AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE CONCEPT OF *JAHILIYYA* IN MODERN
ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST DISCOURSE:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ABU'L A'LA MAWDUDI
AND SAYYID QUTB

by
LILY LEE

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
July 2010

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE CONCEPT OF *JAHILIYYA* IN MODERN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST DICOURSE: A COMPARITIVE STUDY OF ABU'L A'LA MAWDUDI AND SAYYID QUTB

by
LILY LEE

Approved by:

_____

Dr. Tarif Khalidi, Professor   Advisor
Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies

_____

Dr. Bilal Orfali, Assistant Professor   Member of Committee
Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages

_____

Dr. Vahid Behmardi, Assistant Professor of   Member of Committee
Arabic Language and Literature
Lebanese American University

Date of thesis defense: July 23, 2010

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THESIS RELEASE FORM

I, Lily Lee

☐   authorize the American University of Beirut to supply copies of my thesis to libraries or individuals upon request.

☐   do not authorize the American University of Beirut to supply copies of my thesis to libraries or individuals for a period of two years starting with the date of the thesis defense.

_____
Signature

_____
Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and Foremost, I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Tarif Khalidi for his generosity, kindness and guidance throughout. I can't thank him enough for going out of his way to help me with so many different things, academically and personally. Without his support and help, this thesis could not have been completed. Special thanks also go to my other committee members, Dr. Orfali and Dr. Behmardi for giving me valuable advice and feedback.

I am very grateful for great friendships that I have had here in Lebanon. I want to thank Sung-Ok unni for her emotional, intellectual and spiritual support and my darlings, Somi,Kyungsoo and Hayeon for being such wonderful friends. Eating, discussing and sharing lives with them have been awesome. I also thank my other friends with whom I shared great memories with in Lebanon, Ashley, Megan, Faith, Dominik and Sandra.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for being always supportive and trusting no matter where I am and no matter what I do. They taught me the greatest love and sacrifice. I thank God for sending me all these wonderful people. It has been a blessing.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Lily Lee   for   Master of Arts
                        Major: Middle Eastern Studies

Title: The Concept of *Jahiliyya* in the Modern Islamic Fundamentalist Discourse:
   A Comparative Study of Abu'l A'la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb.

       This study intends to explore the concept of *jahiliyya* and its usage in the modern Islamic fundamentalist discourse. *Jahiliyya* which is commonly used as a term denoting the pre-Islamic pagan Arab society is understood and conceptualized in various ways throughout Islamic history. In the modern fundamentalist discourse, it becomes a symbol of evil that stands in contrast to Islam and it gains a signification of a transhistorical condition rather than a bygone historical era. Through the detailed study of the concept of *jahiliyya* in both Sayyid Qutb's and Abu'l A'la Mawdudi's discourse, this thesis addresses the way in which *jahiliyya* is understood historically, conceptualized doctrinally and applied politically serving as a blueprint for modern Islamic fundamentalism.

PREFACE

Modern Sunni Islamic fundamentalism has been investigated by many scholars, politicians, journalists and religious leaders through different methods and lenses.[1] Various speculations and theories have been advanced to explicate the precise nature and causes behind its rise.

There seem to be two major approaches to modern Islamic fundamentalism; The first is based on a politico-economic account with emphasis on the dominant objective conditions, and the second is based on a more anthropological account with emphasis on individuals as active agents with their own subjective interests and values.

The first account usually pinpoints politically unstable and authoritarian regimes, socio-economic crises and reactions to Western political and economic dominance as the main causes for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Although these accounts have done a great service in explaining the general social context of Muslim countries that could have provided a favorable environment for radicalized religious theories and actions to grow and flourish, the basis of this argument stems mostly from a Marxist view of society whose driving force is the struggle for economic and political gain. This politically and economically based explanation doesn't leave any room for understanding how culture can act as an interpretive framework through which political and economic situations can be interpreted and explained. These arguments tend to overlook religious or cultural symbols as an ideological cover to achieve economic and political goals, resulting in what Robert Bellah terms 'consequential reductionism', an

---

[1] Gabriel Marranci *Understanding Muslim Identity: Rethinking Islamic Fundamentalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009), p1. As Marranci claims, there have been more than 100 books and 5,600 articles published on Islamic fundamentalism between 2002 to 2009 alone.

explanation of religion in terms of its functional consequences in propagating political ends.[2] Therefore, in a lot of instances, such explanations reduce the roles of the religio-cultural structure to the politico-economic one.[3]

The second stream of analysis that seems to have emerged as a counterargument to Marxian structuralism is a more agent-centered and individual-based approach. This approach tends to treat an individual or a group as an independent agency whose actions are not necessarily governed by politico-economic conditions in a direct manner but are rather determined by their own emotional and psychological makeup.[4] Although this approach seems to have brought other factors into play and brought the myth of a unifying global logic or the meta-narrative of Marxist approaches into question, in the process of doing so, it tends to disregard structuralism altogether in favor of the post-modern idea of the fragmented and fleeting nature of the individuality.

If the first stream embraces structuralism from a Marxist politico-economic standpoint, the second discredits structural determinism in favor of a subjective and agent-oriented analysis. Both of these approaches, whether they argue for or against structuralism, give little attention to the cultural structure that involves the role of religious discourse as an independent force on its own. Mircea Eliade contends that the more religious a person is, the more paradigmatic models he possesses to guide his

---

[2] Robert Bellah *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p247

[3] See, for example, Bassm Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) ; Youssef M. Choueri *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2002) ;Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris,2002).

[4] See, for example, Judith Nagata, "Beyond Theology: Towards an Anthropology of Fundamentalism," *American Anthropologist* 103, no.2 (June 2001): 481-98; Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill and Willam Paul Williamson *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 2005) ;Gabriele Marranci *Understanding Muslim Identity: Rethinking Islamic Fundamentalism* (Basingstoke:Palgrave Macmillian,2009).

actions and attitudes.[5] Therefore, unless we understand the paradigmatic models that religious persons seek to follow, it would be difficult to fully grasp the purposes, origins and motives of their actions. The Islamist argument is first and foremost grounded on the preoccupation with the idea of obeying God's command and following the exemplary practices of the prophet. [6] These religious ideals and transcendental goals cannot be understood within the positivist utilitarian idioms alone in which only 'hard and realistic' assumptions about human thoughts and actions are allowed.[7]

This thesis seeks to shed light on the formation of Islamic fundamentalist discourse as based on the historical reconstruction of the concept of *jahiliyya*, the theological interpretation of *jahiliyya* and the political application of *jahiliyya*. It traces the historical roots and usages of the concept of *jahiliyya* and the historical perceptions of *jahiliyya* in both medieval and modern intellectual discourses. I attempt to move away from the analysis of Islamic fundamentalism based on the modern political, economic and social contexts and individual's personal psychological and emotional on which there already exists an enormous amount of literature. Rather than focusing on these, my thesis aims to provide a different analytical framework, which connects the historical narrative, doctrinal understanding and political ideology through the detailed study of Abu'l A'la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb's discourses, these two being among the most influential thinkers of modern Sunni fundamentalism. I will try to demonstrate how this religious discourse built on certain historical, doctrinal and political understandings of Islam in turn provide a lens through which the fundamentalists understand social conditions, interpret them, and guide certain of their actions. By

---

[5] Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*: *The Nature of Religion* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987), p96

[6] Talal Asad *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p221

[7] Bellah, p241

explicating the discourses and narratives behind fundamentalism, I hope to refute the

simplistic assumption that fundamentalism is a natural consequence of certain political,

economic and social conditions mixed with individual's psychological and emotional

makeup. Though some modern scholars have touched upon the concept of *jahiliyya* in

relation to fundamentalist thought, there is, so far as I know, only one study on this

concept on its own, namely *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb* by Sayed Khatab.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT OF *JAHILIYYA* IN THE PRE-MODERN PERIOD

The word *jahiliyya*, which is commonly applied to the historical epoch before the advent of Islam, has been translated and understood in various ways. The root of the term *jahiliyya* is derived from the Arabic verb *jhl* whose real meaning in the context of Islamic studies is controversial. Some claim that it means ignorance as an antithesis of *'ilm*, and others say that it signifies barbarity as an antithesis of *hilm*. Some consider it to be a bygone historical epoch, others view it as a characteristic of people and still others think it is a moral or spiritual condition. Then again, the perception of the pre-Islamic period and its practices and customs throughout Islamic history has not been static. At times, it was viewed favorably, at others negatively and at still others it was viewed neutrally. I would like to survey the differences in the meaning of *jahiliyya* proposed by different scholars and then turn to differences in perception of the pre-Islamic period and matters associated with it.

1.1. Survey of the Concept in Modern Scholarship

1.1.1. Ignaz Goldziher

Ignaz Goldziher was the first Western scholar to argue that though there is a signification of ignorance in the word *jahl*, this should be considered secondary and the original meaning of *jahiliyya* is barbarity as contrasted to *hilm*. According to him, *hilm* can mean anything from physical integrity and strength to moral integrity and soundness. The word *halim* means a civilized man and the opposite of it, namely, *jahil,*

means an uncivilized, wild and violent man. He gives examples of the usage of the word *jahil* coupled with the word *halim* in the poetry and inscriptions of pre Islamic times whose meaning can best be translated as barbarity rather than ignorance.[8] Interestingly enough, *jahil* is sometimes used not necessarily as a negative value, but as a quality that can positively complement *halim* as in the following two examples:

1. The wild man amongst us is ferocious (*jahil*) in the defense of his guest;
The ferocious man is mild (*halim*) when insulted by him.(the guest)
2. We act wildly with our hands (*tajhalu aydina*) but our mind is meek, we scorn with deeds and not with talk. [9]

In the Prophet's Hadith as transmitted by Abu Hurayra, when advising his community not to act brutally during fasting, the verb *jhl* was also used by the prophet. Goldziher argues that *jahl* is not ignorance or error, for the Prophet normally uses *dalal* to signify error. A new convert to Islam, Zayd b. Amr ibn Nufayl's saying also confirms the view of *jahl* in contrast to *hilm*: "I will no longer pay homage to Ghanm, who was God to us when my *hilm* was small."[10] Here *hilm* is used instead of *'ilm* as an opposite word for *jahl* when Zayd described the time while he was in a state of *jahl*, before Islam. Thus, in Goldziher's opinion, *jahiliyya* is the period of *jahl,* when barbarity and cruelty were dominant.

1.1.2. Franz Rosenthal and Shlomo Pines

Franz Rosenthal, on the other hand, disputes Godziher's hypothesis on the basis of the Quranic usage of the term. Rosenthal claims that the word *jahiliyya* doesn't refer to barbarity but rather denotes ignorance. Moreover, *jahiliyya* cannot be

---

[8] Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (New Jersey: Transaction Publisher, 2006), pp203-206

[9] Ibid, p205

[10] Ibid, pp206-208

interpreted as a definite time or period, but rather it should be understood as a plural noun for ignorant persons.[11] Along the same lines as Rosenthal, Shlomo Pines also argues that among 25 derivatives of the root *jhl,* most of them signify people or society who is ignorant of the true knowledge and teachings of Islam. However, a detailed analysis of this case is not provided by either scholar.

1.1.3. Toshihiko Izutsu

Toshihiko Izutsu, on the other hand, agrees more with the Goldziher hypothesis as regards the meaning of *jahiliyya*. He gives an example of the usage of the word *jahiliyya* by referring to Ibn Ishaq's biography of the prophet. In the *Sirat al-Nabiyy,* there is a story of Muhammad accusing and condemning new converts for instigating and quarreling against the Jews. Upon seeing this, Muhammad said to them:

> O believers, how dare you forget God? Are you again tempted by the call of the *jahiliyyah,* when I was among you, when God has guided you to Islam, honored you, cut off thereby the bond of *jahiliyyah* from you, delivered you from disbelief, and made you friends of each other?[12]

There is another account of a similar story of the famous Khalid ibn al-Walid who was sent to other tribes for the purpose of proselytizing them but ended up beheading them. When Muhammad heard of this affair he also criticized it by saying: "Go at once, people, examine thoroughly the affair, and trample down the custom of the *jahiliyyah*." Another Muslim also accused Khalid by saying:"You have done an act of the *jahiliyyah* in the midst of Islam."[13]

---

[11] Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1970), pp32-35

[12] Toshihiko Izutsu, *The structure of the ethical terms in Koran (*Japan: Keio Institute of Philological Studies, 1959), pp24-25

[13] Ibid, pp25-26

Based on these passages, Izutsu contends that in these contexts, the term *jahiliyya* cannot refer to the period before Islam, but rather to a spiritual state or consciousness among people that Islam attempts to suppress. Again, the term does not imply ignorance, but a rough and rude manifestation of tribalism which can be regarded as opposed to *hilm*. According to Izutsu, *hilm* is not a passive meekness but an active character that refers to strong-willed power to restrain oneself. It is gentleness, forbearance and calmness that are based on power and superiority of mind and not on weaknesss. He gives an example of a verse from a poem written by Khalaf b.Khalifah of the Umayyad period to illustrate this point: "All of them show a remarkable *hilm* so much so that even a small boy among them looks as if he were a man of a mature age because of his natural dignity."[14] In contrast to this *hilm*, *jahl* was used to refer to reckless behavior, or passionate carnal desire without power of self-control. Qur'anic passages use derivatives of *jahiliyya* such as the following:

> O my Lord! I would sooner be cast into prison than do that which these women urge me to, yet if Thou turnest not from me their temptation, I shall surrender myself to a lustful passion for them and so become one of the *jahilin*.[15]

Here *jahilin* does not necessarily mean ignorance or lack of knowledge as such, though it can mean purposely ignoring the moral code of conduct. Rather it seems to denote loss of one's temper and self-control.[16]

However one should not mistakenly assume that this *jahl* or *jahiliyya* was the predominant moral conduct during the pre-Islamic times. *Hilm* was recognized as a great virtue during that time, too. Izutsu states: "*Hilm* was unanimously recognized, and

---

[14] Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), pp207-208

[15] Qur'an, <u>Sura</u> 12:33

[16] Izutsu, *Structure*, pp27-28

highly esteemed, as one of the most essential, indispensable qualities of a *sayyid* or a

man standing at the head of the tribesmen, with *siyadah* (tribal chieftaincy) and *ri'asah*

(headman-ship) in his hand." Furthermore, it seems to be treated as a trait that is

morally higher than *jahl* as evidenced in the following passage:

> If you ever want to rule people as their chief, then rule them not with rashness
> and abusing. For, indeed, *hilm* produces a better result than *jahl*-you must
> keep it well in mind-except in the event of your being treated unjustly with
> excessive hatred and enmity.[17]

As witnessed in the passages above, it would be misleading to assume that *hilm*

is a characteristic that coincided with the advent of Islam. *Hilm* was an equally

praiseworthy and desirable trait in pre-Islamic times as it was in the post-Islamic era.

Izutsu contends that the Quraysh tribe is known for its *hilm*. It was through their *hilm*

that they could control and manage their neighbors' conduct as well as theirs. Their

character of *hilm* arguably made them politically wise and shrewd and brought them

economic fortune and fame over others. Izutsu cautiously suggests the possibility that

the prophet also could have had this quality of Quraysh that guided him successfully to

build his religio-political community. It is illustrated in the prophet's biographical

literature that the prophet was indeed a *halim* and a shrewd statesman.[18]

In addition to the meaning of *jahiliyya* in contrast to *hilm*, Izutsu also suggests

another possible meaning for *jhl* in the Qur'an. A semantic analysis of the word that

appeared in both Suras 6:3 and 39: 64-65 renders a meaning associated with unbelief

and idolatry:

> 1.Even if we should send down the angels unto them, or the dead should
> speak to them, or We should gather against them everything in array, they

---

[17] Izutsu, *God and Man,* pp211-212

[18] Ibid, p212

would never believe-unless God so willed. After all most of them always reveal themselves to be characteristically *jahil.*

2.Say : 'What! Is it something other than God that you would have me serve, o you *jahilina*?' It has been revealed to thee as well as to those before thee, 'If thou dost associate [aught with God], thy deed shall be lost, and thou shalt surely be in the number of those who lose.' Nay but God do thou serve, and be of those filled with thankfulness.

There is another sura where *jhl* and *kfr* are used somewhat interchangeably:

And We sent Noah to his people, 'I am obviously for you a warner [admonishing you] to worship none save God, Verily I fear for you the chastisement of a painful day.' Then said the chiefs of the people, who were *kafir* 'As we see, thou art nothing more than a mortal like ourselves. As we see, none follows thee rashly except the vilest amongst us. As we see, you have no claim to superiority over us. Nay more, we think you are liars!' [To this Noah replies in v.31] 'As I see, you are a people whose conduct shows every sign of *jahl.*[19]

In the context of religion, *jahl* seems to signify inability to understand and believe God and acknowledge the religious truth. One could attribute this to one's refusal to acknowledge the limitations of human beings and the greatness of God.[20] *Jahiliyya* here entails pre-Islamic values of *anafah* (high-nosed-ness), *iba'* (refusal), *hamiyya* (zeal for defending what one has to defend) and *hafiza* (guarding jealously one's honor). They are epitomized in the haughty spirit of refusal and resistance to obey, as expressed in the following example : "We refuse resolutely to submit to another's direction, whoever he may be! On the contrary, we make all men obey our directions, and that without bit and bridle."[21] Thus, *istikbar* (haughtiness) is how *kafir*s are described. It is the very characteristic that the Qu'ran renders to be belonging to the pagan Arabs: "When the *Kafirs* set up in their hearts the *hamiyyah*, that *hamiyyah* so

---

[19] Qur'an Sura 11:27-29

[20] Izutsu, *God and Man*, pp213-214

[21] Ibid, pp201-202

6

characteristic of the *jahil*-ness."[22] *Jahl* is the very attitude of protest against being

humiliated or having one's honor and pride violated. In the context of Islam, it can refer

to a stubborn refusal to surrender oneself to the authority of one God and resistance to

accept the Prophet and his teachings.[23] For a *jahil*, he himself is the Lord who doesn't

submit to anyone, be it human or divine whereas for a muslim, he is the *'abd* (slave) of

God to whom he surrenders and submits unconditionally. Thus, the binary of *jahiliyya*

and Islam or that of *jahil* and muslim is juxtaposed to the binary of haughtiness and

submission. Izutsu claims that this very *jahil*ness (refusal to submit due to one's

haughtiness) is the source of kuf*r* (unbelief)[24]

On a minor note, Izutsu briefly mentions the connotation of ignorance in *jhl*.

However, this appears rarely and it is implicitly treated as a minor signification

compared to others. He gives an example of a passage from pre-Islamic poetry that

illustrates this meaning: "Why don't you ask our horsemen, if you are ignorant (*jahilah*)

about what you do not know?" Contrary to what Pines claims, Izutsu argues that the

meaning of *jhl* in the sense of ignorance does not play a significant role in the Qur'an.

He gives only one example of such verse: "God shall forgive only those who do evil in

ignorance (*jahilah*) but then quickly repent."[25]

Based on all those Qur'anic verses, bibliographical literature on Muhammad

and poetry, Izutsu concludes that there are essentially two very important notions in the

word *jahiliyya*. One has to do with the reckless and aggressive character of tribal life

that is opposite of *hilm*, and the other has to do with insistence on idolatrous practices

---

[22] Qur'an, Sura: 18:26

[23] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p210

[24] Ibid, pp198-204

[25] Ibid, p215

and a haughty spirit of refusal to submit. There is a sense of ignorance but it appears occasionally. He asserts that *jahiliyya* refers to a moral condition rather than a definite historical time.[26]

1.1.4 William Shepard

William Shepard also argues that the Qur'an uses *jahiliyya* primarily to refer to moral conditions and not to a specific period. There seems to be one particular exception to this when the Qur'an uses the term the first *jahiliyya* as a time period. (Q 33: 33) Even here, however, there are various suggestions as to what it actually implies. The first *jahiliyya* could be a period between Adam and Noah or Abraham and Jesus while the later *jahiliyya* could be a period between Jesus and Muhammad. Alternatively, the first *jahiliyya* could be the *jahiliyya* of unbelief before Islam whereas the later one could be the *jahiliyya* of iniquity after Islam. The latter interpretation opens the door to the possibility that there can be a *jahiliyya* after Islam. This classification of the *jahiliyya* into *jahiliyya* of unbelief and *jahiliyya* of iniquity is explicitly found in *hadith*. There is a story where Muhammad told his followers that there is *jahiliyya*. When asked which *jahiliyya* he meant, whether a *jahiliyya* of unbelief or *jahiliyya* of Islam, Muhammad answered that it is *jahiliyya* of unbelief.[27] This shows that a certain notion existed that *jahiliyya* is not only a mere historical epoch but a condition or characteristic pertaining to iniquity, barbarity, or unbelief that contradicts the spirit of Islam.

The usage of *jahiliyya* to signify the period before Islam as found in al-Bukhari's collection of the *Hadith* came later, when the need to confront and deal with pagans had diminished and so the characteristics of *jahiliyya* were deemed to belong to

---

[26] Izutsu, *The structure*, pp24-31

[27] William Shepard, "Age of Ignorance", *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* V.1(2001), 38-39

the past: "The tribe of the Quraysh used to fast on the day of Ashura in the *jahiliyya*."[28]

1.2. Perception of the Pre-Islamic Period

As many divergent views may be found on the usage and etymology of the term *jahiliyya*, so we can also find different perceptions and attitudes related to the pre-Islamic period throughout history. As Hawting points out, this perception of *jahiliyya* might not be a natural reflection of the real historical conditions.[29] Rather than one fixed or true historical picture for *jahiliyya*, there have been diverse perspectives on it across time.

The perception of *jahiliyya* seems to have shifted from an image of tribal conflicts and idolatry to an icon for true values of Arab identity in the late Umayyad and early Abbasid period. There was an increasing interest in learning about the pre-Islamic period, especially in literary works in eighth century Iraq. Knowledge of pre-Islamic times played one of the most important roles in constructing Arab ethnic identity of the time for that period was thought to represent authentic Arabness. According to Rina Drory, even Caliph al-Mansur took great pleasure in listening to poetry from the pre-Islamic period that exalts the values of *jahili* life. For ethnic Iranians such as Hammad al-Rawiya, being a transmiter and reciter of *jahili* poetry was a way to get into a mainstream society and even to access the Caliphal courts that loved listening to stories and poetry on the *jahili* tribal wars and lore.[30] The Umayyad Caliphate even considered

---

[28] Shepard, p38

[29] Hawting, G.R. '*The idea of idolatry and the emergence of Islam.* (Cambridge:Cambridge university press, 1999), p9
[30] Rina Drory, "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making.", *Studia Islamica*, 1996/1, 40 and Julia Ashtiany, T.M. Johnstone, J.D. Latham, R.B. Serjeant and G.Rex Smith, '*Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p35

it as a duty to preserve and cultivate the *jahili* cultural legacy.[31]

If the favor extended to pre-Islamic poetry and values by the Umayyads went more or less unchallenged, the Abbasid *Shu'ubiyya* movement changed this by opening a door for freedom to express different cultural values without restraint. The *Shu'ubis* claimed that the Islamic value of equality for all men should be put to practice in place of Arab superiority and monopoly of the Islamic empire. They also saw no particularly praiseworthy features of the pre-Islamic Arabs in comparison to Greeks, Persians and Indians. Some *shu'ubis* did not hesitate to mock the underdeveloped weaponry, military tactics and skills of the Arabs when compared to Sasanian chivalry.[32] Others such as Abu 'Ubaydah argued that Arab linguistic skills and literary flair were no match for their Greek and Persian counterparts.[33] Ridiculing pre-Islamic Arabs and glorifying Persian ancestry by *shu'ubi* proponents became common on the literary scene. The *Nabat*, natives of the *Sawad* of Iraq, boasted about their historical land and advanced agricultural methods and tried to prove their superiority over the Bedouins. The Berbers in the Maghreb had their own Berber Qur'an and praised their own ancestral deeds in their literature.[34] Abu 'Amir b. Garcia, an Andalusian shu'ubi writer exalts the virtues of non-Arabs in his *risala* which is considered to be one of the greatest *shu'ubi* masterpieces:

> The non-Arabs were clever, grave, not camel herders or diggers tilling the soil; great kings, not burners of camel dung for fuel. Intelligent, they wore brocade and fine silk cloth not a coarse garment suitable for both summer and winter weather made up of the collected wool of six ewes. They were warriors, not guardians of palm branches or planters of palm shoots; kings who recognized no overlords, not one of whom in quenching his thirst drank

---

[31] Ashtiany, p42

[32] Ibid, pp37-38

[33] Ibid, p43

[34] Ibid, p38

of the milk of milch camels; nay, their drink was wine, and their food roasted meat, not the mouthful of colocynth seeds in the deserts or the eggs of lizards taken from their nests."

Ibn Garcia contrasted the Arabs with this image of non-Arabs and described them as uncivilized people with no manners and as borrowers of other people's achievements and ideas.[35]

1.3. The Arab Reaction

One could argue that all these *Shu'ubi* sentiments triggered an Arab reaction to fight back and defend their identity and cultural values against other foreign influences and to reassert their unique position in the Islamic domain.[36] These ethnic contests among intellectuals in exalting their own lineages and past glories while criticizing and deriding Arabs pushed the Arabs to rethink their identity, rediscover their heritage and culture in relation to their distant past, and reformulate them in the new social context where the influx and mixture of the Persian-Indian-Hellenistic cultural heritage was inevitable.[37]

Another factor that might have contributed to the massive collection of poetry, proverbs, lore and orations of the pre Islamic tribal life and appreciation of their values arguably came as a result of the rise of *Adab*. *Adab*, which can be best translated as a "belles-lettres" began to take shape and make a great impact on transforming the intellectual and cultural landscape of the Abbasid period. It had a counterbalancing effect of creating a more humanistic spirit in the intellectual arena, an arena that had been characterized mainly by the proliferation of strict religious traditions and

---

[35] Ibid, p46

[36] Drory, pp33-34

[37] Ashtiany, p96

knowledge. The spirit of *Adab* ushered a more tolerant attitude towards all kinds of

knowledge without constraining them or treating some of them as evil, harmful or

uncivilized. It was against this background that "the rediscovery of the *jahiliyya*", as in

Khalidi's term, made headway without imposing a negative judgement or prejudice

toward it. Eventually, the superiority of *jahili* poetry over the Islamic became widely

acknowledged in terms of its grammar and usage, and nomadic Arabic came to be

highly appreciated for its eloquence.[38] The rediscovery of *jahiliyya* literature came

hand in hand with renewed awareness of its cultural values, wisdom, glories in wars,

honor and virtues that were embedded in that literature. Some writers have extended the

view of *jahiliyya* as regards its superiority and purity of language to include the

superiority and purity of its life and moral standards as well.[39]

It is interesting to note that pre-Islamic history, its values and its morals were

accepted and often praised almost as much as Islamic ones during Abbasid times. Some

acknowledged *jahili* tribal culture and morals as part of their great inherited tradition

and as being just as legitimate as their Islamic tradition. Suzanne Stetkevych notes that

in Abbasid times, the *jahiliyya* period was even considered to be a golden heroic age.

The *jahiliyya* was not necessarily viewed as antithetical to Islam or as a threatening

force to religion. On certain occasions and circumstances, these traditions were

combined together as one Arab-Islamic tradition. In anti-*shu'ubi* poetry, this mixed

tradition stood against what was perceived to be the subtly forged link between infidel

and Persian traditions. Abu Tammam, a poet in the Abbasid era, attempted to combine

these two traditions into a "unified vision of the Arab-Islamic Abbasid Caliphate." For

---

[38] Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1994), p87

[39] Ibid, p97

example, he used the *jahili* concept of tribal honor and extended this to include the honor of Islamic empire. He took the tribal obligation of vengeance and applied it to Islamic *Jihad*. In a sense, he was composing within a framework of a pagan *jahili* tradition which he refashioned in line with an Islamic ethos.[40]

In wine poetry, a similar line of continuity in values and norms from the pre-Islamic times to the post-Islamic era can be found. Apart from the sharply divided perception of the pre-Islamic Bedouins as the savages with no morality and self-control and Muslims as the noble harbinger of a moral code of conduct and abstinence, one could discover a similar moral principle in accordance with *hilm* in both cases. If the pre-Islamic norm was based on more or less secular abstinence and repentance, Islam has "added a new religious dimension to pre-existing norms of abstinence" with the religious concepts of *tawba* (repentance) and *ghufran*(forgiveness). One can find a sense of repentance and regret in indulging in wine and losing *hilm* in the following poetry from the pre-Islamic times:

> I have found that wine is stubborn and has qualities
> that scandalize a noble man,
>   By God I shall not drink it as long as I live,
> nor shall I invite a boon companion to it,
>   Nor shall I pay a price for it as long as I live,
> nor give it as medicine to a sick man,
>   For wine is a scandal to those that drink it
> and loads them with a heavy burden
>   When the strength of it is passed around,
> its "rising stars" (i.e.bubbles) will make a fool of the ma n of *hilm*[41]

Islamic wine poetry shows similar ideas and impressions of repentance, but based more on God, His mercy and forgiveness:

---

[40] Suzanne Pinckney, "The Abbasid Poet Interprets History: Three Qasidahs by Abu Tammam", *Journal of Arabic Literature,* 10(1979), 49-61

[41] Philip Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp200-202

> I turn to God in repentance for He forgives the sins of Man
> Providing he does not return [to sin].
> I will not return to wine as long as I live,
> Nor will I follow the [temptations] of ignorant stubborn men
> How, when I have given from pledges to my Lord,
> Can I return to wine? –while God, the Lord of the Throne, beholds me.
> I will leave it aside, an accursed thing, and not taste it-
> Even should jealous men be humbled. [42]

Philip Kennedy argues that the medieval Arab writers implicitly treated the notion of pre-Islamic secular abstinence (*shayb* or *hilm*) almost the same as the notion of religious *tawba*. Both of them were used interchangeably as a positive trait to curb the devastating effect of wine. Thus, the sentiment expressed by a poet of the medieval Islamic era would not be unfamiliar to a poet of the pre-Islamic period. A poem written by Mansur al Namari seems to have embraced the pre-Islamic ethos along with the Islamic one without making distinctions between the two.

> Pleasure, youthful folly, pretty women and wine? Never again!
> My jahl has been held back and hilm has returned,
> And grey locks have [put paid] to my impetuousity….
> Harun, the man protected [by God], has been
> Blessed as an Imam with obedience to God. [43]

This illustrates that secular abstinence was acknowledged as obedience to God and deserting *jahl* and espousing *hilm* was praised in Islamic terms, thus blurring the line between pre-and post-Islamic virtues.

1.4. Three Typical Intellectuals

Having briefly surveyed the general atmosphere and attitude towards *jahiliyya* during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, I will now turn to three distinguished intellectuals of different periods to study how these individuals perceived

---

[42] Ibid, p204

[43] Ibid, pp205-207

jahiliya.

1.4.1 Al Jahiz

Al Jahiz(d.868) was an opponent of the *shuʻubiyya* in the name of an Arab-Islamic tradition. At the same time he was a proponent of a humanist *adab* against narrow religious knowledge.[44] Jahiz was born around 776 in Basra to a humble family of *mawali* of African descent. He was exposed to *Hadith*, lexicography and ancient poetry through public lectures given in mosques and was acquainted with a group of Basran intellectuals who held lively discussions on various subjects. He did not reject or disregard the accumulated knowledge of pre-Islamic Arabs on the basis of social irrelevancy or disdain for a Bedouin or pagan lifestyle. Rather he tried to defend this pre-Islamic Arab culture and lore against the *Shuʻubiyya* criticisms.[45] In the two passages of *Kitab al Bayan*, he notes:

> 1.When you take a *shuʻubi* by the hand and cause him to enter the land of the pure Bedouin Arabs, the source of perfect eloquence, and acquaint him with an accomplished poet or an eloquent orator, he will know that what you say is the truth, an evidence clearly visible to the percipient eye. Understand what I say in this, and know that you have never seen a people more wretched than these *Shuʻubis*, nor more hostile to its religion, nor more vehement in ravaging its honour, nor greater bores.[46]

> 2.There is nothing on earth more elegant and edifying, pleasanter to the ear, more easily understood by sensible men or better for loosening the tongue and improving the enunciation than the leisurely talk of intelligent, cultured, eloquent Bedouins with a good command of their language.[47]

In a similar manner he presents evidence against *Shuʻubi* claims that Arabs lacked

---

[44] Ashtiany, p35

[45] Arnim Heinemann, John L. Meloy, Tarif Khalidi, Manfred Kropp, *Al-Jahiz: A Muslim Humanist for our Time* (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2009), p235

[46] Ashtiany, p44

[47] Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jahiz* (Great Britain: 1967), p105

knowledge of warfare and weaponry. He asserts that the Arabs had a variety of spears and swords of different lengths and knew how to use the stirrup. In his writings, he refuted many other such *Shu'ubi* criticisms of Bedouin Arabs and their level of culture.[48]

Though he admits to the fact that pre-Islamic Arabic culture is not deeply rooted in history and lacked possession of writing as a means of transmission for their knowledge, he praised the Arabs for their knowledge of the nature of the Arabian Peninsula. In his *Book on Animals,* he notes:

> We rarely hear of a statement by a philosopher on natural history, or come across a reference to the subject in books by doctors or dialecticians, without finding an identical passage in Arab and Bedouine poetry, or in the everyday wisdom of those who speak our language and belong to our religious community [49]

Charles Pellat also claims that Jahiz did not feel any urgent need to privilege Greek knowledge in such sciences as zoology for almost everything found in the works of Greek philosophers was already known to the Bedouins.[50] Jahiz seems to consider pre-Islamic Bedouin culture as a legitimate and necessary predecessor to the later sedentary life and treated its wisdom and lore with due respect.

Accordingly, we encounter favorable attitudes toward the *jahiliyya* period with regards to certain characteristics such as poetry and the use of an eloquent Arabic language,[51] but there are other times and circumstances when the *jahiliyya* projects a negative image of a society which was the background to its opposite, Islam. Within the

---

[48] Ashtiany, pp39-40

[49] Pellat, p151

[50] Heinemann, p236

[51] Drory, p33-49

strictly religious Islamic tradition, the period of *jahiliyya* was often associated with polytheism, idolatry and immorality.

1.4.2 Ibn Taymiyya

Ibn Taymiyya(d.1328) is a Hanbali theologian and an activist during the Mamluk period who perhaps best represents this negative view toward the pre-Islamic period and in an extreme manner. He says that Islam considers all practices of the pre-Islamic period to be dreadful. Thus one should avoid following them. He gives an example of such practices in *Hadith* by quoting what the Prophet had said:

> 1.Whoever strikes his cheek, tears the front of his garments, and cries out as people did in pre-Islamic times, is not one of us.

> 2.Four characteristics dating from the pre-Islamic period persist among my people and which they do not give up: bragging of high rank, slandering other people's genealogies, seeking rain by the stars, and wailing.[52]

Ibn Taymiyya, by using the Prophet's sayings, also condemns glorifying pagan pride and taking pride in tribal solidarity and ancestry:

> 1.God has indeed removed from you pagan haughtiness and pagan glorying in ancestry. One is only a pious believer or a miserable sinner. You are all sons of Adam and Adam came from dust. Let people stop boasting about their peoples [sic], who are but fuel in hell; or they will certainly be of less account with God than the beetles which emit stench through their nose.

> 2.Whoso broke obedience, deserted the Muslim community, and died, he died the death of a pagan (*jahili*); he who fought under the banner of blindness, vehement in his *'asabiya*, agitating for and assisting it, until he was slain, such a man is slain as a pagan(*jahili*); he who attacked my community, killing its righteous as well as its corrupt, neither sparing its believers nor keeping a covenant, he is not of me, nor I of him.[53]

---

[52] Here crying out or wailing means bewailing the dead out of party-spirit in pre-Islamic times which the prophet disapproved; See Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimiya's Struggle against Popular Religion,* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1976), p140

[53] Memon, p142

Most pre-Islamic practices such as their holidays, invocations, idol worship, blood vengeance and seizure of property were deemed as antithetical to Islam and thus either abolished or forbidden. However, there were some pre-Islamic practices that were incorporated into Islam, such as the pilgrimage rites and paying 100 camels for killing a person as blood money. These practices were not considered *jahiliyya* though they belonged to pre-Islamic times.[54]

Ibn Taymiyya thus draws a line between Islam and *Jahiliyya* not necessarily based on time difference. He seems to consider *jahiliyya* as a state that contradicts Islam. Thus, he quotes the Prophet's saying to Abu Dharr in order to prove the point: "The *jahiliyya* is still in you." He also uses 'Umar's and 'A'isha's remarks respectively prove the same point.

1.In the *jahiliyya* I vowed to pray in seclusion for a whole night.

2. In the *jahiliyya,* marriage used to be of four kinds.[55]

Ibn Taymiyya designates the carrier of these above mentioned traits as *jahili* as well. He seems to understand *jahiliyya* as a state of ignorance or else to refer to ignorant people. It is interesting to note that he treats people who possess knowledge but who act against it as being equally ignorant or *jahili* as people without knowledge at all. His reasoning is that once true knowledge is well established inside a human being, any actions or words countering that knowledge cannot arise. If through inadvertence and weakness a person is led to act against true knowledge, then that very knowledge turns into ignorance by virtue of his *jahili* action.[56]

---

[54] Ibid, pp161-162

[55] Ibid, p144

[56] Ibid, p145

For Ibn Tamiyya, the coming of the Prophet Muhammad ended absolute paganism and absolute ignorance but it did not eradicate them completely. *Jahiliyya* as a state has persisted after the advent of Islam among many Muslims and in Muslim lands to varying degrees. Especially during the time when he lived, Ibn Taymiyya claimed to have witnessed a new *jahiliyya* resurfacing and threatening the Muslims in various ways. For him *jahiliyya* seems to be transhistorical. Thus, he proposed to go back to the origin of Islam and refashion the society according to its pure teachings by eradicating all the *jahiliyya* of the present era. For Ibn Taymiyya, it is the responsibility of Muslims to wipe out traces of *jahiliyya* on earth.[57]

1.4.3. Ibn Khaldun

If Jahiz may be said to represent a by and large favorable view towards the pre-Islamic period and Ibn Taymiyya to represent a decidedly negative attitude towards it, Ibn Khaldun(d.1406) might arguably be considered to assume a neutral position towards the period of *jahiliyya* and matters associated with it. He argues that certain policies, tactics, customs or ways of living are necessary adaptations to given conditions and he narrates the consequences of these policies, tactics and customs. On the whole, he doesn't condemn or praise *jahiliyya*. Rather, he seems to consider *jahili* customs, practices, norms and ways of life as an appropriate and necessary means for survival in a particular environment and these have both positive and negative aspects.[58]

In his *Muqqadima*, Ibn Khaldun makes the point that certain environments make human beings act in certain ways which later become their habits, customs and

---

[57] Memon, pp145-146, Khalidi, p187

[58] Although Ibn Khaldun does not specifically mention the word *jahiliyya* or pre-Islamic period when he gives descriptions of tribal nomadic life of the Bedouins, many of the customs and characteristics associated with them can by and large be considered as traits characteristic to the state of *jahiliyya*.

characters. Though Ibn Khaldun compares sedentary life with nomadic life by enumerating their fundamental differences, his comparison stems from the observation of both their circumstances and characteristics. He gives explanations for characteristics associated with *jahiliyya* such as violence, roughness and lawlessness and investigates the reasons for the appearance and development of these traits in their specific historical circumstances.

Sedentary people are accustomed to enjoy all kinds of worldly pleasure and luxury and their souls are more prone to contamination by evil qualities. Though Bedouins could also be worldly and pleasure seeking, they do not have enough diversions or luxuries to enjoy, and their environment is conducive towards a concern with basic and simple necessities. Therefore, Bedouins have less evil or blameworthy qualities. In a similar manner, he demonstrates other characteristics of Bedouins such as courage and fortitude that sedentary people lack, and explains these differences by referring to their life conditions. Bedouins live in remote places with no walls or gates to protect them; thus they are used to defending themselves and carrying weapons. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun contends that savage Bedouins who are not constricted or made docile under law come to possess more fortitude than sedentary people who are trained to be docile and obedient under law and education. Also, sedentary people are dependent on their rulers or governors to rule for them and armies to guard them, while they themselves amass and enjoy luxuries. Hence they are prone to lose their bravery and become lax.[59]

As far as tribal solidarity and blood ties are concerned, Ibn Khaldun, without passing any moral judgement, tries to explain their character as something innate to

---

[59] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* (New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc, 1958), pp254-261

human nature. He even views these traits as necessary, especially for people living in a wilderness where constant need for defense is present. He does not see tribal solidarity as something evil or un-Islamic that needs to be done away with. Rather, he sees it as an essential asset for human beings since nothing can be achieved without fighting and fighting cannot be done without group solidarity. It is natural for a human being to feel shame when some kind of injustice or humiliation is inflicted on somebody close to him. Blood and tribal ties often evoke these sorts of urges for mutual help and affection.[60]

Ibn Khaldun thinks that Bedouins' isolation in a harsh and savage life of wilderness is able to preserve their pure blood lines without being mixed with people from different regions. He quotes Muhammad to show the validity of perceiving a continuity among the lineages between the pre-and post-Islamic eras. "Men are [like] minerals. The best ones in pre-Islamic times are also the best ones in Islam, if they are understanding." [61] Tribal pedigrees become important especially for leaders whose claim to virtue and nobility need to be legitimized through their association with the nobility and superiority of their forefathers. The feeling of superiority of a group is indispensable especially for royal authority if it is to exert power and rule over others. The goal of a group feeling (*'asabiyya*) is to reach the level of royal authority and the tribe that best possesses this attribute is best positioned to obtain royal authority.[62] He states that the more nobility and prestige one possesses, the stronger the group feeling and tribal ties become. However, in an urban life where different groups intermingle, people start to lose both their tribal solidarity and their purity in lineage. Yet, they still

---

[60] Ibid, pp264-266

[61] Ibid, p173

[62] Ibid, pp285-286

have a certain degree of delusion in thinking themselves associated with noble ancestors even after their group feeling disappears.[63]

Ibn Khaldun claims that groups that are rooted in desert life and that have more vigor and a more violent nature tend to achieve greater strength and superiority than groups that settle into sedentary life and become accustomed to a life of luxury. Those groups with desert habits have a better chance of becoming more powerful and remaining superior. However, once these desert groups become a ruling dynasty, they tend to fall back onto a luxurious life and lose their group feeling and toughness. Without group feelings, they cannot defend themselves or press their claims. Eventually another group with more tribal and desert-like characteristics comes and takes over. When this new group settles in to a sedentary life of luxury and prosperity, yet another group comes on the scene. Hence the cycle of rise and extinction of a group repeats itself.[64]

Although Ibn Khaldun acknowledges the superiority that desert people come to possess and to rule over others by virtue of being tough and brave, he claims that these Bedouins are lawless and uncontrollable savages whose life involves plundering and causing damage to others. When these people rule, they can unleash an absolute power to plunder as much as they want. Moreover, since they do not place any importance on keeping laws, they are unlikely to protect people through law and order and to arbitrate among people to keep them from fighting. Their main concern is to enlarge and increase their territory and possession through looting. Thus, this situation can lead to anarchy and the destruction of civilization. Accordingly, Ibn Khaldun treats tribal solidarity or group feeling as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it nurtures bonding power and

---

[63] Ibid, pp265-276

[64] Ibid, pp286-289

group superiority and victory and on the other hand, it cultivates an aggressive and prideful spirit.[65] It is only through a common religion that their unwillingness to submit to another, their aggressiveness, pride and savagery can be restrained. Since their characters are not contaminated by seeking worldly pleasures and habits, it is easier for them to accept and follow religious guidance. However, it is evident in their history that when they embrace and follow the teachings of a religion, they do so strongly and in an enduring fashion, but this is only temporary and savage and aggressive characteristics of desert life resurface time after time.[66] In his *Tarikh,* he gives accounts of Caliph Uthman's murder in light of this.

> Meanwhile, the virtuous among them [Arab Tribes] believed in giving precedence to those Companions who had attained seniority in Islam and in recognizing their merits. They were still dazed and amazed by prophecy, the frequency of divine revelations and angels descending and ascending. When the mist lifted and government had become thoroughly repressive, the veins of the *jahiliyya* began to throb once more. They discovered that the Emigrants and Ansar from Quraysh and others had come to lord it over them. Their spirits were too proud to accept this state of affairs and this happened to coincide with the caliphate of Uthman. So they began to calumniate his governors in the various camp cities, to take them to task in their every glance or step and to be slow to obey their orders.[67]

Here, he treats the tragic affair of Uthman's murder as being the result of forgetting the importance of the new religion and falling back to their rebellious nature. Ibn Khaldun calls the reappearance of the characteristics of desert life such as prideful and haughty spirit and refusal to submit to the authority as the very reversion to *jahiliyya*.

---

[65] Khalidi, p228

[66] Ibn Khaldun, pp300-308

[67] Khalidi, p227

1.5 Summary and Conclusion

As illustrated in this short survey, *jahiliyya*, whether it be a reference to pre-Islamic people, to moral-spiritual characteristics and states, or to the pre-Islamic epoch can be associated with various shades and layers of meaning. It is difficult to pin all its manifestations down and say what is good, evil or neutral about it, let alone judging the whole *jahiliyya* as either praiseworthy or condemnable. However, one thing seems to be very clear. *Jahiliyya* per se is not a fixed or ready made timeless picture to be represented throughout history. Whatever it includes or entails as a concept, one can consider *jahiliyya* under different aspects and angles according to different periods, trends, contexts and individuals. The historical period itself has not changed, yet there has been a shift in the representation of the period which is illustrated through the narratives of different people. Though the form it takes and what it symbolizes have changed throughout history, its effects and consequences do not cease to resonate. In poetry, language, politics, customs, habits and characteristics, its influence seems to have always have held its own special place.

The depiction of the *jahiliyya* period has gone through yet another major shift in more modern times. Within modern Islamist discourse, *jahiliyya* has come to symbolize the archetype of evil, impurity, moral-spiritual corruption and political and social degeneration. In the next chapter, I will deal with the radical evil of *jahiliyya* as portrayed by radical Islamic thinkers.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF *JAHILIYYA* IN ISLAMIST DISCOURSE: MAWLANA SAYYID ABU'L A'LA MAWDUDI

The previous chapter shows how the concept of *jahiliyya* is understood in modern scholarship and how the perception of *jahiliyya* varied depending on different individuals and social contexts in the pre-modern period. In the following two chapters, I will examine the concept of *jahiliyya* in modern Islamic fundamentalist discourse. Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi (d.1979) was a Pakistani Islamic fundamentalist thinker who reinterpreted the concept of *jahiliyya* in modern times and who also contributed in formulating Islamist discourse centered around this concept. Before turning to explore different shades and layers of meaning that Mawdudi develops with regards to this concept, it is necessary to first look at his personal, social and intellectual background briefly in order to understand the context from which his thought emanated.

2.1. Mawdudi's Personal and Social Background

Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Mawdudi was born in 1903 in Deccan, India from a respected Muslim family that took pride in their lineage as one of the leading branches of the Chishti Sufi order. His father was a pious and distinguished Sufi spiritual master who was influential in the late Mughal empire. It seems that direct British rule and the fall of the Mughals changed their social and political status. However, Mawdudi's father insisted on keeping their ways of religion and tradition and lived a simple and ascetic life detached from the colonial culture. Mawdudi later admits that his father was a model of piety and humility for him to follow after, though he doesn't seem to agree

completely with his father's seclusion and otherwordliness. His father took a close interest in Mawdudi's religious education hoping that one day Mawdudi would become a great religious scholar. Mawdudi had enormous aptitude for learning and he studied Persian, Urdu, Arabic, *mantiq*, *fiqh* and *hadith* from an early age at home. However, he was forced to abandon his studies and earn money when he was fifteen due to his family's financial problems.[68]

Mawdudi started working as a writer in Delhi where he experienced an intellectual awakening through encountering Western thought and scientific ideas for the first time. At the same time, he became interested in politics and began to engage in political activities for   the independence movement of India. When his job as editor of the *Muslim* journal came to an end, he moved to Bhopal where he stayed briefly and was attracted to the school of Ahl-i Hadith, a Sunni puritanical reformist movement. After he returned to Delhi he continued his work as an editor in another paper, and pursued his religious studies to become an *'alim*. He was immersed in both traditional and modern knowledge and tried to bridge the gap between the two by incorporating modern ideas into the traditional Islamic learning. He was both an intellectual and a political activist. He was involved in the *Khilafat* movement where he applied his knowledge of Islam and the West for the purpose of practical political propaganda and social mobilization. Mawdudi had a vision of a united Muslim community under the institution of the Caliphate based on strict and pure Islamic principles. However, the *Khilafat* movement collapsed with the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate. The demise of the Caliphate due in part to the split between the Arab nationalists and Turkish nationalists and the Western collusion and interference in support of these two distinct

---

[68] Ali Rahnema, *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London:Zed Books, 1994), p99 and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp9-14

nationalists sowed deep suspicion and distrust toward nationalism and Westernization in him. Around the same time, Mawdudi became disillusioned by the Indian national independence movement which based its principles on Hindu identity and Hindu majority power. Moreover, the Hindu movement, in proselytizing the low-caste and nominal Muslims to Hinduism, further provoked his discontent. These factors marked a turning point in Mawdudi's transfer of interest from politics to religion in his search for answers, and shifted his focus from communalism towards Islamic revivalism. His intellectual concerns had also gone through a major transformation from the subject of anticolonialism to Islamic history and finally to revivalism.[69]

Before he adopted his position as a revivalist of Islam he had undergone questions and uncertainties regarding his belief. He had shown mystical tendencies of soul-searching and seeking for truth without strict ritual commitments. After the phase of questions and doubts, he went through an inner conversion and returned to his faith on more solid grounds. Later, he wrote about his life in retrospect:

> I can divide my forty-nine years into two parts. The first thirty was spent in reading, listening, thinking, observing, and experiencing, and also in finding a goal in life. My thoughts are the products of reasoning of all those years of intellectual activity. Then I set my goal to strive in the path of truth, to propagate its cause, and to bring my vision into reality.[70]

After his conversion, Mawdudi began to articulate his all-encompassing religio-political vision. One could argue that this vision was born in the context of the decline of Muslim power in India and subsequent frustration that the Muslims experienced in relation to Hindus. An encounter with Kher, a leader of the Congress party, completely shattered the last shred of hope that he might once have had in Muslim-Hindu coexistence under a

---

[69] Nasr, pp15-22

[70] Ibid, pp28-31

Hindu government.[71] He therefore established an Islamic organization called Daru'l-Islam jointly with 'Allamah Iqbal in order to train people for a religious revival movement. He was convinced that the failure of Muslims in the past, especially in the political realm, could be attributed to the lack of proper organizations. Daru'l-Islam became a medium to propagate and institutionalize Mawdudi's view of Islam and politics and also a center to promote and organize Muslim political activities. However, due to Mawdudi's stringent criticisms and political attacks against other Muslim groups such as the Muslim League, he was forced to resign. Mawdudi and his followers ended up moving to Lahore to re-establish Daru'l-Islam. He became even more political there and his strong attacks on the Muslim League and against the British caused problems with the provincial authorities. Through these experiences, he became strongly convinced that the success of the Islamic *da'wah* hinged upon obtaining political power and established organization. From then on, he envisaged creating a political organization and finally founded Jama'at-i Islami in 1941.[72]

After the partition of India in 1947, both Mawdudi and Jama'at-i Islami went through a major transformation to become even more political in nature: "As the Jama'at became more a political party than a religious movement, Mawdudi's style began to change from scholar to politician."[73] Mawdudi's goal now became the Islamization of Pakistan through training an Islamic vanguard to bring about Islamic revival at the national level. Following the concerted efforts with the ulamas whom Mawdudi had formally despised, Mawdudi pushed his religious agenda in the process of drafting the constitution of the country. He even banned people from paying allegiance

---

[71] Ibid, pp31-32

[72] Ibid, pp34-41

[73] Ibid, p43

to the country of Pakistan until it had become fully Islamic. Consequently, the government and the Jama'at-i Islami were not on good terms and relations worsened as Mawdudi attacked the legitimacy of the government over the war in Kashmir. This eventually led to the imprisonment of Mawdudi and other Jama'at-i Islami members. Mawdudi was released but put into prison again over organizing a protest and demanding the dismissal of Zafru'llah Khan, an Ahmedi and thus, in Mawdudi's view, a non-Muslim foreign minister of Pakistan.[74] However, the verdict was soon reversed and the national constitution was drafted in favor of Mawdudi and the Jama'at. This legal victory enabled Jama'at to become a political party that was soon to participate in national elections. However, the victory was short-lived. Under Ayub Khan, Jama'at was suppressed again and it experienced a complete electoral loss. The rise of Zulfiqar 'Ali Bhutto to power with its socialist and populist orientation also challenged the Jama'at regarding the propagation of the Islamic cause. Mawdudi then organized a popular movement against the government and eventually succeeded in bringing the government down. General Muhammad Ziaul-Haq, the next in power, was supportive of the Islamic cause in exchange for Jama'at's approval of the legitimacy of his military rule. Zia even offered Mawdudi a position of senior consultant on Islamization initiatives. Mawdudi, in his last years of life, once again saw the possibility of a true Islamic republic coming into being.[75]

These tumultuous socio-political conditions have arguably contributed to developing and crystallizing Mawdudi's fundamentalist discourse. In his discourse, he describes *jahiliyya* in contrast to Islam at all levels of life, within the framework of dystopia and utopia. Furthermore, he takes these historical epochs and their

---

[74] L. Carl Brown *Religion and State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p152

[75] Nasr, pp41-46

essentialized features and applies them metaphorically to a present condition to explain the socio-political predicaments of contemporary society. I will first examine the intellectual background against which Mawdudi has been influenced in reconstructing and narrating the period of *jahiliyya* and first Islamic period. I will survey three modern Pakistani intellectuals and their ideas. Then I will explore Mawdudi's narrative of the pre-Islamic period and post-Islamic period. Lastly, I will attempt to examine how his narrative shaped the transhistorical *jahiliyya*-Islamic binary which in turn is applied to his own society.

2.2. Intellectual Precursors to Mawududi's Concept

Mawdudi's historical perception of *jahiliyya* and first Islamic period was not developed from a vacuum. There were other intellectuals before him who discussed certain ideas pertaining to *jahiliyya*, the prophetic mission and the advent of Islam that could have influenced his reconstruction of these periods. I will examine two modern Indian thinkers before Mawdudi to illustrate the pre-existing intellectual currents.

2.2.1. Shah Waliullah

Shah Waliullah (d. 1762) was an Indian Muslim scholar and a reformer during the time when Muslim power was deteriorating in India. He devoted his life to uniting and reviving the Muslims in South Asia. Waliullah viewed pre-Islamic Arabia as not necessarily in complete darkness and corruption, but rather in need of reform. The Arabs before Islam were believed to have possessed remnants of the rightly-guided religious customs. Rather than portraying the image of *jahiliyya* as completely opposed to the true religion and an irreconcilable evil, Walliullah suggests that the Arabs before

Islam were not far away from the truth and were ready to accept the prophetic teachings. Even the polytheists who had deviated from the right path were considered to have had some knowledge left in them to be susceptible to the Prophet's teaching: "If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they answer God."[76] However, the good religion was mixed with the bad and it became misleading. Thus, Waliullah argues that the coming of the Prophet was indispensable to correct and rectify their deviances.

Waliullah does not consider the prophetic mission in absolute terms: He does not think that Muhammad came to abolish all the previous customs, practices and beliefs and transform their society from top to bottom. Rather, the prophet came with certain criteria to decide what is good and bad in their laws:

> [Muhammad] examined their law and he kept the things that are in accordance with laws of Ismail and rituals of God and he prohibited the things that belonged to polytheism and deviation.[77]

Muhammad kept customs such as prayer, fasting, giving alms and performing pilgrimage. He forbad practices of fortunetelling and interpretations of omens. Thus, Waliullah views the prophetic mission with the emphasis on delineating what is good and bad and commanding the right and forbidding the wrong from the previous customs and practices rather than completely eradicating all the practices of *jahiliyya* and introducing something completely novel and innovative.

2.2.2. Syed Ameer Ali

Syed Ameer Ali (d. 1928)was an Indian Muslim jurist, political leader, an Islamic scholar and also a founding member of the All India Muslim League.

---

[76] Shah Waliullah, *Hujjat Allah Al-Baligha* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1997), pp284-289; See Qur'an, 31:25

[77] Waliullah, p286

Intellectually, he wrote on Muslim history and modern Muslim thought and politically, he contributed in drafting Muslim personal law as part of Indian law. Syed Ameer Ali depicts a somewhat darker picture of *jahiliyya,* highlighting its depravity and chaos. He claims that Arabs were addicted to drinking and gambling and they practiced polygamy to an unlimited extent. He also points out the custom of female infanticide. As for the religious practices of the Arabs before Islam, Ameer Ali gives an account of different gods and goddesses that were worshipped and he mentions various animals, plants and inorganic objects that were adored. Human sacrifice was frequently involved in worship. Though there were Christians and Jews, he contends that their influence was not strong enough to curb the idolatry and polytheism or restrain the immoral behavior.[78]

If Muhammad was portrayed as a reformer of the formerly existing laws and practices by Shah Waliullah, Muhammad was depicted as a savior from deep moral and social degeneration by Ameer Ali. Ameer Ali narrates various trials that Muhammad and his followers went through to spread the message of Islam and uproot the polytheistic and immoral practices. Muhammad was steady and patient in accomplishing his mission. Ameer Ali highlights the humility and nobility that characterizes the life of Muhammad and the simple and egalitarian life of the first Muslim community in Medina. He narrates the transformation of society by the prophet and the victory of the prophetic mission in contrast with the former state of *jahiliyya* as in the following:

> [Muhammad] found them sunk in a degrading and sanguinary superstition; he
> inspired them with the belief in one sole God of truth and love. He saw them
> disunited, and engaged in perpetual war with each other; he united them by
> the ties of brotherhood and charity. From time immemorial the Peninsula had

---

[78] Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1988), pp54-56

been wrapt in absolute moral darkness…what had once been a moral desert, where all laws, human and divine, were contemned and infringed without remorse, was now transformed into a garden.[79]

It is evident from his book, *The Spirit of Islam* that Ameer Ali conceives the era of *jahiliyya* and Islam as a break rather than a continuity.

As witnessed in this brief survey of the intellectual precursors to Mawdudi, one can discern that the underlying ideas and sentiments as regards the period of *jahiliyya* and the period of the Prophet in Indian Muslim literature were not uniformly shaped. The emphasis and focus of each were different and it resulted in a different analysis and reconstruction of the same period. Now, I will turn to Mawdudi's discourse to see how he formulated his own historical imaginaries within the purview of the former intellectual undercurrent.

2.3. Description of the Pre-Islamic *Jahiliyya*

Mawdudi described humanity in *jahiliyya* as "steeped in ignorance and superstition." What are defined as myth and superstition today were held to be the truth in *jahiliyya*. Also, what are considered as barbarous and uncivilized today were practiced daily in *jahiliyya*. Mawdudi's narrative on *jahiliyya* portrayed its evil not only in one dimension but at all levels of life in order to emphasize its widespread and total depravity. Its evil ranges from the intellectual and cultural sphere, that is, lack of knowledge and superstition, to barbarous customs and primitive cultural practices, to the moral sphere of gambling, drinking polyandry and infanticide, to the economic sphere of exploitation and economic chaos to the political sphere of lawlessness, looting and murder, to the religious sphere of polytheism.

---

[79] Ameer Ali, pp102-103

As regards the intellectual and cultural sphere, Mawdudi claims that the Arabs who were isolated in the desert did not even possess the slightest light of knowledge that the Persian or Byzantine empire had had. Accoding to Mawdudi's narrative, the Arabs were the worst of nations in terms of education, advancement of knowledge and civilization:

> Although they did possess a highly developed language capable of expressing the finest shades of human thought in a remarkable manner, a study of the remnants of their literature reveals how limited was their knowledge, how low was their standard of culture and civilization, how saturated were their minds with superstitions, how barbarous and ferocious were their thoughts and customs, and how decadent were their moral standards. [80]

Without giving any credit to the wisdom and mores that might have developed in the desert life of Arabia, Mawdudi regards the pre-Islamic Arabs as ignorant of the most basic things in life such as proper eating, drinking and washing. He continues to describe the political situation of pre-Islamic Arabia in an extremely negative manner as well:

> It was a country without a government. Each tribe considered itself to be an independent sovereign unit. There was no law except the law of the strongest. Loot, arson and murder of innocent and weak people were the order of the day. Life, property and honour were constantly in jeopardy. Tribes were always at daggers drawn with one another. Any trivial incident was enough to spark off a ferocious war. Indeed, Bedouins from one tribe thought they had every right to kill people from other tribes. [81]

In thus narrating the moral and cultural aspects of *jahiliyya*, Mawdudi highlights their lack of criteria of right and wrong, pure and impure, lawful and unlawful. He maintains the view that the cultural and moral norm of *jahiliyya* is so evil and corrupt in itself that people were unable to distinguish virtue from vice. He seems to generalize the moral features of *jahiliyya* simply as barbaric based on matters such as gambling, drinking,

---

[80] Abul A'la Mawdudi *Towards Understanding Islam* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1980), pp42-43

[81] Ibid, p44

adultery, and female infanticide. He further underlines their immoral state by giving an example that women in *jahiliyya* had the ceremony of circumambulating the Ka'bah while stripped of their clothes. As regards the socio-economic conditions in the *jahiliyya,* Mawdudi highlights inequality, exploitation, class distinctions and class conflicts as the main features.[82] Lastly, Mawdudi depicts the religious condition of *jahiliyya* as characterized by idol worship and polytheism. He says that though the Arabs in *jahiliyya* had some knowledge of Abraham and Ishmael as their ancestors and of some adulterated Christian and Jewish legends, they by and large did not know any true religious teachings.[83]

Having presented these multifarious problems of *jahiliyya* at all levels of life as problems waiting to be solved, Mawdudi turns to narrate the story of the Prophet with regards to his mission as one of purification and redemption from this *jahiliyya*. For Mawdudi, the means to eradicate the evil of *jahiliyya* is deeply related to the prophetic mission and his establishment of an Islamic state in Medina.

2.4. The Prophetic Mission

"In such a dark age and in such a benighted country a man is born."[84] Mawdudi starts his description of Muhammad using a metaphor of light shining in complete darkness.[85] He represents the prophet standing for principles that are in stark contrast with everything that the *jahili* society entails. Even before starting his prophetic

---

[82] Mawdudi, *The Process of Islamic Revolution* (Lahore: Maktaba jama'at-e-Islami, 1955), p40

[83] Mawdudi, *Towards,* p44

[84] Ibid, p44

[85] This is a metaphor used often by other biographers of Muhammad; See for example Khalidi, *Images.*

mission, Muhammad was considered as a man of justice, honesty, modesty and nobility who never engaged in immoral behavior such as drinking and gambling in a society where dishonesty, injustice, immodesty and uncouthness were the order of the day and drinking and gambling were considered as virtues. Mawdudi narrates that Muhammad was always kind to orphans and widows, hospitable to travelers, intervening in conflicts and calling for reconciliation and peace. Moreover, in terms of his religious practice, Muhammad is believed never to have worshipped any idols but only worshipped the one true God.

Mawdudi then describes the transformation of the Prophet after he received the revelation. Muhammad, who was an unlettered Bedouin, suddenly became so knowledgeable and wise that everybody was amazed at his eloquence and wisdom. Also, he was transformed from being a peace-lover to a brave soldier who was to conquer Arabia in nine years. Muhammad, formally a quiet and reserved man, became a great politician who was able to unite everybody under the new religion. It was not only he who changed, but he was able to change others and the society as a whole:

> He changed their modes of thought, their customs and their morals. He turned the uncouth into the cultured, the barbarous into the civilized, the evil-doers and bad characters into pious God-fearing and righteous persons. Their unruly and obstinate natures were transformed into models of obedience and submission to law and order.[86]

Mawdudi interprets the prophet's actions with a great emphasis on expunging the evil and establishing the good through the proclamation that one should submit to God alone. The epitome of the prophetic mission is not so much one social, economic and political reform but rather a reform of the mind to render obedience to God only. Mawdudi believes that a change of the social system or political structure cannot bring

---

[86] Ibid, pp49-51

about the complete transformation of a society. For him, the root cause of all these evils

stems from men's refusal to submit to the one God. Thus, unless this evil is eradicated,

no system, structure and revolution can transform a society:

> ..all evils which arise in the social life of mankind owe their existence to this
> basic misconception that man regards himself as an independent and
> irresponsible being; in other words, he sets himself up as his own god or
> again because he falls into the error of taking someone else besides his
> Creator as his guide and law-giver, whether this may be a human being or
> some inanimate object of nature. So long as this evil persists at the root, no
> amount of Islamic theory can succeed in eradicating social diseases. Unless
> this basic misconception is corrected and man becomes conscious of his
> responsibility to his Creator, an evil suppressed at one point will reappear at
> another point in some other form. Hence if man is to be reformed and human
> society is to be purged of evils, the mind of man should first of all be
> disabused of the idea of independence and mankind should realize that the
> universe in which we live is not in reality a kingdom without a sovereign.[87]

At the heart of Mawdudi's approach to the prophetic mission and transformation of the

society was the propagation of a doctrine of the unity of God from which all other

practical social, political and economic organizations can be derived:

> This conception of the unity of God is not a mere religious creed. As I have
> explained just now, the whole system of social life which is based on the
> conception that man is an independent being or that sovereignty belongs to
> any other animate being is uprooted from its foundation and a new
> superstructure rises on a different basis with belief in the oneness and
> sovereignty of God.[88]

Mawdudi sees Muhammad as the prophet who transcended his environment

and condition. Mawdudi's portrayal of Muhammad as the transcending prophet is two-

fold: Muhammad is viewed as transcendent in that he was not affected by his

environment. He is viewed as transcendent also in that his prophetic mission and

achievements do not lie within a historical boundary of time and place. In a society

---

[87] Mawdudi, *Process*, pp42-43

[88] Ibid, pp47-48

characterized by the sweeping darkness, ignorance, and barbarity of *jahiliyya*, Muhammad was born but not as a product of his environment. He was believed to represent everything that was the opposite of the prevailing characteristics of his society and these characteristics were considered to have played no role in shaping his mind. Completely detached from the evilness of his era, he accomplished a mission to "teach the highest morals, purify humanity and to wipe out prejudice and superstition…laid the foundations of a moral, spiritual, cultural and political superstructure for the good of the whole world….practically, not theoretically, placed business transactions, civics, politics and international relations on moral grounds and produced such a balanced synthesis between worldly life and spiritual advancement.."[89] As Mawdudi conceives *jahiliyya* as an uncompromising evil in all spheres of life, he seems to view the prophetic mission to be all-encompassing panacea. Mawdudi's perception of the Prophet is not historical but transhistorical for his vision "breaks all temporal and physical barriers, passes beyond centuries and millenniums and encompasses within itself the whole of human history." He describes the prophet as the one "who marches with time, who is modern in every age and every era."[90]

Mawdudi says that in order to accomplish his mission in the world, the prophet had to go through difficulties, sacrifices and persecutions. His commercial business came to a halt and eventually broke down as a result of his devotion to propagate the new religion. Both Muhammad and his wife Khadija spent everything that they had earned for carrying out his mission so that when Muhammad went to Ta'if to preach, he didn't even have enough to buy a donkey to get there.[91] Not only did he go through a

---

[89] Mawdudi, *Towards,* pp54-55

[90] Ibid, pp55

[91] Mawdudi, *Process,* pp56-57

financial crisis, but the prophet faced immense opposition to his mission. The reaction that Muhammad got as a result of his preaching was that of great hostility:

> Everyone who had set up an idol for his worship felt the ground slipping from under his feet and all these people hastily patched up a unity among themselves, in spite of their deep-seated differences, to fight this new and formidable menace to their established way of living.[92]

Mawdudi seems to regard this as a natural and permanent human condition since in every era, all the evil forces stand against and reject their prophets whom God had sent. Mawdudi believes that people don't like to submit to God alone and worship him alone. Rather, they desire to have power in order to make people bow down before them; once they obtain this power, they do not like to let go of it. Mawdudi considers this to be the main reason why the prophet was opposed so vehemently. The Prophet claims that there is no God except Allah and everybody has to surrender to God alone and to no human being. The domination of man over other men and forcing people to follow a man's command instead of God's is regarded as the root cause of all evil.[93] There were times when the tribe of Quraysh even offered Muhammad the throne of Hijaz, the prettiest women of Arabia and great wealth if only he would stop his mission. However, neither threat and hostility nor persuasion and tempting offers succeeded in preventing him from carrying out his mission.[94] People in Mecca tortured Muhammad for thirteen years for preaching and urging people to submit to God alone, whereupon he sought refuge in Medina. Yet, Muhammad was persecuted for another eight years there, too. The followers of the prophet are said to have faced a similar ordeal:

> Only those persons came forward to join Muhammad whose minds were clear, who were capable of understanding and accepting the truth, and who had at

---

[92] Ibid, p50

[93] Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Islamic Law and Constitution* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd, 1960), pp6-13

[94] Mawdudi, *Process*, p57

least such love for it left in them that when they realized that his call was a call to truth, they girded up their loins to face death and destruction for its sake. The movement needed people of this very type. They came one by one and in twos and fours. Their numbers increased gradually as the struggle developed. Some of them had to lose their employment; some were driven out of their homes by their own kith and kin; some had to leave their friends, relatives and acquaintances; a large number of them were dragged on hot sand; while others were stoned and abused in the market-place. Someone had his eyes taken out and another his head broken. Attempts were made to buy off people by offering them women, wealth, office, authority and everything else that could be offered.[95]

However, Mawdudi narrates that Muhammad and his followers did not give in to these tribulations, but stood firm to urge people to worship the One God and abandon their idolatry. Upon seeing the sufferings that the prophet and his followers went through not for the sake of wealth, money or fame, but for the new religious truth, people began to be curious to know more about it. As they learned about the faith, they were drawn to Islam and eventually devoted their lives to its message.[96] In the end, after a long struggle, Muhammad successfully established an Islamic state in Medina with his followers and even his greatest enemies and the most barbarous ones such as Khalid ibn al-Walid , 'Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl and Abu Sufyan came to accept his message.

2.5. The Transformation of the Society from *Jahiliyya* to Islam

The whole of Arabia was transformed as if by a magic touch, in its mode of living, in its moral habits and spiritual values, in short, in all aspect of its life. It was not a mere political and social reform that had taken place. The whole basis of material and moral life had undergone a revolution.[97]

Mawdudi portrays the establishment of the Islamic state in Medina as the threshold where the darkness ends and the light begins and the point where everything goes

---

[95] Ibid, p51

[96] Ibid, p54-55

[97] Ibid, p63

40

through a process of transformation. The newly established Islamic state was depicted as antithetical to the previous *jahiliyya* in every way. Thousands of men were trained and taught the Islamic way of life and the whole society was transformed as a result. Just as Mawdudi sees the effect of darkness and barbarity prevailing in all areas of life in *jahiliyya*, so he sees the effect of the message of Islam seeping through all spheres in the Islamic state of Medina. Mawdudi believes that Islam is not a religion confined to the theoretical and abstract realm, but is a fully-fledged socio-political system that pervades every aspect of life from the cultural, economic and intellectual to the political and military, as this was shown in Medina: "…every sphere of life principles were laid down and applied to practical conditions of life…As people saw Islam in its practical form and witnessed its concrete results, they were convinced that this was humanity at its best and that the true salvation of mankind lay in this form of society only."[98] The contrast between the *jahiliyya* and Prophetic era is narrated in absolute terms. Mawdudi describes the pre-and post-Islamic state by giving examples of transformations that many people witnessed:

> Adulterers whose life had been one of insensate self-indulgence were now
> protectors of female chastity and erstwhile drunkards became leaders of the
> prohibition movement. Men who had lived as thieves and vagabonds came to
> have such a keen sense of honesty that they hesitated even to accept food
> from their friends, because it smacked of taking hold of another's property, so
> much so that God Himself had to assure them in the Qur'an that there was no
> harm in taking such food. Those who had been robbers and dacoits became so
> religious that when an ordinary soldier among them, at the time of the
> conquest of the Persian capital, came upon the royal Persian crown worth
> crores or rupees, he concealed it in his tattered blanket and in the dark hours
> of the night handed it over to his general so that his honesty may not become
> an object of public admiration and hypocrisy may not taint his sincerity.
> Those who had no respect for human life at all and with whom it was quite
> common to bury their daughters alive with their own hands came to have
> such regard for their sanctity of life that they could not see even a fowl being
> killed mercilessly. Those who had no idea whatever of truthfulness and

---

[98] Ibid, pp60-61

> justice became so truthful and just that on the occasion of the peace of Khyber, when their revenue-collector went to collect the government tax from the Jews and the latter offered him a large sum of money in order to persuade him to reduce the government demand, he refused to accept the bribe and distributed one-half of the produce between the government and the Jews by laying two separate stacks side by side and asking the Jews freely to choose one of them. At this strange behavior of the revenue-collector, the Jews were taken aback completely and voluntarily cried; 'This is the justice on which the earth and heavens stand.' [99]

His comparison between *jahiliyya* and Islam arguably has a strong undertone of a dystopia-utopia binary. In Mawdudi's narrative, *jahiliyya* has been coded as the sociopolitical and religious conditions of evil that oppose Islam. He dramatizes the life of the pre-Islamic period as absolute darkness and the first Islamic century as the Golden Age in history to emphasize the irreconcibility between them.

Consequently, *jahiliyya* comes to symbolize anything that contradicts Islam and a characteristic or a state that opposes Islamic norms and morality. Mawdudi doesn't seem to find any practice or mores that are in common between them. *Jahiliyya* has become a symbol of evil and darkness that needs to be fought to establish true Islam and transform the society to an Islamic one. What is interesting to note here is that the differences between them have gained not only a descriptive function but a judgemental and normalizing one. This normalizing binary has been established and reaffirmed as a result of creating the symbolic reconstruction based on the historical narratives. It eventually provided the transhistorical symbol for a universal moral judgment in Mawdudi's discourse.

2.6. *Jahiliyya* as a Transhistorical Condition

Once the symbolic reconstruction of the pre-Islamic era is undertaken, and the moral criteria are established and reaffirmed, the development and elaboration of the

---

[99] Ibid, pp63-65

42

social imaginaries of the pre-Islamic era eventually lead to the perception of *jahiliyya* as

a transhistorical condition. In Mawdudi's narratives, *jahiliyya* has evolved to indicate

not merely a bygone pre-Islamic era but a condition out-of –time. The concept of

jahiliyya as a state or condition rather than a historical epoch is not of course completely

unprecedented or unfounded in Islamic tradition. As surveyed in chapter 1, Ibn

Taymiyya used the term *jahiliyya* not to refer to a period before Islam, but to certain

conditions in his contemporary society. Thus, he branded the Mongol rulers as *jahili* for

not properly implementing the Islamic law.[100] Immanuel Sivan points out that the

modern rediscovery of Ibn Taymiyya's political doctrines were made at a time when

Western influence penetrated local Islamic cultures. Consequently, many Muslims felt

threatened by the foreign intrusion and felt a strong necessity to resist and preserve their

identity. Some may have found Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine to be inspiring and adequate to

understand and theorize about their situation: "The analogy of the Mongols and the

concept of the pre-Islamic *jahiliyya* would be reinterpreted to suit the new state of

affairs."[101] However, if Ibn Taymiyya used the term almost exclusively for the

Mongols, fundamentalists like Mawdudi went one step further in suggesting that most

Muslims who acknowledge man-made laws and follow them are in fact usurping the

authority of God and living in *jahiliyya.*[102] Carl Brown has summarized Mawdudi's

position as regards *jahiliyya* in the following manner:

> To the extent that government or public life falls short of Islamist idea, it
> lapses into *jahiliyya.* This "age of ignorance" is not just a historical era
> coming to an end with the arrival of God's message to mankind through His
> prophet Muhammad. *Jahiliyya* exists in any time or any place in which the

---

[100] Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp106-107

[101] Immanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p101

[102] Moghadam, p108

divinely ordained ideal community has not been realized. In Mawdudi's worldview many of the serious shortcomings that make for *jahiliyya* can be attributed to Western ideas and institutions.[103]

Mawdudi's criteria for dividing *jahiliyya* and Islam lie first and foremost in whether a society obeys the laws of Allah or that of a human. He seems to view almost all societies to be in some kind of *jahiliyya* for they are compromised of un-Islamic practices and beliefs. He believes that this *jahiliyya* needs to be fought and overcome until the rule of Islam prevails and takes power.[104] Mawdudi even considers the history of Islam as *jahiliyya* except for the early Islamic era. For Mawdudi, the real Islamic phase was only the period of the Prophet and the rightly guided caliphs. Since what he saw in the later Islamic period didn't reflect Islamic ideals and shows many imperfections, that period is as much *jahiliyya* as the pre-Islamic period. In order to revive the real history of Islam from the rightly guided Caliphate, Mawdudi insists that Muslims should stop the unfolding current of history, and struggle and do what is right for God's command rather than blindly accept what has been practiced continuously.[105]

In conclusion, having investigated Mawdudi's historical narratives of *jahiliyya* and Islam, and its transhistorical position, I will now turn to study how this historical narrative and its transhistorical understanding are both used to legitimize and shape his modern political ideology.

---

[103] Carl Brown *Religion and State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p153

[104] David Sagiv *Fundamentalism and Intellectuals in Egypt, 1973-1993* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p41

[105] Nasr, p60

2.7. *Jahiliyya*-Islamic Narrative Applied to Contemporary Society

If Mawdudi views infanticide, tribal solidarity, polytheism and lawlessness to be the features of *jahiliyya* before Islam, he appears to suggest that sufism, the popular celebrations and practices of Indian culture, time-honored customs, philosophy, literature and the arts all possess a *jahili* character in them today.[106] Since Mawdudi appears to see a clear line that dichotomizes *jahiliyya* and Islam of the past without any common denominator between them, he seems to draw a similar line of demarcation between what is Islamic and un-Islamic, or *jahiliyya* today: "There was either Islam, as it was understood and defined by Mawdudi, or there was un-Islam."[107] Just as Mawdudi described all the evils pervading in the pre-Islamic times, he narrates and describes the evils of his days in an equally condemning tone:

> The nations of the world are in mortal conflict with each other and every country is anxious to strike at the well-being and prosperity of another. The struggle has gone so deep as to draw into its vortex not only national groups but also individuals within these groups…We are able to see in plain colors the moral depravities which escaped men and women and for the detection of which more than usual insight was necessary…We see whole nations exhibiting, on a huge scale, the worst morals which the conscience of humanity has always condemned with one voice. Injustice and ruthlessness, cruelty and brutality, lying and fraud, treachery and hypocrisy, breach of trust, shamelessness, self-aggrandizement, exploitation and other crimes are no longer confined to individuals; they have assumed the dignity of national characteristics…On a closer examination of the matter, it would be found that ethically the body of humanity has become completely putrified. Formerly houses of prostitution and gambling-dens were regarded as the worst sores of moral depravity, but now wheresoever we turn the whole of human society appears to be nothing but one big cancer from end to end.[108]

He also emphasizes today's uncompromising evil in all spheres of life from politics, education, economics, laws and knowledge and compares it to a cancer:

---

[106] Ibid, 59

[107] Ibid, p63

[108] Sayyed Abul Ala Maudoodi, *The Ethical View-Point of Islam* (Ichhra and Lahore: Markazi Maktaba Jama'at-e-Islami, 1947),pp2-6

Parliaments and assemblies of nations, secretariats and chancelleries of governments, courts and chambers of law, press and broadcasting stations, universities and educational institutions, banks and commercial business combines all are cancers, calling for a thorough surgical operation. And the greatest tragedy is that knowledge, which is the most precious asset of mankind, is being utilized today, in all its branches, for the annihilation of humanity, and all the resources of power and life which Providence has vouchsafed to mankind, are being wasted in disorder and mischief.[109]

In line with his description of the pre-Islamic period, Mawdudi describes the current period as *jahiliyya* on the ground that the society is not following God's rule and law. As the root cause of all the features of *jahiliyya* of pre-Islam was attributed to the refusal to submit to God alone, so the root cause of the present *jahiliyya* is also attributed to man's submission to other men and not to God. Although the practical manifestations might differ, Mawdudi claims that *jahiliyya* of any time or place has the same root cause. Mawdudi contrasts *jahiliyya* not necessarily with *hilm* or *'ilm* but rather with *hakimiyya*[110], namely, God's sovereignty. For Mawdudi, the treatment and cure for *jahiliyya* comes first and foremost by exercising this *hakimiyya.* Any economic, political and social system devised by man can easily be relegated to *jahiliyya* according to Mawdudi's logic. Mawdudi seems to believe that Muslims are not Muslims by birth or by confessing the credo, but they become Muslims through an active participation in carrying out Islamic law and morality in all spheres of life and society.[111] Mawdudi arguably established a precedent to interpret and claim any practices, norms and society deemed to be un-Islamic to be belonging to *jahiliyya.* For Mawdudi, the only solution to

---

[109] Maudoodi, *The Ethical View-Point of Islam,* pp6-7

[110] *Hakimiyya* is not a Qur'anic term. It was a newly coined term that rhymes with *jahiliyya* and used as an antithesis of *jahiliyya.* Mawdudi is considered to be the first Muslim intellectual to use *jahiliyya* and *hakimiyya* as political doctrines; see Ahmad Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), p36

[111] Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p129

purify and redeem the society from the *jahiliyya* is Islamic revival and revolution

through which the new utopia of the Islamic State can arrive.

2.8. The Islamic Revolution to Expunge the Current *Jahiliyya*

It is inconceivable for Mawududi to establish the Islamic State without going

through an Islamic Revolution first:

> An Islamic State does not spring into being all of a sudden like a miracle. It is
> inevitable for its creation that in the beginning there should grow up a
> movement having for its basis the view of life, the ideal of existence, the
> standard of morality, and the character and spirit which is in keeping with the
> fundamentals of Islam.[112]

Mawdudi draws parallels between the struggles that Muhammad and his followers went

through and the struggles that current Muslims have to go through to establish the

Islamic State. He emphasizes that the forerunners of the movement should bear proof of

their morality and sincerity and they have to have a sacrificing spirit. They need to be

tested and go through trials and tribulations: "When a person comes forward with a high

ideal and undergoes sufferings, tortures, exile, poverty and other hardships for its sake,

the spirit of that ideal penetrates his heart and fills his mind, and his whole individuality

is transformed into the likeness of his ideal and purpose." [113] Only through these

struggles and unbending will for truth and justice, will they attract people to join their

movement just as Muhammad did.[114]

Mawdudi's concept of Islamic revolution is not something bloody or violent,

but it is a revolution in the mentality and morality of people who will ultimately want a

state-system that can change their society from *jahiliyya* to Islam. Mawdudi doesn't

---

[112] Mawdudi, *Process of Islamic Revolution*, p21

[113] Ibid, p53

[114] Ibid, p23

seem to advocate violent actions for revolution. His position as regards *jihad* is quite different from most other fundamentalists. He does not consider it as a war but as a struggle and he thinks that armed *jihad* should be the last resort.[115] Mawdudi argues that one cannot use force to achieve the Islamic State since Muhammad did not establish his community through force but through persuasion and peaceful reform. Mawdudi also wants a peaceful revolution cooperating with the current social order through a step by step process:

> Living as slaves of an alien power and deprived of the Islamic influences for a long time, the pattern of our moral, cultural, social, economic and political life has undergone a radical change, and is today far removed from the Islamic ideal. Under such circumstances it cannot be fruitful, even if it were possible, to change the legal structure of the country all at once, because then the general pattern of life and the legal structure will be poles apart, and the legal change will have to suffer the fate of a sapling planted in an uncongenial soil and facing hostile weather. It is therefore inevitable that the required reform should be gradual and the changes in the laws should be effected in such manner as to balance favorably the change in the moral, educational, social, cultural and political life of the nation.[116]

Mawdudi claims that Muhammad uprooted practices of *jahiliyya* among people gradually and substituted them with Islamic ones through introducing new education within a period of nine years. In the end, he was able to Islamize the society in all of its aspects. Likewise, Mawdudi argues that his own society needs a new education system to bring about change in people's minds first and prepare the ground for radical reforms toward Islamization of the society.[117] Mawdudi's vision of revolution comes from the model of the Prophet whom he considers to be the "greatest revolutionary." Jama'at's

---

[115] Nasr, p74

[116] Nasr, p71-72

[117] Abul A'la Madududi *The Islamic Law and its introduction in Pakistan* (Lahore: Islamic Publications LTD, 1960), pp43-44

vision of revolution is also more like evolution[118] than revolution aiming for "a gradual change, replicating the Prophetic state of Medina."[119] Mawdudi holds that the goal of the Islamic State can be realized through such a revolution:

> The struggle between Islam and un-Islam, argued Mawdudi, would culminate in an Islamic revolution and the creation of an Islamic state, which would in turn initiate large scale reforms in society, thereby leading to a utopian Islamic order. [120]

2.9. Recontructing the Primordial Islamic Utopia through Establishing an Islamic State

For Mawdudi, the existence of the Islamic state is indispensable since it is closely linked with the reason for revelation. Without an Islamic state as a political entity, Islam as a religion cannot function properly.[121] He quotes a Qur'anic verse to prove his point:

> We verily sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance, that mankind may observe right measure; and We revealed iron, wherein is mighty power and uses for mankind.[122]

Here, Mawdudi interprets steel as a symbol for political power and the prophetic mission as a means to create a condition where people can live according to God's guidance and law. The Islamic State is necessary for Mawdudi for the purpose of safeguarding their citizens both politically from foreign invasion and morally from any forms of evil. Mawdudi interprets Islam in both religious and political terms and he

---

[118] This evolutionary attitude may be related to Mawdudi's early training in Sufi ethics where the emphasis falls on the transformation of the individual soul and on imitation of the Prophet.

[119] Nasr, pp70-71

[120] Rahnema, pp105-106

[121] Nasr, p80-81

[122] Qur'an, Sura 57: 25

does not distinguish religion from politics.[123] The state envisioned by Mawdudi is "a combination of men working together as servants of God to carry out His will and purpose."[124] Men should cooperate to work for God and assume responsibility before God and not before their king, governor or electorate. The ruler's duty is to implement God's law and not to enforce his own laws and will on others, or demand the subject's submission, exercise nationalistic prejudices or appeal to the people to fight for nationalistic causes. Mawdudi believes that implementation of the divine law has to be everybody's demand and desire and not an imposed exigency from a ruler or a state. Thus, for Mawdudi, the Islamization of society comes before the Islamic state.[125]

Mawdudi's concept of an Islamic state is devoid of all traces of nationalism and racism. He argues that neither Christianity nor Communism is able to fully realize such a state based on a perfect system of ideas. Only Islam has the system capable of organizing a state that will be free from nationalism and racism based on its moral and spiritual principles. According to Mawdudi, the Islamic state is the only one that puts humanity before the interest of a particular community and nation. Mawdudi never endorsed populism or the promise to redistribute wealth equally. Mawdudi does not believe in a democratic state either, since there is a possibility that voters might lack an Islamic mentality and spirit to elect true Muslims to parliament in order to structure the society according to Divine sovereignty and implement the *shari'a.* For Mawdudi, neither democracy nor authoritarianism is an ideal type of governance. Rather he maintains that an Islamic society is superior to any other form of governance and as

---

[123] Mawdudi, *Political Theory of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications LTD, 1960), pp25-26

[124] Mawdudi, *Process*, p15

[125] Rahnema, pp106-107

viable as any other system or polity.[126] Mawdudi firmly believes that the Islamic state in the prophetic period can reappear if one follows the model of the prophet. After studying history, he seems to be convinced that it is a natural occurrence with a logical cause and effect. Mawdudi claims that if people are to follow the example of the Prophet and his companions, they can recreate Muhammad's state. Again, since he considers *jahiliyya* as a transhistorical term and a dystopia that can appear time and time again, he also views Muhammad's state in Medina in transhistorical terms as a utopia that can emerge in any time or place.[127]

2.10. Summary and Conclusion

Mawdudi's discourse on Islamic revolution and the Islamic state of here and now is drawn from his understanding and interpretation of *jahiliyya* and Islam about fourteen hundred years ago. In a similar manner, his religious ideology for propagating Islamic revolution and calling for an Islamic state is modeled after his perception and reconstruction of history of the prophet's revolution and his establishment of the Islamic state in Medina. Mawdudi's reconstruction of historical *jahiliyya* and first Islamic period serves as a foundational framework based on which he develops his transhistorical ideology. I will now turn to study another modern fundamentalist thinker, Sayyid Qutb, whose discourse has a common thread of *jahiliyya*-Islam binary but with a more developed theory designed to serve as a blueprint for the modern radical fundamentalist movement.

---

[126] Ibid, pp8-16, p35

[127] Ibid,   p69

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF *JAHILIYYA* IN ISLAMIST DISCOURSE: SAYYID QUTB

Sayyid Qutb(d.1966) is arguably one of the most important and influential fundamentalist ideologues in the modern Islamic world. He articulated and crystallized Islamic fundamentalist doctrines and ideas in a distinct manner. People have described him with different labels such as "the most noted advocate of the interpretation of Islam as revolution," "an eminent leader of the Brethren," "one of Islam's new crusaders and a great author and scholar," and "the most famous personality in the Muslim world in the second half of the twentieth century."[128] Sayyid Qutb took the same line of interpretation and application of the concept of *jahiliyya* from Mawdudi who was a contemporary of Qutb and developed it further. His concept of *jahiliyya* became indispensable in theorizing Islamic fundamentalist discourse that has an influence and a resonance even beyond his time and place. Before I discuss Qutb's discourse of *jahiliyya,* I will first examine his personal and social background.

3.1. Personal and Social Background

Sayyid Qutb was born in 1906 in the village of Musha, Egypt. Egypt at that time was under British tutelage and there were reactions against British rule that triggered the founding of different political, religious and social organizations with a strong anti-colonialist tendency and nationalist sentiment. Sayyid Qutb's father was an educated man who served as a delegate to Mustafa Kamil's National Party and he held

---

[128] Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), pp14-15

many political meetings at home. Qutb, from his early childhood was exposed to a political environment. His family was well-known and respected with strong religious values. Qutb was sent to a local modern school and later to a kuttab (Qur'anic school) and had both a traditional and a modern education. He was interested in modern sciences and at the same time, he memorized the Qur'an when he was ten. Like Mawdudi, Qutb had an intellectual bent and a passion for knowledge and learning. Through reading newspapers and books on independence movements and attending nationalists' meetings from an early age, he was keenly aware of issues relating to the political movement of the time, and during the 1919 revolution, Qutb participated in student rallies and demonstrations.[129]

Qutb left his village and moved to Cairo in order to acquire a better education and lived with his uncle who was also involved in nationalist movement like his father. He was enrolled at the Dar al-'Ulum where he learned both secular and religious subjects. Qutb earned his B.A. in education and after graduating from Dar al-'ulum, he worked for the Ministry of Education. During this period, Qutb showed a passionate interest in secular literature.[130] He wrote secular poems, autobiographies, novels and literary criticisms. In his stories, there were themes such as love, pain, nudity, marriage, intimate relationships, modernism and liberalism. At the same time, Qutb was politically active and was involved in the Nationalist party. He wrote articles highly critical of the government that was backed by the British. From then on, Qutb was not on good terms with the government. His anti-government writings led to his dismissal

---

[129] Sayed Khatab *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb* (London and New York:Routledge, 2006), pp44-48 / Mousalli, p21

[130] It was the time when the power of the Islamic Caliphate was withering and Islamic values and ideas were also challenged by European secular ones. The ascendancy of the Wafd government over the monarchy and implementation of European model of constitution over autocracy reinforced the tendency toward secularism as opposed to Islamic tradition in general; see P.J. Vatikiotis *The History of Modern Egypt:from Muhammad Ali to Mubarak* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), pp216-316

and exile. At one point in his career, Qutb was sent to America by the Ministry of Education to study the modern system of education there.[131]

Residence in America arguably became a turning point in Sayyid Qutb's life as regards the orientation of his thinking. One can discern a shift of his concerns from secular and nationalist matters to more religious subjects. In his book, *America that I saw*, Qutb describes his shock upon encountering the materialist, racist and sexually promiscuous culture of America. He was appalled by Western imperialism, colonialism and Zionism. Disillusionment with America and the Western world in general led him to fundamentally question the moral values of the West and he rediscovered Islam as a superior moral and spiritual basis for organizing and structuring society. Qutb became firmly convinced that Islamic revival was the key to solve the problems that Egyptian society faces and upon his return to Egypt, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood.[132] Qutb voluntarily resigned from the position of an Advisor to the Ministry of Education and dedicated his time and effort to partaking in the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood at that time worked closely with the Free Officers for the preparation of the revolution and Qutb served as an adviser to the Revolutionary Council. He played an important role in the concerted efforts between the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood to overthrow the government by coup d'etat under an anti-Western and pan-Arabist slogan in1952. However, Qutb later discovered that the Free

---

[131] Khatab,*The Political*, pp48-57/ Mousalli, pp22-24

[132] As European constitutional democracy itself was being challenged with the violent ideologies of Nazism and Fascism in Europe, so Egyptian liberal constitutional experiments on the European model were challenged as well. Moreover, the newly drafted Egyptian constitution was attacked and was replaced by the Wafd government with the one that favors stronger and more repressive autocracy. This, along with the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty that ensured continued stationing of British troops in Egypt alienated many supporters of the government who had held their hopes up high. Disappointed with the government, many people began to turn away from it and what it has promised for, namely, the new and modern form of governance after the European model. Alienated and frustrated masses were mobilized by some of the extremist organizations such as Muslim Brotherhood that blamed European influence and rejected all foreign influence. In 1930s and 1940s, the Muslim Brotherhood become very popular and gained widespread support all over the country with its emphasis on authentic cultural ideals; see Vatikiotis, pp317-374

Officers were not interested in establishing the Islamic State and eventually he broke away from them. After successfully revolting against the monarchy and coming to power in 1952, the Free Officers under Naguib and then Nasser started to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood that had once been their allies and eventually dissolved them in 1954, charging them with anti-government activities. The assassination attempt against Nasser by one of the Muslim Brotherhood members led many of its members including Sayyid Qutb to be arrested and imprisoned. Sayyid Qutb was tried and sentenced to a 25-year prison term.[133]

Qutb's prison experience is often considered as responsible for further radicalizing his ideology. In prison, Qutb witnessed a massacre of his fellow Muslim Brotherhood members and he himself went through so much torture that he ended up spending most of his time isolated in an infirmary.[134] While he was in prison, Qutb wrote most of his books including the 30 volume commentary of the Qur'an, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. He also wrote one of his most widely-read and most radical books, *Milestones*. Qutb was soon released at the request of the Iraqi president, 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif only to be put into prison again on charges of a terrorist attempt. This time, Qutb was sentenced to death and he was executed with two other leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1966.[135] Qutb's ordeals and sufferings that he went through in life as well as the political and social crises that he witnessed in Egyptian society arguably provided him with a fertile ground to develop his radical interpretation of Islam and extreme political ideology.

---

[133] Albert J. Bergersen eds. *The Sayyid Qutb Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008),pp4-5

[134] Ibid, p4-6

[135] Moussalli, pp34-38

Having surveyed Qutb's personal as well as socio-political background, I will now turn to examine the intellectual backdrop that was set by modern Egyptian thinkers before Sayyid Qutb . There are a number of important modern intellectuals who pioneered and developed a strong reformist trend in Egypt. I will choose two such thinkers to demonstrate their ideas and interpretations concerning *jahiliyya* and the advent of Islam.

3.2. Intellectual Precursors to Qutb's Discourse on *Jahiliyya*

Muhammad 'Abduh and Muhammad Husayn Haykal can be considered two important modern Egyptian Muslim thinkers before Qutb . They might be regarded as representatives of the dominant streams of thought for reconstructing the history of *jahiliyya* and Islam and the perceptions regarding these in modern Egypt.

3.2.1 Muhammad 'Abduh

Muhammad 'Abduh (d.1905) was an Egyptain Muslim jurist and an Islamic scholar. He is often regarded as a founder of Islamic modernism. Muhammad 'Abduh's narrative of the pre-Islamic period has a strong condemning tone not only towards the Arabs but towards the Persian and Byzantine empires as well. 'Abduh identifies the Persian and Byzantine empires as arrogant, bloody and evil dictators that victimized other nations such as the Arabs. Thanks to these empires' greedy and clever schemes for stealing and snatching possessions from the poor, the Arabs were subject to the deprivations of both material and spiritual well-being. These rulers fed the people with superstitions and vain follies to deepen their subjects' ignorance and they injected the mentality of servitude in the subject's mind lest these people would rise up and revolt against them. 'Abduh narrates the benighted conditions of the Arabs, as a result of such

treatment by the two empires, a treatment charaterized by its violence, immorality, unrest and idolatry:

> This was how these peoples were in their cultural and material life-oppressed slaves sunk in blind ignorance. There were a few exceptions among those with whom survived something of the wisdom of the past and of the earlier laws still lingering in their minds. For such the present was utterly detestable, but the past they only dimly glimpsed." [136]

'Abduh claims that it was through God's mercy that a messenger was sent " to dispel these dark distresses hanging over all people". It was neither Muhammad's wealth, nor supporters, nor status that enabled him to accomplish his mission successfully. Rather,'Abduh emphasized that it was the divine revelation that was "lighting the way before him [Muhammad] and like a captain and a warrior leading him in its heavenly authenticity." [137] Other Egpytian intellectuals such as Jad al-Mawla and Muhammad Farid Wajdi followed suit in drawing a clear line between *jahiliyya* and Islam and dividing them as the age of darkness and the age of light respectively.[138]

3.2.2 Muhammad Husayn Haykal

Muhammad Husayn Haykal (d. 1956) was an Egyptian Muslim writer, journalist, politician and a Minister of Education. He was influenced greatly by Muhammad 'Abduh. However, if Muhammad 'Abduh held the view similar to Syed Ameer Ali with regards to *jahiliyya*, Muhammad Husayn Haykal had an approach to *jahiliyya* analogous to Shah Waliullah. Rather than focusing on the historical rupture between *jahiliyya* and Islam, Haykal sheds light on the continuities between them by highlighting the virtues and purity of pre-Islamic Arabia that were in accordance with

---

[136] Muhammad 'Abduh, *The Theology of Unity* (New York: Books For Libraries, 1980),pp109-110

[137] 'Abduh, p114

[138] Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), pp274-275

the virtues of the post-Islamic era. Although Haykal recognizes that the tribal and lawless character of *jahili* life was due to their desert condition, he, at the same time, appreciates the virtues of *jahiliyya* such as honor, nobility, integrity, hospitality, bravery, mutual assistance and magnanimity. He claims that the conditions of desert living allowed these virtues to be cultivated and to become the moral rules of the day. Haykal also extols the life of pre-Islamic Arabia as one conducive to nurturing religious consciousness since the people in the desert are always in touch with the universe without being distracted by wealth and occupation.[139]

As for the paganism and polytheism of the *jahiliyya*, Haykal seems to hold Christianity and Judaism accountable for not having been able to influence and guide the Arabs to the right way since the people of these religions had a decadent mind and they were preoccupied with sectarian disputes. Furthermore, he argues that compared to the paganistic tendencies within Christianity of the past and present, the pre-Islamic Arabs were not too depraved and certainly excusable:

> We would be less quick to condemn them for their continued idolatry and following the footsteps of their ancestors when we remember that they were the witnesses of a desperate struggle of Christian neighbors against one another who had not yet liberated themselves completely from paganism. [140]

Thus, rather than pronouncing a wholesale condemnation on the life of *jahiliyya*, Haykal balances the picture with their virtues, and rather than rendering the practice of idolatry as an unacceptable and absolute evil, he counterbalances it by juxtaposing it with its Christian counterparts.

The historical reconstruction of *jahiliyya* as a background to Islam varies among different modern intellectuals. As Khalidi has argued, some have categorized

---

[139] Muhammad Husein Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad* (London, Cairo and Beirut: Shorouk International, 1983), pp15-17

[140] Ibid, pp18-19

jahiliyya as absolute evil in contrast to Islam with a clear dividing line between them. They seem to have intended to emphasize a great need for a savior who can extinguish the darkness and bring light. Some intellectuals portrayed pre-Islamic society as an absolute dystopia and tended to disregard their virtues. Others, on the other hand, viewed *jahiliyya* as a period that is continuous with Islam. They accepted historical persistence and found things that were in common between the pre-and post-Islamic eras rather than embracing the view that Islam changed everything that had preceded it. [141]Against this background of different intellectual streams, I will now turn to Qutb's reconstruction of *jahiliyya* in his historical narrative in connection with his theorization of *jahiliyya* in his political discourse.

3.3. Description of the pre-Islamic *Jahiliyya*

Sayyid Qutb's description of the age before Islam is very similar to that of Mawdudi. He portrays a bleak picture of the pre-Islamic Arabia as follows:

> When Islam came, the world was full of accumulated debris: beliefs, concepts, philosophies, myths, thoughts, doubts, superstitions, customs and traditions. Truth was mixed with falsehood, right with wrong, religion with superstition, and philosophy with mythology. The human mind, buried beneath this debris, was flailing around in darkness and doubt, unable to find certitude. Human life was drifting into corruption and dissolution, into tyranny and humiliation, hardship and misery, a life unfit even for animals! …Everything evil was being injected into humanity and all the structures on which it depended.[142]

Qutb narrates the conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia in the political, economic and moral spheres. Politically, the Arabs were under the tutelage of Persian or Roman empires. In Syria, they were ruled by the Romans and in Yemen they were dominated

---

[141] Khalidi, *Images,* pp274-275

[142] Sayyid Qutb, *Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview* (North Haledon: Islamic Publications International, 2006), p19

by the Persians. The only lands that were free from the control of these empires were the deserts of Hijaz, Tihama and Najd. Economically, Qutb draws attention to the prevailing injustice, inequality and spirit of materialism. A small group of people monopolized all the wealth while most people were hungry and poor. Not only was there inequality of wealth, but also, as a result of this economic inequality, there was an inequality of honor and dignity: "It was the age of being corroded by a criminally luxurious and wasteful life on the one hand, and hopelessness and frustration and despair on the other." [143] The pre-Islamic moral condition was considered to be at its nadir and there was no law or guidance except for primitive tribal customs. As many other Muslim intellectuals point out, drinking and gambling were mentioned by Qutb to illustrate the vices of *jahiliyya*. Fornication was also said to be widespread and oppression was the order of the day. Qutb describes four different kinds of marriage in *jahiliyya* to underscore its sexual immorality by quoting 'A'isha:

> There were four kinds of marriages during *Jahiliyya*. One was as we have it today; that is, a man would ask a person for the hand of his daughter or his ward in marriage, would pay the marriage-gift, and would marry her. The second type was that a man would tell his wife, in between her menstrual periods, to call such and such man and become pregnant by him. He would stay away from her and would not touch her until the signs of pregnancy appeared. If he then wished, he would have intercourse with her. He adopted this method to obtain a son of high lineage. A third form of marriage was polyandry. A group of men, less than ten would come to a woman and have sexual intercourse with her. If she became pregnant and then gave birth to a child, and a few nights passed after childbirth, she would call them. No one could refuse this call. When they would all gather, she would tell them, 'You know the result. I have given birth to a child.' Then she would point to one of them and would say, 'This is his child.' The child would then be named after that person and would be considered his, and he could not deny this. A fourth form of marriage was that many men would go to a woman, and she was willing to accept any. Actually, these were prostitutes and would place a flag in front of their doors as a sign. Anyone who wished would go to them. If such a woman became pregnant, after the delivery many people would gather by her and would call an expert in recognizing resemblances. To whomever

---

[143] Sayyid Qutb, *Milestoness* (Cedar Rapids: The Mother Mosque Foundation), pp26-27

he would ascribe the child's paternity, the child would be considered his and he could not refuse it."[144]

Although Qutb narrates the evil of pre-Islamic Arabia in different realms of life, his focus is more on the idolatry and polytheistic practices of pre-Islamic Arabia and he further claims that ignorance of God was the biggest evil of the day.

3.4 The Prophetic Mission

Qutb's narrative regarding the prophetic mission gives an account of what the real intention and purpose was behind that mission. He claims that what Muhammad started was neither a nationalist movement, nor a social movement, nor a movement for a moral reform. Notwithstanding all the positive aspects of these movements, Qutb claims that Muhammad's intention and purpose of his prophetic mission was fundamentally different from these. Qutb argues that Muhammad could have united the Arabs under the banner of Arab nationalism and freed the Arabs from the clutches of the Persian and Roman imperialism and stopped the tribal warfare among the Arabs. Qutb also contends that Muhammad could have started a social movement through which he could redistribute the wealth by declaring war against the wealthy and taking away their possessions and giving them to the poor. He also claims that Muhammad could have started a movement for moral reform and established a moral standard to salvage society from moral degeneration. Muhammad could have earned supporters and strengthened his position through these movements first and then could preach his religious message. However, Qutb argues that this was not the Prophet's way. Qutb says that no movement of social, political, and moral reform could amount to a religious

---

[144] Qutb, *Milestoness*, pp28-29

movement and none of these movements can be firmly established without   faith and

true religion from which all the values and criteria of right and wrong can be drawn.

Thus, Qutb considers the core and essence of the prophetic mission to be the

proclamation of 'la ilaha illa Allah'. All the other social, political and moral

purifications follow as a result but do not precede the declaration of faith in the one

God.[145]

Qutb's idea of the prophetic mission appears to be revolutionary in nature. It

transformed society from a polytheistic and tribal one to a monotheistic and unified one

through a revolution. His narrative regarding the prophetic mission emphasized the

waging *jihad*. Unlike Mawdudi who underplays the role of *jihad* in favor of more

peaceful aspects of the prophetic mission such as persuasion and endurance, Qutb seems

to regard *jihad* as an indispensable force to eradicate *jahiliyya*. At first, Muslims were

held back from fighting. Qutb explains this away by giving different reasons in relation

to the circumstances that the Muslims were in at the time. Qutb argues that the Prophet

was free to preach his message in Mecca under the protection of his clan and there was

no organized authority to forbid him from spreading the message. Therefore, the use of

force was unnecessary. Also at this stage, the Prophet focused more on preparing and

training people to control themselves, to have patience and to refrain from exacting

grudges for personal harms. This phase was, thus, devoted to cultivating high morals

and noble characters for individual Muslims. Qutb also claims that since there were

discords, bloodshed and tribal warfare already existent in Arabia, Islam needed to be

detached from these rather than adding another cause for fighting. Also, since the

Muslims were small in number, they did not want to wage *jihad* that could possibly be

---

[145] Qutb, *Milestoness*, pp25-30

seen as another tribal feud by Arabs in different regions. During the early Medinan period, the fighting was forbidden as well. However, this time, it was because the prophet made a peaceful pact with Jews and the Muslims had real power. Following this early period, Muhammad started to send groups to different regions and these were met with some opposition and persecution. When they encountered armed resistance, they started to wage *jihad* and the first major battle, the Battle of Badr, took place. Qutb's line of argument regarding *jihad* has its roots in Ibn Qayyim's interpretation:

> Muslims were first restrained from fighting; then they were permitted to fight; then they were commanded to fight against the aggressors; and finally they were commanded to fight against all the polytheists.[146]

Qutb believes that the purpose of *jihad* waged by the Prophet and his followers was not solely for the defense of Medina. It was considered indispensable for carrying out the very movement that the message of Islam embodies: "The aim [of *jihad*] was not to protect the resources and the center of the movement- the movement for freeing mankind and demolishing the obstacles which prevented mankind from attaining this freedom." [147] Qutb sees verses from the Qur'an, the Tradition and the entire Islamic history as being filled with *jihad.*

Although both Qutb and Mawdudi narrate the hardships, struggles and trials that the prophet and his followers went through to propagate Islam, their focus was different. While Mawdudi underlines the difficulties resulting from opposition and persecution by people who were hostile to the new religion, Qutb, though he acknowledges this point, focuses more on the hardships regarding the sacrifices Muslims made and costs they had to pay to respond to the call for *jihad*:

---

[146] Ibid, p64

[147] Ibid, p65

This call to arms occurred at the height of the summer, when resources were scarce, the weather was extremely hot, and when fruits had ripened. At such a time people would prefer to stay at home and do very little work; travelling in the desert was almost unbearable. [148]

Qutb quotes Qatadah to affirm this point:

They set out to Tabouk when it was burning hot, and they encountered great difficulty. It is reported that two men would share a single date. Indeed a few men would all share one date, with one of them sucking it a little and drinking some water, then he would give it to another to do the same, and so on.[149]

Qutb also quotes Al-Tabari to demonstrate difficulties encountered during their expedition:

'Umar was asked about difficulty. He answered: " We marched with the Prophet to Tabuk. We encamped at a place where we were so thirsty that we felt our throats were cracking with thirst. Any one of us might go out looking for water, and by the time he came back he would have felt his throat cut. Any of us might slaughter his camel and take out its inside, extracting all the fluid to drink. He would place the rest over his belly." [150]

Despite the hardships, Qutb argues that the first Muslim community was strong and solid enough to respond to the call for expeditions and to overcome the difficulties in their path.

Having established the necessity for *jihad*, all the strivings, struggles, and the trials that the first generation Muslims endured to oppose the forces of *jahiliyya* came to be highlighted. The war against the evil force of *jahiliyya* gained a symbolic significance and it was esteemed as a sanctified act to destroy the forces of the darkness and evil. The first war waged against the *jahili* forces, the Battle of Badr, was not only viewed as indispensable for economic or political establishment of Islam but also for

---

[148] Bergesen, p127

[149] Ibid, p131

[150] Ibid, p131

military confrontation itself.[151] The victory won by the Muslims was narrated in such a way as to underscore the fact that good will eventually defeat evil and Islam will vanquish *jahiliyya*. Again, the conquest of the great empires of Chosroes and Caesar by Muslims is narrated to affirm the triumphant status of Islam against the *jahili* forces.[152] Consequently, the faith-based social and military actions become a legitimate and necessary factor to create a good society in Qutb's discourse. The violence used for the expulsion of what is conceived to be evil becomes in a real sense justified.

3.5. The Transformation of the society from *jahiliyya* to Islam

> When, after hard work, belief became firm and the authority to which this belief refers was acknowledged, when people recognized their Sustainer and worshipped Him alone, when they became independent not only of other human beings but also of their own desires, and when "La ilaha illa Allah" became imprinted on their hearts- then God, through this faith and through the Believers, provided everything which was needed.[153]

Qutb claims that after all the hard work and trials for propagating Islam, redemption came in the form of a complete transformation and purification of the society from *jahiliyya.* In a similar manner to Mawdudi, Qutb narrates the transformation from *jahiliyya* to Islam in the following terms:

> Morals were elevated, hearts and souls were purified, and with the exception of a very few cases, there was no occasion even to enforce the limits and punishments which God has prescribed; for now conscience was the law-enforcer, and the pleasure of God, the hope of Divine reward, and the fear of God's anger took the place of police and punishment. Mankind was uplifted in its social order, in its morals, in all of its life, to a zenith of perfection which had never been attained before and which cannot be attained afterwards except through Islam.[154]

---

[151]   Khatab, *The Political*, p37

[152]   Ibid, p129

[153]   Qutb, *Milestoness*, p30

[154]   Qutb, *Milestoness*, p30

Notwithstanding various outward manifestations as a result of these transformations, Qutb highlights the fact that the doctrine of 'la ilaha illa Allah' was imprinted in the hearts and minds of people

Qutb's narrative of transformation has a strong undertone of freedom from oppression and the establishment of justice. He emphasized that the earth was freed politically from the Persians and Romans and the people were freed mentally from the pride of their lineage, and socially from their loyalty to tribes and households. As God saw them to be pure and free from all those things, after uprooting *jahiliyya* and establishing Islam, God finally gives them the authority to rule and assume responsibility as representatives of God on earth. These people did not take advantage of authority for their own sake but only for God's religion and laws. Thus, social justice was achieved and realized through establishing divine law and order on earth. Qutb seems to regard this establishment of a system, law and a state that Islam founded and embodied as the epitome of the transformation.[155]

So far, I have studied how Qutb views the society of pre-Islamic Arabia and the prophetic mission as the symptom of evil and its cure. Also, I illustrated the effect of curing the evil of *jahiliyya* through the transformation of the society in Qutb's discourse. Having studied the historical narrative of the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic society in terms of the radical change that the prophetic mission has brought about, I will now turn to examine the formation and theorization of a *jahiliyya* discourse that is to become a transhistorical and universal reality.

---

[155] Ibid, pp30-31

3.6. *Jahiliyya* as a Transcending and Universal Reality

The view of *jahiliyya* as a condition and not as an epoch was not something novel and innovative any more. As we saw above, not only Ibn Taymiyya from medieval times and Mawdudi from modern times had used the term as a condition to refer to their contemporary society, but there were some other modern intellectuals in Egypt who employed this term in a similar sense. Muhammad 'Abduh notes:

> For all of these we would say that *jahiliyyah* today is harsher than the *jahiliyyah* and those who went astray during the time of the Prophet.[156]

Qutb's mentor ,Al-'Aqqad describes Egyptian society in a poem as characterized by dominant poverty and depravity by using the term *jahiliyya* as well:

> *Jahiliyya* was widespread, atrocity overflowing,
> The goodness and Truth were whispering,
> But the voice of deviation was very loud.[157]

However, if these above mentioned intellectuals' application of their conception of *jahiliyya* was more or less limited to the ill of their own societies as a legitimate rhetoric used to criticize and condemn their societies, Qutb enlarged the scope of application of his theory of *jahiliyya* to cover other societies such as the American, British and French and to characterize different historical epochs from medieval to modern.

Qutb's theory of *jahiliyya* is universal and transcending in two aspects. Firstly, its signification transcends the historical bounds of time and place and secondly, its meaning and application transcends the boundary of mere theory and doctrine. Qutb argues that human history is a cycle composed of Islam and *jahiliyya* : God has sent prophets in each era to call people toward "Islam" (understood as the pristine religion of

---

[156] Khatab, *The political*, p107

[157] Ibid, p61

mankind) and after each prophet, people have understood this religion but soon they deviate from the true path and fall back to *jahiliyya*. Thus, *jahiliyya* ,as understood by Qutb, is a recurring condition and attitude that appear cyclically:

> The *jahiliyya* is not confined to any particular interval between two periods of time. It is a typical attitude of mind and comes to the forefront when those standards and norms of behavior sanctioned by Allah give way to those inspired merely by sophisticated and debased appetites.[158]

Thus pre-Islamic Arabia is one such *jahiliyya* among many and not a one-time-only phenomenon that is historically unprecedented and unique. Neither does Qutb bestow such a unique and unrepeatable status to Muhammad as regards his prophetic mission, even though there is no doubt that Qutb tries to follow the footsteps of the prophet as a great example. As Qutb considers pre-Islamic Arabia to be one of many *jahiliyyas*, so he seems to consider Muhammad as one of many prophets who have been sent by God to eradicate *jahiliyya*.

Sayyid Qutb embraces a more active and practical interpretation of *jahiliyya* and attempts to transform it from an abstract theory to an actual living movement:

> This *jahiliyya* is not an abstract theory; in fact, under certain circumstances it has no theory at all. It always takes the form of a living movement in a society which has its own leadership, its own concepts and values, and its own traditions, habits and feelings.[159]

Since this understanding *jahiliyya* in Qutb's conception is not understood as a theory but rather as a living and active force in people's lives, the way to abolish this *jahiliyya* should accordingly take the form of a living and active movement rather than a theoretical solution. Thus, Qutb moves away from a conceptual level to engage and address the immediate and practical conditions of Egyptian society and explains and interprets its evil based on his framework of *jahiliyya.* Having examined Qutb's concept

---

[158] Khatab, *The political*, p150

[159] Qutb, *Milestoness*, pp45-46

of *jahiliyya* as a transhistorical condition and transtheoretical reality, I will now turn to

investigate how this *jahiliyya* is applied as a symbol of evil in Qutb's binary discourse

of *jahiliyya* and Islam.

3.7 Application of the *Jahiliyya*-Islamic Binary

For Qutb, *jahiliyya* can be anything that he considers to be antithetical to Islam,

whether it be a society, an idea, or a culture

3.7.1 Jahiliyya as society -formation of Qutb's occidental discourse

Qutb defines *jahili* society as follows:

> The *jahili* society is any society other than the Muslim society; and if we
> want a more specific definition, we may say that any society is a *jahili* society
> which does not dedicate itself to submission to God alone, in its beliefs and
> ideas, in its observances of worship, and in its legal regulations. According to
> this definition, all the societies existing in the world today are *jahili*.[160]

Accordingly, Qutb establishes *jahiliyya* as a characteristic of all kinds of societies from

ancient to modern, from Eastern to Western, that do not submit to God alone and

acknowledge His sovereignty in all matters. Qutb was not only concerned with his own

society's ills, but also other societies' predicaments, and shows interest in pinpointing

them. For Qutb, the symptoms of *jahiliyya* resurface in similar forms in different

societies and in different periods. He does not hesitate to condemn such a society to be

in *jahiliyya.* However, he especially focuses on condemning Western societies from the

medieval to modern period as the ones filled with *jahiliyya.:*

> Westerners-the inheritors of the Roman *jahiliyya*-accustomed to express their
> use of the power of Nature by their saying: 'qahir al-tabi'ah' [conqueror of
> Nature]. This expression has its clear evidence on the view of the *jahiliyya*,

---

[160] Qutb, *Milestoness*, p80

69

which has no connection at all with Allah and the spirit of the universe, which submitted itself to Allah.[161]

Sayyid Qutb narrates the evil of the West epitomized in colonialism as follows:

> Colonialism is a savage and barbarous movement that knows only its desires and does not glorify anything of what humanity is glorifying. The British exploited our country, made it poor to the stage that the farmer cannot live as a human being. They spoiled the country in the shares of the Suez Canal, in the price of cotton, and in exports during and after the War. [162]

The evil of the enemy, identified as the West, is narrated in a vivid and graphic manner to emphasize its cruelty. As Neil Smelser claims, harshness provides the participants of collective movements with evidence of the vicious character of the enemy and thus justifies extreme and militant tactics.[163] Qutb describes the French invasions of and attacks against different Arab countries highlighting their bloody and barbarous nature:

> I have reviewed the history of France in the East, but I have found no more than pages of barbarism and savageness. I have found no more than lakes of blood wherever France put its foot…. In the days of Napoleon the artillery on the mountain-hill bombard the houses and civilians in Egypt. Barbarously the French forces with their horses entered al-Azhar. The blood ran on the streets and the dignity of religion was trodden on with their feet…..In 1925, they bombard Damascus and the blood ran on the street…. Before and after 1931, the blood ran on the streets of the Arabic Casablanca in Morocco because the French were forcing people to enter Christianity and leave their Islam. Since then the Moroccan leaders are still in exile. [164]

The identification of evil with the West has a historical root that goes back to the time of the Crusades in Qutb's Occidental narrative. This narrative was developed and crystallized to provide him with a ground to articulate the *jahiliyya* binary and to link these unrelated past events with current ongoing developments. Qutb elaborated

---

[161] Sayed Khatab, *The Power of Sovereignty* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p102

[162] Khatab, *The Political*, p114

[163] Neil Smelser, *The Social Edges of Psychoanalysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles:University of California Press, 1998), p58

[164] Khatab, *The Political*, 114

jahiliyya in the following Occidental narrative:

> The evil stirred up by the crusaders was not confined to the clash of arms but was first and foremost a cultural evil. The European mind was poisoned by the slurs which the crusaders' leaders cast on Islam as they spoke of it to their *jahili* masses in the West…..The seeds of hatred were sown. The bigotry of the *jahiliyyah* of the crusaders had its sequels in many parts of Europe and encouraged the Christians of Spain to go to war to deliver their country from the yoke of idolators! But the downfall of Muslim Spain was to require many centuries before it was completed; when this protracted struggle and the constraint which it involved lasted so long, hostility to Islam started to take root in Europe, and ultimately became permanent. Finally it took the form of a complete extirpation of Islam throughout Spain, after a conflict which reached a pitch of ferocity and bitterness hitherto unknown. The cries of joy which all over Europe greeted this event were unfortunately uttered in *jahl* of the consequences which would arise; for the result was that science and learning were blotted out, and in their place came the *jahl* and barbarity of the Middle Ages.[165]

Qutb, by calling the Crusaders and European missionaries ignorant religious fanatics under whose influence European attitude toward Islam are still forming, draws a parallel between these Christians of the West and the Pre-Islamic Arabs.[166] He also links the mentality of the Crusaders with the mentality of the twentieth century imperialists to further develop his Occidentalist discourse:

> France declared open war on Islam in the western Arab world…..England acts more deviously and stealthily influences the teaching institution in Egypt to create a general mentality that scorns the Islamic elements in life….and when it has created a generation of teachers with this mentality it sends them into the schools and offices of the Ministry of Education to influence the mentalities of the following generations and to produce the programs and the plans that lead to the formation of this mentality, with great caution to keep the elements that represent Islamic culture from the centers of control in the Ministry.[167]

---

[165] William Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp283-284

[166] Khatab*, the Political*, p134

[167] Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb*, p287

At the heart of these narratives lie the dichotomization of virtues and vices of the

Western and Islamic social systems:

> From this summit of Islamic legislation, in peace and war, we could observe
> the despicable conditions in which the Western civilization is living. We
> would perceive the difference between a system prescribed by Allah to the
> people and a system prescribed by people to the people. We would also
> perceive what the world has lost by disregarding the system of Allah and
> pretending that what man desires for himself is better than what Allah desired
> for him. Humanity shall continue to suffer increasing injuries at the hands of
> the atheists beguiled and misguided by corrupted civilization unless Islam
> receives the leadership to lead the perplexed humanity to justice, order and
> peace.[168]

Sayyid Qutb has given an account of various modern societies and he accused

each and every one as being devoid of the noble characteristics of humanity. He

describes the British empire, along with other European empires as 'based on national

greed' and claims that they have exploited and oppressed other countries through

colonization. He also condemns communist countries as the ones that desire to destroy

class differences but 'its underlying emotion is a hatred and envy of other classes'.[169]

He discredits all kinds of societies by narrating their evils and advances the argument

that only Islamic society can truly bring about the good of the mankind. Thus, Qutb

considers any society that is not based on the Islamic conception to be *jahiliyya*.

3.7.2 Jahiliyya as philosophies, ideologies and cultures

Not only does Qutb confine *jahiliyya* to a society, but he also sees *jahiliyya* in

ideas, cultures and ideologies as well. Thus, the binary of *jahiliyya* and Islam is applied

to any social, political, cultural or intellectual realm as well:

---

[168] Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Salam al-'Alami Wa Al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar Al Shuruq, 1979), p199

[169] Qutb, *Milestones*, p50

In all societies, the *jahiliyya* takes varying forms emerged from the belief and conception. It takes the form of belief [creed]; of government; of behavior; of ethics; and of knowledge. It takes the form of legislative decisions; of values; of standards that governs society and that evaluates people, things and events. *Jahiliyya* takes the form of knowledge in all its aspects and of all basic principles of intellectual, philosophical and artistic activities…the *jahiliyya* differs in its types and forms, its flags and symbols, its names and descriptions, its allies and adherents, its systems and ideologies.[170]

Qutb regards any knowledge or thought that is not Islamic[171] to be *jahiliyya* and rejects Western philosophical ideas such as Rationalism, Positivism and Sensualism on the ground that they are human-centered and not God-ordained. Although he does not see pure science and technology to be necessarily in conflict with Islam, Qub condemns the philosophy behind it and its evil usage.[172] Qutb's view of various political ideologies is similar. He rejects nationalism and calls it *jahiliyya* based on its regional character that contravenes the Islamic principle of universality. He argues that secular nationalism sows the seeds of hatred and bitterness toward others based on a national and racial distinction. Rather than setting up a geographical boundary based on a nation or a race, he divides the earth into two parties, that of Allah and that of Satan. He argues that for Muslims, there is no nationality or homeland. The only nationality that Muslims belong to is *ummah,* a community bounded by belief, and the only homeland that a Muslim lives in is a state where *shari'a* is applied. He views Arab Nationalism as *jahiliyya* for two reasons:

1. Arab nationalism is based on principles that regard Islam as secondary to ethnic identity.

2. Arab nationalism may oppose in some cases, universality of Islam, that is universality of *uluhiyyah* (divinity), universality of *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty

---

[170] Khatab, *The Power*, pp54-55

[171] The use of the term "Islam" as in "Islam teaches this, that or other" is a modern usage characteristic of both modernizers and fundamentalists but is largely absent in pre-modern discourse.

[172] Ibid, p113-114

of Allah) and universality of *‘ubudiyyah* (complete submission) of all humanity to Allah alone.[173]

Qutb goes as far as to associate Arab nationalism with the practice of idolatry and considers the nation-state as something similar to the pre-Islamic tribal entity:

> The pagans have a variety of idols that are sometimes called homeland (*watan*) and race(*jins*) or nation (*qawm*). These forms of idols appear from time to time-once under the name of popularity, once under the name of Hittite nationalism, and once more under the name Arab nationalism and sometimes under various names and flags.[174]

As for culture, Qutb also divides it into that of *jahili* and Islamic:

> Beyond the pure sciences and its practical application, Islam considers that there are only two kinds of culture, Islamic culture and *jahili* culture. Islamic culture is based on Islamic conception, and *jahili* culture is based on various but reducible to one basic principle, that of setting up human thought as the divine and not making God the ultimate truth.[175]

Qutb seems to apply his binary of Islam and *jahiliyya* to almost all matters. Unlike Mawdudi, who seems to divide the past *jahiliyya* and current *jahiliyya* in terms of their different nature and forms, Qutb categorizes them all in one group without necessarily historicizing or categorizing them:

> The *jahiliyya* is the *jahiliyya*, and each *jahiliyya* has its types and forms of abominations, atrocities, enormities and taboos. The form of *jahiliyya* of a particular time or place is not important. If there is no *shari‘ah* governing the daily affairs of the people, there will be nothing but *jahiliyya* in any of its varying forms and shapes. The nature of the *jahiliyya* of the world today is not different from the nature of the *jahiliyya* of Arabia or the *jahiliyya* of the world before Islam.

Qutb sees *jahiliyya* everywhere and in all things. His conception of *jahiliyya* is not confined to any one ideology, culture, thought or society. Everything that he sees to

---

[173] Khatab, *The Power*, pp120-123

[174] Ibid, p128

[175] Ibid, p114

be in conflict with the fundamental principles of Islam is regarded as *jahiliyya* by Qutb. For him, it is all a prevalent and ubiquitous reality that every society and nation encounter throughout history across the world. Notwithstanding the different manifestations of *jahiliyya*, Qutb sees the root of *jahiliyya* to be one; deviation from the worship of God and his laws. The only cure for such a universal *jahiliyya*, according to Qutb, is the Islamic revolution.

3.8 The Islamic Revolution to Expunge the Current *Jahiliyya*

Like Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb contends that the goal of Islamic revolution is to eradicate the practice of man's servitude to other men and establish the Islamic state where people submit solely to God and obey His law alone. Qutb agrees with Mawdudi in that revolution is the only key to attain a true Islamic state with social justice and application of *shari'a*. However, Qutb takes the binary between Islam and *jahiliyya*, evil and good, or truth and falsehood to a greater extreme. Mawdudi acknowledges the difference between a partial *jahiliyya* which is not ruled by God's law but still has religious aspects in it, and a pure and absolute *jahiliyya* where there is complete ignorance of God. However, for Qutb, the distinction does not seem to exist and the whole world is in pure *jahiliyya*.[176] Again, Qutb denies the possibility for the coexistence of *jahiliyya* and Islam. Since Islam cannot coexist with *jahiliyya*, the struggle to overcome *jahiliyya* is not a temporary phase but rather an eternal state of affairs until the last traces of *jahiliyya* are wiped out from the earth. The Islamic Revolution for Qutb is not a mere injunction to defend the borders in special conditions

---

[176] Moussalli, p20

but an eternal struggle to free all mankind until the religion is completely purified.[177]

In order to rescue the society from prevailing *jahiliyya*, Qutb suggests two solutions. He first divides *jahiliyya* into two categories. One is *jahili* ideas and beliefs on an epistemological level and another is *jahili* systems and authority on a practical level. As for the ideas and beliefs, Qutb believes that they can be corrected through persuasion and preaching. However, with actual institutions and authorities, he proposes to deal with them through physical force and *jihad.* In order to free people from the enslavement to other men, Qutb argues that these two methods should go hand in hand. Qutb claims that one cannot solve practical problems with abstract theories only. In as much as *jahiliyya* is a practical living reality embedded in all kinds of social and political organizations and leadership, it needs to be defeated and eradicated through practical means. Against those who only insist on defensive *jihad*, Qutb refutes them by stating:

> They say, "Islam has prescribed only defensive war!" and think that they have done some good for their religion by depriving it of its method, which is to abolish all injustice from the earth, to bring people to the worship of God alone, and to bring them out of servitude to others into the servants of the Lord. Islam does not force people to accept its belief, but it wants to provide a free environment in which they will have the choice of beliefs. What it wants is to abolish those oppressive political systems under which people are prevented from expressing their freedom to choose whatever beliefs they want, and after that it gives them complete freedom to decide whether they will accept Islam or not. [178]

Qutb warns people not to confuse the doctrine that there is no compulsion in religion with the defeatist mentality that interprets *jihad* in a defensive way only. He argues that the message of Islam cannot have been spread only through preaching and

---

[177] Qutb, *Milestoness*, p65

[178] Ibid, pp55-56

exposition. Everytime Islam faced oppositions and obstacles from political, social and economic systems it resorted to force to remove them. Qutb is convinced that those people who usurped the power and authority of God and made men subservient to them would not easily surrender their power through preaching only. Hence, he thinks that Islamic *jihad* is a proper movement to wipe out tyranny and free all of mankind.

To carry out the movement against *jahiliyya*, Qutb suggests the idea of vanguards who would set themselves apart from *jahiliyya* to devote their lives for the cause of a new Islamic State. These vanguards would work under a leadership separate and independent from the *jahili* leadership:

> The center of this new group should be a new leadership, the leadership which first came in the person of the Prophet himself and after him was delegated to those who strove for bringing people back to God's sovereignty, His authority and His laws. A person who bears witness that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger should cut his relationship of loyalty from the *jahili* leadership, whether it be in the guise of priest, magicians or astrologers, or in the form of political, social or economic leadership, as was the case of the Quraish in the time of the Prophet. He will have to give his complete loyalty to the new Islamic movement and to the Muslim leadership.[179]

If Mawdudi focused on more literal and abstract interpretation of the reasons for the appearance of *jahiliyya*, as man's submission to other men and not God alone, Sayyid Qutb pinpoints to the failure to take responsibility and leadership by Muslims as the main cause behind the rise of *jahiliyya*:

> Since Islam is pre-eminently a faith that inspires leadership, its real mettle is tested and proven only when it assumes responsibility. It can lead the caravan of life. It cannot be a camp follower…Then came a period in which Islam lost its leadership due mainly to the failure of the Muslims to sustain and discharge efficiently the great responsibility of the trusteeship of mankind…[180]

---

[179] Qutb, *Milestoness,* pp47-48

[180] Khatab, *The Political,* p149

Thus, for Qutb, regaining the leadership by the true vanguards is indispensable in implementing God's law and in guiding society to God's way. If Islamic revolution as a way to expunge *jahiliyya* is considered to be the present material form of carrying out the prophetic mission in the past, establishing the Islamic state is equivalent to the present realization of the purpose of the prophetic mission for bringing about the true utopia of the prophet's Islamic community in the past.

3.9 Reconstructing the Primordial Islamic Utopia through Establishing an Islamic State

Sayyid Qutb's ultimate goal is to create an Islamic state based on social justice and shari'a. His political concept for building an Islamic state is based on his theological concept of *tawhid*. *Tawhid* literally means oneness of God or proclaiming the oneness of God as in the declaration "no god but God." Qutb takes this theological concept, adds a political dimension to it and refashions it into a doctrinal basis for his political vision of an Islamic utopia:

> *Tawhid*, according to Qutb, consists of three principles: first, freedom from subordination to anyone but God, or God's *hakimiyya*; secondly, revolution against the authority of tyrannical lords; and thirdly, considering as a crime of unbelief the negation of personality and giving up freedom. It is a crime because, God having created him free, man subordinates himself to a tyrannical president or chief or to al-*jahiliyyah*.[181]

As Qutb does with the concept of *jahiliyya*, so he emphasizes the practical nature and reality of the concept of *tawhid*: "*Tawhid* is not a negatively philosophical and theoretical declaration but is a positively realistic and active declaration." [182] Thus, for Qutb, the ultimate embodiment of the concept of *tawhid* not only at a theological

---

[181] Moussalli, p200

[182] Ibid, p204

78

level but at a practical level would be realized through the establishment of the Islamic state.

Qutb's vision of the Islamic state has a strong undertone of freedom. He notes:

> After annihilating the tyrannical force, whether it be in a political or a racial form, or in the form of class distinctions within the same race, Islam establishes a new social, economic and political system, in which the concept of the freedom of man is applied in practice….Islam is a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men.[183]

Though both Mawdudi's and Qutb's theoretical idea of the Islamic state are centered on sovereignty of God and man's submission to God alone, their practical vision of the Islamic state has a somewhat different focus. While Mawdudi's vision of the Islamic state is the one devoid of traces of nationalism and racism, Qutb's vision of the Islamic state is one free from all kinds of political oppression. One might argue that they each project a picture that is the complete opposite of what they perceive to be the absolute evil of their society onto their image of the Islamic State. In a way, the concept of the Islamic state serves as a symbol for an idealized utopia that they each dream of.

3.10 Summary and Conclusion

Qutb's historical reconstruction of *jahiliyya* owes its ideas to both medieval and modern intellectual precursors. He built his universal and transcendent *jahiliyya* discourse based on the concept of *jahiliyya* as a transhistorical condition proposed and used by many other intellectuals before him. However, he took this concept and developed it further to establish Islam and *jahiliyya* binary in a more extreme manner. He also extended the application of such binary to all different societies, concepts, philosophies and ideologies and attempted to explain the ills of every society through

---

[183] Qutb, *Milestones,* p160

79

the metaphor of *jahiliyya*. Qutb, like Mawdudi, suggests an Islamic revolution as a solution to expunge *jahiliyya* and to purify society and establish the Islamic state. However, unlike Mawdudi, who sees the revolution in more evolutionary term, Qutb advocates *jihad* and radical revolution to bring about the Islamic utopia.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

As Pierre Bourdieu has suggested, every facet of life is regulated by densely structured symbolic codes. Human action is almost by definition a symbolic action that is grounded on meaning.[184] Meaning is relational and relative and good always articulates itself in the language of evil and sacred in the language of profane.[185] Levi-Strauss insists that social actions should be studied in terms of symbolic classification that is patterned in such a binary system of good and evil.[186] The dichotomization of reality into the binary of sacred and profane is especially crucial in understanding religious phenomena for it is intrinsic in religious structure.[187] For religious people, sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world and two existential situations assumed in the course of their history.[188].

This symbolic binary is important not only conceptually and metaphysically, but also socially and realistically. It is because this metaphysical symbolic binary structure creates certain social norms of right/wrong and sacred/profane that are to be embodied in real social actions on both the individual and the social levels. Durkhemian sociology of religion introduces us to the function of the symbols; its autonomous organization is divided into the sacred and profane that responds to innate human needs

---

[184] Robert Bellah *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p261

[185] Jeffrey Alexander *The Civil Sphere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p50

[186] Jeffrey Alexander *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p161

[187] Peter L. Berger *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber& Faber, 1969), p27

[188] Mircea Eliade *Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religon* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987), p14

for meaning and order and that also constitutes authority and control of the social structure.[189] Thus, what seems to be an abstract notion of the symbolic binary creates both a meaning structure and a social structure. Thus, a formulation of the sacred and profane binary and its functions is extremely important in providing meanings of social actions and normalizing and controlling them. Islamic fundamentalism is also based on such a symbolic structure that constitutes the sacred and profane in the minds of people. According to Eisenstadt, fundamentalism, more so than others, emphasizes this construction of sharply divided symbolic boundaries. It emphasizes the sacred and profane, us and them, and the purity of the internal community as contrasted with the impurity of the outside world.[190] Within Islamic fundamentalism, the theory of *jahiliyya* has been an important symbolic framework on the basis of which to formulate the sacred-profane binary, to explain the social reality and to shape social consciousness.

4.1 General Summary and Analysis

As Jeffrey Alexander contends, evil is not ontological, but epistemological. Thus, it is a matter of representation as to how it is known and coded that certain actions, events, and societies come to be perceived as evil.[191] The perception of the pre-Islamic period is not a natural reflection of the period itself. To put it differently, it has gained a symbolic status of referring to the 'virtuous' and 'moral' or 'profane' and 'evil' through *representation*. The nature of the pre-Islamic period called *jahiliyya* was

---

[189] Alexander, *Structure,* pp174-175

[190] Shmuel Noah Einsenstadt *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution :The Jacobian Dimension of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p26

[191] Jeffrey Alexander *The Meaning of Social Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p32

coded differently throughout the Islamic intellectual tradition as neutral, as noble and as evil. However, in modern Islamic fundamentalist discourse, certain vices of *jahiliyya* were highlighted and narrated in detail and consequently the whole of pre-Islamic Arabia was condemned and viewed as not just evil but 'radical and unacceptable evil'. Within fundamentalist discourses, the term *jahiliya* is developed into a complex symbol that connotes the archetype of evil, impurity, moral-spiritual corruption and political and social degeneration. The Prophetic mission serves as the solution to eradicate the evil of *jahiliyya* and the means through which society is salvaged and purified. The fundamentalists' narrative highlights complete transformation of the society through the prophetic mission with its redemptive undertone.

In contrast to the descriptions of *jahiliyya* as the period of absolute darkness, Muhammad's state in Medina, as Henry Munson, Jr. put it, was coded as an Islamic primordial utopia.[192] In Islamic fundamentalist narrative, Muhammad's state was considered to be free from all oppression and the Islamic system was firmly established to rule and guide the society according to Allah's law. The stark contrast between the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic era was presented and elaborated in detail to underscore the sacred-profane binary. Consequently, *jahiliyyah* has been coded as a complex of sociopolitical and religious conditions of evil that oppose Islam. Practices of *jahiliyya* were regarded as in every way antithetical to Islamic ideals.

Once the symbolic reconstruction of both the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras is undertaken, and the moral criteria are established and reaffirmed, development and elaboration of social imaginaries of the pre-Islamic era eventually lead to the formation of a certain kind of universalized *jahiliyya* consciousness. In certain Islamic narratives

---

[192] Quoted in Einsenstadt, p20

of sacred/evil, *jahiliyya* evolved to denote not merely a bygone historical epoch but a condition out-of –time and gains the transcendental status of tradition to provide a basis for explicating all sorts of social ills. As a result, the description of *jahiliyyah* is transformed from the historically specific particularities into the universal categories that can appear in any time or place, and it can again address the specific conditions of the present.

By virtue of being universal, transnational and transhistorical symbol of evil, *jahiliyya* provided what can be termed as a bridge metaphor. A device of analogy to bridge the gap between the different social factors in the past and the present was employed by drawing parallels of certain events and crises and by viewing certain elements as an unchanging archetype of evil.[193] What this ultimately does is to make sense of the social life of the present through the powerful bridging metaphor of the past. By invoking this narrative of *jahiliyya,* it is sometimes natural to ignore certain historical particularities of ideological wrongness and rightness. Thus, the *jahiliyya* narrative becomes a powerful analogical framework to address any forms of current economic, social, political and social predicaments by employing a bloated metaphor. *Jahiliyya* is evoked as a reference point for all sorts of different societal problems and predicaments to draw the Muslim's attention and to trigger religious reactions. It can also blur the issues of religious deviation with other social issues and tries to gain control over the normative judgements not only within the religious community but in the general social sphere at large by applying the sacred principles of *jahiliyya* narratives. By employing this binary as a normalizing judgement, two things have been accomplished; reflecting and reinforcing what they consider as good within the Muslim

---

[193] Alexander, *The Meaning*, p69

community, and safeguarding this normative good against what is perceived to be evil and a threat from outside. The division is maintained through elaborate rules and institutions and a sacralization is periodically renewed through the emphasis on transcendent meaning.[194]

There seems to be three most important functions that this discourse has. First, to explain and make sense of the reality, second to state what kind of action is thus necessary and appropriate and third to promise the redemption.[195] Through it, facts are interpreted, social reality is explained, social actions are given a meaning. Having generally summarized and theoretically analyzed the fundamentalist discourse, I will now turn to compare Qutb's and Mawdudi's discourses in specific details and account for their similarities and differences in ideas.

4.2 Specific Comparison and Conclusion

Both Qutb and Mawdudi lived through tumultuous years of the early 20th century characterized by colonialism, social, economic and political crises, questions of Arab and Muslim identity and competing ideologies. They were both seeking solutions to redeem their societies from the dominance of Western influence from without and the political and economic dilemmas of their own societies within. They both had good knowledge of both modern and Western thought and traditional and Islamic thought. Within the framework of *jahiliyya*, they developed a religio-political ideology for an Islamic revolution and the Islamic state. Although they differ in the scope and extent of their application of the concept of *jahiliyya*, their conceptualization stems from their similar historical reconstruction and symbolic binary. Although they differ in their

---

[194] Alexander, *Structure*, p180

[195] William Montgomery *Truth in the Religions*: *A Sociological and Psychological Approach* (Edinburgh Scotland: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p37 / Alexander, *The Civil* , p7

understanding of the nature of Islamic revolution-Mawdudi proposing more peaceful revolution in evolutionary terms whereas Qutb suggests more a violent one in revolutionary terms-they both agree that Islamic revolution is the only means to salvage the society and the only way to achieve the utopia of the Islamic state. By the same token, although they differ in their ideological focus on the Islamic state-Mawdudi envisioning one free from nationalism and racism while Qutb dreaming of one free from political oppression- both of them firmly believe that establishing the Islamic state is the key to solve all social ills.

Their argument draws its legitimacy from their historical understanding of *jahiliyya* with an emphasis on certain aspects of it and it is not concomitant of a mere political strategy out of thin air. Although the socio-political factors provided a background from which to develop and formulate their ideas, these two thinkers do not seem to have used religion for purely political goals. Even political directives were always guided by religious beliefs. It is not a mere socio-political ideology that was brought forth without any conceptual framework. Religious discourse is a result of the dynamic between predisposed theological concepts and other social forces working at hand. It is neither a composite of pure and timeless set of ideas nor a ready -made set of claims completely manipulated by social forces without any logic of its own.

Modern Islamic fundamentalist discourses formulated by Abu'l A'la Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb provided an interpretive schema or worldview that is neither Western nor Eastern and neither modern nor traditional but a distinctive combination that perhaps contains bits and pieces of all of those elements. It theologized the traditional Islamic doctrine against the modern and Western-influenced social background to present a radical interpretation of 'what Islam means.' However, the power of their

discourses does not end there. It gained a life of its own and became a reference point for Muslims beyond their generation and society to make sense of their reality. This, in turn leads to a formation of 'a new Islamic tradition of thought ' and whole new configuration of both the reality and perception of Islam to the   modern and contemporary radical fundamentalists.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

'Abduh, Muhammad. *The Theology of Unity*. New York: Books for Libraries, 1980.

Ali, Syed Ameer. *The Spirit of Islam*. London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1988.

Bergersen, Albert. , ed. *The Sayyid Qutb Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.

Haykal, Muhammad Husein. *The Life of Muhammad*. London, Cairo and Beirut: Shorouk International, 1983.

Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqqddimah*. New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc, 1958.

Mawdudi, Abu A'la. *The Ethical View-Point of Islam*. Ichhara and Lahore: Markazi Maktaba Jama'at-e-Islami, 1947.

Mawdudi, Abu A'la. *Islamic Law and Constitution*. Lahore: Islamic Publication Ltd. ,1960.

Mawdudi, Abu A'la. *The Islamic Law and Its Introducation in Pakistan*. Lahore: Islamic Publications LTD., 1960.

Mawdudi, Abu A'la *The Political Theory of Islam*. Lahore: Islamic Publications LTD., 1960.

Mawdudi, Abu A'la. *The Process of Islamic Revolution*. Lahore: Maktaba Jama'at-e Islami, 1955.

Mawdudi, Abu A'la. Towards Understanding Islam. London: Islamic Foundation, 1980.

Pellat, Charles. *The Life and Works of Jahiz* . Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1967.

Qutb, Sayyid. *Al-Salam Al-'Alami Wa'l Islam*. Cairo: Dar Al Shuruq, 1979.

Qutb, Sayyid. *Basic Principles of the Islamic Worldview*. North Haledon: Islamic Publications International, 2006.

Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*. Cedar Rapids: The Mother Mosque Foundations, n.d.

Shepard, William. *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996.

Waliullah, Shah. *Hujjat Allah Al-Baligha*. Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifa, 1997.

Secondary Sources

Alexander, Jeffrey. *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Alexander, Jeffrey. *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Alexander, Jeffrey. *The Meaning of Social Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion*. Baltimore M.D: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Ashtiany, Julia, T.M. Johnstone, J.D. Latham, R.B. Serjeant and G.Rex Smith. , eds. *'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Ayubi, Nazih. *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

Bellah, Robert. *Beyond Belief*. New York: Harper& Row, 1970

Berger, Peter L. *The Social Reality of Religion*. London: Faber&Faber, 1969.

Brown, L. Carl. *Religion and State*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Choueri, Youssef M. *Islamic Fundamentalism*. London and New York: Continuum Books, 2002.

Drory, Rina. "The Abbasid Construction of the *Jahiliyya*: Cultural Authority in the Making." *Studia Islamica,* v.83 (February 1996), 33-49.

Einsenstadt, Shmuel Noah. *Fundamentalism, Sectarianisms and Revolution: The Jacobian Dimension of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999

Eliade, Mircea. *Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1987.

Goldziher, Ignaz. *Muslim Studies*. New Jersey: Transaction Publisher, 2006.

Hawting, G.R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Heinemann, Arnim, John L. Meloy, Tarif Khalidi, Manfred Kropp. *Al-Jahiz: A Muslim Humanist for Our Time*. Beirut: Orient-Institute Beirut, 2009.

Hood, Ralph W.,Peter C. Hill and William Paul Williamson. *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism*. New York and London: Guilford Press, 2005.

Izutsu Toshihiko. *God and Man in the Koran*. Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and

Linguistic Studies, 1964.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in Koran.* Tokyo: Keio Institute of Philological Studes, 1959.

Kennedy, Philip. *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

Khalidi, Tarif. *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period.* Cambrige: Cambrige University Press, 1994.

Khalidi, Tarif. *Images of Muhammad.* New York: Doubleday, 2009.

Khatab, Sayed. *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb.* London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Khatab, Sayed. *The Power of Sovereignty*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Marranci, Gabriele. *Understanding Muslim Identity: Rethinking Islamic Fundamentalism.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Memon, Muhammad Umar. *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion.* The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1976.

Milton-Edwards, Beverley. *Islamic Fundamentalism since 1945.* London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Moghadam, Assaf. *The Globalization of Martyrdom.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

Montgomery, William. *The Truth in the Religions: A Sociological and Psychological Approach.* Edinburgh Scotland: Cambridge University Press, 1963.

Moussalli, Ahmad. *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb*. Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992.

Nasr, Seyyed Vali Reza. *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Nagata, Judith. "Beyond Theology: Towards an Anthropology of Fundamentalism", *American Anthropologist* 103, no.2(June 2001): 481-498.

Rahnema, Ali. *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*. London: Zed Books, 1994.

Rosenthal, Franz. *Knowledge Triumphant.* Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1970.

Ruthven, Malise. *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Sagiv, David. *Fundamentalism and Intellectuals in Egypt, 1973-1993.* London: Frank Cass, 1995.

Sivan, Immanuel. *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

Smelser, Neil. *The Social Edges of Psychoanalysis.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. "The 'Abbasid Poet Interprets History: Three Qasidahs by Abu Tammam." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 10 (1979), 49-64

Tibi, Bassam. *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder.* Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

Vatikiotis, P. J. *The History of Modern Egypt: from Muhammad Ali to Mubarak.* London: Weidenfeld &Nicholson, 1991.