many Muslims with little or no literacy, the oral text has been the only form available for reference in world view formation. The text is replete with noticeable patterns, formulae and cadences at many levels. At the surface level of the text, even the untrained ear hears some of the richly textured repetition of phrases, similarly inflected, and words following the same morphology, which trained reciters are able to enunciate to dramatic affect and effect. Indeed, the text provides a vast arsenal of phrases which come quickly to mind for traditional Muslims in the face of common social-psychological experiences, such as fearing, anxiety, entreating, warning, condoling, congratulating, cursing, and so on.[5] Although the majority of Muslims in the world are not native speakers of Arabic, and Arabs generally do not discourse in the archaic language of the sacred text, nonetheless, through socialization children learn to quote appropriate Arabic religious phrases — most of them Quranic — inserted into vernacular rhetoric and discourse. The socially reproduced world views[6] which characterize Muslim ways of thinking in turn evidence the formulaic elements of the Quranic cosmology.

In the Qur'an, two realms of being animate the cosmos. They are referred to in various spatial and temporal categories such as the seen and the unseen, the phenomenal or here-and-now, and the hereafter. The beings who dramatize the Quranic cosmography correspond to the realms of being and are fundamentally divided between God *(Allah)* and humankind *(insan)*, the latter of whom are helped or hindered by other agents and actors, such as angels, satans and the jinn. The inherent conflict between angels and satans in the heavenly unseen sphere(s), reflecting those who obey God and those who disobey, gets worked out on the phenomenal sphere of humankind. This sphere also is divided between those who submit and do the will of God, including the performance of divinely prescribed religious duties (literal meaning of *muslim*) and who believe *(mu'min)*, and those who disbelieve and act ungratefully *(kuffar,* singular, *kafir)*. Believers, for example, are "those who expend their wealth in the path of God" (Qur'an 2:262, *inter alia*) while unbelievers go about giving the lie to God's signs and messengers and leading believers astray (Qur'an 2:39, 3:184, *inter alia*). An ambiguous but frequently mentioned class of human beings in the Qur'an pretends to believe but actually consorts with satans and works against divine purposes.[7]

Into this cosmologically framed drama of the *muslim/mu'min* striving in the path of God, constantly against humanly and satanically inspired attempts to thwart and lead astray, God has sent prophets (of whom Muhammad was the last and seal), to warn their peoples to fear God and obey the teachings and guidance of the prophets. The Quranic theme of past communities rejecting their prophets and of divine retribution against such communities, establishes the context of Muhammad's mission to the seventh-century Arabs, which is referred to throughout the Qur'an but not developed in continuous narrative form. The privilege of Islam and hence of the Muslim *umma* 'community' is the finality of the Qur'an, "sent down" to the Arabs in a miraculously inimitable form of their native Arabic tongue through the Angel Gabriel,

with Muhammad serving as the historical mouthpiece. The narrative of Muhammad's "historic" role as prophet in Mecca and Medina is represented primarily in biographies of the Prophet,[8] and in a genre of Quranic commentary known as the "occasions of sending down" (the revelations).[9]

Another aspect of religious studies analysis of such concepts as jihad is that the events of the Qur'an, framed largely by the mission of the Prophet Muhammad to Mecca and Medina between A.D. 610 and 632, must be seen as paradigmatic for Islamic history generally. In the Muslim world view, in some crucial sense one must see and understand "that" history in order to understand "this" history; what happened to the Prophet and his followers places important perspective on what is happening here and now in the context of one's own striving in the path of God. The generic character of Quranic speech and the indefiniteness of referents easily allows the primal reference to the *umma* or community established by Muhammad to refer also to one's own contemporary experience. The Quranic *jahiliyya* or time of religious ignorance prior to Islam can also refer to contemporary non-Muslim cultures which, like the ancient communities mentioned in the Qur'an, reject Allah and His prophets, or to secular governments ruling over Muslim; the *shirk* or polytheism of Arabia proscribed by the Qur'an can also refer to contemporary forms of Islamic secularism, modernism or other deviations from a putative purer interpretation of Islam. A more specific application of this thesis will be made regarding the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue of reform in Egypt, Sayyid Qutb, in the latter part of this paper.

If it is possible to say that one cannot, as a Muslim, properly understand one's own history unless one understands the determinative history of the prophet, one can also say that one cannot understand that history except by reference to one's own horizon of understanding, say, in Tripoli, or South Beirut, or Tehran in the 1980s. This is what Martin Heidegger referred to as the "preunderstanding" which readers bring to a text: interpretation involves the dialectic or "hermeneutical circle" which archs from reader/hearer to a text produced by a writer/speaker and back, generating the interpretive process.[10]

Finally, the analysis of the Quranic cosmology for what it might say about violence in Muslim world views provides at this level a set of verbal symbols — what semioticians, such as Thomas Sebeok, call textual constituents[11] — which do not in and of themselves generate violent or any other form of human behavior. The historian of religions is conducting his or her analysis below the surface of the text at this stage. Although what has been said thus far might lead one to suspect that expressions of violence in Islamic societies could be traced to the Quranic cosmological dynamics between the forces of the seen and unseen worlds, Islamic historical examples of love, dignity and peace-making acts have the same cosmological basis, as will be shown in the next section on jihad in the discourse of Islamic mysticism and piety. Hayden White has argued that the processes by which, say, sex becomes transformed into sexuality and then mythologized into rituals of love in a human society, or how

aggression becomes transformed into violence and mythologized into rituals of sacrifice, require us to analyze the discourses of mastery and control.[12] Violence does, of course, exist among Muslim peoples as it does in all human societies. To the extent that historians of religion have something to contribute toward understanding violence, the task is to analyze it within the framework of religious world views as evidenced by religious texts and their worldly contexts.

Having constructed an interpretive backdrop, the problem now is to explore semantics of *jihad* and related notions, around which violent behavior may form its discourse. The argument moves, then, from the cosmographic structure of the Quranic text to its semantics, as employed by Muslims in discourse about *jihad*. Social, historical contexts now come more directly into play.

SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF *JIHAD FI SABIL ALLAH*

In Quranic cosmology, as has been seen, that basic group of humans who submit to the will of Allah and believe in His religion *(din)* and obey His messengers must strive in the Path of Allah. To understand the enormous importance of this demand in Muslim world views one need only turn to the first surah (chapter) of the Qur'an, known as the Opener *(al-fatiha)*, which is frequently recited during personal prayers and in social contract situations, such as when two families seal a marriage arrangement, and on countless other private and public occasions.[13] Following a brief invocation, the popular opening surah contains this supplication:

> Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds; most gracious,
> most merciful; master of the Day of Judgment; Thee do
> we worship, and Thine assistance do we seek; lead us in
> the Upright Path *(sirat al-mustaqim)*, the Path of those
> on whom Thou has bestowed Thy grace, not wrath, and
> (who do) not go astray.[14]

The Arabic verb for this "striving in the path of God" is *jahada* and its verbal noun is *jihad*. As the third form of the root *juhd*, it connotes a transitive relationship to some "other." One who strives in the path of God is known as a *mujahid*, a term which has contemporary coinage, as for example its use by numerous counterrevolutionary groups, such as Afghani freedom fighters. As mentioned previously, the Qur'an refers to the "path" of God in over 180 passages, and the term *jahada* and cognates such as *mujahid* and *jihad* occur about 35 times. Some passages associate *jihad* with bearing patiently;[15] others identify the strivers with those who believe.[16] In some cases the Prophet's or the believers' *jihad* is pitted against the unbelievers and hypocrites.[17] In other cases the focus of personal striving is against oneself.[18] It is frequently pointed out that God knows those who strive in His path,[19] that such behavior receives divine guidance,[20] and has eschatological consequences.[21] Islamic literature and public discourse abound with references to these several connotations of jihad. At the level of semantics, then, the observation by Western commentators that *jihad* is a major preoccupation of Muslims is

entirely correct, although it says very little about a presumed Muslim penchant for violence and holy war.[22]

Islamic literature identifies a variety of senses of jihad by peaceful means and for peaceful purposes.[23] There is the *jihad al-lisan* 'striving of the tongue' and the *jihad al-galam* 'striving with the pen': both are ways to conduct the *jihad al-tarbiya* 'striving through education' or *jihad al-da'wa* 'striving by propagating' (the faith). Other nonaggressive psychological connotations of jihad are found in such concepts as *jihad al-nafs* 'struggle against oneself' and *jihad al-shaytan* 'struggle against satan'. In general, the jihad by peaceful means is referred to in Islamic law as *al-jihad al-kabir*, the greater jihad, and is distinguished from *al-jihad al-saghir*, the lesser jihad, that is, legitimate forms of strife with other human beings through war, violence, and so on. In support of this distinction between striving peacefully and striving in war is a *hadith* 'saying' attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, in which he is reported to have said after returning from battle one day: "we have now returned from the smaller jihad to the greater jihad."[24]

In so far as violent behavior toward others is rationalized within Islamic world views, it is done primarily in discourse which rests on the semantics of the lesser jihad. Moreover, the term jihad as such, when left unqualified, almost always refers to the jihad of armed struggle and justified violence.[25] In the broadest conceptual sense, the lesser jihad is a perdurable state of affairs existing between Muslim society (*dar al-islam*, the domain of Islam) and non-Muslim societies (*dar al-harb*, the domain of war). Khadduri makes the distinction as follows:

> the jihad was the just of Islam. God commanded the believer to spread His word and establish His Law and Justice over the world [Qur'an 9:5]. The dar al-Islam was the house of believer where Law and Justice were given practical expression, and the dar al-Harb was the house of the unbeliever and an aspect of the jihad. Religion, however, was and still is to be carried out by peaceful means, as there should be no compulsion in the spread of the word of God [Qur'an 2:257]. The expansion of the state carried out by jihad, was an entirely different matter. Thus the jihad, a duty prescribed by Religion and Law, was surely as pious and just as *pium* and *justum* in the way described by St. Augustine and St. Thomas and later Hugo Grotius.[26]

The Islamic discourse on jihad in the sense of striving against other human beings was established in the classical works on Islamic law. In this body of literature, the discussion is closely tied to Quranic and early Islamic legal distinctions among categories of human beings against whom jihad may be directed, and under what circumstances.[27] These include *kuffar* 'unbelievers,' *mushrikun* 'polytheists,' *irtadda* 'apostacy,' *baghi* '(political) dissent,' criminals, *ahl al-kitab* 'non-Muslim scriptuaries' and enemies at the *ribat* 'frontier(s)' of Muslim-held territories, that is, *dar al-islam*. The greatest body of literature on the lesser jihad of

striving against one's enemies, however, has been that which has been written since the beginning of the colonial period. In an important study of the discourses of jihad in national liberation contexts and reform movements, Rudolph Peters has examined many of the contextual variables which modulated the classical doctrine of jihad in modern times, introducing new conceptual categories, or newer interpretations of older categories.[28]

A major distinction between the broader religious sense of striving in God's Path and the duty of war is that the former has usually been defined as an obligation on each individual *(fard al-'ayn)* while the latter is regarded as a duty to be fulfilled by society as a whole *(fard al-kifaya)*. In the latter case it is sufficient to raise an army for battle and for the rest of Muslim society to be represented by those who go to battle, lending material and moral support as may be needed. The practicalities of diplomacy and statecraft led many jurists to avoid the conclusion that the duty of jihad should be "waged against non-Muslims solely on the grounds of disbelief." A genuine threat or attack against Muslims became the practical grounds for war, indeed, a defensive war.[29] In the next section a recent discourse on jihad in which the disbelief of both Muslims and non-Muslims became grounds for a call to jihad will be examined.

THE RADICAL DISCOURSE ON JIHAD IN MODERN EGYPT

On October 6, 1981 a military vehicle suddenly stopped in front of a reviewing stand in Cairo, where President Sadat and other officials were watching a parade commemorating the eighth anniversary of the Sinai war with Israel. Four men leaped from the halted truck and began firing automatic weapons, killing Sadat and some of his bodyguards, and wounding several others. The grenades which were hurled into the crowd did not explode, thus averting a more general massacre. The leader of the assassin squad, Lieutenant Khalid Istambuli, was associated with a Muslim extremist group known as "al-Jihad." Gilles Kepel[30] has shown that Istambuli was not an ideologue for the group known as al-Jihad, nor did he contribute to the discourse on Islamic revitalization directed against the state and/or the West. Despite the enormity of his act, Khalid Istambuli was a minor figure. He can be seen as having responded to the more radical speech acts of others who defined Islam against the perceived otherness and alien character of the Egyptian government and the non-Muslim West. Istambuli also did what he did, of course, in light of his own personal circumstances. In the background lay various spokesmen and movements, tolerated and untolerated by the Egyptian regime. While most scholarship on Islamic extremism has focused on the Muslim Brotherhood, especially its founder, Hasan al-Banna',[31] Kepel initiates his study of Muslim Extremism in Egypt with an analysis of the writings of Sayyid Qutb and the social world from which they emerged.

Although Sayyid Qutb has had very little name recognition in the West, either in life or since his political execution in 1966, he has nonetheless been an important voice in Egyptian religious thought, and

his writings continue to influence revival movements in Egypt and elsewhere in the Islamic world. Far better known in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood *(ikhwan al-muslimin)*, for whom Qutb wrote from prison in the 1950s and 1960s in Cairo, was Hasan al-Banna', its founder. More widely read, translated, and discussed by Western scholars was the ideologue of the Iranian revolution, Ali Shariati. Better known for his impact upon political events was the Pakistani reformer and publicist, Mawlana Mawdudi.[32] Indeed, it was not until the late Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat lifted a political ban on the publication of the religious, revivalist writings of the Brotherhood in the early 1970s, some six years after Sayyid Qutb's death, that the latter was to be widely read beyond membership circles of the Brotherhood.

For all that, Sayyid Qutb was what poststructuralist critics would call a "strong reader" of Islamic religious texts. His rereadings of the Qur'an and other textual resources within the conservative Hanbali tradition of Islamic piety and reform[33] have become an inspiration to thousands of contemporary Muslims. For Qutb as well as for most Islamic visionaries of reform, the rationale for using violence is framed by the doctrine of jihad and related notions of justified conflict with one's enemies. The historical context for such discussions was the colonial and postcolonial period, the rise of nationalism, and the general Muslim ethos of weakness caused by the perceived and real domination of Western power and culture.[34]

Sayyid Qutb was born the son of a mildly prosperous landowner in Asyut provence of Egypt in 1906, a year after the demise of Muhammad Abduh, the famous al-Azhar rector, judge, and Islamic modernist reformer who influenced the direction of Islamic thought on reform during the preceding generation.[35] Qutb acquired a more or less traditional education, learning the Qur'an by heart on his own, a firm basis for much of his later education and intellectual activity. His father sent him to Cairo to study at Dar al-'Ulum, a religious academy meant to train Muslim scholars more broadly than the more traditional al-Azhar University. At Dar al-'Ulum he learned to appreciate Western literature and was introduced to the ideas of Muslim intellectuals who sought to Westernize and modernize Islamic society. After his education he took a post in the ministry of education, inspecting government schools, which brought him into contact with other parts of Egypt. As a result of his appointment to the Ministry, in 1949 he was sent to the United States for two years to study educational administration in Washington, D.C. and in California.

Yvonne Haddad has singled out two aspects of Sayyid Qutb's experiences in the United States which were to influence his later writing. First, was the wide support he correctly perceived that Americans gave to Israel and, at the same time, the growing anti-Arab feelings in America. The creation of the state of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war, with disastrous results for Arabs materially and mentally, had an enormous effect on Qutb, especially as he sought to understand and endure them in the American cultural context, which was so alien to him. Second, he has

been described as a slight, dark, sickly man, said to be reticent, intense, and humorless. As a result, he complained of having experienced social estrangement and even racial prejudice, as well he might have, especially in the late forties and early fifties in the U.S. Soon he returned to Cairo, disenchanted with the culture (Western) whose literature he had once eagerly sought and read.[36]

From his return to Egypt in about 1951 to his execution in 1966, Sayyid Qutb became progressively more radical. This can be seen in the growing urgency of his interpretation of Islamic responses appropriate to outside political, economic and cultural forces which he believed threatened an authentic Muslim existence in the world. If American racial conflict and support for Israel helped shape his experiences and thoughts abroad, the 1952 Egyptian revolution provided a different sort of context when he returned to Cairo. He joined the activist and reform-oriented Muslim Brotherhood, which was usually regarded and treated as subversive by the Nasser government which the revolution had brought into power. He read more widely the writings of other Muslim reformers and fundamentalist figures, such as Pakistan's al-Mawdudi. It took only until 1954 for Qutb to be imprisoned with a fifteen-year sentence for his views. There he remained but for a brief respite in the early 1960s. In 1965 he was re-imprisoned, largely owing to the more outspoken radicalism of his writings, and executed a year later.

What contributed to Qutb's demise were the more radical implications of his interpretations of Islam, which he drew out in his writings done in prison. As Haddad observes, "the ideology he proposed in the early fifties as a guideline, a 'tentative blueprint,' by 1965 acquired a dogmatic nature, an absolute given."[37] Kepel's analysis of Qutb also stresses the brutality and violence of prison life for members of the Brotherhood.[38] Under these conditions for Qutb in prison, where his poor health was constantly exacerbated, proposals for reform gave way to radical solutions for restoring an authentic Islamic government and society against those forces in the world which opposed it.[39] Those opposition forces were the secular ideologies which dominated humankind in the twentieth century, primarily capitalism and communism. The colonial experience had divided and made the world of Islam *(dar al-islam)* dependent upon Western economic, political and cultural systems which were clearly in trouble and in conflict with one another on their own terms. Muslims were being tempted by non-Islamic ideologies, to which they were turning for political survival in the modern world. Islam, in Qutb's view, however, was the most perfect, divinely established resource for establishing a good and just society; Muslims have no need, he argued, for turning to communism, socialism, or capitalism, all of which are palpably in trouble in today's world, when a better "way" is at hand.

The solution for Muslims with respect to politics, economics, culture, and morality, but especially religion (all of which are inextricably bound up together in a single "Way" in any strict understanding of Islam), was to return to the Islam established by the Prophet

Muhammad. Qutb's prose tacks back and forth between the Qur'an and the paradigmatic events of the Prophet's *umma* in Arabia on the other side and the situation of Muslims at mid-twentieth century on the other as he attempts to set the course of Islam back to the moorings from which he believes it has drifted.[40] Indeed, for Qutb and most radical Muslim visionaries, the view of Islam presented in their discourse is ahistorical. The tendency has been to view the "history" of Islam from the golden age of the past to the critical juncture of the present as much less important in shaping the present than the more cosmic forces of the Quranic cosmography and the paradigmatic time of the nascent *umma*.[41] On the other side, his critiques of Western civilization are serious and informed by his earlier reading in English literature as well as his personal experiences in America.

Qutb held that ultimately humankind as created by God is a single community whose divinely intended unity had been seriously fractured by the time Islam came to seventh-century Arabia. Islam arose to restore human unity and bring peace to the world. In his most widely read and translated book in the West, *This Religion of Islam* (1967), he argued, using ample Quranic references, that "God distinguishes between people on the basis of belief, irrespective of ties of ancestry, race or homeland between them."[42] This generally held view among Muslims, that ethnic, economic and political human differences are artificial and unimportant *sub specie aeternitatis* but that the distinction between belief and unbelief is all important, provides the linkage to Sayyid Qutb's interpretation of the doctrine of Jihad. In his own words:

> [God] has established only one cause for killing — when there is no other recourse — and that is striving for the sake of God *(jihad)*. He has defined the aim of the believer and the aim of the disbeliever in a clear and decisive manner:
>
> "Those who believe fight for the sake of God. And those who disbelieve fight for the sake of idols. Fight then the followers of Satan, surely the guild [*sic*, guile] of Satan is but feeble.[43]

In a work written in 1951 titled "International Peace and Islam,"[44] Sayyid Qutb sought to revise what Majid Khadduri suggests is the Islamic equivalent of the doctrine of the just war, an interpretation of jihad found articulated already in the classical texts on jurisprudence.[45] In this view, war for religious purposes, that is, to defend Islam against its enemies, is the only allowable or "justified" war in the Quranic world view and early legal definitions. War for other political or economic purposes is not condoned.

Sayyid Qutb's discourse about violence, then, parallels the structure of the Quranic cosmological polarity between the believer and the unbelieving "other," the bearers of truth and falsehood, respectively, in the world. For Qutb and for those who have read him and continued his agenda in Egypt for the past two decades since his hanging, the "other"

was primarily the Egyptian government, although the Christian Copts of Egypt and the non-Muslim West have also been occasional targets of polemic and even violence. Qutb argued that only divine purposes justified war, but he did not restrict war to defensive ends. He reasoned that non-Muslim societies destroyed world peace by fighting over economic, racial and political (that is, not divinely sanctioned) issues and thus pose a threat to peaceful existence of Muslim societies, a very plausible reading of the situation for the Third World in the period of neocolonialism and the Cold War. Therefore, the traditional consensus that jihad against non-Muslims should be fought only in defense of Islamic society was not sufficient for Qutb and his followers. They were driven from passive to active interpretations of the fundamental texts.

In a chapter on jihad in "International Peace and Islam"[46] Qutb states explicitly that contemporary Muslims should return to the original policy of the era of conquests and empire of inviting *(da'wa)* non-Muslims to become Muslim. Those who wish to remain within their own confessional communities, a status called *dhimma*, should then be required to pay the poll tax *(jizya)* in exchange for the license to propagate their own religion. If non-Muslims reject Islam or *dhimma* status, then "fighting *(qital)* is the only remaining response under the circumstances," for by their refusal they deny the word of God and thus oppose the means He has provided for a comprehensive peace among humankind *(bashariya)*.[47] Clearly, Qutb had reduced Islamic perceptions of "otherness" in the twentieth century to the categories discussed above from Quranic cosmology — People of the Book and client converts to Islam: all others must be forcibly brought to Islam.

The most radical agenda for the actions which Qutb felt would have to be taken in the Path of God if Islam was to fulfill its divine mandate was worked out in "Signposts Along the Way," which Qutb wrote in prison.[48] In a chapter on "Jihad in the Path of God," Qutb refutes the traditional Muslim interpretation of the lesser jihad as war taken only in defense of Islam.[49] He explores other meanings more appropriate to his own belief that the Nasser government represented a *jahiliyya*, a time of religious boorishness hostile to the practice of Islam. Jihad is the proper Muslim response, the divinely enjoined responsibility of Muslims to combat those who would lead humankind astray from the Path of God. A movement *(haraka)* must be formed to implement the teachings of the discourse *(bayan)*[50] on how to confront one's enemies in order to live in the Path. Kepel notes that in the growing official discourse against radical Islam there was an attempt to establish a (pejorative) link between Qutb's radical programme and the early Muslim separatist group, the Kharijites, who had called for the expulsion of those who failed to live up to the teachings of Islam, including the Caliph (Egyptian President Nasser, in Qutb's schema).[51] In *Signposts*, then, Qutb had brought the doctrine of jihad to bear upon secular powers, like the Nasser government, which ruled over Muslims. Again, a concept was borrowed from Islamic beginnings, one which was a certain term of opprobrium, namely, *jahiliyya*. The semi-official response of the Nasser regime, that of

leveling the charge of "kharijite" against Qutb, countered one term of opprobrium with another. 'Religious ignorance' versus 'secessionist' were the charges, couched not in references to history but rather within the semiotics of texts about sacred beginnings.

The significance of the writings of Sayyid Qutb goes beyond what the texts he left behind say in themselves — what they might tell us about the man and how he might have come to have held such views over and against more moderate and traditional Muslim conceptions of, say, jihad. From 1966 to 1981, others beyond the confines of prison, yet in different ways constrained by the same dynamic environment in Egypt, thought, wrote, and in some cases acted on their conceptions of jihad in the Path of God. A discourse on Islamic action, or counteraction, in a world gone astray from its ideal beginnings in seventh-century Arabia had come into being.

The most striking case was that of Lieutenant Khalid Istambuli, an errant member of the movement called al-Jihad, who took it upon himself to assassinate President Sadat. More broadly a part of the general discourse of radical Islamic alternatives were the cautiously permitted continuance of the Muslim Brotherhood, student groups under the influence of Qutb's writings and of the earlier ethos of the Muslim Brotherhood, the popular preaching of Shaykh Kishk, the movement known as *al-takfir wal-hijra* [excommunication and (Islamic) emigration], and more radical ideologues such as Abd al-Salam Faraj, leader of al-Jihad and author of its manifesto, a pamphlet called *al-farida al-ghayba* 'Hidden Imperative.'

Kepel has done the best job to date in deconstructing the vague conceptions of Muslim extremism in Egypt by examining each of these movements, the common aspects of their world views as well as their differences, and the particular circumstances of their activities.[52] If his work suffers any defect it is that shared by all attempts to analyze radical groups which foment violence, namely, the lack of effective participant observation in order to understand the contextual determinants of the texts of Islamic resurgence in Egypt, as speech acts. This does not, as such, render Kepel's interpretations wrong; it simply signals another dimension of interpreting meaning — the social experiences of the group which produced the texts — a dimension to which few scholars have had sustained, direct access.

SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

What Sayyid Qutb had wanted, a return to power of the idealized model of the Prophet's *umma* of the seventh century, he structured around a discourse on peace. He organized "International Peace and Islam"[53] concentrically around internal or personal tranquility, *salam al-damir,* then domestic or household peace, *salam al-bayt,* then social quietude, *salam al-mujtama',* and finally international peace, *salam al-'alam.* Personal, internal peace was basic, he felt, and without it there could be no world peace.[54]

The need to define Islam and Muslim society in pursuit of a sanctioned course of action "in the Path of God" over and against the enemies of that Path were also given by Sayyid Qutb's own experience of power — the economic and political power of America, the influence of Western culture and morality upon Muslims subject to decades of colonial rule and postcolonial imperialism, and the power of the Free Officers' movement and the Nasser government to restrict and control Muslim political pursuits. His radical understanding of jihad was more in response to his social circumstances than a mystical striving within himself; though the latter was not entirely absent from his thought, it simply was a stage in the development of this thought which finally came to ask how Muslims should act in and upon the world in the 1960s. The successive development of a discourse on jihad — by the Muslim Brotherhood, student groups, Shaykh Kishk, Excommunication and Emigration, and al-Jihad — provided further instances of speech acts, doing things with words to effect change in society.

The importance of Sayyid's Qutb's concept of jihad is that he employed socially shared symbols, the texts of Islamic religion, and used them, primarily in literary speech acts, to try to produce social results. He is important also because others joined him and created a discourse about jihad that went beyond the traditional, legal understanding of the term. That is why their texts are worth reading and understanding within the several contexts in which they operate.

It is acceptable and even desirable, however, as Kepel warns readers in his conclusion,[55] to admit that they are surprised, even shocked, by the otherness cultures, such as Islam. That admission is the first step toward demythologizing our conceptions of the "other," so that we can deconstruct their discourses about a world they are trying to change, by examining their texts and the contexts in which they use them. For Kepel, as for J. Smith, who has analyzed the Jonestown massacre, pointing to the shock of some forms of otherness — assassination of heads of state and massive communal suicides — must be attended by framing modes of interpretation so that one may understand.[56] The form of understanding argued for here is the historian of religions' examination of religious texts and their human contexts of use. This line of scholarship needs to be part of the research on violence and terrorism, to which other scholars and public officials have turned their attention so sharply in recent years.

Endnotes

1. A version of this paper was presented at an International Conference on Terrorism, April 14-17, 1986, at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and will appear in the published proceedings of the conference. In the conference paper I deal more with the failure of the humanities in general and religious studies in particular to take up the study of religion and violence.

2. See Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, "Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1980): pp. 423-53.

3. Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1986).

4. Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), p. 4 notes that in modern Islamic writing, terms such as *al-jihad al-muqaddas* 'holy war' are "probably a *calque*, coined under the influence of Western languages. At the same time it seems to reflect a growing awareness among some Muslims that much of military conflict today is not religious and that hence the religious character of some wars needs to be emphasized."

5. An excellent semantic analysis of Muslim religious speech acts is Moshe Piamenta, *Islam in Everyday Arabic Speech* (Lieden: E.J. Brill, 1979).

6. Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 175 defines world view as "shared cultural assumptions about the nature of the social world." The social process of transmitting and adapting world views from one generation to the next has been studied by Eickelman in relation to a traditional mosque university in Morocco, in Dale F. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20/4 (1978): pp. 485-516. An interesting study of Quranic education in Moroccan schools is Daniel A. Wagner and Abdelhamid Lotfi, "Traditional Islamic Education in Morocco: Sociohistorical and Psychological Perspectives," *Comparative Education Review* (1980): pp. 238-51.

7. A good treatment of the semantic fields of the Quranic cosmography is Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964). Michel Allard *et al., Analyse conceptuelle du Coran sur cartes perforées,* 2 volumes (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1963), vol. 2: pp. 27-42 mapped out the dynamics of the cosmographic actors and the kinds of "communication" that go on between and within the two realms of being. I have attempted to redeploy the findings of Izutsu and Allard *et al.* in a "constituent analysis" of the Quranic text. See Richard C. Martin, "Understanding the Qur'an in Text and Context," *History of Religions* 21/4 (1982): pp. 361-84 and *idem*, "Symbol, Ritual and Community: An Approach to Islam," *Islam in the Modern World* (1983 Payne Lectures in Religion), ed. Jill Raitt (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, Department of Religious Studies, 1983). "Constituents" are redundant semantic units into which texts may be divided for analytical purposes, e.g., God sending prophets, humankind heeding prophets, satans leading astray, etc. On Constituent analysis, see Thomas A. Sebeok, *Structure and Texture: Selected Essays in Chemeris Verbal Art* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1974) and Sam D. Gill, *Sacred Words: A Study of Navajo Religion and Prayer* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981).

8. The most important biographical text is that of Ibn Ishaq, an eighth-century Muslim scholar whose collection of pericopes about the life and doings of Muhammad and his companions is far more comprehensive and written closer to the time of the prophet than is the case in most other world religions. A usable translation is Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

9. On the analysis of *asbab al-nuzul* genre, see Andrew L. Rippin, "The Quranic *asbab al-nuzul* Material: An Analysis of Its Use and Development in Exegesis" (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 1981).

10. For a discussion of the implications of Heidegger's hermeneutical theory for contemporary criticism and historiography, see David Cousins Hoy, *The Critical Circle:*

Literature, History, and Philosophical Hermeneutics (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1978).

11. See note 6 above on constituent analysis.

12. Hayden White, "The Redemption of Myth," Religious Studies Faculty Seminar, Arizona State University, March 19, 1986. White's analysis is a reaction to but nonetheless structurally similar to René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Md. and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

13. A good study of Muslim prayers and the Quranic component in them is Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer Manuals in Common Use* (London: S.P.C.K., 1961).

14. Qur'an 1:2-7.

15. Qur'an 3:142.

16. 8:74, 75; 61:11.

17. 66:9; 25:52.

18. 8:72; 9:41; 49:15.

19. 47:31; but see 9:16.

20. 29:6; 60:1.

21. 29:6; 60:1.

22. This point is made by Peters, *Islam and Colonialism,* p. 3 and confirmed by my own experience. The ubiquitousness of literature on jihad may well be what has led writers such as Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), p. 215 to write about jihad as evidence of a putative quarrelsome quality of "the Arab mind."

23. Good summaries of the various semantic qualifications of jihad are found in Peters, pp. 117-21 and Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955), pp. 55-82.

24. Quoted by Peters, p. 118.

25. Quoted by Peters, p. 10 (citing numerous sources).

26. Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 165.

27. See Khadduri, *War and Peace*, pp. 74-82.

28. Peters, *op. cit.*

29. Khadduri, *Justice*, p. 165.

30. Peters, *op. cit.*

31. On the Muslim Brotherhood and its founder, see the article "al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* Second Edition, ed. H.A.R. Gibb *et al.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill and London: Luzac & Company, 1960-) and Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) and Kepel, *op. cit.*

32. Brief treatments of these and other modern Muslim reformers are found in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

33. See Mitchell, *Muslim Brothers* and *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* articles on Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya.

34. Wilfred Cantwell Smith's well-known characterization is that "the fundamental *malaise* of modern Islam is that something has gone wrong with Islamic history." (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957], p. 47). Smith and Gustav E. von Grunebaum, *Modern Islam: The Search for Cultural Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1962) labored at mid-century to measure the impact of modernity upon traditional Islam and to diagnose structural characteristics of Islam which impeded, in their views and in the views of many of their Islamicist contemporaries, an effective Islamic response to modernity and the West.

35. Sayyid Qutb's Arabic biography is Mahdi Fadlallah, *Ma'a Sayyid Qutb fi fikrihi al-siyasi wa-l-dini* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1978), which is summarized by Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," in Esposito, ed., *Voices, op. cit.* Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, is currently the most readily available source of information about his intellectual and religious *vitae*. Without access to Fadlallah's work, I have relied on Haddad and Kepel in preparing this paper.

36. Haddad, "Sayyid Qutb," p. 69.

37. Haddad, p. 78.

38. Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, pp. 26-35.

39. Haddad, p. 78.

40. See Sayyid Qutb, *This Religion of Islam (Hadha 'd-Din)*, trans. Islamdust (Palo Alto, California: Al-Manar Press, 1967).

41. See Kepel, pp. 227-28.

42. Qutb, *This Religion of Islam*, p. 87.

43. *Ibid.*, citing Qur'an 4:76.

44. Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Salam al-'alami wa-l-islam* [International Peace and Islam] (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1974).

45. Khadduri, *Justice,* pp. 164-67.

46. Qutb, "International Peace," pp. 169-77.

47. Qutb, *Al-Salam*, p. 174; see Haddad, p. 83.

48. Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi l-tariq* [Signposts Along the Way] (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1985).

49. See Kepel, p. 54.

50. The term *bayan* normally is translated as "announcement, explanation." Kepel captures its rhetorical force polemical literature by translating it as "discourse," which should be understood as Michel has used the term.

51. Kepel, pp. 58-60.

52. Kepel, esp. his conclusion, pp. 223-40.

53. Qutb, *Al-Salam, op. cit.*

54. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

55. Kepel, p. 223.

56. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Devil in Mr. Jones," *Imagining Religion from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 102-34.