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## An Exegete in the Shadow of Criticism: Sayyid Qutb in the Context of Fı Zılāl Al-Qur’ān

### *Eleřtiri Oklarının Gölgesinde Bir Müfessir: Fı Zılālî'l-Kur’ān Bağlamında Seyyid Kutub*

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## An Exegete in the Shadow of Criticism: Sayyid Qutb in the Context of Fī Zilāl Al-Qur’ān

### Summary

*Sayyid Qutb is one of the names whose ideas and works have been widely studied both in the Islamic world and in the Western world. In addition to being a thinker and writer, he is also an activist. He emphasised that Islam and the Qur’ān are not only about faith, morality and worship, but also about movement and action, and argued that the messages of the Qur’ān should be understood within this framework. Although Sayyid Qutb was both a literary figure and a sociologist, he made his greatest impact through his religious works, and these works have sparked major debates. His adventure of thought and writing, which started in the fields of literature and sociology, later culminated in Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān, one of the most influential works in the field of Qur’ān and tafsīr. Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān can be seen as a text that reflects Sayyid Qutb’s thoughts and practical experiences on how the Qur’ān can be understood. In this respect, Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān, which stands out as a new interpretation of the Qur’ān, has left its mark on many people and has been the most popular among the tafsīrs written in the twentieth century. This tafsīr, which has been claimed by Western scholars to harbour ‘fundamentalist’ tendencies, has attracted extraordinary interest in much of the Islamic world since the 1960s. Sayyid Qutb did not aim to seek innovations in this commentary in which literary approaches were emphasized and modern interpretations were exhibited. The main aim of Sayyid Qutb’s method in his exegesis of Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān is to construct a new and ideal model of man, life, society and humanity based on the Qur’ān itself. He always prioritises this goal when interpreting the verses. It is not possible to claim that the influence of Sayyid Qutb, who had a multifaceted impact on many people, was entirely positive. He was criticised as much as he was appreciated for his ideas, life and works. Some of Qutb’s views and Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān, which contains some of these views, have been subjected to criticism from various angles. One of them is the general division of societies into ‘Islamic society’ and ‘jāhiliyya society’ in his commentary. According to him, Islamic society is the society that implements the social order that Allah wants people to fulfil within the framework of the belief in tawhīd. Jāhiliyya society, on the other hand, refers to the human order that positions all its systems independently of the divine. Another view that has been criticised in the context of his commentary and some of his works is that he made some statements that inspired violent movements. His claim that a true ummah does not exist today and his characterisation of the current situation as jāhiliyya opened the door to takfīr, and later this claim became an important argument on which takfīrist movements relied. Therefore, Sayyid Qutb’s influence on violent organisations has been widely debated in the literature, and this has sometimes prevented an accurate assessment of his Qur’ānic interpretations. This study aims to resolve this tension and analyze Qutb’s approaches, which benefited not only Muslims but the world at large. As a scholarly intellectual who taught at the university and a contemporary commentator of the Qur’ān who received wide acclaim in the Islamic world, it is essential to examine his interpretation, influences, contributions to contemporary Muslim thought, and what kind of criticism was directed at him. Focusing on Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān, this article analyzes his thoughts with reference to related literature, and it presents an objection to the literature on pro-violent Islamism triggered by Qutb, along with a critical attitude towards Qutb’s approaches. Qualitative research, clarifying the main motives of human behaviour, is used throughout the study. Employing an analytical framework, the study concludes that Qutb’s tafsīr opens new horizons for contemporary intellectual life that warrant serious scholarly attention. On the other hand, this work illuminates Qutb’s scholarly output and aids in achieving a more comprehensive understanding of his Qur’ānic interpretation.*

**Keywords:** Tafsīr, Sayyid Qutb, Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān, verse, violence, critique.

### Eleştiri Oklarının Gölgesinde Bir Müfessir: Fī Zilālī’l-Kur’ān Bağlamında Seyyid Kutub

#### Özet

*İslam dünyasında olduğu kadar Batı dünyasında da gerek fikirleri gerekse eserleri hakkında pek çok araştırma yapılan isimlerden biri Seyyid Kutub’tur. O, bir düşünür ve yazar olmasının yanı sıra aksiyoner bir kimliğe de sahiptir. İslam’ın ve Kur’ân’ın sadece imandan, ahlaktan ve ibadetten ibaret olmadığını aynı zamanda bir hareket ve aksiyon boyutunun da olduğunu vurgulamış, Kur’ân’ın mesajlarının bu çerçevede anlaşılması gerektiğini savunmuştur. Seyyid Kutub hem edebiyatçı hem de*

sosyolog olmasına rağmen, asıl etkisini dinî alandaki eserleriyle göstermiş ve söz konusu bu eserleri büyük tartışmalara yol açmıştır. Onun edebiyat ve sosyoloji alanında başlayan düşünce ve yazın serüveni daha sonra Kur'ân ve tefsir alanının ses getiren eserlerinden biri olan Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân çalışmasıyla istikrar bulmuştur. Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân, Seyyid Kutub'un Kur'ân'ın nasıl anlaşılabilceğine dair düşüncelerini ve pratik tecrübelerini yansıtan bir metin olarak görülebilir. Bu yönüyle Kur'ân'ın yeni bir yorumu olarak öne çıkan Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân, birçok kişi üzerinde izler bırakmış, XX. yüzyılda yazılan tefsirler içinde en çok ilgi toplayan tefsir olmuştur. Batılı araştırmacılar tarafından "fundamentalist" eğilimler barındırdığı öne sürülen bu tefsir, 1960'lı yıllardan günümüze İslam dünyasının büyük bir bölümünde olağanüstü bir ilgiye mazhar olmuştur. Seyyid Kutub, edebî yaklaşımların ağırlık kazandığı ve modern yorumların sergilendiği bu tefsirinde yenilikler peşinde koşma amacını gütmemiştir. Seyyid Kutub'un Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân tefsirinde izlediği yöntemin temel gayesi bizzat Kur'ân'dan yola çıkarak yeni ve ideal bir insan, hayat, toplum ve insanlık modeli inşa etmektir. Ayetleri yorumlarken bu hedefi hep öncelemektedir. Pek çok kimse üzerinde çok yönlü etkileri bulunan Seyyid Kutub'un oluşturduğu etkinin tamamıyla olumlu yönde olduğunu ileri sürmek mümkün değildir. O, fikirleri, hayatı ve eserleri üzerinden takdir gördüğü kadar eleştiriler de almıştır. Kutub'un kimi görüşleri ve bu görüşlerinden bazılarını barındıran Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân çeşitli açılardan tenkide maruz kalmıştır. Bunlardan birisi tefsirinde toplumlari "İslam toplumu" ve "Cahiliye toplumu" olarak genel bir ayrıma tabi tutması olmuştur. Ona göre "İslam toplumu, Allah'ın insanlar için yerine getirmesini istediği toplumsal düzeni, tevhit inancı çerçevesinde uygulayan toplumdur. Cahiliyye toplumu ise bütün sistemlerini ilahi olandan bağımsız olarak konumlandıran beşerî düzeni ifade etmektedir. Tefsiri ve kimi eserleri bağlamında tenkit edilen bir diğer görüşü ise şiddet hareketlerine ilham verici bazı açıklamalar yapmış olmasıdır. Onun gerçek bir ümmetin günümüzde mevcut olmadığını söylemesi, mevcut durumu da cahiliyye olarak nitelmesi tekfîre kapı açmış, daha sonra bu iddia tekfîrci akımların dayandığı önemli bir argüman haline gelmiştir. Bundan dolayı Seyyid Kutub'un şiddet yanlısı örgütler üzerindeki etkisi literatürde geniş bir şekilde tartışılmış ve bu durum bazen onun Kur'ânî yorumlarının doğru bir şekilde değerlendirilmesini engellemiştir. Bu çalışma, bu gerilimi çözmeyi ve Kutub'un sadece Müslümanlara değil tüm dünyaya fayda sağlayan yaklaşımlarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Üniversitede ders vermiş bir entelektüel ve İslam dünyasında büyük tevaccüh görmüş çağdaş bir Kur'ân yorumcusu olarak Kutub'un yorumlarını, etkilerini, çağdaş Müslüman düşüncesine katkılarını ve kendisine yöneltilen eleştirileri incelemek önem arz etmektedir. Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân'a odaklanan bu makale, Kutub'un düşüncelerini ilgili literatüre referansla analiz etmekte, Kutub'un tetiklediği şiddet yanlısı İslamcılık literatürüne bir itiraz ve Kutub'un yaklaşımlarına yönelik eleştirel bir tutum ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma boyunca insan davranışının temel güdülerini açıklığa kavuşturan nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Analitik bir bakış açısının kullanıldığı araştırmada Kutub'un tefsirinin çağdaş entelektüel hayata göz ardı edilmemesi gereken yeni ufuklar açtığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Diğer taraftan bu çalışma Kutub'un ilmi çalışmalarına ışık tutmakta ve onun Kur'ân yorumunun daha iyi anlaşılmasına yardımcı olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tefsir, Seyyid Kutub, Fî Zilâlî'l-Kur'ân, âyet, şiddet, eleştiri.

## Introduction

Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) was born into an Egyptian, religious family and he completed his primary education in his village. He graduated from the teacher's school in 1926 and the university in 1933.<sup>1</sup> He was a graduate of Dâr al-'Ulüm, a higher education institution. He did not study at Al-Azhar, Egypt's leading mosque and university.

Musallam claims that Qutb had a period of early secularist inclinations and was entranced by the study of modern psychology, Western literature, sociology, psychoanalysis, the theories of Darwinism, chemistry and also Einstein's theories

<sup>1</sup> Hilal Görgün, "Seyyid Kutub", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009), 37/64.

on relativity and the nature of the universe.<sup>2</sup> It has been argued that Qutb defined himself as an atheist in the period (1925–1939), which almost corresponded to his years as a university student, a teacher and a university lecturer.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, John Calvert and William Shepard say his literary studies of the Qur’ān do not seem to be the work of an unbeliever but they certainly do not push an Islamist agenda.<sup>4</sup> Qutb made a trip to the United States between 1948 and 1950.<sup>5</sup> After seeing that country, on the one hand, he acknowledged America for its science and industrial productivity<sup>6</sup> but on the other hand he criticized the American way of life, society and racism there. When Qutb returned to Egypt, he became a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hasan al-Bannā (d. 1949). He had the chance to express his ideas through the group’s newspaper and journals of the organization. He was associated with the 1954 attempted assassination of Egypt’s second president, Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir (d. 1970),<sup>7</sup> and spent ten years in prison after his trial. After his release, he was sent back to prison on August 9, 1965, due to the opinions he expressed in his book *Milestones* and for his role in reactivating the organization with a number of Muslim Brotherhood members. After a lengthy trial, he was sentenced to death and executed on August 29, 1966.<sup>8</sup> Sayyid Qutb is considered one of the three most cited authors in the literature of Islamic Jihād<sup>9</sup> and he is presented as a source of inspiration for violent people or organizations. Contrary to Zimmerman’s approach based on carefully selected radical parts, this research hypothesizes that Qutb, who says “Democracy is in Islam”,<sup>10</sup> should not be considered a violent fanatic thinker. He is too versatile to be confined to those narrow definitions. In addition to religious thought, he has many works in the fields of literature, literary criticism, education, politics, journalism, and publishing.<sup>11</sup>

This article which can be considered somewhat authentic as it incorporates an expostulation to the critical texts related to “uncompromising Islamism” alleged to be encouraged by Sayyid Qutb, as well as an argumentative paradigm towards Qutb’s approaches, revolves around these questions: “What are the prominent features of Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān in the context of the critiques directed at Sayyid Qutb’s

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Religious Studies, Master Thesis, 2012), 52.

<sup>3</sup> Tahsin Yıldırım, *Fas İslâmî Hareketleri: Tevhid ve Islâh Hareketi Örneği* (İzmir: İzmir Kâtip Çelebi Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2020), 89.

<sup>4</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *A Child from the Village*, trans. John Calvert-William Shepard (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Nadia Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other* (Germany: Gerlach Press, 2019), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 78.

<sup>7</sup> Danny Orbach, “Tyrannicide in Radical Islam: The Case of Sayyid Qutb and Abd al-Salam Faraj”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 48/6 (2012), 969.

<sup>8</sup> Görgün, “Seyyid Kutub”, 37/65.

<sup>9</sup> John C. Zimmerman, “Sayyid Qutb’s Influence on the 11 September Attacks”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16/2 (2004), 239.

<sup>10</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Dirāsāt Islāmīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1427/2006), 120.

<sup>11</sup> Görgün, “Seyyid Kutub”, 37/66-67.

views? How have the views expressed by Qutb in *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* and his other works been evaluated? Which figures have intellectually influenced Qutb? For which views, and in what ways, has he predominantly been criticized?"

During the research, other classical and modern period works related to Qutb's approaches were referenced from time to time. In this study, the descriptive method, which concerns describing the characteristics of a particular individual or of a group,<sup>12</sup> will be adopted. Additionally, in the context of criticisms/contributions, this contemporary commentator's interpretation will be focused on and his evaluations will be presented. Although the focus of this article is Qutb's *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, other sources defining him and his opinions will also be referenced. Besides, "the qualitative research" method, the aim of which is to discover the underlying motives of human behaviour, has been functional in this article.<sup>13</sup> Through this method, it is hoped that the various factors that motivate Qutb to behave in a particular attitude will be clarified. Besides, his views on topics discussed in different sections of *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* have been compiled using an intra-textual method, in other words, a method that includes cross-references within a single text collection.

## 1. A Tafsīr in the Shade of the Qur'ān: *Fī Zīlāl Al-Qur'ān*

Salāh Abd al-Fattāh al-Khālīdī (d. 2022) analysed the stages of Sayyid Qutb's Islam and Qur'ān-centred transformation, which he went through periods of mental and intellectual development and change at various stages of his life, in three stages. The first stage was in the 1940s, when he analysed Islam and the Qur'ān in terms of art and aesthetics. The second stage, which covers the years 1947-1953, is the phase in which he analysed the Qur'ān in depth in terms of its content and attempted to read and study the Qur'ān as a guide for thought, social life and reform. The third and final stage is the period after 1954, when he analysed and assimilated Islam and the Qur'ān in a holistic manner in terms of thought, deeds, faith, morality, culture and jihād, and interpreted Islam and the Qur'ān more in terms of jihād, movement and politics.<sup>14</sup>

In this last stage, he wrote his two famous works, "Milestones" and "*Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*". His tafsīr *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* is his best known work. This book is a tafsīr of the Qur'ān, which he completed in thirty chapters, the number of chapters of the Qur'ān. In this tafsīr, he presented his views and thoughts on the Islamic cause, movement, confrontation and change. The subjects he emphasised most in his commentary were aqīdah (faith), da'wa and notification, movement, jihād, tashri (legislation and shari'ah) and jāhiliyya.

*Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, which is among the most famous tafsīrs of sociological

<sup>12</sup> C.R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 2004), 37.

<sup>13</sup> Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Salāh Abd al-Fattāh al-Khālīdī, *Sayyid Qutb: Min al-Milād ilā al-istishhād* (Dimaşk: Dār al-Qalam, 1991), 265-282.

tafsîr school, is undoubtedly the most widely circulated of all Qutb's works. Many Muslims use it as a reference for teachers, preachers, and writers.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, Qutb's background in literary criticism greatly helped him in presenting and writing *Fî Zilâl al-Qur'ân*.<sup>16</sup> It was written between 1951 and 1965 and much of its contents were written while Qutb was in prison.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, some critics associate Qutb's harsh comments with his prison conditions. However, he is a committed practitioner who is trying to re-experience the verses of the Qur'ân and find a meaningful way of applying its verses to his life.<sup>18</sup>

To summarize, Qutb's *Fî Zilâl al-Qur'ân*, avoids the traditional methods of tafsîr, which typically refer to previously accepted commentaries and other established authorities.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the reader encounters very few philological, philosophical, mystical, and jurisprudential debates within this tafsîr. This is because the tafsîr primarily focuses on reforming both the individual and society through the guidance of the Qur'ânic verses. According to Badmas Lanre Yusuf, Qutb probably wanted to discuss issues concerning socio-political matters by using the Qur'ânic principles as his parameter, so that readers would know that his views are rooted in the Qur'ân.<sup>20</sup> From a less pessimistic approach than Yusuf's, it can be said that Qutb's tafsîr tries to guide society through the light of the Qur'ânic verses.

## 2. Background of the Writing of *Fî Zilâl Al-Qur'ân*: The Question of Sources and Influences

This chapter will examine the factors that had both direct and indirect influence on Qutb. Among the figures who exerted a direct impact, Mahmud al-Aqqād (d. 1964) stands out as a significant example. Qutb met him during his student years,<sup>21</sup> through his uncle and is said to have been highly impressed by Aqqād's personality and thought.<sup>22</sup> For a while, Qutb was intellectually and politically influenced by him.<sup>23</sup> al-Aqqād was a notable pro-western intellectual and it is said that he imitated him in terms of ideology and even his writing style.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Qutb recognizes the nobility in the principles of the French Revolution such as liberty,

<sup>15</sup> J.B. Heru Prakosa, "Approaching the Word of God: A Study on Fazlurrahman and Sayyid Qutb", *Orientas Baru* 17/2 (2008), 125.

<sup>16</sup> Amir Husin Mohd Nor, *The Concept of Jihād According to Sayyid Qutb in His Fî Zilâl al-Qur'ân* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Faculty of Arts, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Doctoral Thesis, 1997), 215.

<sup>17</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhâb*, 82.

<sup>18</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhâb*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Badri Habibi, *A Comparative Study Between Sayyid Qutb's and Fazlurrahman's Political Thought: The Relationship Between Islam and State* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2017), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Prakosa, "Approaching the Word of God: A Study on Fazlurrahman and Sayyid Qutb", 125.

<sup>21</sup> Görgün, "Sayyid Kutub", 64.

<sup>22</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism* (USA: University Press of Florida, 1999), 132.

<sup>24</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhâb*, 55.

equality and fraternity,<sup>25</sup> but only in the early Islamist stage of his life.<sup>26</sup>

As to indirect influence, chronologically it is said that Wahhābism, the religious-political movement attributed to Muhammed b. Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792), had an impact on a large part of the social and political background of Qutb's sociological Salafizm.<sup>27</sup> However, Qutb does not mention Muhammed b. Abd al-Wahhāb's name even once in his commentary. This shows that the claim in question is exaggerated.

Qutb draws on Alexis Carrel (d. 1944), who is a French surgeon and biologist who made significant contributions to the development of modern medicine, leaving a wide-ranging impact with his interdisciplinary assessments of the relationship between human biology, society and modernity, while also emphasising the importance of religion and spirituality in human life,<sup>28</sup> in Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān four times.<sup>29</sup> When Qutb emphasizes the importance of prayer, he mentions Carrel. Carrel says that the universe, in all its vastness, is full of active minds beyond our own. In this context, prayer is a means of connecting with the mind that dominates the fate of the minds around us and all beings we see and cannot see.<sup>30</sup>

With reference to Carrel, Qutb states that common diseases such as children's diarrhea, tuberculosis, diphtheria, malaria, and typhoid fever have drastically decreased, but they have been replaced by diseases such as restlessness and depression. The number of nervous and mental patients has increased significantly. In some states of America, the number of insane people confined in mental asylums exceeds the number of inpatients in all other hospitals of those states. Various nervous disorders and mental disorders, such as insanity, also tend to increase. These disorders are the most effective factors that make individuals unhappy and destroy families. Mental ailments are far more dangerous to civilization than stomach ailments. However, health experts and doctors have so far focused their attention on the sole purpose of curing stomach ailments.<sup>31</sup> By referencing Carrel, Qutb tries to criticize the West more objectively.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Qutb was open to influences of Pakistani-Indian Muslim experience.<sup>32</sup> The theo-democracy thesis of Sayyid Abū'l-A'lā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1979) influenced Qutb's social justice system.<sup>33</sup> Also, al-Mawdūdī proposed the

<sup>25</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 64.

<sup>26</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 134.

<sup>27</sup> Hatice Kınık, *Teolojik Selefizmden Sosyolojik Selefizme Dönüşüm: Muhammed b. Abdülvehhab ve Seyyid Kutub Örneği* (Konya: Selçuk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2005), 130.

<sup>28</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1412), 6/3685.

<sup>29</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 2/637, 654, 1116, 6/3685.

<sup>30</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 6/3685.

<sup>31</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 2/637; Alexis Carrel, *Man, The Unknown* (London: Wilco Publishing House, 1959), 27.

<sup>32</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Esra Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism: Perspectives from Mawlānā Abū'l-A'lā al-Mawdūdī, Sayyid Qutb and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, International Relations, Master Thesis, 2008), 129.

theological nature of the government which was later developed by Qutb.<sup>34</sup> In *milestones*, Qutb clearly draws inspiration from him by the way he echoes al-Mawdūdī's ideas about Islam being a complete system for living one's life and how Muslims must establish Islamic law.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Qutb developed al-Mawdūdī's ideas to a more radical level.<sup>36</sup> Qutb's exegetical approach of the Qur'ān led him to present a relatively radical understanding of Islam.<sup>37</sup>

Abū al-Hasan al-Nadwī (d. 1999) states in his book *al-Tafsīr al-Siyāsī fī al-Islām* that Qutb agrees completely with the views in al-Mawdūdī's *Four Terms in the Qur'ān*.<sup>38</sup> The numerous references to al-Mawdūdī's works in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* clearly support al-Nadwī's claim: *Jihād*,<sup>39</sup> *World Peace in Islam*,<sup>40</sup> a book not named by Qutb on usury and the foundations of economics between Islam and contemporary systems,<sup>41</sup> *Shahādat al-Ḥaqq*,<sup>42</sup> *al-Ribā*,<sup>43</sup> *Hijab*,<sup>44</sup> *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Nūr*,<sup>45</sup> *Tenkīhāt*,<sup>46</sup> *Four Basic Qur'ānic Terms*,<sup>47</sup> *Mabādi' al-Islām*,<sup>48</sup> *Moral Foundations of the Islamic Movement*,<sup>49</sup> *Islam and Ignorance*,<sup>50</sup> *Ethical Viewpoint of Islam*.<sup>51</sup>

By quoting from al-Mawdūdī's book *The Moral Foundations of the Islamic Movement*, Qutb draws attention to the dominant influence on the thoughts, behaviours, social systems, and moral values of the governed people. If power is given to those who fear Allah, society will walk on the right path, and even the evil centres of society will have to be subject to certain rules. On the contrary, if the government is taken over by those who reject God, the society's lifestyle will be dragged into rebellion against God, exploitation of man by man, moral degeneration and cultural corruption. Thus, this event affects science and art, political economy, culture, morality and behaviour, law and justice, leading to a general decay of ideas and ideals.<sup>52</sup> This point of view assigns a substantial role to the state's authority over people's thoughts and lifestyles. The tendency to power in people prevents ignoring this point of view presented by Qutb.

In the words of Bashir Musa Nafi, Qutb was accused of being under the in-

<sup>34</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 87.

<sup>36</sup> Vanessa Martin, *Creating An Islamic State Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2003), 135.

<sup>37</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 128.

<sup>38</sup> Abū al-Hasan al-Nadwī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Siyāsī Lil-Islam* (Qāhirah : Dār Āfāq al-Ghad, s.a.), 68.

<sup>39</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/295; 3/1544, 1591.

<sup>40</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/295.

<sup>41</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/321.

<sup>42</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/403; 2/810.

<sup>43</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/511; 2/639.

<sup>44</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/602; 2/633, 648, 652.

<sup>45</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 2/648, 652.

<sup>46</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 2/663.

<sup>47</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 2/927, 1156, 1163, 1255; 3/1354; 4/1902.

<sup>48</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 2/1133; 3/1556.

<sup>49</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 3/1321.

<sup>50</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 3/1755, 1800.

<sup>51</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 4/1918.

<sup>52</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 3/1320.

fluence of socialist thought throughout his life<sup>53</sup> because of Qutb's book named *Social Justice in Islam*, which was penned in 1948, before his two-year journey to the United States.<sup>54</sup> According to this approach, Qutb developed the social justice thesis, which benefited from socialist worldview.<sup>55</sup> A more appealing hypothesis is that Qutb's social justice system is influenced by al-Mawdūdī's concept of theocracy.<sup>56</sup>

Qutb, different from Fazlurrahman (d. 1988) who was accused of following the approach of the Western scholars,<sup>57</sup> proposed jihād as the methodology to defend against the West and to build up the ideal Islamic order.<sup>58</sup> He gets support from al-Mawdūdī, in explaining the nature of "Jihād in Islam" and "Nature of This Religion". According to al-Mawdūdī, the Franks<sup>59</sup> use the phrase "holy war" if they want to translate the word "jihād" into their language, but this is a bad comment.<sup>60</sup> In this case, jihād does not mean killing people for the sake of Allah. In any case, Muslims do not kill people to earn religious rewards. Jihād is made either for defensive purposes or to pave the way for preaching.

Although Qutb comes to mind when the concept of ignorance is mentioned, al-Mawdūdī and Abū al-Hasan al-Nadwī emphasized this concept before him.<sup>61</sup> Hereby, Qutb's contribution to the term jāhiliyya, which plays a part in Islamic tradition much akin to that of 'barbarism' in the Western tradition as Goldziher remarks,<sup>62</sup> is to apply the jāhilī condition of pre-Islamic era to modern times.<sup>63</sup> According to Qutb, the word jāhiliyya does not refer just to the 'ignorant' period before Muhammad but to all societies in all times and places that do not rule themselves by Islamic belief, values and jurisprudence.

Abū al-Hasan al-Nadwī, who was an Indian scholar, Muslim preacher and scholar, was among the figures who exerted a significant influence on him. This is clearly evidenced by Qutb's eleven references to al-Nadwī's book "What World Lost When Muslims Fell?" in his commentary.<sup>64</sup>

It is also Duvall's contention that much of what is assumed to be Qutb's thought, particularly in Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān, is a reflection of his younger brother, Muhammad Qutb (d. 2014).<sup>65</sup> Seven references to Muhammad Qutb in Sayyid

<sup>53</sup> Yıldırım, *Fas İslâmî Hareketleri: Tevhid ve Islâh Hareketi Örneği*, 89.

<sup>54</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 128.

<sup>56</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Prakosa, "Approaching the Word of God: A Study on Fazlurrahman and Sayyid Qutb", 127.

<sup>58</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 64.

<sup>59</sup> The name given to Christian Europeans belonging to Catholic and Protestant denominations in the Muslim world.

<sup>60</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 3/1444.

<sup>61</sup> According to Shepard and Fathi Osman, see: Görgün, "Seyyid Kutub", 65.

<sup>62</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt The Prophet and Pharaoh* (USA: University of California Press, 1986), 44.

<sup>63</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 68.

<sup>64</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 1/10, 15, 31, 139, 166, 508, 510; 2/629, 663, 974, 1010; 5/3149, 3162; 6/3948, 3951, 3968.

<sup>65</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 139.

Qutb's tafsîr partially support Duvall's claim.

It is considered that Qutb's life experiences, especially those in prison, must have had a profound effect on the way he interpreted the Qur'an.<sup>66</sup> Qutb was likewise shaped by the internal social conditions within Egypt that determined how he would interpret the teachings of Islam and utilise the Islamic scriptures to justify his extremist ideology. With this background information in mind, one can better understand just who Qutb was.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, as evidenced by his references to Alexis Carrel, he is not a closed fanatic to all non-Muslims approaches.

In conclusion, America visit, Egypt's social and political situation, Mahmud al-Aqqād, Abū al-Hasan al-Nadwī, Alexis Carrel, al-Mawdūdī influenced Qutb. These influences have no negative effect on the worth of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'an*. On the contrary, it demonstrates the alive communication between a Qur'an exegete and life.

### 3. Qutb's Contributions to Muslim Thought

Unlike Hasan al-Bannā, Qutb was neither a leader of men nor an organizer, but an author or man of letters, who became an ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood only during the last fifteen years of his life.<sup>68</sup> It is argued that no man has more influence over the contemporary Islamic awakening than him.<sup>69</sup> In this part, Qutb's influence on Egypt, Tunisia, Palestine and Morocco will be mentioned. Additionally, his impact on Türkiye, unlike Zimmerman's article which incorporates Qutb's influence,<sup>70</sup> will also be discussed.

The 1930s and the 1940s were the decades when Qutb dwelled on the theme of Islam by getting involved in political debates regarding the role of Islam in Egypt. He brought a moralist approach to the issue by discussing the reasons for the moral decline of Egyptian society and pointing out greater awareness of ethics based on Islamic values as a solution. It was an introduction to his glance, signifying an Islamic community.<sup>71</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood members were influenced by Qutb.<sup>72</sup> Although this movement initially emerged as a *da'wa* movement, it turned into a political formation, especially during the Qutb period.<sup>73</sup> With the escalation of Egypt's political conflict, Qutb developed a strong emotional bond with the Muslim Brotherhood as his Islamist ideas matured. He declared his official Brotherhood member-

<sup>66</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 91.

<sup>67</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt The Prophet and Pharaoh*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> Aref Ali Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", *Islamic Studies* 31/3 (1992): 355.

<sup>70</sup> Zimmerman, "Sayyid Qutb's Influence on the 11 September Attacks", 222-252.

<sup>71</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 65; Charles Tripp, "Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision", *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnama (London: Zed Books, 1994), 156-157.

<sup>72</sup> Şeyda Büşra Atalan, *İslamcılıkta Kırılma Noktaları: Hasan el-Benna ve Seyyid Kutub* (Çorum: Hitit Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2018), 50.

<sup>73</sup> Yıldırım, *Fas İslâmî Hareketleri: Tevhid ve İslâh Hareketi Örneği*, 89.

ship and was directly involved in the movement.<sup>74</sup>

Contrary to the above, according to Zollner, there is no doubt that Qutb's conceptions of Islam are important sources of modern Islamic interpretation. However, there is a clear ambiguity related to the question of whether he contributed to the Muslim Brotherhood's ideological foundation. Defending his input, some members of the Muslim Brothers point out that his legacy must not be limited to his thoughts as presented in *Milestones*.<sup>75</sup>

According to John Esposito, Tunisian politician, thinker and co-founder of the al-Nahdah Party and serving as its intellectual leader Rachid Ghannouchi's preaching and writing drew heavily upon the interpretations and ideological worldview of Muslim scholar-activists including Sayyid Qutb as well.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, the natural result of Qutb's influence on Ghannouchi was not anti-democratic political attitude. Contrarily, Ghannouchi firmly adhered to democracy in his country and said that those who tend to violence have neither reason nor religion.

With his life, works and execution, Sayyid Qutb is one of the intellectuals who had a great influence on the Islamic thought and movements that developed in the second half of the twentieth century. His works have been translated into many languages, enabling his influence to spread across the regions inhabited by Muslims.

According to İbrahim Sarmış's exaggerated interpretation, Qutb's Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān is among the most noteworthy commentaries that strongly relate the Qur'ān to lived reality within the historical corpus of tafsīr. The work, by transporting Muslims back to the Meccan and Medinan periods, effectively wages a battle against jāhiliyya in pursuit of a comprehensive struggle against polytheism. For this reason, it has succeeded in generating a significant level of awareness regarding the phenomenon of jāhiliyya. Moreover, Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān offers remarkably original contributions by elucidating concepts from both the Islamic and jāhiliyya eras and by assessing contemporary societies through the Qur'ān's lens of objectivity. One of the fundamental points that distinguishes this tafsīr from previous ones is that it aims to explain the Qur'ān in terms of transforming and building society, rather than focusing on topics such as jurisprudence, kalām, history, philosophy, and grammar.<sup>77</sup>

Qutb is characterized as having applied Qur'ānic principles to political discourse, a methodological approach that purportedly demonstrates his exegetical fidelity and commitment to the text.<sup>78</sup> Although it is said, "It is noteworthy that he

<sup>74</sup> John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 172.

<sup>75</sup> Barbara H.E. Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2009), 50; Atalan, *İslamcılıkta Kırılma Noktaları: Hasan el-Benna ve Seyyid Kutub*, 48.

<sup>76</sup> John L. Esposito, *Islamic Threat Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 155.

<sup>77</sup> İbrahim Sarmış, "Seyyid Kutub'un Kur'an'a Yaklaşımı", *1. Kur'an Haftası Kur'an Sempozyumu* (Ankara: Fecr Publications, 1995), 218.

<sup>78</sup> Kövser Tağiyev, *Ebu'l-A'la el-Mevdudî ve Seyyid Kutub'a Göre Siyasal İçerikli Ayetlerin Tefsiri* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2010), 124.

used the word ‘only Qur’ān’ instead of the cliché ‘Qur’ān and Sunnah’<sup>79</sup> he does not have a negative attitude toward the Sunnah.<sup>80</sup> Again it is said that Qutb suggests that the reader understand the Qur’ān based on the Qur’ān but it would be very hard to understand the Qur’ān through this method due to the fact that every verse of the Qur’ān was revealed to the Prophet and could not be separated for certain reasons. So to obtain a comprehensive meaning of the Qur’ān, the reader needs other sources and devices such as historical sources, linguistics and so forth.<sup>81</sup> This intertextuality criticism against Qutb can be justified to some extent. Because he includes both hadiths and historical information about that period in his commentary. His “understanding of the Qur’ān based on the Qur’ān” does not exclude hadith and the early period of Muslim history.

Qutb highlights an important contradiction of the deniers: Denying something requires knowledge of its correctness.<sup>82</sup> In other words, saying that ‘There is no truth.’ does not make the truth disappear. Unless one can confirm the non-existence of something, it cannot be claimed that it does not exist, even if it does not appear.

It is claimed that the ideology that Qutb left behind helped Palestinian cleric and academic Abdullāh Azzām (d. 1989), who is considered an influential theoretician of jihād, to understand the Western world through Qutb’s critique of America. The depictions of American society assisted Azzām in understanding that inevitably there would be a type of confrontation between the Islamic and the Western worlds. Qutb’s ideology demonstrated that secular governments should ultimately fall since they are feebly contrived entities that flow against the design of the Creator. Qutb passionately argued in favor of establishing Islamic states to replace the faulty illusions that secular governments embodied. Azzām’s actions demonstrate that he did not only understand Qutb’s ideology about creating a vanguard to protect Islamic culture, but Azzām actively took proactive steps towards making it a reality.<sup>83</sup> The theme of jihād, specifically in the case of armed struggle, is a strong focus for Azzām just as it was for Qutb.<sup>84</sup>

In Bilal al-Talidī’s words, Moroccan Islamists were influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood movement, especially by Hasan al-Bannā and Sayyid Qutb, who were the leaders of the movement. Many young Moroccans joined Islamic groups, influenced by the works of the Islamist Sayyid Qutb.<sup>85</sup> In the 1970s in Morocco, a generation of intellectuals who did not receive traditional religious education and who wanted to integrate into the political system rather than being radical Islamists,

<sup>79</sup> M. Kürşad Atalar, “Sayyid Kutub’un Çağdaş Müslüman Düşünce’ye Katkısı”, *Muhafazakâr Düşünce Dergisi* 48 (2016), 181.

<sup>80</sup> In Qutb’s tafsīr, the expression “Qur’ān and Sunnah” is used in two places. See: Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur’ān*, 5/2660; 6/3595.

<sup>81</sup> Habibi, *A Comparative Study Between Sayyid Qutb’s and Fazlurrahman’s Political Thought*, 79.

<sup>82</sup> Qutb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur’ān*, 1/59.

<sup>83</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 120.

<sup>84</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 120.

<sup>85</sup> Yıldırım, *Fas İslâmî Hareketleri: Tevhid ve Islâh Hareketi Örneği*, 54.

started to come to the fore as anti-modernists. The political career of these enlightened Islamists, who were against modernism, began in the Islamist al-Shabībah Movement. This movement was founded in 1969 by Abd al-Karīm al-Mutī, who followed Qutb, and whose political manifesto had a troubled past and was described as radical by political commentators at that time. al-Mutī made Qutb's book *Milestones*, which inspired many Islamic movements in those years, the ideological reference of his organization.<sup>86</sup>

In Türkiye, which was included by Qutb in the category of "the East,"<sup>87</sup> the journal *Hilāl*, which started its publication life in 1958, was on a line that could be called anti-communist, conservative, democratic American supporter in its early days. While the journal, in 1965s-1970s, like Sayyid Qutb, evolved into an 'anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist' line with the translations of works belonging to the symbol names of Islamism. Again with translations, new concepts entered the Türkiye's agenda. For example; The concept of "right-wing" was reconsidered and it was tried to be Islamized. This brought along a new debate: "Racism". *Hilāl* stated that right-wing and racism are different things, and the concept of "Muslims from Türkiye" started to be used instead of the concepts of "Turkish" and "Muslim". After the translation of *Milestones*, the call to "return to the pure source (the Qur'ān)" was activated and the journal covers contained only the message "Listen to the voice of the Qur'ān only!" were printed. Again, *Hilāl* introduced both Turkish Islamism and its readers to different ideas and an international perception through translations from Islamist writers such as Qutb.<sup>88</sup>

In the 1970s, organizations such as the *Akıncılar Organization*, around which young people gathered, began to express their panislamist political aspirations to popularize the use of "Muslim youth" instead of "national youth" and advocacy of "Islamic identity". The journal *Hilāl* accepted organizations such as *Akıncılar* as organizations founded by young believers whose purpose was "jihād". Many translations of Qutb are included in the journal. Later, a new journal called *Akıncı Güç* was published after a separation in the journal publication team. Although they include critical articles for each other in both journals, they had common discourses.<sup>89</sup> While the effect of Qutb was direct in *Hilāl*, *Akıncılar* and *Akıncı Güç* journals, the effect of Qutb was indirect in *Diriliş* journal.<sup>90</sup> Qutb readings in Türkiye, as in Tunisia, never gave rise to a large-scale opposition to democracy.

Qutb's interpretation of Islamism provided the radical Islamist movements such as Hamas and Islamic Jihād in Palestine, Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria and al-Qaeda the philosophical foundation for defense against the identified enemy.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Yıldırım, *Fas İslâmî Hareketleri: Tevhid ve Islâh Hareketi Örneği*, 411.

<sup>87</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 17.

<sup>88</sup> Aylin Güneş, *Seyyid Kutub'un Fikirlerinin Türkiye'ye Yansımaları (1970-1980 Arası İslamcı Dergiler Bağlamında)* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2020), 81.

<sup>89</sup> Güneş, *Seyyid Kutub'un Fikirlerinin Türkiye'ye Yansımaları*, 82.

<sup>90</sup> Güneş, *Seyyid Kutub'un Fikirlerinin Türkiye'ye Yansımaları*, 83.

<sup>91</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 103. Stepanova claims that al-Qaeda's

Although *Milestones* did not recommend the use of bombs and guns, it did preach Muslim emancipation through the “movement” and not through words alone.<sup>92</sup> It is not certain that Qutb defined jihād in a different way from the mainstream approach among Muslim scholars. Conversely, Qutb does not distance himself from classical exegesis. He supports his argument for example by referencing to al-Ṭabarī (d. 310)<sup>93</sup> and al-Ālūsī (d. 1924)<sup>94</sup> in tafsīr.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, he also took the classical tafsīr tradition into consideration. Indeed, while composing his tafsīr, he drew on the works of prominent classical mufasssirs such as Tha‘labī (d. 427), Baghawī (d. 516), Zamakhsharī (d. 538), Qurtubī (d. 671), and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774), in addition to al-Ṭabarī and al-Ālūsī.<sup>96</sup>

In conclusion, it may be argued that Qutb accords significant importance to the role of human intellect. He does not marginalize rational inquiry when interpreting Qur’ānic verses; rather, he integrates reason as an essential component of understanding the divine message. For this reason, it would be unwarranted to dismiss his contributions merely on the basis of the substantial body of critical literature directed against him. Instead, the more judicious and insightful elements of Qutb’s thought should be carefully identified, engaged with, and further developed. Such an approach would allow contemporary scholars to benefit from his interpretive insights while simultaneously maintaining a balanced and critical perspective.

#### 4. Sayyid Qutb Exposed to Arrows of Criticism

Not all criticism of Sayyid Qutb comes from his opponents like secularist Zimmerman who dehumanizes Qutb in a very biased way and presents him as a misleader of his readers.<sup>97</sup> He also ignores that the natural consequence of every “Qutb reading” is not always conflict. This section will include criticisms of Qutb by Muslim writers who do not reject him outright, but rather offer a more nuanced perspective. It will not focus on approaches like Zimmerman’s that portray Qutb as a source of terror.

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structure is based on Sayyed Qutb’s vision of elitist Islamist vanguard cells. See: Ekaterina Stepanova, “Regionalization of Violent Jihādism and Beyond: the Case of Daesh”, *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 2/2 (2016), 44.

<sup>92</sup> Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt The Prophet and Pharaoh*, 31.

<sup>93</sup> “Then, when the sacred months have passed, kill the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (Sūrat al-Tawba 9/5). According to Qutb, what is most singular is that al-Ṭabarī expresses the view that this verse applies equally to those who are bound by a treaty and those with no treaty. See: Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, 3/1590.

<sup>94</sup> Qutb, mentions al-Ālūsī only once in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān* and this reference is not related to jihād but the priests and rabbis who are given rights of legislation similar to God. See: Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, 3/1642.

<sup>95</sup> Nor, *The Concept of Jihād According to Sayyid Qutb in His Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, 216.

<sup>96</sup> H. Bekir Karlığa, “Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1996), 13/51.

<sup>97</sup> Zimmerman, “Sayyid Qutb’s Influence on the 11 September Attacks”, 229, 228, 226.

Hasan Ismāʿīl al-Hudaybī (d. 1973), who was his companion and was the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, wrote a book called *Duʾāt lā Qudāh: Abdāth fī al-Aqīdah al-Islāmīyah Wa-Manhaj al-Daʿwa ilā Allāh* while he was in prison in 1969. In that book, he criticized Qutb's book named *Milestones* without naming it. al-Hudaybī clarifies the issues that come to mind, when Qutb is mentioned, such as sovereignty, ignorance, takfīr, riddah, and administration. According to al-Hudaybī, it is wrong to associate the word *shahāda* with *hākimiyya* and to argue that there is no faith without deeds and it is wrong again to accuse Muslims of belonging to the *jāhiliyya* today. The most to be said is that they are ignorant. While criticizing Sayyid Qutb without mentioning his name in his book, al-Hudaybī mentions al-Mawdūdī by name.

Much of the Qurʾān according to al-Hudaybī was revealed within a given context in Arabian history and to take it out of context and universalize certain passages are grossly irresponsible. Qutb interprets the Qurʾān based on his perception which he would be entitled to do since each individual is responsible for their faith but he would not be entitled to use it as a means to judge other individuals as believers and nonbelievers.<sup>98</sup>

In 1982, the third leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Umar al-Tilimsānī (d. 1986), stated that Qutb's views would only bind him, and distanced his writings from the official views of the organization. al-Tilimsānī wrote: "Sayyid Qutb represented himself alone and not the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>99</sup> Qutb is considered as an exegete who interprets the Qurʾān in a manner that supports his political and ideological ambition.<sup>100</sup> By the end of 1980, al-Tilimsānī's journal was making every effort to avoid mentioning Sayyid Qutb except when necessary.

In addition to this, in an interview with Sayyid Qutb, al-Tilimsānī, who discussed this issue with Sayyid Qutb while he was in prison regarding this issue of takfīr, which was constantly kept on the agenda, included the statements of Sayyid Qutb and stated that he never declared believers to be kafir the believers, and that he used a harsh style due to the very troubled conditions he was in and his sensitivity to reform, and that this was misunderstood.

It is argued that some Islamic movement theorists such as al-Mawdūdī and Sayyid Qutb, who are members of the revolutionary movement, stuck in traditional thought based on the dialectic of the ruler and ruled.<sup>101</sup> Another claim is that Qutb developed a social justice thesis by making use of the socialist worldview that prefers collectivism against individualism and cooperation over competition.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, he was accused of redefining al-Bannā's message in a revolutionary way.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 69.

<sup>99</sup> Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt The Prophet and Pharaoh*, 55, 63.

<sup>100</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 95.

<sup>101</sup> Yıldırım, *Fas İslâmî Hareketleri: Tevhid ve Islâh Hareketi Örneği*, 182.

<sup>102</sup> Aras, *The Question of the West in the Ideology of Revivalism*, 128.

<sup>103</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, "Egypt's Salafi Awakening in the 1970s: Revisiting the History of a Crucial Decade for Egyptian Islamic Activism", *Religions*, (2022), 13/316, 5.

Qutb, whose brand of Islamism is considered “religious Occidentalism,”<sup>104</sup> almost ignores the diverse nature of Western tradition including, for instance, capitalism versus Marxism, Christianity, Judaism, and fascism versus democracy. He nearly regards the West as a single cultural entity and places the Christian West in jāhili system the opposite of which is there Islam and the East.

It has been argued that the subjects and concepts Qutb dealt with were the products of an atomistic approach rather than a holistic and systematic method in his works. Consequently, his statements were susceptible to being taken out of context and understood in different ways, which led to the author being accused of being a takfīrist and radical.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Sheik Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī (d. 2022) rebukes Qutb for essentially cherry-picking select verses of the Qur’ān that refer to jihād and ignoring other verses that contradict his main points. According to al-Qaradāwī, Qutb did so to put forward his radical agenda of continuous war against all pagan and nonconformist Muslim societies.<sup>106</sup>

It is necessary to briefly address the critique that Qutb’s intensive engagement with socio-political themes renders his exegesis excessively ideological. In our view, however, this feature can be defended as a natural extension of the Qur’ān’s own profound concern with issues of social justice, community formation, and moral reform. Qutb’s attention to contemporary social problems represents an effort to actualize Qur’ānic principles within modern contexts, a practice fully consistent with the long-standing tradition of interpreting the scripture in light of current realities. Therefore, his socio-political observations should not be regarded as an imposition upon the text, but rather as part of a broader hermeneutical endeavor aimed at ensuring that the Qur’ān continues to guide modern societies. Viewed from this perspective, Qutb’s contributions underscore both the interpretive flexibility of the Qur’ān and the enduring vitality of its message across historical periods.

Finally, regarding the criticisms asserting that Sayyid Qutb’s most prominent and widely debated work, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, encourages violence, several points may be made. In our view, Qutb’s exegesis does not, in fact, promote violence; rather, it situates the Qur’ānic message within a paradigm of moral and social reform. Qutb consistently emphasizes concepts such as justice, human dignity, and the ethical transformation of society. His treatment of jihād is not framed as unrestricted aggression but is instead grounded in the notions of a Muslim’s resistance and self-defense. When read within its proper historical and intellectual context, Qutb’s tafsīr emerges not as a call to physical confrontation, but as an effort aimed at liberating individuals from oppression and re-establishing divine sovereignty. Therefore, the claim that his interpretation of the Qur’ān encourages violence is the product of a selective or decontextualized reading.

<sup>104</sup> Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism: Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, 3.

<sup>105</sup> Abdūlmuttalip Baycar-Muhammet Ali Acar, “Seyyid Kutub’un Düşünce Sisteminde İdeal Toplum ve Cihad”, *İhya Uluslararası İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5/2 (2019), 485.

<sup>106</sup> Hosein, *A Cross Examination of Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhāb*, 69.

## Conclusion

This article argues that characterizing Sayyid Qutb as a fanatical proponent of war is not an accurate assessment. On the contrary, it is evident that Qutb enriched his intellectual framework not only by engaging with Islamic sources but also by drawing upon the works of non-Muslim authors. He sought to formulate proposals for social reform based on the fundamental principles of the Qur'ān, and he composed his exegesis with a level of clarity and simplicity accessible to the broader public. Moreover, he refrained from asserting the absolute correctness of his interpretations; rather, he underscored that the views he presented were merely the reflections of what he, as a human being, understood from the Qur'ān.

If eulogist studies are disregarded, previous studies in general have focused on Qutb's ideas in the context of global jihād. Differently, this article, which adopts an eclectic approach towards Qutb's ideas, has concentrated on his famous work i.e. *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, which can be categorized in sociological tafsīr school, and drew attention to its prominent features. Additionally, it discusses the related literature with Qutb's opinions, the ones that affected him cerebrally, his contribution to modern era intellectuals and comments on Qutb. He was a man, and therefore error-prone, and it was not sacrilegious to argue against his ideas.

America visit, Egypt's social and political situation, intellectuals such as Mahmud al-Aqqād, Alexis Carrel, al-Mawdūdī had an influence on Qutb. Additionally, some critics associate Qutb's harsh comments with his prison conditions. Nevertheless, those influences do not reduce the value of *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*. Contrarily, it shows the live communication of a tafsīr and real life. Qutb is a strong believer who is trying to re-experience the verses of the Qur'ān, find a meaningful way of applying its verses to his life and guide society through the light of the Qur'ānic verses. Some of his controversial comments cannot be a reason to reject all his approaches as he does not present his comments as timeless. So, Muslims can be elective against his comments. There can be rejectable, acceptable and neutral aspects towards his comments.

Although Qutb is presented as the father of jihādist groups (by ignoring the fact that Qutb readings do not result always in ignoring democracy, as in Tunisia and Türkiye), his commentary attracts the attention of ordinary Muslims around the world. Accusing him of being an extremist without telling about the political situation of his country and the influence of the West in the Muslim World is not just. It is not reasonable to put his views aside because of quite large Qutb criticism literature. In this context, his emphasis on jihād cannot be seen as religiously wrong but strategically. Because Islam accepts to have war far from oppression and in the way of Allah.

The claim that Qutb mentioned some Qur'ānic verses to support some of his political approaches can be partially true. Nonetheless, it can never be claimed to have determined *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*'s general method. What stands out in Qutb's method of interpreting the Qur'ān is the interpretation of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān.

Qutb, appreciates and emphasizes the value of intellect. He does not ignore

it when commenting on the Qur'ānic verses. He draws attention to the limitation of the mind and expresses that the possible acceptor of the prophecy is the mind. The wise ones of Qutb's views should be taken into account and developed.

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