Islamic Modernism
The case of Qutb in Dar es Salaam

Thesis for the Research Masters in Cultural Analysis. ASCA

In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need for its own abolition. This involves the keep perception that life cannot forever be kept in leading strings; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources.

Muhammed Iqbal.
Islamic Modernism: the case of Qutb in Dar es Salaam

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A note on the cover page

Cover page (cc) Douwe Schmidt.

The cover page contains a repetition of the term: [بِلَآ كِيْفِ] [bi la kayf]. It is first used by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari, when he attempts to resolve some of the problems of Mutazila thought (a rationalist tradition of Islam). It refers to how one understands the attributes of God, and indicates that one should not understand them as metaphors (which would be to apply reason to the direct revelation of God) nor understand them as referring to the human characteristics we normally associate with the named characteristics.

Instead, they are bi la kayf: as they are; language in force without significance, a language that no longer refers. The importance of the structure of thought underlying the notion of bi la kayf is developed in section II.I.

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For J.B.
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List of Arabic and Swahili Terms

There is, as T.E. Lawrence once moaned, no standard scheme of transliteration from Arabic into English. In this essay I have standardised spellings according to the list presented below: the standardisation has been made simply for ease of reference, and I have aimed solely for consistency. If quoted material spells a word differently, the original spelling of the quote will be kept, with my transliteration indicated in a foot note.

**Swahili words:**

Dua: Islamic prayer.

Juzuu: Parts (e.g. of the Quran).

Sharifu (plural: masharifu): A descendent of the Prophet Muhammed.

Taifa: Nation.

**Arabic words:**

Adab: Prescribed way of living.

Ahmadiyya: The Ahmadiyya group emerged in the 19C, and believe in the coming of a second prophet in the 19C – Ghulam Ahmad. They are generally treated with suspicion by the other main Muslim groups in Tanzania.

Aqidah: Creed [religious belief system]; those matters over which one has conviction.

Azlam: Unjust.

Bid‘a: An innovation in Islam not practiced during the life of Muhammed.

dar- al- Islam: The abode of Islam.

dar al- Harb: The abode of war.

Fitra: Innate human nature.
Fitna: A schism, or equally, to indicate a time of struggle.

Fiqh: Jurisprudence in Islam.

Hadith: Oral traditions relating to the life of the Prophet Muhammed.

Hakimiyyah: God's total and singular sovereignty.

Halal: Permissible.

Hanafi: One of the madhabs of Sunni Islam.

Hanbali: A further madhab of Sunni Islam.

Haram: Forbidden.

Ibadhi: School of Islam distinct from both Sunni and Shi’a.

Jahiliyya: Ignorance, normally used to refer to the period before the revelation of the Quran, in more contemporary usage, it refers to a world in which Quranic values are not upheld.

Ijma: Community consensus.

Ijtihad: A legal interpretation based on independent consultation of the legal sources (Quran and Sunna).

Ilham: Inspiration.

Isnad: The chain of transmission of a hadith.


Mutazila: Rationalist school within Sunni Islam.

Madarassa: Islamic religious school.

Madhab: Islamic school of jurisprudence.

Maulidi: The celebration of the Prophet’s Birthday.

Quadi: A judge ruling in accordance with Islamic law.
Qiblah: The direction that should be faced during salat.

Sahwa: Awakening. The Sahwa movement in Saudi Arabia attempted to ground a more political engaged form of Islam, in response to the presence of US soldiers in the Kingdom during the first Gulf War.

Salat: The daily ritual prayers, one of the five pillars of Sunni Islam.

Shaf'i': One of the madhab of Sunni Islam.

Shia: One of the two major branches in Islam.

Sheikh: Honorific title in Arabic, normally connoting rank in Islam.

Sunna: The way of the Prophet: religious actions initiated by the Prophet Muhammed.

Tahwid: Monotheism.

Tajammu: Association.

Takfīr (takfiri): The process of declaring someone an unbeliever.

Ubudiyyah: Man's submission to God’s sovereignty.

Ulema (plural), alim (singular): Men of knowledge (lit.). the ulema compromise in a broad sense all those engaged in several different fields of Islamic law and jurdisprudence.

Umma: The collective community of Islam.

Wahy: Revelation.

Watan: Homeland.
List of Abbreviations

In the footnotes, books that will be used frequently will have full bibliographic information the first time they are referenced, and after that will be indicated by an abbreviation and a page number. For ease of use, below is a list of the abbreviations:

**BAKWATA:** National Muslim Council (Tanzania).

**CS:** Al-Rasheed, Madawi. 2007: Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic voices for a new generation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


**EAMWS:** East African Muslim Welfare Society.

**FBIS:** Foreign Broadcast Information Service [Intelligence component of the CIA].


**IPC:** Islamic Propagation Centre.

**IS:** Qutb, Sayyid: 1979: In the Shade of the Quran. Vol. 30 [originally Fi Zilal al Quran]. London: MWH Publishers


**P:** Agamben, Giorgio: Potentialities. Stanford: Stanford University Press


TANU: Tanganyika African National Union.


Part I. A very modern ghost

I. among the pamphlets; the Book

We chose to translate Qutb because he has a message for the man of today: the Quran is not just for the past, but also the present and the future, and each generation must interpret it on their own terms.

Aliy S. Kilima

Kariakoo is a bustling area of Dar es Salaam, notable chiefly for the men standing indolently on the street, still as statues, who burst into life when small groups of Chinese or Israelis come past, hands ready to move to pockets and socks lined with their wares; the gem stones that accumulate in Kariakoo from around East and Central Africa.

Kariakoo is also a centre of a small Islamic publishing industry, and in the Ibn Hazm Media Centre, a book shop opposite the wa Mtoro mosque, you can see the books on display.

At the back of the shop, lining the shelves above the heads of the booksellers, there are proud rows of large books: Qurans, commentaries by Ibn Kathir, some work by Ibn Taymiyya; ornate Arabic etched in gold runs along spines that were freshly dusted that morning. In all the time I spent in Kariakoo, waiting in book shops, I only saw one of these books sold. The distinguished customer did not come himself, but sent an emissary, whose hands grasped tightly at the book that was reverently handed to him; the messenger did not speak Arabic (aside from prayer), but was assured of the importance of the book, and told me (in Swahili), that Arabic was the

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language of the Quran, and one cannot be a good Muslim without speaking Arabic.

Most of the people who came into the bookshop – school teachers, people whiling away time before or after prayers – did not speak good enough Arabic to read the books on the top shelves, or did not have enough money to buy them, and so the weighty Qurans were left untouched on the shelves, accumulating the dust which was to be rubbed off each morning: these books were sentinels, who kept a sleepless watch over the everyday trade that constituted the main business of the shop.

Below the sentinels, the two book sellers passed out Arabic language primers and histories of Islam to the school teachers; with each book came the implicit promise that, given enough time and training, they too would be able to read the books waiting above them.

Perhaps it was not the book sellers intention, and perhaps, in any case, it could be explained practically (it always can), but the books obeyed a vertical hierarchy. At the top, the weighty Qurans, further down our hierarchy, and in easy reach of the sellers, sat the Arabic language primers, just behind the counter. At the bottom of this vertical line of printed matter, piled onto the glass cabinets in front of the booksellers, are small pamphlets, virtually the only thing written in Swahili.

The pamphlets are intended to be read. And so they are, as people pass through the shop, pick up a small pamphlet, badly printed on cheap yellow paper, and seek instruction concerning how to talk to Christians from a pamphlet called Majadiliano kati ya Mkristo na MuIslamu$^2$ (the Muslim wins), and learn about prayer in Dua za kinga na kuondosha Matatizo.$^3$ I was surprised when I first saw these pamphlets. Why would a Muslim who has


$^3$ Badawai, Mussa [No date]: Dua ya Kinga na Kuondosha Matatizo. [Prayers to guard oneself and to chase away problems]. Kutub Enterprises. No printer listed.
received instruction at a madrassa require instruction in the correct way to perform salat? Have school standards really slipped so low?

My surprise, however, paled into insignificance the first time I saw, hidden among piles of pamphlets on dream interpretation, a large book in Swahili. It was the only comparable book I found during all my time in Dar es Salaam. Its 398 pages sat there, among the pamphlets, untouched. In the small world of Islamic publishing in Dar es Salaam, this book, with its fonts and layouts that would not be out of place in a small English publishing house, seemed like an anomaly.

There is no market for such a book. My surprise grew when I examined the inside cover, and saw that this book, volume thirty of Qutb's commentary on the Quran, had been translated, not from the Arabic, the language of the Quran, but from an English edition.4

Understanding the translation of Qutb's In the Shade of the Quran is the focus of this essay.

A discontinuity, Foucault once remarked, is simply a continuity waiting to be explained. Analogously, the translation of Qutb, seemingly such an anomaly within the publishing industry in Dar es Salaam, will be used as window to cast light on the process that informed its translation: “it creates a problematic situation which renders up the situation as process: as a type of problem making and simultaneously object, site and substance of thought.”5

Alliy S. Kilima, the translator of Qutb quoted at the beginning of this essay, talked of finding in Qutb’s work a message for today. The message, as he presents it, is that the Quran is not – simply - a historical artefact, nor does it refer only to what has happened. Instead, the Quran is for the present, but, as Kilima notes: “each generation must interpret it on their own terms” – the

4 Volume thirty, it turns out, was translated because it was initially brought out in English after a publisher in North London had published a cheap paperback using the translation carried out by an English magazine.

Quran, in Qutb's thought, is not merely available, one must bring its transcendental message to life in a particular historical context.

Such an understanding of the Quran claims that the transcendent is not simply available: it is not by way of ritual or repetition of the past that one gains access to the divine; instead, one must actively live one's religion immanently, in each epoch looking for the way in which a transcendent truth runs through contemporary historical phenomena.

In part, this message is one directed against the religious hierarchy in Dar es Salaam: Qutb's emphasis on Islam being a project for the present, with necessarily political implications, resounds with a secularly educated generation frustrated by economic marginalisation and a religious establishment they see as interested only in self-preservation and ritual matters. Ultimately, what Qutb offers up to Tanzanian Muslims is a project for the future (and, analogously, a market-to-come for the book): a way of living Islam that attempts to reconcile political marginalisation and ethical conduct.

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6 Whether the religious hierarchy exist, or demonstrate the type of homogeneity that Kilima ascribes to them, is rather doubtful, as we will attend to later in the essay. However, when understanding the appeal of translating Qutb, and his specifically anti-cultural message, what is important to understand is how the translators constitute their understanding of the world into which they believe the translation will be received, over and above the empirical validity of their claims.
II. The arrival of the originary moment

The Islamic society is not just an entity of the past, to be studied in history, but it is a demand of the present and a hope for the future.

Sayyid Qutb, Milestones.⁷

The world Islam is rarely used in the Quran, and indeed in Muslim texts in general before the 19th century,⁸ when it came to be used as a word to embrace all Muslim practices. It emerges in tandem with colonialism, “one might even say that “Islam” and the question of modernity were born at the same time, insofar as this Islam emerges in modernist debates as a historical agent and authority in its own right.”⁹ It is not simply a question of Islam emerging as a category in relation to a challenge from outside: Islamic agents had fought many wars against people of other faiths before, without the development of an idea of “Islam”. Instead, if we look to the work, for instance, of Sayyid Ahmad Khan¹⁰ (d.1898), what we see is that Islam emerges as an idea at precisely the point when outside agents wanted to circumscribe Islam from within itself rather than challenge it from the outside: render, for instance, the transcendental truth of the Quran as a historical product, or cast doubt on the process of hadith authentification.

In societies where Islamic agents found themselves politically marginalised by colonial (Christian) powers, and where consciousness of an idea of Islamic powers, and where consciousness of an idea of Islamic

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⁹ Ibid. pp.64-65.
¹⁰ Sayyid Ahmad Khan, whom we will return to later in this essay, was an influential Muslim reformer in Pakistan, who replied to William Muir’s (a British administrator) book on Muhammed with one of his own. Sayyid Ahmad Khan anticipates the temporal structure of Qutb’s thought in some of its aspects. For instance, in the journal Tahzib ul-Akhlaq, he sets out that modernity originated with Islam, was then forgotten, and must now be rediscovered in Europe. This appropriation of the modern, reintegrated into an originary moment, is a temporal schema we will find resonating across Dar es Salaam. See Khan, Ahmad Sayyid. “Mazhabi khayal zamanah-e qadim awr zamanah-e jadid ka”. In Panipati, Muhammad Ismail (ed.) 1961: Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid. Vol. 3. Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqqi-ye Adab.
‘decline’ became powerful, there were three broad paths one could choose between. Perhaps, when one looks at the routes taken by individual agents, these routes combine elements of each of these paths, but, nevertheless, the three paths outlined below indicate the ideal types from within which the sensibility of the colonial Muslim world was arranged.

The first would assert that such a society must follow the path of the colonial power, have a secular government, and limit religion to the private sphere. One could summarise this choice as: “be like them, but better”. Such a rout could be anti-colonial, but would fix the horizons for resistance within the colonial project.

A second choice would be to forsake the colonial world and its incumbent idea of progress, and campaign for a return to an older, better time, when Islamic values were still upheld. One could summarise this choice as: “back to the golden age.”

The first looks to the future, and to an idea of progress, the second, to a past from which we are definitively separated and to which we must return. Sayyid Qutb (d.1966) chooses neither of these options. Instead, he attempts to find in the present, the originary moment.

This is an essay about the translation of In the Shade of the Quran, one of the last texts Qutb wrote when rotting away in Nasser’s jail. It is thirty volumes of interpretation. He wrote it at the same time as he wrote the much more notorious Milestones – four chapters of Milestones are taken directly from In the Shade of the Quran. Because this is an essay about In the Shade of the Quran, and moreover its reception, we will not spend too long on his earlier texts, except to here briefly give the reader a sense of his development as a thinker.

Sayyid Qutb (b.1906) moved to Cairo to complete his education, and embarked on a career as a poet and an essayist, while working at the Ministry of Education. In 1948 he wrote one of his most notable books,
Social Justice in Islam,\textsuperscript{11} before leaving for the United States. Upon his return, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood, the central Islamic activist group in Egypt.\textsuperscript{12} He was first arrested in 1954 due to his involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood and spent much of the remainder of his short life in prison, before being executed in 1966.

In his early work, Sayyid Qutb’s idea of modernity was imbued with an admiration, though not unreserved, for European secularism. He states, much like Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the previous century: “We must unavoidably borrow from European civilization since Europe is ahead of us on the path of progress just as it borrowed from our civilisation when we were ahead of it on the path of progress.”\textsuperscript{11} As his thought develops, Qutb increasingly, while hanging onto an idea of material progress and modernisation, comes to reject the idea that there is any social progress or progress in values.

In Milestones, Qutb outlines a highly ambiguous view of what he takes to be secular modernity. Science, technology, all those things constituted as progress, he tells us, began with Islam, before being taken up by Europe. Islam abandoned its creations to Europe because it ceased to uphold Islamic values.

\textit{This was in the era during which Europe’s genius created its marvellous works in science, culture, law and material production, due to which mankind has progressed to great heights of creativity and material content. It is not easy to find fault with the inventors of such marvellous things, especially since what we call the “world of Islam” is completely devoid of all this beauty}.\textsuperscript{14}

Quite why Europe was able to succeed in science and material production while being devoid of Islamic values, while the Islamic world declined, is

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Equally, from Hassan Al-Banna onwards, one of the two central poles – along with what was to become Pakistan – of Islamic revivalism.
\textsuperscript{14} M:9. My Italics.
\end{flushleft}
never explained. There are a series of tensions in Qutb’s work revolving around this theme: Europe is accused of being without the values that would enable man to live properly and yet is grudgingly admired for its technology; the emphasis for the Muslim is on living in a properly Islamic fashion, and yet “this does not mean we should neglect material progress” for Islam “makes material progress obligatory for us.” 15 Gaining material equality is sufficiently important that Muslims are encouraged to go and learn technical subjects in non-Muslim countries if such training is not available in a Muslim country; 16 what they should not learn however, are the humanities and social sciences, and other such subjects whereby man creates his own values (though learning administration is allowed as long as it is only the technical aspects). In the ambiguousness of this last clause, regarding administration, we can see Qutb’s attempt to remove any sense of a value system from technology, science 17 and the other aspects of what Qutb might otherwise call “progress.”

In recent years, rather too much has been said, I think, about the incoherence of Qutb’s thought. I want to suggest something different: that perhaps his work it more coherent that we might think, and that, moreover, the undeniable degree of incoherence we do find is what makes his work so useful and so attractive to Muslims around the world.

Qutb attempts to Islamise the myth of progress. 18 Far from Islamic society being something of the past, it is, as the quote at the beginning of this section indicates: “a demand of the present and a hope for the future.” In the phrasing of this demand, Qutb breaks with a notion of tradition in a way which resonates with European modernists. Islamic society is not guaranteed

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15 M:10
16 M:109. We should also note here that for Qutb, there are no Muslim countries at present; only countries in jahiliyya (ignorance) who pretend to be Muslim while having secular goals.
17 In doing so, Qutb echoes debates that occur in the Weimar Republic earlier in the century, about whether technology can be harnessed by political systems not rooted in bureaucratic democracy – whether technological progress, ultimately, is value neutral. In both cases, what we see is an increasing concern about the relationship of a tradition to a concept of progress seen as exterior to it. See Schmitt, Carl. 1963. Der Begriff des Politischen. Berlin: Dunker Humboldt. p.75.
18 See, for a more fully developed view of this argument, which however, proceeds to different conclusions: Shepard, William. 1997: The Myth of Progress in the Writings of Sayyid Qutb. Religion. No. 27, pp. 255-266.
by a tradition, by a passage from a proper time, or by a hierarchy of ulema. It is instead an immanent moment in which one can live again according to (transcendent) Islamic values. Such a moment, for Qutb, is eminently practical: it takes up the historical situation in which one finds itself. For the era in which Qutb is writing, and sadly, for our own, the historical situation would have to include the lack of progress (as conceived of in European thought) in the so-called Muslim world. By offering a way to combat political and material marginalisation through Islam, Qutb offers an Islamic view of progress.

A typical nineteenth century idea of progress, one could say, includes a sense of passage from being subjected to things, to willing things themselves. Thus for instance, progress in regard to nature would be man becoming more and more in control of his environment. For Qutb, such a process of will has two aspects. Islam is itself a reconciliation of man with himself19 (and thus one wills what one is [subject to from God]). Furthermore, one is no longer subject to marginalisation in all its aspects, but wills, through Islam, its mastery; Qutb seeks to integrate Islam within the framework, not of a tradition, but of subjective disposition, and wrest it away from debates about its place vis à vis culture.

The particularity of Qutb’s approach, which is vital to understanding why he might be translated in Dar es Salaam, is shown in his reading of the life of Prophet Muhammed. Qutb asks why Muhammed chose to act in the particular way he did, and he opposes it to three (very modern) categories. He asks why Muhammed did not fight a nationalist struggle, for “he would then have been able to free the Arab lands from the domination of Roman and Persian imperialism and would have been able to establish an Arab state.”20 Qutb then asks why Muhammed did not21 begin a class war, which would have freed people from domination. Finally, he asks why Muhammed

19 M:92.
20 M:25.
21 M:27
did not begin a process of moral reform; ensuring people outwardly complied with Islam.22

What should be immediately clear from the anachronistic phrasing of these rhetorical questions is that Prophets Muhammed’s choice should be considered, for Qutb, homologous to our present situation. One should not, for Qutb, fight a nationalist war (a clear rebuke to Nasser, then in power in Egypt), for this is to follow values created by humans (nationalism, patriotism etc.). Such a critique (only Allah gives value, all other values are jahiliyya, ignorance) also applies to class warfare, though here Qutb – whose concern with social justice exceeds the scope of this essay - adds additionally that the equality promised with class struggle will emerge (and can only emerge) through a truly Islamic society. Finally, such a society cannot emerge because people outwardly follow Islam, while remain in jahiliyya in their hearts; a just society for Qutb can only emerge if each person has submitted to Allah.

In arguing this, he draws a distinction between moral reformism23 instituting the creation of a framework of positive law, and the need for Islamic law, a law which transcends the categories of public and private, and cannot simply be assured by the passage of a law in parliament. Instead, he posits that Islam is bound up in action: “the understanding that instruction is for action.”24 This action should be, first and foremost, the cultivating of a life which is in accordance with Islam. Qutb does not ask that one lives with traditions that are politically marginal, or non-Islamic, but instead “it is necessary for a Muslim, therefore, to return to the guidance of God in order to learn the Islamic concept of life – on his own, if possible, or otherwise to seek knowledge from a God-fearing Muslim whose piety and faith are reliable.”25

22 Ibid.
23 M:33.
24 M:18.
While Qutb seems in part to be reacting against modern marginalisation, and turning\textsuperscript{26} to an originary Islam, as Charles Taylor has noted: “the irony and pathos here lie in the fact that precisely these attempts to return to purer forms are the sites of the most startling innovations; what is more, they feed on those innovations that are usually seen as quintessentially modern.”\textsuperscript{27}

The relationship between Islam and the modern constructed by Qutb in his work is contradictory and incomplete. It is certainly that. But perhaps this is precisely the point. The absence of any positive political program (nowhere does Qutb stake out what a program of positive law might be) resounds with groups, like the translators in Dar es Salaam, who have not only no means to take power, but find even the possibility of entering politics as an Islamic agent blocked. Why these contradictions are so attractive in Dar es Salaam is the subject of the next section.

\textsuperscript{26} But not re-turning, for Islam for Qutb is not a prior state but an immanent possibility of the transcendent.

III. A forgotten translation

There are very few Tanzanian authors publishing books. Most of the book trade is dominated by works written in the Middle East, and published – in translation, or more commonly, in the original – in India, before being shipped to Mombassa, and then onto Dar es Salaam.

Of the few books that are written, most are small pamphlets written in Swahili that concern themselves with religious instruction. Rather than books, the majority of what Tanzanian Muslims write is published in the two principal Muslim newspapers that are published in Dar es Salaam: Al Huda and An Nuur, who concern themselves exclusively with politics and contemporary events.

Initially, this appears to be a disjunctural relationship: we don’t see political books, and we see no religious content in two purportedly Muslims newspapers. To understand this separation, we cannot just look at what is written, but at the framework in which people are not writing books. When we consider this framework, it becomes apparent that the apparent disjuncture between the two types of writing is emblematic of the broader tensions within the Muslim community.

In Tanzania, parties are not allowed to form on a religious basis: an explicitly Islamic politics is proscribed. It is thus noteworthy that even when Omar Sange, the editor of An Nuur, told me that Islamic (and Christian) parties should be allowed to contest elections, he phrased this demand in secular language, claiming that “just as secular politics is an ideology”, 28 so we should “also allow Islamic and Christian parties to compete in the marketplace of ideas.”

This is not as far away from Qutb’s position as it seems. While this will be developed later in the essay, here it is sufficient to note that if, for Qutb,  

28 Interview carried out in Dar es Salaam, June 2007, in English.
religion must be political, and not simply moral reformism, that means it must also enter the political field – and thus, rather than being a singular religion set apart from the public sphere, it must compete and engage with other political movements; the emphasis on politics and religion being a unity leads to religion becoming a domain of politics.

This is amply illustrated by the approach taken by An Nuur, which publishes stories drawing attention to the Muslim community as a minority group within a secular polity, rather than as a religious force. The way the Muslim community is inserted into the political sphere thus in part explains the absence of books that address the Muslim community in Tanzania as an Islamic community: the only well known book on the Muslim community in Tanzania written by a Tanzanian – which, markedly, was published abroad – is Muhammed Said’s The life and times of Abdulwahid Sykes (1924-1968): the untold story of the Muslim struggle against British colonialism in Tanganyika, a book about how the Muslim role in the nationalist story has not been properly acknowledged.

Analogously, the pamphlets that are written stay well clear of politics, and while they play an important role in the community’s internal conception of religion (and its political subjectivity), they do not articulate a distinctive Islamic political sphere.

In an interview with Omar Sange, I asked him about why Muslims intellectuals in Tanzania do not write books reflecting on their situation. He tied this to two sets of circumstances, one external, and the other internal to the community. Firstly, he explained, there has been discrimination against Muslims since the colonial period, and this has resulted in a lack of opportunities to access education and the types of possibilities that would

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29 There are, equally, a host of less prosaic reasons books are not written: a small and expensive publishing industry, an absence of capital that would fund the writing of books, and so on. But equally, as we can see from the translation of Sayyid Qutb, while these are debilitating restrictions, they are not total barriers to book publication, and we must look outside of a narrowly functionalist explanation to understand why books are not written.

make book publishing possible. The essay does not have space to evaluate the veracity of his claims; however, we should note that, as with the presentation of Islam as one ideology among many, the emphasis here is on placing Islam’s development as a force in terms of a national political arena and Christianity as a political force within this arena.

The internal reason, he told me, concerns the separation between the secularly educated, who possess the knowledge that would allow them to write books, and the religious hierarchy, whose low opinion of Swahili as a suitable language for religious books, anti-political stance, and lack of concern with the situation of Tanzanian Muslims means that they are not inclined to write books about the political actuality. So we have forces constituted by the actors as modern and Christian, and in opposition, a tradition (and the associated clergy) that is no longer seen as adequate for the contemporary situation.

The depiction of the religious establishment outlined above was echoed by Kifea, the editor of Al Huda, the other Muslim paper of note. In his criticism of the way that the religious establishment separates the situation of Muslims from their political faith, he echoes the debate that occurred in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the 1990’s, when the silence of the ulema in response to the positioning of American troops in the country led the sahwa [awakening] sheikhs to name the ulema the “sheikhs of menstruation”, due to their perceived obsession with ritual and formality, their ignorance of politics, and their inability to apply Islamic teachings in the world. What such a critique occluded was the very concrete political reasons that meant the ulema did not criticise the house of Saud.

Likewise, in Tanzania there may well be compelling political reasons why sheikhs who hold positions of authority do not publish books; it is certainly

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the case the government would be none too friendly towards powerful figures advocating political Islam. As Kifea put it “a Minister would not be happy being on a Mosque committee, and a Sheikh would not want to try to intervene directly in government on behalf of all Muslims.”

There are further reasons for the absence of Tanzanian Muslim writers. Swahili, as we have established, is looked down upon as a language of religious instruction, and there is little market for Arabic texts that use a language more complex than that of an Arabic primer. Furthermore, while many of the Imams and Sheikhs of Dar es Salaam have had excellent religious educations and read and speak fluent Arabic, it is uncertain the extent to which many of them could write in fluent Arabic.

On the other hand, those with a secular education find themselves, so they claim, without the expertise to write books on Islam that would be approved by the standards of religious scholars. So the problem of education is two-fold, and thus the emphasis amongst the journalists at the newspapers on marrying the two forms of knowledge.

To return to the economic question, it is not simply a lack of a market for books of serious prose, there is also a lack of sponsorship; the sponsorship that Middle Eastern writers receive from the state is often talked of enviously by the secularly educated intellectuals in Tanzania. This lack of sponsorship is driven by a climate which sees building a mosque as a religiously important thing to do, but publishing a book as a marginal activity.

It is within this difficult situation that the Islamic publishing trade, such as it is, takes place. Most firms are small family run affairs, with kinship ties to agents in Zanzibar or Mombasa, and to publishing houses in India, with more erratic ties to Lebanon and the Gulf. One of them, Kutub publishing, an Indian-Tanzanian outfit, is responsible for the majority of the leaflets published in Swahili.
Like Kutub publishing, the Ibn Hazm Media centre, who are the nominal publishers of the Swahili translation of Qutb, is a family-run affair, and, just like Kutub, the publishing arm of the business is vertically integrated with the book shop described at the beginning of this essay. It was created by three men in 1996: Abdul Kerim, Yassir Salim, and Said Bawaziri – the latter, for reasons to be explained shortly, denies having anything to do with the firm. Books are translated and edited by fairly flexible networks of people that cross-cut ideological and religious differences. Abdul Kerim has several other businesses that seem to underwrite the cost of Ibn Hazm, which, he claimed in an interview with me, was set up: “to allow Muslims in Tanzania to know their own religion.” In contrast to Kutub Publishing and almost all the other publishing companies – with one exception – they are committed to translating books from Arabic and English to Swahili, and this goal is underwritten by a religious conviction we shall explore later.

Due to the difficult economic circumstances I outline above, Ibn Hazm have only published twenty to thirty titles in the ten years they have been in operation, and even these books – which have been focused on hadith exposition and salat instruction – are published in co-ordination with other publishers, with whom there is collective distribution and sharing of titles. The exception to this is their translation of Sayyid Qutb’s In the Shade of the Quran, which is most definitely not solely concerned with salat or hadith.

I say their translation of the book, because their name is marked on the inside cover, however, Abdul Kerim, one of the founders of the organisation, after claiming that the book was published so long ago he could not remember who published it (2005), then claimed that Ibn Hazm did not publish it, and that it was instead published by Brighthouse Ltd., a firm who, he claimed, used to publish under the Ibn Hazm imprint before becoming a

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33 This evasiveness, I think, should not suggest anything in the readers mind other than the fully justified suspicion that a Tanzanian Muslim has about a European asking incessant questions about Sayyid Qutb, an author, as Abdul Kerim was well aware, that many in the West automatically associate with terrorism. This situation was exacerbated by the supposed Islamist nail bomb attack in Nairobi in the previous month. For another aspect of the way Tanzanians have related to the ‘war on terror’, see Becker, Felicitas. 2006: Rural Islamism during the ‘War on Terror’: A Tanzanian case study. African Affairs. 105/421. pp. 583-603.
separate company. Brighthouse was begun by, among others, Said Bawaziri, one of the founders of the Ibn Hazm Media Centre.

Brighthouse Ltd. is the only Islamic publishing company based in Dar es Salaam that would be recognisable as such to a European publishing agent: it is not vertically integrated with any other aspect of the publishing trade, none withstanding its links to the Ibn Hazm Media Centre, it outsources translation and editing work, and was formed by a network of friends, rather than on the basis of pre-existing religious or kinship ties. Said Bawaziri, one of the company’s founders, emphasised the last point when I spoke to him, to distinguish the company from the Ibn Hazm Media Centre.

It is an association of five men, all of whom had previously translated for the centre. Alliy Kilima, the translator was quoted as the beginning of this essay, claimed the company was set up in 2005, though the company has older roots than this.

Said Bawaziri and Alliy Kilima trace the origins of the company to a meeting that took place in 2001 (Abdul Kerim places this meeting in 1995, and claims that it was also this meeting that led to the transformation of Ibn Hazm from a book store – it has two branches, one near the wa Mtoro mosque, the other, older shop, was established next to the Mayema mosque in 1996 – to a publishing company), This meeting was between some of the intellectuals who had received a secular education, and members of the religious hierarchy. The subject of the meeting was the challenge to the Muslim community caused by declining attendance at the madrassa, as people now increasingly entered a secular education system. The meeting wanted to find new ways of allowing people to learn about the Islamic faith and connect it to their lives.

If we are to believe Said Bawaziri, it is out of this concern that Brighthouse was formed. They endeavour to translate major works of the Islamic faith into Swahili, he told me, focusing on the Quran and the Sunna. They have
only translated one work so far, the first volume of Ibn Kathir's commentary on the Quran,\textsuperscript{34} as well as playing an ambiguous role in the translation of Sayyid Qutb. Both these volumes are professionally printed, and each is about 400 pages. It is not obvious to whom they sell: indeed, the only buyer I saw during my time in Dar es Salaam was I.

The translation of Sayyid Qutb emerges in a particular local world, one in which there is a need to re-define what it is to be Muslim against a backdrop of growing secular education and comparisons to Christianity.\textsuperscript{35} Within this world, two elements will be highlighted in the context of Qutb's translation: the extent to which Brighthouse emerges against a backdrop of what is constituted as modern (secular education, the engagement of the Muslim world with a secular polity), and the degree to which, in its goals and aims, the translation, like the work of Qutb himself, can be understood as a modernist reaction to this challenge.


\textsuperscript{35} On the fraught nature of these comparisons, see: Said Muhammed. 2006a: \textit{Muslim Bible Scholars of Tanzania: The legacy of Sheikh Ahmed Deedat.} Paper presented at the International Symposium on Islamic Civilization in Southern Africa, University of Johannesburg.
IV. One book; many worlds – a methodological consideration.

In times gone by, anthropologists and archaeologists alike spent much of their time arguing about whether an observable cultural phenomenon had diffused from a single centre, or was a product of independent origin. In this case, such a dichotomy would ask whether what I name Islamic Modernism in Dar es Salaam has its own, original independent development in terms of local circumstances, or has diffused from Egyptian and Pakistani centres down to a local level.

The debate would have been endless and circular, and thankfully, Levi-Strauss ended it in 1963,36 with the penetratingly simple observation that regardless of whether a given phenomenon can be constituted as having an exterior origin, we still need to investigate the reasons such a phenomenon is taken up in each local case. Levi-Strauss’ work has led to anthropologists focusing on local refashioning of supposedly global ideas.

Given that it is very difficult to reconstruct a chronologically linear narrative of the awareness of Qutb on the one hand, and the development of Islamist thought among secularly educated intellectuals in Dar es Salaam on the other,37 a typical anthropological study that followed the example set by Levi-Strauss would attempt to understand how a local culture adapted or in some way made its own the writing of Sayyid Qutb. The question would be: what is the importance of Qutb’s thought to its translation? The answer would be: the large read through the small,38 in which Qutb’s name would become a signifier to be adapted, more or less freely, by a text that talked of Tanzanian Islam in some local variation.

37 Indeed, such an chronology would be precisely not the point: the developments leading up to his translation could only come about from the inter-mingling and resonances between the two.
38 This normally has the conclusion: the big is not what it thought it was. My favourite examples of this genre are the essays in Money and the Morality of Exchange in which the formula is: given that tribe x uses money as toilet paper, clearly Marx is wrong. I have, as will be made clear in the following paragraphs, great problems with such an approach. See Bloch, Maurice & Parry, J. (eds.) 1989: Money and the Morality of Exchange. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Such an approach is not possible in the case of this translation, if it is ever desirable. First, to ask the question: what is the importance of the translation of Qutb to Islam in Tanzania? Zero. No one buys this book, if imams read him – in an Arabic they haven’t quite mastered – then they keep it out of the Friday sermons; Qutb’s influence in society as a whole is quite negligible.

Which is what makes this translation so interesting: it is not a question of seeing how Qutb is taken up in Tanzania, for except for his translators, he is not taken up at all. It is instead a question of understanding what, in Qutb’s thought, makes him attractive to his translators, who wish to negate several aspects of their own society. Here it is not simply a question of understanding the position in which the translation will occur in society: it is understanding the position in which the translators would like it to occur, why it will not occur there, and why there is a sufficient appeal in the text that the translators will publish it for a future market: the hope for the future Alliy Kilima mentions at the beginning of this essay in words that almost exactly parallel Qutb’s depiction of Islam in Milestones.

Due to this particular set of circumstances, this essay places much more emphasis on a close reading of the work of Qutb than one might normally expect from a standard anthropological essay. I think this approach is warranted by one further set of considerations.

Normally, one might ask: what are the cultural factors in a society that encourage the translation of/adoption of x? The difficulty of asking this question in terms of Qutb is that his entire message is based on the negation of culture. Here I want to quote at length from a statement Olivier Roy imagines a Mullah saying to an immigrant in a European country.

You have not inherited your grandfather’s Islam because your grandfather did not pass his Islam on to you, your grandfather came from Morocco, from Algeria, your grandfather claims to be a Muslim, and sees himself

as one, but he did not pass on his Islam to you. But that’s good, because your grandfather’s Islam is not the right Islam.

Your grandfather’s Islam is the Islam of the Marabouts, Moroccan Islam, the Islam of the Sufis, traditional Islam, which has nothing to do with the teachings of the prophet. So, it is really good that you have lost the traditional culture of your family. You don’t feel French or Spanish or Italian, you don’t feel European, which is fine because Europe is not Islam. You don’t feel anything in particular; which is perfect, as it puts you in the best possible situation to become a real Muslim, that is, to live your Islam like a pure religion, like a set of norms and values without any social or cultural content.

There are several things to note about this speech. First, culture is seen as a barrier to Islam. This is also the case in the work of Qutb, who sees the temptation to merely manifest the outward signs of religious observance (practices we might identify as cultural signifiers) as moral reformism which has nothing to do with the proper cultivation of an internally held Islamic disposition. It is also the case for the translators of Qutb in Dar es Salaam, who are angry that the religious hierarchy are content to allow ritual observance of Islam to be separated from a political engagement in the society that must be based in an attempt to live Islam in every aspect of one’s life.

Then, one must also note that Europe has a double role in this speech. It is negative – because Europe, as it is constituted in the text, is not Islam. Yet this negativity has also played a positive function, in that it has stripped culture and society away from the immigrant, and prepared him for a purely subjective, immanent experience of Islam. This double-edged sword, as we saw in the second section of this essay, is also present in the work of Qutb. It is also present in Dar es Salaam. Concern is raised about the erosion of Muslim values due to secular education, yet, it is this very secular education that allows the translators to argue for a new experience of Islam, in Swahili, accessible to people in their everyday lives through the emphasis on individual education and politics.

The sum total of this movement is that the process of secularisation in society does indeed erode religion – as understood as a collective, political spirit – but does not banish religious observance into the far reaches of time.
Instead, it changes its structure: becoming the manifestation of religiosity; an explicit and discursive form of religion recast along secular lines.

On one sense, this is an essay on Dar es Salaam; on the way a text was translated. But, as the speech quoted above should have made clear, the type of structural process we see occurring with the translation of Qutb is one increasingly mirrored around the world. It is perhaps most evident in Europe, where the feeling of the loss of tradition is most apparent in generations of immigrants, but this feeling of loss also occurs in societies with large Muslim populations. Indeed, as Al-Rasheed\(^{40}\) has made clear, it also occurs in Saudi Arabia, where the domination of a religious rhetoric by a government with secular goals increasingly forces people who want to dissent to attempt to re-found Islamic practice in new and more explicit ways. So while we are looking at the translation of Qutb in Dar es Salaam, this necessitates looking at the translation of Qutb: at a series of broader transformations in the nature of religion that occur in the world today.

I don’t just want to suggest that there are structurally similar processes occurring in different countries however; the process of translating Qutb is occurring simultaneously in many countries, and this translation is not a series of depth-phenomena\(^{41}\) to be compared, but an immanent process that binds people together across local cultural contexts. One example will suffice here.

While I was living in Dar es Salaam, I frequently ate at the Al-Uruba Hotel on Mkunguni Street. It is notable for its excellent Somali food, and infamous for housing the bombers of the US Embassy in 1998. I frequently asked about the bombings when I ate there.

Most people in Dar es Salaam saw the bombings on CNN,\(^{42}\) despite them happening just around the corner. This is equally the case for those who

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\(^{40}\) CS: 134-175.  
\(^{41}\) Phenomena with a temporal density that is isolatable.  
\(^{42}\) This point is developed in a different way by Devji, Faisal. 2005: *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*. London: Hurst & Co. p.xi. Henceforth LJ.
stayed at Al-Uruba, which has two large televisions in the restaurant, normally tuned to CNN or Al Jazeera. Those who breakfasted with the bombers, then saw the events unfold on television. Not only are you seeing something visually which is identical to what is being watched in America, it is also an event that then becomes immediately framed in a determinedly global way. The international coverage immediately frames the event in terms of names which exceeds you – Muslim, Islam - and which asks you to be responsible to things you had no part in. The Tanzanian government left the Muslim population in no doubt that someone would be held accountable, in the security crackdown that followed soon after. The debate that follows – about Islam, its relationship to America, people’s connection to this relationship – links people into a broader framework in which the ideas of Qutb form a compelling resource.

Much of this debate is confused. Take, for instance, the sense of “loss of tradition” alluded to in the proto-speech I quoted from Olivier Roy. Anthropologists have spent much of the last fifty years showing that where people see disjuncture and change, there is actually continuity: that, in a classic caricature, the supposedly ‘modern’ Pakistani banker keeps and redefines their cultural tradition in imaginative ways. I would not want to argue with those who see continuities everywhere, but I think they are largely missing the point. Indeed, if there is a grand continuity we can see over the last hundred years, it is a continuous sense of destruction and loss of tradition. That this is not actually a loss of tradition – that practices continue, that things are reinvented – is less important here than the way people relate and act on the basis of this loss of tradition. It becomes important when considering the popularity of Qutb to understand that when tradition loses its justificatory basis for action (when, even if I act in line with a tradition, I cannot justify my action in relation to it) a new model of thought must be devised, or assumed, to make the world meaningful again.

The same confusion reigns in reference to the modern, a term which, at various points in my time in Tanzania, I heard in reference to: America,
secular education, technology, Europe, Islam, computers, books, the CIA. Is secular education really modern? What makes it so?

The point, here, I feel, should not be to show up the contradictions in the accounts of the modern given in Dar es Salaam, in order to disallow them or criticise them, but to understand how the links between these words are constituted: to make the contradictions explicit is useful, assuredly, but only as a means of understanding the unity of thought, and, where there is not unity, the structural reasons behind what is un-thought: the contradiction that cannot be spoken.

The loose association between the words clustered around the modern take us back to the 1930’s, where Wittgenstein is trying to work out what might define the word game. In the Philosophical Investigations, he wrote:43

"I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than ‘family resemblances’: for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.

And for instance the kinds of number form a family in the same way. Why do we call something a “number”? Well, perhaps because it has a -direct- relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that there is one fibre that runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.

Following the threads of the modern that criss-cross Qutb and Dar es Salaam, and then span out to include France, America and much of the rest of the world, is crucial to understanding the translation of Sayyid Qutb.

However, the fact we are dealing with confused notions, does not mean that the essay itself should be confused. Something needs to be said about three words: tradition, modern and modernity. The first will be used as an emic category for almost this entire essay; I will analyse what people refer to when they use the term, taking notes of differences in usage and the objects to which it is assigned. The exception to this rule will be in the next section,

which deals with the notion of tradition in Islam, where it takes the more standard place given to it in fiqh – due note will be taken to separate the sense given here to the term and the sense given by the translators of Qutb.

Similarly to the word tradition, the word “modern” will be used as an emic category, situating its meaning for the enunciator of the term in each case. And while there is not one thread, as Wittgenstein noted, there is perhaps a sense, and it is a sense of lack. The modern is principally constituted – in all its different family relations – as either something we do not have, or something which oppresses us. As Don Donham⁴⁴ has argued, this feeling of lack is a powerful constituting factor behind attempts to find a resolution between a tradition that is felt to be insufficient and a modernity which is out of one's reach. The importance of this sense will be traced throughout the essay.

There is also an entic concept that I am using, and I cannot claim this is a question of family resemblances: it is the concept of modernity, and equally modernism: when this essay speaks of Islamic Modernism, it means an Islam embedded in modernity, as an entic, analytic category, and not an Islam in an epoch we call ‘modern’: by using the term Islamic Modernism, I am making a statement about the structure of thought, not about the temporal period in which the thought takes place.⁴⁵

This structure of thought is bound up, however, in a certain experience of the world it is within:

Associated with the ascendancy of reason, sciences and statist forms of political organisation as they emerged in Europe from the 13th to 17th centuries, culminating in the triumph of industrial capitalism in the 19th century, and, finally, complemented by the October Revolution in Russia that brought state socialism into the world. Implicit in the dynamics of modernism was its globalization by way of colonial extension and capitalist expansion. A strong feature of modernism was its basic secularism, finding meaning in the combination of

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⁴⁵ Though indeed, the thought of the modern is indeed always a thought about the time in which it takes place: this historicity is a common attribute of thinkers as otherwise seemingly far removed as Marx, Schmitt, and yes, Qutb.
materialist and scientific developments that made knowledge the equivalent of what an earlier age had regarded as salvation.46

Thus, what we aim to discover is how modernism, and the colonialism bound up with it, produced not simply European Modernism, but also Islamic modernism, and not as an antonym, but as a product of those very same political movements, leading to similar structures of thought.

What this statement should not be taken to be is a comparative one. There is a great danger that, by calling Qutb an Islamic modernist, we beginning to compare Qutb to a figure taken to be a modernist (say, Marx, for instance), and, because Qutb does not culminate in the same conclusions despite similarities, we judge him insufficient, or confused. This type of comparativism plagues all those who write about the superficial similarities between Protestant thought and Islamism.

The enterprise is a different one. We will analyse the internal development of Qutb's thought, in line with the socio-economic position of the Muslim world in which he found himself; one subjugated by the West and led astray by secular politicians masquerading as Muslims. We will then see how Qutb retains an Islam that does not look to a past, but attempts to negate its own tradition (of ijma47, or consensus, for instance) and simultaneously deny and take up the modern. In doing so, Qutb attempts to ground an Islam which is both modernist (in its conception of politics, and in its temporal structure)


47 In this example, the similar terms (which Qutb adopted from the Pakistani thinker Mawdudi) include the notion of the vanguard. In Qutb’s case, he has written Milestones for an Islamic vanguard who will prepare the coming Islamic state. Unlike his Marxist predecessors, however, his thought does not contain an outline of how one might take state power; indeed, in his emphasis on subjective feeling, he seems to specifically disavow such a tradition. More structurally, what makes Qutb a modernist thinker is the way he thinks through a disjuncture between tradition and present, returning to a moment of the past (the Quran) in order to free oneself from the tradition in which one finds oneself (jahiliyya). While it is not the subject of this essay, it should be remarked upon that this conception, as it is stated in the quote that began this essay, bears a great deal of resemblance to Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the messianic moment. On Mawdudi see: Nasr, S.V.R. 1996: *Mawdudi and the making of Islamic Revivalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. henceforth MIR. For Walter Benjamin see (2006) On the Concept of History. In Eiland, Howard & Jennings, Michael W. (eds.): *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. Henceforth OCH.

48 Ijma is the process by which agreement is reached in the community of Muslims. In particular, it now tends to refer to the agreement of religious scholars about the correct interpretation of hadith.
and yet retains the claim of embodying the transcendental truth of the Quran. This movement will constantly be tracked and compared to the situation in Dar es Salaam.

A word should also be said here about what it means to track the internal development of someone's thought. A great deal of ink has been spilled on such questions as “is the taking of life permissible in Islam” and “what does Islam say about x”. A lot of authors asking these questions are extremely erudite, but, to my mind, they are asking the wrong question. Islam doesn’t say anything, other than the Quran, and quite what that means has been debated since it was received; it doesn’t seem likely that this debate is going to die down anytime soon.

This essay will not attempt to understand if the use of Qutb in Dar es Salaam is in accordance with his thought, nor whether Qutb’s thought is in accordance with some putative Islam: it will not attempt to make a correspondence theory of Islamism. This essay is instead interested in what people do, and the words they use to justify and explain what they do – to themselves and to other people. The thought of Qutb can provide a path in Dar es Salaam – and in much of the rest of the world – to legitimate a certain understanding of the world, and a correlative domain of action. In such an approach, contradictions or confusions in thought are not obstacles to action: they may be precisely the points which make action possible.

Given that we are tracing two developments (of Qutb's thought, of the situation in Dar es Salaam) without comparing them to European modernism, it is pertinent to ask what the benefit is of invoking the term “Islamic Modernism”. The first reason is an eminently practical one. We are everywhere confronted with statements to the effect that Islam is “archaic”, that Islamists want to return a golden age. What this misses is just how contemporaneous the Islamist phenomenon is: the degree to which it is only

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thinkable on the basis of an engagement with the modern world (even as it denies it) that is structurally similar to much of European thought.

In making such an invocation without making a rigorous and scholarly comparison between Qutb and x author (or authors), this essay runs the risk of painting too broad a picture. I am fully aware of that things are more complicated than the way I present them in this essay. In the words of Marcel Gauchet\textsuperscript{50} “my sole excuse for deliberately taking these risks is the need to understand and my conviction that these risks must be taken.”

These risks must be taken, if risks they are, because without attending to the broader historical movements at play we remain trapped within preconceptions that our cultivating of a small garden of knowledge (the particularities of Islam in Dar es Salaam) is precisely designed to avoid. These days, one is continuously advised not to make sweeping comparisons, for with such comparisons comes the danger of euro-centrism. What I want to suggest is the reverse: that by thinking we are only dealing with, for instance, Islam in Tanzania, we hide all our assumptions under the small carpet of specialisation.

To give an example. One of the foremost commentators on Islam who has warned against the unproblematic comparison of Islam to ideas from European political theory is Olivier Roy, who counsels, at the beginning of The Failure of Political Islam,\textsuperscript{51} that one should not attack Islam for not developing a system of thought about the state, because Sharia cannot be correlated with positive law (a point we have already seen Qutb develop). It is thus sadly ironic that this book, and the later Globalised Islam,\textsuperscript{52} claim Islamism has politically failed because it was unable to ensure the passage between the subjective feeling of the believer (the religiosity spoken of in the quote from Roy in the preceding section: the immanent experience of religion without reference to culture or society) to the existence of a political


\textsuperscript{52} Roy, Olivier. 2004: Globalised Islam. London: Hurst & Co. Henceforth GI.
thought about the state. In language which recalls Hegel’s analysis of the
terror of the French revolution (and in structure of argument, recalls it
absolutely), Roy claims: “The existence of an Islamic political society is a
necessary condition for the believer to achieve total virtue, but on the other
hand such a society functions only through the virtue of the members
beginning with its leaders.”

Roy here remains trapped in a – very European - framework that sees the
taking of state power as the ultimate horizon of politics. What this essay will
suggest is that far from being a failure, the popularity of Qutb can be
explained by his suggestion of a different mode of politics: one based on
ethics, rather than the establishment of positive law. To groups such as the
secularly educated engineers who translated him in Dar es Salaam, or indeed
marginalised Muslims in a Europe of secular governments, such a model
poses a number of attractions.

What this essay will emphasise in making such an argument is that we
should not look at Qutb’s thought, nor his translators, as a rupture with
either the various currents of Islam or with the modernity that Qutb both
deries and recycles: Qutb’s thought emerges out of a tradition, is justified
and defined by it, just as he negates it, and in a homologous sense, it is
created through an engagement with a modernity that is both embodies and
denies.

pp.357-363. Henceforth PoS.
V. The ghost.

Only when it is too late do we dream of the past and then our dreams incorporate everything we want to deny.

Olivier Roy, The Failure of Political Islam.\textsuperscript{54}

Roy wrote this line in reference to Islamism: a movement which begins to dream of an Islamic time, of a time without secular modernity, only too late, only when the Muslim world was already suffused by secularism, and by that stage, these dreams of the past were, in turn, suffused and expressed in secular fashion.

Ghosts. Ghosts of a present we want to deny permeating a past in which we wish to live. And isn’t that the case with all ghosts? That they are not past presences we cannot banish from the present, but current moments we do not wish to acknowledge that disrupt our view of the past.

Roy’s statement applies to more than just Islamist thought. Just as Islamism incorporates the present it wishes to deny into its dream of the past, our vision of the type of Islam that Qutb represents is infused with all the actualities of the present we want to deny. There are three senses of this denial to which I want to draw attention, and that will form the backdrop of this essay.

An often heard claim made by those who make such things (and here I think of Christopher Hitchens and Martin Amis)\textsuperscript{55} is that, after the 9/11 towers fell, they had a visceral sensation this was “our war” - for those who missed Nazism and Communism, we present for you: “Islamo-Fascism”! Islamists whom, to make matters worse, are clearly influenced by the communists. Suddenly, the world, which was previously grey, can be clearly assimilated to

\textsuperscript{54} FPI:23.
a Manichean dichotomy. Our dream here is of a past where one could create an enemy – outside, observable, against which one could wage war. As I made clear in the previous section, aspects of this dream even influence the most sophisticated of commentators; it influences Olivier Roy when his immensely learned treatise on Political Islamism fails the Islamists – it occasionally seems that he is an anxious French school teacher marking an essay in a small town somewhere outside of Tours - because they have no thought of the state. Here then, is an enemy we must be able to defeat, if only because it so tenaciously refuses to be what we want it to be in our dream.

Our dream of the past is bound up with the present in two senses. First, as Olivier Roy correctly noted, “The crowds that in the 1950’s demonstrated under the red or national flags now march beneath the Green banner”, with the collapse of the Communist project, and the failure of the secular movements in the Middle East (e.g. Nasser), people increasingly placed their demands – which were often about social justice, as much as Allah – in the language of Islam: the end of the Cold War provides the change in grammar that makes Islamism possible as the phenomena it is today; it is the end of the dream that makes possible the present we wish to deny.

Second, in the way we identify the enemy, in the indeterminate legal practices that mark our engagement with the enemy; we mirror both their practices, and the contemporary situation we wish to deny – a situation without a clearly defined enemy that we can fight.

It is also notable, and much remarked upon, that both many Islamists and some of the American establishment share the conviction that there is a war of civilisation, and that Islam wishes – whatever Islam here is supposed to be – to return to a medieval age. This dream of the past incorporates and denies a much more ambiguous present. In this present, displays of religiosity increasingly dominate both Christianity and Islam. In, for instance, the born-

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56 FPI: 4.
again phenomena in America, we see people who are not necessarily born into a faith, but re-define themselves in terms of it; the self is interpreted in terms of the religion, and what is crucial here, just like for Qutb's cultivation of an internal disposition in Islam, is the way in which the believer believes in his or her faith. 

There is thus a horrible irony in the Muslim World Outreach project, an attempt by the American state to find and support a “modern Islam”, which emerged out of the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. The supposedly modern Islam the project wants to promote would be a secular Islam – what it ignores is that the modernist Islam is wants to fight is already, as this essay will explore, contoured by the secular, and is thoroughly modern.

It is not merely an accident, or a politically advantageous manoeuvre, to deny the modernity of the type of Islamism that Qutb represents. If “the 19th century’s Hegelian idea was to rely on the movement of history ‘to surrender to the life of the object’, the 20th century’s idea is to confront history, to master it politically”, such is the thesis of Badiou’s recent analysis of the 20th century. In it he sketches out the main threads that bind together modernist projects as superficially different as Futurism, Marxism and Absurdist theatre. What he finds in common to all of them is a willingness to think of the future: to not think of life as the domain of value, but to be willing to go beyond life. The nuances of this account exceed the scope of this essay, except to say that the willingness to believe in values beyond human life (and which may then ask you to sacrifice your own, or someone else’s) is rigorously historical: they emerge not as transcendental ideals, but as events that erupt from within our own time, even as they take leave of it.

57 It is notable in Qutb’s work that being born a Muslim is no longer sufficient to be thought of as a Muslim. “The callers to Islam should understand that when they invite people toward the revival of religion, they should invite them to accept Islam’s fundamental belief: even though these people call themselves Muslims or their birth certificates register them as Muslims.” M:35.

58 For further analysis of this project, see Mahmood, Saba. 2007: Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation. Public Culture. 18:2.

It is this commitment to a sort of transcendental historicism, that, I will argue, one can find in the work of Sayyid Qutb. It is also an area of thought that, while it continues to define us, is not talked about today: any idea with a whiff of utopianism is decried as leading to the gulags; in this respect, the fact that the dominant political paradigm of our time is a human rights discourse that sets life as the sole sovereign value and does not allow for a positive political project illustrates the degree to which the modernist project has been thoroughly removed from the domain of the sayable.

It is in this climate that so thoroughly a modern thinker as Qutb appears as archaic; a climate in which the thought of his common present with us cannot be stated. The way Qutb is taken up in Dar es Salaam, and elsewhere around the world, is not part of a history that we can keep distinguish as separate from our own, anymore than it is a turn towards the past. It emerges out of a negation of history, a negation that European modernity also attempted, and takes place in a world in which we all find ourselves. The story I will now tell about Dar es Salaam, is also our story.

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60 Human rights can only be violated – and thus the resulting political action has only a value in terms of restitution, not as a positive political project; one is continually stuck trying to guard against the abuse of rights rather than setting out a positive political program. See Hamacher, Werner. 2004: The right to have rights (four and a half remarks). The South Atlantic Quarterly. Vol. 103, No. 2-3, pp.343-356.
Part II: Tradition and Inheritance

In authentic history writing the destructive impulse is just as strong as the saving impulse. For what can something be redeemed? Not so much from the disrepute or discredit in which it is held as from a determined mode of its transmission. The way in which it is valued as heritage is every bit as insidious as its disappearance could ever be.

Walter Benjamin.\textsuperscript{61}

There is a place, Benjamin seems to claim, for the saving impulse in authentic history writing. In Benjamin, perhaps, this impulse is to save the voices that are mute; that have no place in history. However, in the quote above, it is the destructive aspect of the process that is highlighted; precisely the aspect we are unaccustomed to associating with history and tradition.

Saving here is treated with suspicion: saving, the veneration of a period perhaps, or a chain of transmission (we might say here, a set of relationships and institutions that conserve and control the transmission of history), is treated as leading to heritage. This mode of transmission holds history apart from life, rather than, and this is Benjamin's aim, finding in the moment of the present the historical constellation that gave rise to it. To this valuing as heritage, he opposes the destructive impulse, which does not attempt to make history disappear, but liquidates it to be realised in the present. In a short text, called The Destructive Character, he clarifies what he means: “The destructive character stands in the front line of traditionalists. Some people pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them; others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called the destructive.”\textsuperscript{62}

This concern with history brought into a moment of the present re-emerges again and again in Benjamin’s writing. Benjamin’s concern is with history,


and also, importantly, how history is passed on. There is a common reading of Benjamin that holds what he wants to do is to count those that are uncounted, the much quoted line from the thesis where he declares that “There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism”\textsuperscript{63} is taken to mean that behind every eulogised tradition there is a legacy of violence, and the task of the historian is to uncover and make explicit those voices; because, of course, this task is never accomplished – there are, sadly, always more of the uncounted – the historian becomes a reformer, constantly challenging the record and including more and more of the uncounted, finding in the rubble of history’s forgotten the secrets which can illuminate the present.

I doubt very much Benjamin would have been against such a task, though he may have found it rather like the task of the Social Democrats, but it is certainly not his goal. In the quote that began this section, he asks what can be redeemed, and answers, one can redeem something from a determined mode of transmission; which is to say, transmission at all.

Benjamin’s thought attempts to find a way to act through tradition: not to conserve it in a mode of transmission, but to destroy it, even as this movement of destruction is justified and defined through the tradition it attempts to negate. It is not the only body of thought that attempts to find such a path. This section will set out the increasingly difficult relationship between tradition and transmission in the thought of Qutb and some of his predecessors, and then consider how Qutb’s thought is taken up in the Tanzanian context.

Islam does not, as Christianity does, take faith or dogma as its centre, but rather something which is simultaneously public and private, civil and religious, temporal and transcendental: the Sharia.\textsuperscript{64} How one gains access to


the Law\textsuperscript{65} has been a difficult question throughout Islam’s history. In principle we have two sources, the Quran, the direct revelation of God, and the Sunna, the imitatio Muhammadi which “became the standard for ethical behaviour among Muslims, forming the basis for Islamic law and setting the standards for even the most mundane activities.”\textsuperscript{66} Following on from this distinction, the Quran is understood as direct revelation, \textit{wahy}, and it can, correlatively, be recited, whereas Sunna is \textit{ilham} (inspiration), and cannot.

In contemporary Islam – almost uniformly, though perhaps less uniformly than two hundred years ago – one gain’s access to the Sunna through the hadith. In the first two centuries of Islam, a variety of rather marginal movements suggested different ways to access the Prophet’s example; some, for instance, held that the living community were the embodiment of the original companions (who followed the prophet), as their practice was a continuation of previous practice, and through this habitual inheritance, a path can be traced back to the gestures and movements of the companions. It was not until Al-Shaf’i’ began to standardise the sayings of the prophet, and develop the procedure of verification that would enable a community of scholars to discern which hadith were fake and which were real, that these debates about alternative modes of accessing the Sunna abated.

It is not my intention to enter the vast world of hadith scholarship, both Islamic and academic, except to note that in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, questions again to be raised about the status of the hadith. Western scholars questioned the \textit{isnad} (chains of transmission\textsuperscript{67}) on which the veracity of the hadith were based, some Islamic scholars questioned who should be allowed to decide about hadith, and what type of \textit{ijma} was needed. Others, who we shall look at later, questioned the very necessity for the hadith themselves.

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\textsuperscript{65} Law will be capitalised whenever it refers to the Sharia, in lower case whenever it refers to positive law (laws that must be set down in statute books alone).


\textsuperscript{67} Each hadith must be shown to have a line going up the Prophet – e.g. x said to x said to x. Each enunciation is then evaluated on its historical probability and on the character of the transmitter.
As we have seen, the Quran is wahy, the Sunna is not. The Quran, however, is at many points obscure, and not given to clear literal readings. Classically the Sunna is used to explain the Quran, so while it has less value as revelation, it is given an interpretive dominance, to the extent that in many madhab, if the Quran seems in contradiction with the hadith, it is the Quran that needs to be reinterpreted. Some schools in the 19th century began to take issues with this interpretive dominance, arguing either that the Quran should be used to explain the hadith (and thus hadith seemingly in conflict with the Quran, even if they have a good isnad, should be ignored), such as Ahl-i-Hadith argued in Pakistan, or that the Quran itself stands as the literal word of Allah and is not in need of the hadith for exploration, as is argued by Ahl-i-Quran; a radicalisation of the thesis of Ahl-i-hadith.

Many of these debates “are indeed new and a product of modern circumstances, but in other respects they will look surprisingly like discussions that took place during the formative phase of Islamic legal thought.”68 All of these debates revolve around the status of tradition: whether it allows you access to Islam, what type of authority holds this access in place, and whether one can have a truer relationship to the example of Muhammed through the type of destructive tradition that is outlined by Benjamin at the start of this section.

These are very complicated debates; any discussion of tradition in Islam is always a legal discussion – because it ultimately deals with the Law that should be followed on earth – and it is always a theological discussion – for it involves how we gain access to God’s intentions for us. In each local environment, these issues are then embedded in power structures that determine who can speak in the name of a tradition, or mediate between opposing traditions. What emerges in Qutb, this essay will show, is a particular type of tradition – despite the fact that it is destructive, this destruction only emerges in terms of, and through the tradition. This tradition argues that we, now, must be Islamic, and we can have no support

68 RT:6.
in being so – there are no outward signs sufficient to manifest true faith, to ensure that we are faithfully following the Prophet’s example, other than ourselves.
I. Without how

He it is who sent the Book to you. In it are verses clear and decisive (muhkamaat) – they are the mother of the Book- and others ambiguous (mutashaabihaaat). As for those in whose hearts is deviancy, they follow that in it which is ambiguous, desiring dissension, and desiring its exegesis. Yet no one knows its exegesis except God.

Quran 3:7

Who decides what is muhkamaat and what is mutashaabihaaat? There are three questions involved in the idea of transmission. First there is the question of what is transmitted (its content). One must here ask how one ensures the relation between what it is to be transmitted (e.g. the Prophet’s example) and the substance of the transmission itself (in the case of the hadith: words), we must then ask about how such things are transmitted (orally or scripturally for instance, or equally questions about the form of the transmission – in Islam, a question of isnad, above all else), and how one adjudicates conflict between elements of the transmission that seem to contradict one another (two contradictory reports of the Prophet’s behaviour for instance).

There is then a second, related question: who transmits what, and who adjudicates. To a degree, these questions are identical in much of the hadith scholarship, since successfully convincing transmission rests largely on the personal qualities of the transmitter, but, in a contemporary context, they are sufficiently separated to warrant being a separate area of enquiry: one can ask a question about the appropriate grounds for making a claim about transmission (how do we know x is a fake hadith?), and one can also ask a question about the person who is making the claim (in what power structures is he embedded that allow him to make such a claim? How does

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69 All references to the Quran in this essay are from. The bilingual edition translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali – see the bibliography for further references. I have altered the translation here. All further alterations of the translation will be indicated.
he legitimate his right to make a claim?) –the relationship between tradition and these structures will be the focus of much of the rest of this essay.

But, perhaps more fundamentally, there is a third question behind the idea of transmission that we must attend to: the question of transmission itself.

*Every reflection on tradition must begin with the assertion that before transmitting anything else, human beings must first transmit language to themselves.*

It is worth pausing over what Agamben intends with this sentence. When one utters the preposition, there is x, one asserts not simply [there is x], but also [there is x][x]: the structure of intelligibility in which the assertion gains meaning. As Wittgenstein notes: “I can only name objects. Signs represent them. I can only speak of them, I cannot assert them. A proposition can only say how a thing is, not what it is.”

It is impossible, from within language, to arrive at a point where one names an object precisely, other than as a bundle of threads (properties) which do not point to what the thing is exactly.

What ultimately causes this inability of language to point to objects is language itself. One falls immediately into infinite regress when trying to define language from within itself. A constant thread of much modernist literature in the 20th century has been an awareness of this inability; a constant attempt to purge from language any claims other than language being itself.

This issue becomes even more problematic when one places this problem of reference in relation to religion, and, in particular, to God’s names and attributes. If we take the propositions in the Quran which refer to God’s attributes/names, then we, if we remember Wittgenstein, have great problems saying to what they refer.

*Allah is He, other than Whom there is no god. Who knows all things, both secret and open. He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.*

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70 P:104.
72 An issue continuously explored in TC.
Allah is He, other than Whom there is no other god. The Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace, the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the justly Proud. Glory to Allah! High is He above the partners they attribute to Him.

He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Whatever is in the heavens and on earth declare His Praises and Glory. And He is Exalted in Might, the Wise. 

There has been a long historical debate about how to understand these attributes. For at the same time, the Muslim is told that these names are the attributes of God, and yet Allah prohibits anthropomorphism – one is told repeatedly in the Quran that God is unique and unlike his creations; however the attributes used are recognisably human attributes described in a language known to humans. Early rationalists like the Mutazilah argued that reason and revelation cannot contradict themselves, and so these names must out of necessity be metaphors (God’s commandments cannot enter into contradiction). The Hanbali mazhab opposed such a view – insisting on the Quran as a direct revelation, but equally insisting on the fact that one cannot understand these attributes directly referring to human features. One is instead left with bi la kayf (without how); language is left in force as a series of signifiers without object. Here, rather than language offering a series of properties of God, one is asked to not rely on the faculty of reasons to understand the attributes, but to see them as the direct immanent manifestation of God’s presence.

The debate around Allah’s name in the 8th century has been repeated recently, both in debates around, yet again, God’s attributes, and also, structurally, in relation to the Quran and hadith in general. What has been placed in question is the relationship of the knowing subject to God, and equally, the institutional structures that guard and preserve this relationship. For, if the hadith outline a mode of living in the manner of the Prophet and his companions, which is guaranteed and observed through the ijma of a community who use reason and codes of interpretation, the type of linguistic appeal made by the Hanbali madhab, and later by Qutb, calls into

73 Quran 59: 22-24.
74 An overview of these issues is available in Nagel, Tilman. 2000: The History of Islamic Theology. Princeton: Markus Wiener.
question how these structures relate to the only legitimate source of sovereignty: Allah.

In every case, this contestation of scriptural authority is rooted in a changing political environment. This essay will later go on to analyse the erosion of tradition in the context of colonialism in Pakistan & Egypt - where Mawdudi and Qutb wrote - and in Tanzania. It is enough now to look at the appeal of Ibn Taymiyya to Qutb, and to note the connection between two aspects of his thought not normally considered together.

Ibn Taymiyya was living (d.1328) at a time when the Mongol invasions has seriously weakened many of the Muslim powers in the area we now call the Middle East. Ibn Taymiyya needed to find a way to make attacking the Mongol rulers legitimate, despite the fact that they proclaimed to be Muslims, and that given that they would thus normally be counted as Muslims, it would not be legitimate to attack them. Writing from Damascus, Ibn Taymiyya consistently held to the view that, despite the fact that the Mongols claimed to be Muslims, one could judge them takfiri (apostates) by conflating the questions of faith and belief and claiming that as their actions followed from frameworks other than Islam - so he judged - they were shown to be fake Muslims, and thus one could kill them. Again, what one notes here is that the outward properties of the object are no longer able to guarantee its intrinsic nature, and what is argued to replace these objective conditions is a dimly elucidated - unverifiable - subjective disposition that cannot be assured by any outward test.

What one should also note here is that Ibn Taymiyya was also constantly imprisoned for anthropomorphism, as he refused to see God’s attributes in metaphorical terms, and was imprisoned by a state that backed a rationalist ulema. It may seem that these two structures are opposed. In one, Ibn Taymiyya judges people according to their internal disposition as takfiri or

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76 E.g. Being a good Muslim in one’s actions – having enough faith – and being a Muslim tout court. This issue is explored further in Craze, Joshua: 2007b: The Intellectual Origins of Wahhabism, SaudiDebate. Published 24.01.2007.
not, in accordance with his own internal disposition towards the actions in question, in the other, he refuses to allow people the space for interpretation. What underlies both these seemingly contradictory positions is the renewed emphasis on *tahwid* (monotheism) and the proper place of humans beneath God: one should live this presence without objective guarantee, and one must understand God’s attributes without mediating interpretation.

This is also the structure we can find in reference to tradition in Sayyid Qutb’s thought, which was heavily influenced by Ibn Taymiyya creation of a disjuncture between outward appearance and manifest intention. In *Milestones*, Qutb frequently criticises those who transmit the Quran, because they do so for either academic reasons, or for reasons of personal enjoyment. Part of his critique occurs because people do these things in a particular place (a home, a school, a private place) for a particular purpose (enjoyment, personal learning), whereas for Qutb Islam must banish all these distinctions, and an Islam that is restricted to any one area, and is not universally applied, is a false Islam. One must note here that this is not a question of the content of what is being transmitted – he is not angry at people learning details of *fiqh* at home, he is angry that are learning at home: it is the form, rather than the content, of the learning which is insufficient: Islam as a tradition must be passed on and experienced immanently in every area of life.

What is noticeable in both Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb is that there is a suspicion about objective conditions. In Ibn Taymiyya’s case, it refers to people who claim to be Muslims, who show all the outward signs of being Muslim, and yet, he is sure, are not Muslims. In Sayyid Qutb’s case, it is with people who obey all the rituals of Islam, but yet do not manifest the

77 This is the same error that at the start of this section we saw Benjamin accusing people of falling into when they attempt to save something as heritage – not realising the power of the past in the present but trying to preserve it in a form that alienates its message from its political implications.
requisite religiosity necessary to believe in Islam as a way of life that influences all walks of life.

This suspicion about objective conditions occurs in a political environment in which the political institutions they both find themselves subject to are being controlled by people (Nasser and the Mongols, respectively) that they think are not Muslims, and specifically preclude an Islamic polity. Thus the insistence on the cultivation of subjective intention, which for Qutb culminates in an emphasis on *ijtihad*: personal judgement without reference to prior case or example. This emphasis has powerful political implications: one no longer needs any external aids to interpret the Quran other than the Arabic language in which the Quran is written.

This process of negation leaves only one precondition: that one must be a speaker of Arabic. It is difficult to overemphasise the importance of the Arabic language to Islam: it is the language in which Muhammed, an illiterate man, received the Quran; the direct revelation of Allah is in Arabic. Even Qutb makes the practice of personal ijtihad conditional on being an adult who speaks Arabic. Most translators of the Quran still obey the convention of not calling their text the Quran (rather, the introduction to the...) because it is not in Arabic.

The importance of the language of revelation is heightened in places where Muslims first (or even third) language is not Arabic. Here, what seems to be an egalitarian gesture – that of personal ijtihad – is nullified by the fact that people depend on networks of Imam’s and ulema in order to teach the people Arabic, or, in the case where people do not speak Arabic, exercise judgement in their place.

Can one still transmit God’s revelation in a language other than Arabic? Sheikh Abdullah Salih Al-Farsy, one of the first translators of the Quran into

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78 See RT:43.
79 First one doesn’t need the ijma, then one doesn’t even need the hadith, then one doesn’t even need an official interpretation of the Quran.
Swahili, and a major figure in Islamic reformism in East Africa, put it succinctly: “Uislamu hautaki Istimaari wa dini. Si Lazima lugha ya Kiarabu.”

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80 “Islam does not want colonialism in religion. Arabic is not necessary.” My thanks to Justo Lacunza-Balda for the reference. Farsy, Shaykh Abdullah Salih. 1972: *Baadhi ya wanavyuoni wa kishafile ya mashariki ya Afrika.* Mombasa. I have altered the translation, which was originally by Lacunza-Balda.
II. “Don’t start from the good old things, but the bad new ones”81

There is a gap between the explicit belief system and the lines of force underlying the thinkable, a space in which circumstances and structural pressure can cause inventions and change to flourish.82

In his sweeping account of the political history of religion, Marcel Gauchet talks, using Karl Jaspers phrase, of an ‘axial age’ from approximately 800 to 200 BC. In this period, he sees a change from what he calls primitive religion to the religions of the book. It is beyond the scope of this essay to give a full description of Gauchet’s account of this transformation, but several elements will be highlighted in so far as they are relevant to the subject at hand.

Primitive religion is characterised by repetition: there is an originary moment which is entirely inaccessible – through repetition and ritual we make it present without ever reaching back to that moment; “religion in its purest state is drawn into a temporal division that puts the present in a state of dependence on the mythical past.”83 This stage of religion Gauchet characterises by a triple negation: the distinguishing ability of humans is their ability to negate – to think of a life other than it is. Religion, in the form understood above, then negates that ability, by assured the human animal that all this change is the result of an originary moment over which they have no control.

For Gauchet, the second wave of religion (amongst which he counts Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam) is then characterised by a negation of this negation. Through God becoming singular, he becomes removed from the world (rather than there being a myriad of Gods whose force is felt

82 DW:43.
83 DW:25.
throughout the world). But this ascription of absolute sovereignty paradoxically opens up the space for human interpretation – for God is now absent, his words must be understood, and with that comes a different temporal framework. The space of the originary moment becomes open to being re-lived; re-appropriated.

During the axial period in question, the great merit of Gauchet’s work is that he accords the state the rightfully central place in his narrative: it is with the state that the religiously absent God is made into a social presence. I don’t want to focus so much on his account of religion, which has many criticisms to be made of it, but pick up on what happenings during this transformation. God does not make his absence felt immediately – it is a process that takes, at a minimum, 400 years, during which time that which was once everywhere is slowly felt to be nowhere, and this nowhere can become reappropriated on a subjective level. God is never necessarily challenged in this movement: what happens is that the old belief system is gradually undermined by the lines of force underneath it.

This section of the essay suggests that the change in religious structure that we are seeing today is no less sweeping: and, remembering the time span of the events involved in Gauchet, no less gradual. If the period up to 1700 was characterised by God’s absence opening up a space of interiority that required – ultimately – the mediation of the church and the state, what we see before us is the end of mediation. Secularism, by dispensing with the possibility of a state framework for the mediation of an absent presence, opens up a world of individuals, and with it, a particular type of religious community.

So in laying out the debates and tensions over the use of Arabic in East Africa below, I want to claim (at least) four things. In Islam we see a constant tension between a universal equality and a linguistic specificity which is

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84 Where to begin to date this period is open to question. We could think about Luther’s reformation (1517), Locke’s The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695), Sayyid Qutb’s Milestones (1964), and Muhammad Iqbal’s The Reconstruction of Religious Though in Islam (1937), as points through which we could trace this movement.
taken up and becomes particularly acute when it is used to reinforce or undermine local power structures. In this debate, the use of Arabic is not fixed: it is used as a weapon both by globally orientated reform movements and local hierarchies, depending on the stakes of the particular battle. However, in the period under consideration (that of the translation of Sayyid Qutb), the scepticism about the use of Arabic is bound up with an increasing scepticism of tradition tout court, and this suspicion is grounded in a rejection of the connections between objective political conditions and religious authority: these circumstances have been structurally mirrored several times before in history (we have looked at Ibn Taymiyya and Sayyid Qutb, we will explore Mawdudi later). This suspicion is responded by to an increased emphasis on the subjective interiority of the believer, which in this case is expressed not through a mediating presence (ulema or clergy) but through an emphasis on the individual appropriation of religion through the word – but not the revealed word – after it has been stripped of every religious and cultural referent: itjihad through bi la kayf.

In East Africa, as Kai Kresse has noted, there is a continual tension between “locally rooted religious practices of Muslims and globally orientated reform movements.”85 This tension has a long history. Up until the nineteenth century, on the coast of East Africa, there was limited distinction between religious and political power: those in power monopolised the learning of rituals, and the memorisation of the Quran – religion was not seen as a tool for political struggle86. Indeed, Arabic as a language was looked down upon by a Swahili culture that prided itself on their own oral traditions; it was used for prayer, and little else, though during this period Swahili was written with an Arabic script rather than the Latin alphabet it uses today.

86 Though this depoliticisation is in and of itself political: a naturalisation of the existing state of affairs.
This situation changed decisively in the nineteenth century. In an era when the coast was becoming increasingly integrated into the world economy, immigration from the Arab peninsula (chiefly Hadrumat, Yemen) shot up. With the new immigrants came a distinction between Islamic learning and political power that had not previously existed. There was a growing culture of literacy, and an exposure to a different localised version of Islam: various culturally significant local practices - like the Maulidi, the celebration of the prophet’s birthday - were criticised as bid’a, invocations not known during the Prophet’s time, and therefore unIslamic. These distinctions grew more acute in Kenya under British rule, and in Tanzania after the beginning of British rule after the brief German occupation, as the Arabs were accorded a de facto racial superiority. Religious figures in the period began to criticise Swahili practices in Arabic, relying on the changed social capital of the Arabic language.

It was in this environment that Sheikh al-Amin b. Ali al-Mazrui (d.1947), the teacher of the reformer Al-Farsy, quoted at the beginning of the last section, began two related tasks. From an Arab family, and influenced by readings of Al-Afghani and Al-Wahhab, he began to criticise the practices of coastal Islam he claimed were based in culture and not in religion. However, al-Amin did not see the solution to this problem as being that everyone learns Arabic: instead, he thought it was vital, if these practices were to be overcome, that people learned about Islam, and did so in their own tongue. In 1932 he began to publish the newspaper Sahifa, in a bilingual edition in Arabic and Swahili in a Latin script. He was convinced that the newspapers, of all the “modern things” is the right way to “wake up the hearts” of the people and “insert good things” into their mind; in a word – to form a subjectivity. This newspaper continued for eighteen months, and then another paper, al-Islah, was published for another year before al-Amin became the chief Quadi in Mombasa.

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88 SEAR:286.
Sheikh Abdullah Salih al-Farsy took up this project, publishing the first full translation of the Quran by a Swahili mother tongue speaker in 1969. It is interesting here to note that the first translation of the Quran into Swahili, and thus also the first attempt to render into scriptural authority the religion (as opposed to culture) was a Christian missionary, G. Dale, in 1923. The second attempt was also not made by a Swahili speaker, but by an Arab, M.A. Ahmadi, in 1953, which was published by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission\(^{89}\): all the early attempts to textualise the religion were attempts from the exterior to remove some of the ground previously thought of as central to the religion.

The agenda of the early Swahili reformers was different. Sheikh Muhammed Kasim Mazrui of Mombasa, another student of Al-Amin, despaired:

> A Muslim knows the history of people like Napoleon and Christopher Columbus and other famous Western people, and he should know nothing about the history of people like Sydna AbuBakar, Sydna Umar, Sydna Uthman, Sydna Aly, nor anything about the great men of Islam.\(^{90}\)

The problem, as Muhammed Kasim understood it, is first and foremost a question of knowledge: people do not know Islam, so they are unable to differentiate between haram and halal. The solution, he claims, is education – only through self-knowledge can one overcome the dogmatic demands of culture and tradition, and these, as they are not based in religion, should be avoided.

This emphasis on self-reliance puts al-Amin, al-Farsy and Muhammed Kasim in the company of the Islamic scholars to whom they themselves stress their links: in Egypt, the reformism of Muhammed Abduh and Rashid Rida, and

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\(^{89}\) Ahmadi, Muhammad Mubarak. 1953: *Qadiani*. Nairobi: East African Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission. The Ahmadiyya group emerged in the 19C, and believe in the coming of a second prophet in the 19C – Ghulam Ahmad. They are generally treated with suspicion by the other main Muslim groups in Tanzania. The vast majority of Tanzanian Muslims are from the Shaf’i’ madhab, though there are significant Ibadhi and Shia populations.

\(^{90}\) Quoted SEAR: 287. Original is: Mazrui, Muhammad Kasim. 1959: *Maisha ya Assidik AbuBakar* [The life of Abubakar]. Mombasa: Adam Traders. The translation in the main body of the text is Kai Kresse’s.
more in more recently stressed connections, to al-Wahhab\(^{91}\) and the Indo-Pakistani Tablighi Jamaat, which Mawdudi, Qutb's main inspiration, was involved in setting up, and which will be discussed further later in this essay.

Furthermore, one should note that a constant part of the refrain of these three men was that Islam must organise itself against the perceived dominance of the Christian state: in Muslim discourse in Tanzania, the onset of the colonial period was seen to bring with it the starting of an oppressive Christian system (mfumo kristo). Like we have seen in Pakistan with Sheikh Ahmed Khan, and in Qutb with relation to Nasser's secular government, it was the imposition of a state power that attempted to undermine the religion from within (attempted to explain it or understand it, rather than just treating it as an opposition), that in part produced an emphasis on explicit discursive knowledge.

In the Swahili reformers emphasis on an individual appropriation of Islam we can see parallels to Qutb's refusal of traditional frameworks for the understanding of Islam in favour of an individualised approach. It should be noted here that this approach is not a schism from Islam: the insistence on individual submission to God without mediation, and the refusal of anything that is not religion (e.g. what is constituted as culture) is an intensification and a purification of the centre of the Islamic faith.\(^{92}\)

It was not the case, for instance, that this meant tradition, and the Arabic language in which it was transmitted, was refused: Muhammed Kassin repeatedly insists that in the end we must return to the Arabic Quran for clarification. In each case (the Arabic language, cultural traditions claimed to be religious etc.), its negation is supposed to bring you closer to the unmediated core of Islam. It is precisely because of this appeal to an

\(^{91}\) Muhammed ibd Abd-al-Wahhab was a theologian who is credited with providing the ideological justification for the current Saudi Arabian regime. He emphasised a strict tahlid that saw his followers repudiate saint worship and other practices that they thought deified someone other than Allah: a movement of purification paralleled by reformist practice on the Swahili coast. See Craze (2007b).

\(^{92}\) It is this point, ultimately, that distinguishes Islamism from Protestant thought.
unmediated core that the reformers posed such a political threat. As Kai Kresse has argued:93

On the other hand, it was a potential threat to the position of social power that local religious figures and teachers (particularly sheikhs and masharifu) had acquired. They were now in danger of losing their status as virtually indispensable mediators between Muslim commoners and the Prophets Muhammed and God.

In this struggle, it would be incorrect to ascribe a definitive position to Arabic (and, conversely, Swahili); as Pouwels94 argues, this is not a teleological debate. Arabic has been used to legitimise local hierarchies, as we saw in the introduction, where people claimed that work should not be translated into Swahili. But it has also been used to undermine these hierarchies, with people using the Arabic language to publish condemnations of local cultural practices.

Equally, the position of the reformers I outlined above is much more complex than I can show in a summary – their demands for reform interact with a host of different local concerns that space does not allow me to develop here. What is more important to the development of the argument is to note the various plays of inside and outside that are occurring here.

In the claim, for instance, that we do not need Arabic to be Muslims (made by Al-Farsy at the end of the last section) we see the explicit refusal of an exterior influence – he even calls it colonialism – in favour of the development of an East African Islam: something which occurs locally, but whose centre is in something completely exterior – namely an absent God made manifest only in the revelation. Then, Muhammed Kassin argues, it is only through developing an Islam available to everyone that we can ensure people are truly religious: it is only through making Islam local that we can negate the local. I will develop this structure of thought in section II. III.

For now, I want to focus on the play of inside and outside in those who do not think there should be a translation into Swahili at all. The centre here is constituted as Islam. In Islam, everyone should read the Quran, which was received in Arabic. This circle is a linguistic one, and it is a religious one: they are made to be parallel when for the reformers they diverge. Ironically, in present-day Tanzania, they also overlap with a further circle: that of local religious power (precisely what the insistence on Arabic is supposed to negate: locally structured power networks and cultural practices).

Translation shifts two of these circles away – local power and the Arabic language.

Part of the refrain of the translators of Qutb is that the local ulema could not face up to the socio-economic realities on the ground. One of those realities, much discussed, was this: in a country where Swahili is the main language, where people want to have a secular education, and where Arabic language instruction in madrassa is not sufficient to achieve a good level of Arabic, for people to know Islam, they must learn themselves in Swahili.

For those who are suspicious of Swahili texts about Islam, such a project removes the obligation from the Muslim to learn Arabic, and as such, takes them out of the power structures in which such learning would be possible. We can see their attitude present in many different aspects of Tanzanian society. For instance, when newspapers quote from the scriptures, they do so in Arabic. These sentiments that Arabic is closer to Islam than Swahili find resonance in a long oral tradition that sees words themselves having power, rather than the content they refer to. The verb for reading in Swahili, *kusoma*, is synonymous with recitation. No writing without speaking.

If we now return to the quote from Marcel Gauchet that began this section, we can see that there is a gap here “between the explicit belief system and the lines of force that underlying the thinkable” – in a secular environment, the lines of force which allow one to be a Muslim have changed in a way that renders those who believe one should only learn in Arabic increasingly unable to think through the world they are in. This change makes them very
suspicious of the egalitarian promise of Swahili, as we shall learn in the next section.

II. I Fake prayers and Jewish Qurans

Kutub Publishing has two bookstores, a newer one recently opened next to the Mayema mosque, where the elderly Indian book seller would spend his day drinking tea and conversing with the clients who drifted through. He seemed unmoved by his business – thinking of it, first and foremost, as a business, and displaying none of the zeal that I saw in my interviews with the translators at Brighthouse Ltd. He responded absentmindedly to my incessant questions about books and politics. Only one issue moved him from his chair. Once, without any sort of context, he told me that I should be careful about going to other bookstores. I thought this was merely a merchant’s patter warning me off the competitors – I had been buying a lot of books and pamphlets – and was about to move onto the next question when he told me the reason: there were, apparently, Qurans in circulation which, though they claimed to be from respectable sources in the Middle East, were actually printed in Israel and were designed to take Muslim's away from God’s path.

Fake Qurans.

The more I pressed, the more I found the publishing industry abounded with rumours of fakes: dodgy Qurans printed by Israelis with the name of Moses systematically substituted for the name Allah. Errors, apparently, also corrupted every Swahili edition of the Quran.95

95 Unlike the rumours about mysterious Israelis’, there was perhaps more solid empirical ground for suspicions about Qurans. The translation into Swahili undertaken by Dale, a Christian missionary, was thought to be embarrassing and fully of faults, many of which had been analysed in textual commentaries by coastal scholars. See Lacunza-Balda. Justo. 1997: Translations of the Quran into Swahili and Contemporary Islamic Revival in East Africa. In, Westerlund, D. & Rosander, E. E. (eds.). African Islam and Islam in Africa. London: Hurst. pp.95-127.
Things got more confusing the more questions I asked. No one was able to point to a mistake or work of forgery in an actually existing book. Instead, when asking about Swahili editions of the Quran, I was pointed back to the fact that Swahili was an inferior language to Arabic, and when asking about the mysterious Israeli Qurans, I was looked at with a sort of paternal kindness while it was explained that, given the extent of the Zionist plot, a few fake Qurans would not be in the least surprising.

What to make of these rumours? Almost all of them cannot be empirically proved – many of them can be empirically proved false (there are only so many bookshops in Dar es Salaam...). But to dismiss these rumours as merely false as the Qurans they claim to warn against would be to miss the point. Suppose the book seller had said: “The Venezuelans have systematically distorted the Quran.” People would not have responded with a knowing nod and a comment on the situation in the Occupied Territories, as they did when he mentioned the Israeli Qurans.

A rumour cannot simply be judged at the level of fact or fiction. Through rumours a society can talk about things that would otherwise be repressed, jokes or fears that cannot be presented at the level of explicit argumentation. These fears govern the acceptance of a rumours; the criterion for the acceptance of a rumour here being not some aspects of believability, but a set of undetermined threads that include usability, pleasure and the ability to speak about that which is disavowed from everyday language. In White’s rather strangled prose they are “a way of

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97 Indeed, a rumour can be empirically true, but not allowed to be said, and thus still judged in terms of whether it allows one to speak of what one cannot be said. For instance, on October 9, 1942, the Nazi Party Chancellery complained that rumours about very harsh measures against the Jews “were being spread by men on leave from the various forces units (sic) deployed in the East, who have themselves had the opportunity to observe such measure.” My Italics. Here the truth cannot be said, and so is presented as rumour. See, Evans, J. Richard. 2008: How Willing Were They? Review of Life and Death in the Third Reich by Peter Fritzsch and Ghettstadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City by Gordon J. Horwitz. New York Review of Books. June 26, 2008. p.59.

98 Indeed, given that Swahili was often criticised in Swahili, what could be less permissible than the repudiation of a language from within itself?
talking that encourages a reassessment of everyday experiences to address the workings of power and knowledge and how regimes use them.”

The regimes referred to here are multiple. We have already seen how central the establishment of an accurate isnad is to hadith verification: during the 230 years in which the official Sunni canon of hadith (the six major collections) came into being, hundreds of thousands of hadith were judged mawdu (fake). It is hard to underestimate the challenges that fake hadith pose to the religion: without certainty about the isnad, one cannot be sure one is accessing the Sunna, without access to the Sunna, one loses the possibility to clarify the Quran through the example of the Prophet’s life. This challenge becomes even worse if one is dealing with a fake Quran.

Unlike the Bible, there is no mediation between the Book and God: it is the direct and unmediated presence of God. The only one available: without this wahy, we have to mediate and interpret the signs; one cannot be sure one is still submitting to God’s sovereignty, and not to human values – a constant concern for Qutb, if we recall the second section of this essay.

Thus we can see that the anxieties aroused by historicist critiques of the Quran and the hadith, which claim that it is a historical product to be refuted or verified on the basis of evidence not dependent on God’s sovereignty. This uncertainty runs through the concerns about transmission and the power structures in which the transmission is embedded that we outlined above. These concerns, finally, also emerge in the vexed question of translation itself.

The translator's task consists in this: to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original can be awakened in it. 100

As Benjamin notes at the start of his essay on translation, one of the principle difficulties of translating poetry is that the poem says very little to someone who understands it: a poem principally states itself, rather than

99 SV:58.
any message one might associate with it; searching for a message, Benjamin argues, is the mark of a bad translation. When the original is God’s word, the question of how one awakens an echo is a vexed one: the word is predicated on the fact that there are no echoes, that it is singular. In the pamphlets, the question is lessened, because we are dealing with the sunna rather than direct wahy, nevertheless, how one awakes the presence of the original (the original suna being the life of Muhammed) is nonetheless difficult, in Arabic, as we have seen in the case of the hadith, and in Swahili.

In Dar es Salaam, the booksellers would warn me to regard the leaflets of Mustafa Badawi with suspicion, despite the fact that Badawi, who wrote many leaflets in Swahili on basic themes in Islam, was published by Kutub publishing, whose very owners were warning me against him. I had asked Badawi why he wrote books instructing people in regard to prayer and the sunna. He explained that “Islam is not like Christianity. It is a total faith, so the teaching we receive at the madarassa is not enough: we must receive additional instruction in all areas of life.” The immediate reference to Christianity will be attended to in the next section, what is striking here is the difference between two claims. The first, made by Badawi, is that for Allah’s presence to be made manifest, we must receive instruction in all areas of life: the translation that preserves the original is here to be felt in the actualisation of God’s wishes among women and men on earth: the absence of translation (unmediated presence) through translation. The second, made by his detractors, is that God’s presence, a singular one, is to be found in the institutions which can aim to guarantee the continuity of that presence.

This absence of translation – the criticism of the pamphlets, the wish for a purely Arabic Islam – is bound up in a claim about authority; God’s sovereignty is already, unavoidably mediated, though the claim that it is pure is not, as we shall see, unimportant. Part of the reason that people often told me that I should only consult Arabic sources is because they

101 See the bibliography for full bibliographic information.
wanted to communicate to me that they were excellent speakers of Arabic and had no need of reading in Swahili, and, correlativey, those that did not speak Arabic as well as they did had no right to enter into a discussion about religion with them: non-translation here means that a great many people cannot speak, let alone read, and thus exclusion of people from the body of speakers reinforces structures of power that sees those that dominate the madrassa system dominate the Islamic polis in Tanzania, such as it is. Although people told me all this in Swahili, and used Swahili constantly in their everyday life, religious life was to take place in a closed linguistic economy which had homologous correspondence to precisely the type of apolitical divides that Qutb wanted to overcome.

Those who were sceptical about the Swahili leaflets uniformly claimed to speak good Arabic; it is not necessarily true. While some people had been educated in the Middle East, many attended madarassas in Dar es Salaam, and spoke Arabic at only a slightly more than rudimentary level, and the Arabic they did speak was a Quranic Arabic that would make reading Sayyid Qutb, a bold stylist in classical Arabic, rather difficult. Thus the repudiation of Swahili was also, for many doubters, also a way of shoring up an anxiety about their level of Arabic, and this anxiety was paralleled by an anxiety felt about the place of Tanzanian Muslims in the world umma.

It should be noted here that doubts about the Quran have a longer history than simply the second intifada. The first translation of the Quran into Swahili was made by a missionary, and was full of errors, and concerns about Islam being undermined from within fed on these colonial memories. These memories of the long durée re-emerged in terms of more contemporary conflict, but they nevertheless reflecting a structural fear about the undermining of Islam from the inside. Borrowing Wendy James’

102 This tension regarding which Arabic one uses is repeated in the Middle East: some of Nasser’s rhetorical appeal derived from his use of colloquial Arabic, and his correlative emphasis on class politics. See Booth, Marilyn. 1992: Colloquial Arabic Poetry, Politics, and the Press in Modern Egypt. International Journal of Middle East Studies. No.24: pp.419-440.
phrase, we could say they are evidence of “conservatism in la langue, and flexibility in la parole.”\textsuperscript{103}

The flexibility was much in evidence. At the Ibn Hazm media centre I was told that Qurans which claimed on the inside cover to be made in Iran were actually made by the Jews of America (and if there was ever speech that was capitalised, the book seller would have capitalised this phrase), who had systematically distorted the Quran in order to draw Muslims from the path of true Islam. Every element of the story is improbable: especially the placing of the Qurans’ printing in Iran – Shia Quran’s were not sold at any of the Sunni book stores I came across, and despite an occasionally grudgingly flattering reference to the revolution, Iran was not talked about with much affection.

This rumour draws local textual concerns into a broader Muslim symbolic economy.\textsuperscript{104} As I mentioned, the fear of Jewish fakes originating in Iran opens a window to talk about the current historical situation (the tensions between Iran and America, Israel and Palestine), and allows what is being talked about as a war on Muslims to be applied to Tanzania: it is both a reaction to the ‘war on terror’ and a way of becoming included in it; of feeling that one also has a stake in the battle that the waves of arrests that followed the ‘98 embassy bombing, and that occurred during my fieldwork in neighbouring Nairobi, let one know viscerally that one was a part of, whether one liked it or not. These rumours about fakes made explicit in the lived experience (to borrow a Husserlian locution, one’s \textit{Lebenswelt}), the sense of the world.

Rumours here emerge in the midst of the community. In an analogous way, Qutb understands ignorance – \textit{jahiliyya} - no longer being a function of the

\textsuperscript{103} Which is to say, a certain continuity in structures of thought that find themselves rearranged in superficially new constellations in the demands of the pressing present. See James, Wendy. 1999: \textit{The Listening Ebony: Moral Knowledge, Religion and Power among the Uduk of Sudan}. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 1-48.

pre-Islamic past, but a perpetual possibility in a de-centred world: for the similarity between these two processes see Part IV.

We have also noted that these accusations shored up one’s Arabic against the uncertainties of birth into a Swahili mother tongue. One might also add here a contradiction predicated on the particular technology of the book: fakes and deliberate distortions by a Zionist conspiracy explain how printing errors enter into a book that is supposed to be infallible. Fakes and errors play their part in a centre that is constantly trying to purge itself of an outside (cultural influences) while worrying that the centre itself will become circumscribed (‘secular’ Islam).

This essentialising of the centre is precisely what Qutb attempts to work against: by seeing the centre not as an immediately available present, but as a demand on the present, he asserts translation is the precondition to access to the transcendent, and negation of the particular. Swahili and Arabic: neither language can be translated perfectly; the divine is always elsewhere.
III. When the word was enchanted

In an interview with the editor of An Nuur, one of the two main Islamic newspapers in Dar es Salaam, Omar Sange, I asked about the effect the small pamphlets this essay has been looking at had on the process of learning about Islam. “In my day”, he told me, “It would have taken months to learn how to perform salat correctly, now one can learn from a book in ten minutes.” Whether or not one believes quite how long it would have taken him in a madrassa, his comments points to a distinction in the form of learning – the instantly available texts that we see, from which any individual, on their own, possessing sufficient knowledge of Swahili, can learn about Islam, function in a very different way to the slower process of learning in a madrassa.

In many madrassa’s in Tanzania, and certainly the two madrassa run by the Islamic Propagation Centre105 in Dar es Salaam that I visited, the day begins at 8.30 am, with the students reciting supplications, dua ya kuingia, in Arabic. The day proceeds with a series of lessons in which one learns by rote. Though there is more discussion in the classrooms than many depictions of madrassa give credit for, the examinations are focused solely on correct recitation, and knowledge of Arabic is acquired only passively. Initially, students are expected to master between four and six juzuu from the Quran, before going on to learn some basic jurisprudence and some of the easier hadith collections. In total, the madrassa education should take twelve years. Few finish. Many have primary school in a madrassa before moving to a secular secondary school – many of the madrassa teachers themselves had not finished secondary school education. For those who do finish, there is the possibility

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105 Publishers of the An Nuur newspaper. They also run several schools, and publish the majority of the scholastic material for the madrassas. Consistently, throughout their publications, the Muslim community in Tanzania is depicted as a marginalised community in the context of an oppressive – Christian – government.
of continuing one's education in the Middle East, but this requires further language instruction and the money and connections to acquire it. For those who do finish, the prospects for further employment are dim: one starts another madrassa, becomes a teacher, or chooses another career entirely.

Even if one does choose to become a teacher, one’s salary is not high: students should pay between 200 and 300 Tanzanian shillings per month, but this payment is in the form of charity, and real wages can fall much below what one might expect from these contributions. This lack of prospects led to a degree of anger from the teachers I spoke to, and, correlativey, a great need to preserve the madrassa education system and the limited opportunities it enshrines for its graduates.

Abdi Hussain Kifea, the editor of Al Huda, and one of the most enthusiastic proponents of Qutb, was damning in his condemnation of the madrassa teachers. The teachers, he told me, know nothing about Islam apart from a set of rituals, and Islam was not a set of rituals but, as Qutb has laid out, a way of life. “The problem for Muslims today is that their leaders are incompetent and their followers ignorant. By leaders being incompetent I mean that most of the secular scholars know nothing about Islam, and most of the Sheikhs do not really speak Arabic – they only know Quranic Arabic and cannot really understand it, only recite it.” He spoke of the madrassa teachers having a superiority complex, and believing that their ritually sanctioned knowledge makes them feel better than secularly educated intellectuals – such as himself – while having an inferiority complex about their lack of prospects.

The parents of the madrassa students seem to feel the same way in some respects: the strategy of going to madrassa for primary school and a secular

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107 Kifea uses several aliases, for reasons to be explained in the next section.

108 Al Huda’s management team was actually part of An Nuur and the IPC, and split away, to form their own paper, for reasons too complex to be developed in this paper.

109 Interview took place in June 2007, Dar es Salaam. In English.
secondary school being an uneasy way to reconcile secular and religious priorities. Modern secular schools have a higher status among students of both schools\textsuperscript{110}, and the interaction between teachers and students is slightly greater than it is in the madrassa. Most importantly, such an education leads to the slim possibility of a university education and the chance of employment.

Unlike neighbouring Kenya, Tanzania made Swahili the sole national language, and schools teach in Swahili and English, the latter a language of much commercial potential:\textsuperscript{111} in contrast, a madrassa education must seem out of step with the world of today. It is in this out-of-step world that the translators of Qutb wanted their work to have an effect: for the translators, Qutb’s work offers a way to unify a generation who are increasingly secularly educated and feel they have lost touch with their religion, and a religion which is currently the monopoly of a group who want to restrict it – the translators feel – to ritual effects and the maintenance of a monopoly of religious power.

Thus far we have looked at the organisation and content of the learning. There is another change, and in terms of how we understand Qutb’s appeal, it is just as important, and that is in the form of learning. Broadly speaking, the contrast given above offers two figures: the young man reciting the Quran, among many others in a class room, without the space to interpret what he means, and the young man sitting alone, reading the Quran by himself, thinking and questioning, with the help of leaflets and commentaries such as In the Shade of the Quran.

Learning from the Quran has traditionally meant learning by rote; but it also meant learning a whole set of dispositions distinct from the information being imparted. As Brinkley Messick sets out in The Calligraphic State:

\textit{Corporal and other forms of explicit correction, frequent and fear-inspiring though they might be, constituted only an overt aspect of the broad and subtle disciplining that was an important Quranic-school objective. This} \\
\textit{__________________________} \\
\textsuperscript{110} RVK:113. \\
\textsuperscript{111} Though Arabic, given the frequent possibility of work in the Gulf, is not without commercial potential.
was to instill adab, a complex of valued intellectual dispositions and appropriate behaviors. A verb from the same root (addaba) means to educate, to discipline, and to punish, while adab the noun can refer specifically to either literature or manners. In a general sense, adab was the primary responsibility of a child’s parents. The Quranic school specialized in correct comportment, both among a cohort of pupils and especially in relation to Sinna, and in the memorized acquisition of the Quran, the sacred text.  

While Messick is referring to the highlands in Yemen, the point stands for madrassa in general; in addition to the content they teach the emphasis is on creating the proper disposition towards the Quran, the sacred text. Part of the power of this instilling of adhab derives from the power of the recitation. Tanzania, on the East coast, has a long tradition of oral recitation. As Ong has pointed out, spoken words in oral societies are dynamic, they are events that have power; this power is not a part of their content, but their literal performance in a certain context. Rather than words being things that are neutral until spoken, they are charged with a particular power: imparting to students the effects of this particular kind of power requires time: a slow process under the careful stewardship of the authorities within the institution designed to impart knowledge to the student.

This process is thrown open by the effects of mass secular education. Suddenly, education is no longer a process in which words have power in and of themselves, and analogously, recitation has no a priori value. The change in political structure is of course also pronounced: one is now no longer under Islamic values in school – though Tanzanian schools do teach Islamic history – but under a secular authority. However, this change is perhaps not as fundamental as the change in the structure of learning. Suddenly, secrecy collapses: there is, at least in theory, an open egalitarian access to information that is not structured in terms of overarching religious

Religious literature is, of course, as old as religion itself, and, if you care to look at the titles of religious books down the years, from the beginning to the present time, you will find, century after century, books with very similar titles, such as "The Explanation of Secrets". Sometimes they are metaphors: "The Pearls of the Sea", "The Pearls of Knowledge", etc. Yet, for some time now we have seen titles appearing without precedent in religious literature: "What is Islam?", "What Does it Mean to be a Muslim?", "How to Experience Islam?" There is a wealth of literature nowadays that tries to provide an objective definition of what Islam is, because there is a need for such an objective definition, because there is no longer any evidence of religious belief, because there is no longer any mediation of knowledge by the ulamas, or legal experts. Everyone is faced with the need to invent, define, and objectify what religion means to them.

In any place where the religious structure that provides the sense of the world is detached from the political structure in which the world occurs, and in which that political world excludes the functioning of the religious at its basis, major changes are going to occur in the structure and needs of religious education. One of the notable things about the rise of demands for pamphlets – small, individually orientated guides instantly available – is that extent to which this is mirrored around the rest of the world. To quote again from Olivier Roy:

It is worth unpacking the claim in this quote. Previously, books offered instruction on how to search for what is absent: clues on how to detect the face of God in the moss, trace the presence of the absent one in the sense of the world. Today, Roy argues, we see the emergence of a new type of book, one in which religion, which was previously present in everyday cultural structures, suddenly needs to be defined and objectified by each individual believer without recourse to the institutions that previously guaranteed this objectification.

I contend that we see much the same change in Tanzania if we trace the pamphlets rise in popularity; a way of learning about Islam outside of the

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115 It is still, of course, structured in terms of – secular – authority, but the claim ("knowledge should be for everyone") is what changes here, and it is what is most essential to understanding the translation of Qutb.

116 IE.

117 This is not to imply that doubt is not bound up in these structures, as it is an intrinsic part of religious thought. However, in, for instance, a country in which everyone fasts during Ramadan, it is less likely that the religion as a whole (indeed the idea of religion in general) is brought into question.
hierarchical basis of the madrassa: a secular way of learning, to be sure, but a secular education of a particular kind, for it does not take place within the normal institutional constraints of a secular education - it is still principally a negation of the madrassa rather than an affirmation of the university; it is an anti-authoritarian claim that asks that religious knowledge is brought into the world and not left with the Sheikhs of menstruation.

This position gives rise to a certain structure of subjective knowledge confirmation that I will discuss in II.V.

What we see in the development of alternative modes of learning about Islam outside of traditional structures, is the construction of a way of thinking that is distinguished by a wish to return to a pure Islam (an Islam everyone knows and feels without the innovations of culture), through negating the structures held as Islamic, and as an alternative, embracing a mode of individual learning that is derived from a secular education system, even as the secular state is held to be the Christian opponent.

The translation of Sayyid Qutb appears here not as the anomaly it initially seems to be, the one large book resting among the pamphlets. Instead, the claim the Islam should be for everyone is also carried through into the translation of Qutb’s Quranic commentary. Moreover, it is in the structure of thought present in the work of Qutb that we find resonances with the patterns I have been describing in Tanzania.
\textbf{IV. The double edged sword}

We aspire for Islamic Renaissance on the basis of the Quran. To us the Quranic spirit and Islamic tenets are immutable: but the application of this spirit in the realm of practical life must always vary with the change of conditions and increase of knowledge...Our way is quite different from both the Muslim scholar of the recent past and modernized European stock. On the one hand we have to imbibe exactly the Quranic spirit and identify our outlook with the Islamic tenets while, on the other, we have to assess thoroughly the developments in the field of knowledge and changes in conditions of life that have been brought during the last eight hundred years; and third, we have to arrange these ideas and laws on life on genuine Islamic lines so that Islam should once again become a dynamic force: the leader of the world rather than a follower.\footnote{Mawdudi, quoted MIR: 51.}

There is no culture of Islam. No rituals (other than those contained in the Quran), no practices (other than the sunna), no set system of authority (other than God’s sovereignty). This claim is a historical one, in two senses. First, the rituals, practices and authority that are claimed as immutable, and are raised up from cultural and historical products to a transcendent level, do nonetheless emerge from a particular historical period. This truth is not simply that of historicist scholars at western universities who want to discover Islam “as it was”\footnote{What Islamic Modernism puts into question is how this past should be acknowledged. “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger.” These words, spoken by Walter Benjamin, hold equally true for Qutb and Mawdudi. See OCH: 391.} in the age of Muhammed. It is also a truth acknowledged by the rigorous care that Islamic scholars make in tracing an isnad back to the companions of the prophet: the prophet did exist in a particular time and place, even if the truths that were revealed to him are immutable. The originary moment of the religion – the revelation – is not forever removed from the believer, as it is in Gauchet’s description of religion before the religions of the Book – it can be accessed, and it can be so because it has occurred (and may occur again).

The second sense in which the claim that there is no culture of Islam must be historicised is that it occurs in a particular world of the present. There is no culture of Islam, it is said; instead there are immutable truths. These immutable truths, for Mawdudi, no less than Qutb, are not simply available: they must be actualised by the umma in each era. These immutable truths are a function of a particular time: “the application of this spirit in the realm...
of practical life must always vary with the change of conditions and [the] increase of knowledge."

Into which world must this spirit be applied? It is always a local world, and while the principles might claim to be the same, the priorities and conditions in post-colonial Tanzania, pre-Independence India and Egypt under the reign of Nasser are not.

Yet the claim is the same: make it (a)new: discover the moment of the transcendent in the particular. In as much as the claim must emerge to be applied in a particular world, it also emerges from that particular world – this is the third sense in which the transcendental claim is historical.

To explain the similarity of the appeal to a pure, egalitarian Islam in Tanzania and the writing of Qutb thus means answering three related questions: how was this claim taken up (what are the set of circumstances in which Islam became a claim one could make in this particular local world)? Which world does it attempt to negate (what are the local conditions in the Muslim world it wants to act against)? How will this claim be applied (what local conditions need to be modified)?

Part III of this essay deals with the political economy of Tanzania in which we see the emergence of Islamist thought, and correlative to the respective position of Qutb in regard to Nasser’s secularist government. We have seen, in this section, something of the world in which this claim will take place, and what will be negated. Parts IV and V deal with how this claim will be applied.

What we will now deal with is why this claim seems to emerge in several different places at the same time: despite being, as we have seen, a claim which rests on an evaluation of local conditions.

As stated in the methodological introduction, this cannot be simply a question of correspondence theory (people putting into local practice international ideas) – indeed, if we were to look at the Tanzanian example more closely than the space of this essay allows, we would see numerous
divergences and adaptations between Qutb’s position and that of his translators, most notably in terms of the position of the Arab.\footnote{On the continued importance of this figure, see. Devji, Faisal. (In Press). 2008: The ‘Arab’ in Global Militancy. In Al-Rasheed, Madawi (ed.). Kingdom Without Borders: Saudi political, religious and media frontiers. London: Hurst & Co. pp. 285-303.} However, what interests us here is how a similar structure is mirrored around the world, rather than the local adaptations (or, the local adaptations only insofar as a certain flexibility of structure engenders the claim’s adoption).

Despite the fact that a diffusionist answer to the question of convergence is insufficient, it is worth emphasising the empirical links between Islam in Tanzania and Mawdudi. Abu al-Ala Mawdudi founded Jam’at-Islamia, and many of his students came to Tanzania and Kenya to teach; in English, and, correspondingly, to those secularly educated to be able to speak English at a high enough level; here the colonial connection between the countries becomes more important than the putative linguistic connection between Muslims who should speak in Arabic. These connections were such that al-Farsy, despite taking some distance for his positions, approved the translation of Mawdudi’s introduction to the Quran into Swahili.\footnote{It should be noted that this occurs in an era when the Jam’at-Islamia were mounting a campaign against the Ahmadiyya which found favour amongst Islamist reformers in East Africa.} Equally, while students with a sufficient grasp of Arabic and the right connections could aspire to further their Islamic education in the Middle East, many notable Tanzanian Muslims went to be taught in Pakistan.\footnote{For the analysis of the spread of another movement from Pakistan around the world, connected, though differing in important ways (differences that will be explained later in this section), from Jam’at-Islamia, see: Masud, Muhammad Khalid (ed.). 2000: Travellers in Faith. Studies of the Tablighi Jamaat as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal. Leiden: Brill.} In his article on Sheikh Kassim Juma bin Khamis and the Dar es Salaam pork riots of 1993, Muhammad Said\footnote{See, Said, Muhammed. 2006b: Al Murhum Sheikh Kassim Juma bin Khamis (1940-1993) and the Dar es Salaam pork riots of 1993. Paper presented at the conference: Islam’s Encounter with the challenges of the 21st Century. Nairobi, Kenya: Kenyatta University.} sets out the extent to which Sheikh Kassim Juma (a widely known orator) was influenced by his exposure to Jam’at-Islamia. Finally, many of the secular intellectuals under consideration in this essay claim to have been taught, in English, by his students, though I have not yet
been able to collect sufficient information to construct an accurate
genealogy.

This emphasis on Mawdudi might seem misplaced in an essay principally
concerned with Qutb, but as the following section will make clear, their ideas
are sufficiently close to make an understanding of Mawdudi’s popularity in
Tanzania sufficiently important to understand why the claim outlined at the
start of this section, which we find in Qutb, is one we also find in Tanzania.

Several things unite the three worlds. The presence of a Christian or secular
government at odds with God’s purported sovereignty; the sense that one is
‘behind’ in relation to a non-believing Europe, and the status of one’s fellow
Muslims in relationship to these sentiments.

It is perhaps here that Qutb’s thought is most radical. To understand the
structure of history we outlined at the beginning of this section, and why
this leads to an appeal to individuals outside of any traditional structure, we
will consider the development of the notion of jahiliyya, ignorance, in Qutb’s
thought.

Jahiliyya is mentioned repeatedly in the Quran, in reference to the period
before the revelation of the Quran; it is a period of ignorance, to be sure, but
a period that was not wilfully chosen. In this period of pre-Islamic ignorance,
God is both present everywhere (because he has not revealed himself to be
singular), and absent (his singular absent presence has not occurred). In such
a framework, for Gauchet, “that other age, the sacred moment of origins,
regularly returns through ritual to restore our world, by appearing to bring
about a turn through ritual to restore our world, by appearing to bring about
a recurrence of what has already definitively taken place.”

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124 For example: 5:50, 33:33.
125 DW:30.
Following the revelation, as it is classically understood, Islamic history begins.\textsuperscript{126} For Qutb, jahiliyya does not solely refer to this period. In fact, jahiliyya ceases to refer to any historical period at all, save for the fact that it definitely does not refer to the time of the Prophet, nor the coming time when Islam will rise again; but in every other period, there is jahiliyya: it is not of fixed duration, but a permanent actuality, just as, correspondingly, access to revelation becomes a permanent possibility in our lives.

This huge shift has three effects: it absolutely changes the Islamic perspective of history, it unseats the spatial co-ordinates of Islam, and it firmly entrenches the Islamic task in terms of the believer’s interiority.

If previously there was an Islamic history, after the revelation, for Qutb, there is now a non-Islamic history, a history of people not up to the challenge of living with the revelation.

For while the world, Qutb concedes, is becoming more prosperous, this prosperity is morally bankrupt, because it cannot tie material progress to God’s sovereignty (the only source of morality). Thus, to be clear, the West is morally bankrupt, and cannot offer a good model for Islamic life.

However, for Qutb, this also holds for the Islamic world. By removing the notion of an Islamic history, he calls into question what was previously given – that the Muslim world is indeed Muslim. Just as in what Qutb thinks of as the West, in the so-called Muslim world, people are not living in submission to Islam, and thus are no longer to be thought of as Muslims. This shift forces one to make explicit whether, and how, one is a Muslim, in a way we have already seen manifested in the use of pamphlets and books in part II of this section.

Previously, the challenge of combating jahiliyya was also correlated to a spatial division. There was the dar al- Islam (land of Islam), and here one can find Muslims. Outside of this, there is the dar al- Harb, the land of war,

where one does not find Muslims, but finds ignorance. In Qutb’s conception of the world, the barriers between these worlds can no longer be assured: we may find secularists posing as Muslims running Egypt, and we may also find true Muslims in Europe (who thus face a more or less identical challenge to the true Muslims in Egypt).

In a time of increasing immigration and the spread of secular ideology in the Middle East: “Qutb and Mawdudi...re-inscribe the cosmic battle between the Abode of Islam and the Abode of War inside the Muslim community.”

However, it would be wrong to think that the jahiliyya of the pre-Islamic days is the same concept that Qutb and Mawdudi use: Qutb believes that the ancient jahiliyya is comparably easier to fight, because it comes from ignorance of God, whereas contemporary jahiliyya emerges from the wilful disregarding of God’s sovereignty (which for Qutb is always manifest and evident) in favour of man-made values.

We are today immersed in jahiliyya, a jahiliyya like that of early Islam, but perhaps deeper, darker (azlam, more unjust). Everything around us expresses jahiliyya: people’s ideas, their beliefs, habits, traditions, culture, art, literature, rules and laws. Even all that we have come to consider Islamic culture, Islamic sources, philosophy and thought are also jahli constructs. This is why Islamic values have not taken root in our souls, why the Islamic world view remains obscured in our minds, why no generation has arisen among us equal to the calibre of the first Islamic generation.

We are not ourselves. It might be that such a notion would give rise to a great sense of unease, rather like someone in those equally jahili societies in the Communist bloc, who realise that Communism is not quite what they thought. It might be, except that here in the Muslim world (which is everywhere), we already felt ill at ease, sitting in our house with a government on the television espousing Islam and acting otherwise. We felt ill at ease, and now we know why. The solution to this ignorance cannot be

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128 M:11.
found in those lying institutions that already claim to be Muslim; it must be found internally.

The undermining of Islam from within was Mawdudi’s greatest concern with the colonial government in India; his criticism, unlike that of Khomeini in Iran, was not rooted in a strongly socio-economic critique, but in a concern with the imposition of secular institutions, and, correspondingly, a loss of influence for Islam and a gaining of ground by the Muslims. Because of the accent of this critique, the West is not opposed as a historical force, instead it, “provided a display of power in the modern world and hence could be emulated.”130 This emulation in terms of technology and organisation (Mawdudi adopted the concept of the vanguard from Lenin, which Qutb also later made use of) would, however, be as nothing without individual Muslims cultivating an internal disposition towards Islam:

*The future of the whole world of Islam will depend upon the attitude that the Muslims ultimately adopt to Islam. If, unfortunately, present hypocritical attitudes... persist, I am afraid that the newly independent Muslim nations will not be able to preserve their freedom for a long time.*

The solution to this hypocrisy is to disengage Islam from the culture surrounding it. As Mawdudi notes, “A Muslim is not a Muslim by appellation or birth, but by virtue of abiding by holy law.”132 This insistence on an active submission to God emerges first as a critique of those who claim to be Muslim, or think that merely proclaiming themselves Muslim is sufficient. Here Mawdudi mirrors Walter Benjamin, when, in the Concept of History, he notes that “Nothing has corrupted the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological developments as the fall of the stream with which it thought it was moving. From there it was but a step to the illusion that the factory work which was supposed to tend toward technological progress constituted a political

130 MIR: 51.
131 Ibid:55 (quote from Mawdudi).
achievement.”133 Equally, for Mawdudi and Qutb, the idea that simply being born a Muslim or taking part in ritual observances leads to an Islamic society is a pernicious error, and from there it is but one step to supposing that ritual observance constitutes a religious achievement.

What is less clear is what is supposed to replace this sense of Islam as a given. Both thinkers claim we must actively submit, and place Islam at the centre of our lives. In Qutb’s case, he started writing believing in some conception of progress (see I.II). By the end of his life, in Components of an Islamic Conception, a book which develops the themes that had preoccupied him in Milestones, he has returned to a classically Islamic idea of history.

Humanity moves within a broad range; it may rise till it is higher than the angels, or descend until it is lower than the beasts. Its whole history in this respect is a series of rises and falls, and there is no one ascending line over time. Its scientific knowledge and experience in the material world and its ability to use the practical laws of the universe may indeed proceed in a rising line, but humanity does not proceed along this line. Rather it follows the guidance of its nature (fitra) to the soundest of conditions – that is, service to God alone and freedom from service to servants – or to deviation from that sound condition. The ascending line of science does not matter, nor does the ascending line of the facilities of material civilisation. They can become causes of decline and factors in a deterioration to ‘the lowest of the low’ when they are separated from the line of truly sound ascent. ‘We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then do we abase him to be the lowest of the low, except such as believe and do righteous deeds.’134

Here, as we saw in the introduction, material and spiritual progress are decisively sundered. Yet, while he does not retain the western conception of progress (as he understood it), he does not dismiss it either, and he does not reject its perceived benefits; it is simply that they are secondary to the purpose of the mission - which is the return of a pure Islam.

But while they are secondary, they may be valuable tools on the road. For Mawdudi, as for Qutb, the coming of modernity has destroyed traditional values, but equally, it has opened up the possibility of an Islam without cultural values attached. We can see an example of such an approach in the usage of books and pamphlets.

133 OCH:395.
If we recall that al’Amin (section II.II) thought newspapers, of “all modern things” put good news into people’s heart, we would not be surprised to read Benedict Anderson’s famous description of the morning paper:

The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?

This form, used, in Anderson’s account, to unite nations (that secular community) is here mirrored by an Islamic Modernism that places no less emphasis on the creation of an internal sentiment linked, silently, to thousands of others, this time, in the umma and not the nation.

V. How to ride a street car

Does it mean that we, today, for instance, everyone sitting in this hall, have a greater knowledge of the conditions of life under which we exist than has an American Indian or a Hottentot? Hardly. Unless he is a physicist, one who rides on the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get into motion. And he does not need to know. He is satisfied that he may ‘count’ on the behaviour of the streetcar, and he orients his conduct according to this expectation; but he knows nothing about what it takes to produce such a car so that it can move. The savage knows incomparably more about his tools. When we spend money today I bet that even if there are colleagues of political economy here in the hall, almost every one of them will hold a different answer in readiness to the question: How does it happen that one can buy something for money—sometimes more and sometimes less? The savage knows what he does in order to get his daily food and which institutions serve him in this pursuit. The increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives.

It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means. This process of disenchantment, which has continued to exist in Occidental culture for millennia, and, in general, this ‘progress,’ to which science belongs as a link and motive force.136

On more than one occasion I have been having a conversation in which someone tells me “Science tells us...”, and I have been speechless. Not so much because I know what Science tells us (I am sceptical science tells us any one thing, but if it did, then I would surely not be the person to know what it is saying), but because the form of the argument leaves me bewildered. Science here seems to stand in for a sign of knowledge, pure and simple. Often, criticism of texts which include such appeals, especially by Islamists, are patronising: they claim, implicitly: the ravages of colonialism, the dire straits a poor education can bring a man: the claims of the text about science are delinked from the scientific debate and marked as ignorant.

Perhaps however, there is something else going on. Perhaps, in the way the word Science is used, for instance, we can see a different structure of knowledge, one not inconsonant with the structure of knowledge outlined in the rest of this section.

There opposition between the savage and the modern in Weber’s characterisation of enchantment moves through two poles. The savage, for Weber, thinks everything is motivated by mysterious forces. Everything exceeds her or him, and yet there is no alienation; God is present in all things, and they can use all things (that appear as such in their world). This is in part the product of a lack of differentiation in the means of production, but, moreover, it is the product of a particular type of subjectivity; sovereignty is not absent, and one can thus negotiate with it, enter into it: see it in all things.

Our disenchanted modern man, in contrast, thinks there are no mysterious forces at work in the world: there is nothing in principle that he cannot understand. In principle. In reality, he wanders the world without understanding any of the things that he interacts with; everything is available, and yet nothing is known. Everything is present, but unavailable.

In the case of the savage, the divine, the mysterious, can be accessed in set ways – through rituals, through repetitions of the originary and founding moment (the creation of the world) that bring one no closer to that moment. In the case of the disenchanted modern man there is no boundary between knowledge and things: there is no sphere of the divine that should be set apart from everyday life. In the first case, the divine is everywhere, but can only be accessed through certain set rituals, in the second case, the divine is nowhere, and can be accessed in everything. Indeed, for Qutb, should be accessed in everything.

In the world of Islam in Dar es Salaam evoked by the translators, knowledge had to be ritually sanctified: one learned knowledge only through institutionally approved officials, and one accessed God through certain rituals – such as the Maulidi – and not through the insistence that Islam must be practiced in everyday life. Furthermore, decisions about this

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137 If space allowed, it would be interesting to take up Levi-Strauss’ work in La Pensée Sauvage and to show that the structure of savage knowledge is not one that ends during a teleological progression of history, but is ever-present in our lives: the savage and the disenchanted are two poles between which ways of understanding the world alternate. See Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1962: La Pensée Sauvage. Paris: Plon.
knowledge are not available to everyone: the emphasis on ijtihad is not to be found in Shaf‘i’ Islam, where it is the ijma that makes decisions about the sunna. Religion is placed within a series of barriers: and one cannot access the divine without taking these barriers into account.

Such a world is precisely the one that Qutb was militating against; if we look at the structure of the translation and its social context, it seems, to borrow an old Marxist term, almost a perfect example of Qutbian praxis. He wrote Milestones, he tells us, for the vanguard, “which I consider to be a waiting reality ready to be materialised.”\textsuperscript{138} He warns the vanguard they will face opposition from so-called Muslims, that they must be open to technology and science but not secular values, that they must seclude themselves and not allow so-called Muslims to influence them. Here we have a translation which steps into an existing form of thought, but not yet an existing community: a community that is a waiting reality to be materialised, if only they can overcome opposition from those who want to keep religion forced into ritualised spaces and away from politics. Here is a book translated from the English by, in the person of Alliy Kilima, a secularly educated engineer.

There are no limits, remembering Weber’s description of disenchantment, to secular knowledge. Likewise, for an absent God whose presence must be felt in every aspect of society, there are no limits: all Engineers are ulema,\textsuperscript{139} Islam is directly and immediately available to everyone, just as God is present in all things.

One should note here, that as the form of knowledge we see in the pamphlets and in the translation of Qutb is principally in response to Islamic, ritualised forms of knowledge, the normally constituted secular barriers to speech (needing a university degree, an institutional position etc.) are not present.

\textsuperscript{138} M:12.
\textsuperscript{139} See, for a further discussion of this viewpoint, from which the following leans on heavily, FPI, Chapter Six: The New Islamist Intellectuals.
Both secular and religious thinkers distinguish their knowledge in relation to a corpus. One is closed, and everything must be referred to the Book, the other is heterogeneous and open to being challenged.\textsuperscript{140} For our new Islamist intellectuals, knowledge is not defined in terms of a corpus sanctified and controlled by an institution. Everyone is authorised. The corpus we see available to the translator of Qutb juxtaposes the secular education he imperfectly received and the single authorising text that he does not understand. There is here a strange fragmentation: knowledge is open in theory to everyone, but must be brought back into the domain of God's sovereignty. In this montage effect, modern science becomes emblematic: its power is respected, but its willingness to break the world into pieces seems a fundamental denial of \textit{tahwid}, and so is denied. Correlatively, in the institutional structure of knowledge, any attempt to limit one's ability to speak is refused: to make knowledge conditional on exams, for instance, is to make knowledge a function of learning, rather than the qualitative jump required by an ever-present (absent) God; for if God knows all things, and one has knowledge of God, what knowledge could one not acquire? How could one be stopped from translating, just because one doesn't speak Arabic?

As you leave the wa Mtoro mosque compound, in a small ground floor building on the right, is the office of Al Huda, with its irrepressible editor, Abdi Hussain Kifea. Al Huda also doubles as a publishing house. It is uncertain how many books they have published, though Kifea claims to have twenty ready to be printed, but for a lack of finance. What is surprising is that neither of the two books I purchased at the office were on sale at the nearby book stores; Kifea claims this is because of a lack of a distribution network, though given the proximity of the shops this does not seem like a likely explanation.

\textsuperscript{140} One must here note that neither being closed is not a property of the religion nor being heterogeneous a property of the secular \textit{per se}; there are plenty of examples of closed secular systems for instance – the constant call of "returning to Marx" being a classic example. See FPI:91.
The books are instead distributed in samizdat from the offices of the newspaper. Both of the books I purchased were written by Kifea, or by family members: he claimed he wrote one of them under an alias, but it is indeed a strange alias, as he has retained his last name. The book, in question, authored by Mousa Yakob Kifea, is called Mitando ya kijasusi duniani: Harakati za Wzayuni kutumalaki dunia. It concerns the world-wide Jewish conspiracy. The text of the books is not necessarily the interesting thing: it is the same tired old mix of conspiracy theory, supposedly authoritative facts (Science again) and Quranic quotations. What is interesting is the type of fragmentary montage assembled in the bibliography: a mixture of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, “CIA reports”, science text books and Quranic interpretations: it is precisely the type of fragmentary montage, positioned between two worlds, which Olivier Roy sets out in The Failure of Political Islam: there are no institutional demands of accuracy about the “CIA reports”, but nor are there checks on the interpretation of the Quranic quotes used in the book: the type of interiority that Mawdudi and Qutb see as a solution to jahiliyya struggles to find - if indeed it is searching - a mode of regulation, and has as its vehicle a self-authorising mode of knowledge production.

One must also ask, in this context, why, in a country without a Jewish population – aside from passing Israeli gemstone dealers – is there such a degree of anti-Semitism? Given the international environment, in which the struggles in the occupied territories are the most visible sign of what people often understood in Dar es Salaam as a battle against Islam, the anti-semitism of such leaflets functions here as a sign: a way to try and participate in the struggle in which the umma is perceived to be in worldwide. Interestingly, in this regard, Kifea told me that he felt the publication of his work would do a great deal to raise Islamic consciousness:

which is precisely the effect one would expect the invention of a fictional enemy around which to cluster a community to have.

It is into this structure of knowledge that Qutb emerges – he lends legitimacy to the vanguard that must turn aside from the traditional structure (while justifying itself through tradition) and equally from secularism (while borrowing its structures). In the translation of Qutb, and the leaflets which lay around it, we see the reading of the world from a set of fragments left from systems in which our translators are only ambiguously a part.
Part III: We are not ourselves

How can the divine avoid undergoing a radical reassessment when the territorial monarch aspires to reconstitute the arrangement of the entire visible sphere? 142

The great merit of Gauchet’s treatment of religion is that he accords the state its rightfully central place in the transformation of religious structures. “With the State’s appearance”, he claims, “the religious Other actually returns to the human sphere.” 143 This is not to claim that God is simply seen as conterminous with the state: no matter what the state might claim, God’s sovereignty is still exterior, as those who criticise the Saudi state on the basis of the religious doctrine that lends it legitimacy makes clear. The crucial point is rather that when sovereignty emerges in state form, and has to harness, in some way, exterior religious sovereignty, the exteriority of the divine is transported into the social sphere, and what was previously non-human now has to be incorporated into social relations.

This process of incorporation is never closed. “What is the value of this world compared to its other? From now on it will be structurally impossible to stop asking this question.” 144 In Michael Walzer’s145 classic study of English Puritanism, The Revolution of the Saints, it is precisely this disjuncture that allows the Puritans to completely reject the existent realm, to “repudiate the routine procedures and customary beliefs of the old order”; 146 in this repudiation, “their destructiveness is all the more total because they have a

142 DW:42.
143 Ibid:35.
144 Ibid:49.
146 Ibid:317.
total view of the new world.”147 This new world is the other of the present configuration promised by the religions of the Book.

As we saw at the beginning of section II, in Islam this relationship is complicated because the Law cannot simply be positive law, and yet those making legislation are required to submit positive law to the Law. The history of Islam has come up with a variety of structures to deal with this tension: from the insistence one cannot rise up and overthrow a government that claims to be Muslim,148 to the development of a clergy almost entirely independent from the state (as the Shia clergy was up until the Iranian revolution in 1979).

The question that Gauchet asks at the beginning of this section is an open one: there is no predetermined path one follows when, as in the case of both Egypt and Tanzania, in different ways, the state is explicitly not Islamic. In lieu of a pre-determined path, we will instead trace the development of Qutb’s thought in terms of its relation to Nasser, and likewise, of Islamic thought in Tanzania relative to the colonial and post-colonial governments.

This will not be an exhaustive history – instead, I want to set out some of the background to the structure of thought we have observed in the previous section. The relationship to interiority, and the refusal of hierarchy, will be traced relative to state development.

There is something else that must be touched on, and that is the feeling of lack that was mentioned at the start of this essay: the powerful feeling of marginalisation that has been a force for some of the most important revolutionary movements of the last century. It is difficult to write a political history of a sentiment; to show how a structure of lack contributes to a body of thought, without lapsing into facile psychologism. This section does not aim to explain away Qutb by giving a psychological interpretation (if only they felt better about Europe...), rather, if the previous section could be

147 Ibid:318.
148 The modern debate about this issue, with its unusual distinctions between faith and belief, is explored in Craze, Joshua, 2007b.
characterised as largely archaeological\textsuperscript{149} in nature, this section will be genealogical; it will aim to show the development of Qutb’s texts, and their translation, in terms of “their objectives, the strategies that govern them, and the program of political action they propose.”\textsuperscript{150}

In making such an analysis, especially of a phenomenon that is so resolutely secular in many of its structures, it is worth answering those who might wonder just how Islamic all of this really is.

In the aftermath of 9/11, there have been two voices that have been strident: one has said, “This is not Islam”, and disengaged Islam from any discussion of Islamism. The other has claimed “This is Islam”, and feel free to bandy about the term Islamo-fascism, or condemn the religion tout court. Both these positions, as we have noted, are mistaken. Islam is not one thing – if indeed, it is anything, other than the Quran. Some, such as Joel Beinin,\textsuperscript{151} have sought an antidote to this essentialism by emphasising we must understand Islamism as a social phenomena as any other: looking at networks and socio-economic effects.

He too, though his work is welcome, is missing the ball slightly.

Olivier Roy is correct to surmise that “the crowds that in the 1950’s demonstrated under the red or national flags now march under the green banner”\textsuperscript{152}, that the social groups that were once motivated by nationalist or socialist ideologies are today finding in Islamism a powerful mode of expression.

He is only partly correct, however, when he complains that “religious universalism killed universalism plain and simple”\textsuperscript{153} because Islam, unlike 

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid: 36. I have modified the text.
\textsuperscript{152} FPI:4.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Marxism, “draws on its own limits and produce a ‘culture war’ effect that makes it difficult to see the relationship between third world contestation and Islamic self-assertion.”

Even if people have seemingly no knowledge of Islam, the very fact of acts and people being named as such, and acting within that name, is significant: if there is a disjuncture between how these people act, and what we expect from the name Islam, we cannot simply leave this as a discontinuity and claim they are socio-economically motivated, as Roy often seems tempted to do – we must uncover what in that discontinuity is continuous, both with the history of Islam and the history of political radicalism. Gaps also have a history, even if, as in the case of this essay, writing the history of a non-history, or a disjuncture, or a non-writing (or worse, all three combined), remains a fraught endeavour.

Islam is not somehow tacked onto the end of a socio-economic force; as a vague ideological superstructure; the tradition of Islam is the discourse in which Qutb expresses himself, it makes demands on him, just as the political world he is in makes demands on his work.

The paragraph above could describe the any political writing; it always exceeds and is constrained by the senses of the world in which it finds itself. In our case, this is particularly acute: an appeal is not made to any class, nor to an existing community. One might think that this appeal to a universal was also true of Communism between 1848 and 1917, but it nevertheless emphasised the moment of a socio-economic force, and its translation into a political movement. Islamism today makes no such claims: the appeal is simultaneously to the individual, and to a wider world of effects. This point will be developed in Part V.

\[^{154}\text{Indeed, if we remember the extent to which for Mawdudi, colonialism was not a socio-economic issue, but a cultural one, it is striking that what Mawdudi, and latterly Qutb, respond to and attempt to overcome is a structure of thought, more than a political imposition.}\]
Olivier Roy claims to see a continuity of appeal (both in the groups Qutb’s message appeals to, and the message itself) between Islamism and the radical left in Europe. He writes:

_The far left in Europe today has abandoned zones of social exclusion. This is a fact. We have good reason to rejoice in the disappearance of a violent and radical far left, but it did have a function, which was to contain and hold in check a certain revolt, often also based on the generation gap. But this is over: a 30-year-old, in France, who would have joined the proletarian left, the Maoists or Action Directe, who, in Italy, would have joined the Brigate Rosse, who, in Germany, would have joined the Rote Armee Fraktion, this young person no longer has the opportunity to join left-wing movements, and if he or she wants to fight the system, and use violence, he or she has only one role model: and that is bin Laden, or the local Islamist networks, and his or her friends._

He is surely wrong, and not just empirically: Islamism does not promise the same thing, nor attend to the same structure of thought. Where he is correct however, is in emphasising the need to understand the fracturing of post-colonial movements and socialist forces in order to understand both the apparatus of capture that Qutb and Mawdudi use to appropriate secular ways of thinking, and the climate that makes Islamism a viable mode of politics.


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155 IE.

156 As we see in the case of the translators, and as Olivier Roy himself remarks throughout FPI and GI, Islamism is attractive not to the zones of social exclusion in Europe (and, equally - as if the Brigate Rosse or RAF was anything other than bourgeois in their appeal), but to secularly educated intellectuals without a sense of place in the world.
King Faruq’s reign stuttered to an end at the beginning of the 1950’s. Nasser had been fighting against Israel in ’48, when his vehicle got stuck in the desert, and the inefficiency he saw in that vehicle increasingly came to mean, for him, the dire straits in which Egypt found itself.

In those heady days, there were two forces that were poised to take over Egypt: the coalition of ‘free officers’ gathered around Nasser, and the Muslim Brotherhood, the most important Islamist movement in the country.

Nationalism and Islamism: the two most potent ideologies in the Middle East during the 20th century. Each borrowed heavily from the other: Arab nationalism laid claim to a historical legacy that was fundamentally bound up with Islam, Islamism took up nationalist ideas and discourse (as we saw in section I.II), as well as socialist ideals. Moreover, they both borrowed a language rooted in a European discourse of revolution, and changed it for their own ends. Nasser, writing of the revolution in 1952, claimed: “I believe the entire nation was ready awaiting the Vanguard to break through, at which point the nation would proceed in a sacred march towards achieving greater aims.” Here religious destiny is combined with communist necessity to produce a justification for Arab nationalism: a combination that would not see out of place to any reader of the works of Benedict Anderson.

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158 As Qutb does in SJI.

Qutb was also waiting for a Vanguard, a few years later, sitting in Nasser's jail, writing *Milestones* “for the Vanguard, which I consider to be a waiting reality ready to be materialised.” These few years – between revolution and jail – are crucial for Qutb. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the commonalities between them, the Muslim Brotherhood, in which Qutb had assumed a leading role by the end of the 40’s, was always against communism, and Nasser’s socialism sat uneasily with them: any socialism that erected class as a battleground that was prior to religion was guilty of placing human values before the values of God and should thus be condemned.

However, Qutb's relationship to Nasser was more complicated than one might think given the account above. In part, this is because of strategic reasons: Nasser’s initial openness to the Muslim Brotherhood allowed them to wield an unheard of level of influence, and Qutb must have seen the revolution as one more milestone along the path to the caliphate. It is difficult to disentangle the causality between his strategic priorities and his discursive statements, but one can, nonetheless, explore the relationship between the two.

Qutb sees nationalism as acceptable, as a first stage. As we see in the quote that began this section, Muslims only have the right to establish the right order for the entire world; a properly religious claim, whereby Islam’s claim is one of universality, applicable to all men at all times. The problem with nationalism is its particularity.

Arab nationalism is a particular kind of nationalism. It is, first and foremost, an uneasy one: wandering uncertainly between racial identity, religious belief and secular thought about the nation state. At its worst, for Qutb, it means: only applying to the Arabs, or, even worse, only to Egypt.

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160 M:12.
In his writing, Qutb attempts to resolve this tendency towards particularity by making Arab nationalism a particular kind of linguistic nationalism.

The victory of the Islamic language in the battle with ancient countries is a remarkable phenomenon that, unfortunately, has not received systematic study or analysis. From my view the victory of the Islamic language is more remarkable than the victory of the Creed (aqidah) and its establishment. Change the language, which interweaves all social life of the people, Arabs and non-Arabs, is a complete miracle! The factor behind this matter of change was not the 'Arabic language.' Arabic language was in Arabia long before Islam . . . The new energy which has renewed Arabic language was only Islam . . . Therefore, I call it [Arabic language after Islam] 'Islamic language.' The language, which has changed the history, was the Islamic language . . . In the countries liberated by Islam, the geniuses went on to express themselves, not by their native languages but by the new language, the 'Islamic language.' They produced works in every field of knowledge. The Islamic language became, actually, the mother tongue for these geniuses. This was because the energy of Islam and the nature of the obligation that this language [Islamic language] is carrying were closer to the soul of these geniuses than their ancient cultures and languages. This energy was only Islam...

Arabic here ceases to become a marker of ethnic identity; “the Arabic language was in Arabia long before Islam” – the particular genius of Arabic is that it is the vehicle of Islam, it becomes “Islamic Language”, and in doing so negates the particular culture from whence it issues – the mother tongue becomes the tongue that has no mother - and becomes the possibility to negate culture, and enter into the universal. Qutb accepts Arabic only insofar as it allows one to transcend particular markings (ethnic, kin etc.) and talk to the all.

Freed from regional restrictions, the only criteria for Qutb becomes linguistic (fluency). He continually emphasises how many early Muslim scholars were not Arabs, and in doing so, and negating the particular cultural legacy of Arabic, he elevates it to universal principle.

This may seem to pose unavoidable problems for our translators of Qutb; for if Arabic is the particular language through one gains access to the universal, the status of the particular language – Swahili – that is not Arabic is seemingly undermined.

They have an easy reply. Qutb talks of an Islamic language – “the Islamic language became, in fact, the mother tongue for the geniuses.” Above and

\[162\] FZ, Vol. 3. 673.
beyond Arabic, it was conversing in and through Islam that counts. Qutb believes Islam can only be understood by understanding its place within a particular cultural and historical horizon of possibility: if that field means learning Arabic is a way of blocking Islam’s implementation in every field of existence (as it arguably is, given the constellation of political positions in Dar es Salaam), then Swahili can also become an Islamic language.

In the Egypt of 1952, the horizon of Islam was determined by Nasser. Later, as Jeremy Salt has noted, “the revolution of 1952 modified the concept of nationalism into an idea in which Islam has come to be of secondary importance to language and history.” But at that moment, at the time of the revolution, one had a choice between turning away, and thus, necessarily, being seen as with King Farooq; or being with the revolution.

Qutb chose the revolution.

It is hard to know precisely what he expected. The Revolutionary Council called him “the tribune of the Egyptian Revolution”. He endeavoured, over a series of radio broadcasts that lasted six months in 1952, to explain the Islamic nature of the 1952 revolution.

He indicated that for him, the revolution was the first step towards the unity of all Muslim nations. The unspoken correlate of such a claim is that the revolution is only justified if it is indeed a first step towards such a task. Just six months before the revolution, in January 1952, he published an article, Mabadi al-Alam al-Hur [Principles of the Free World], which set out a succinct version of his understanding of the revolution.

The flag which unites us in our struggle is the flag of Islam. Among us, a number of people prefer to be associated (yatajamma’u) under the Arab flag (al-rayah al-Arabiyyah). I have no objection to this association (al-tajammu) being transitory (waqtiyyan) as a step on the road of a wider association. There is no conflict (ta’arud) between Arab nationalism (al-qawmiyyah al-'Arabiyyah) and Islamic Patriotism (al-wataniyyah al-Islamiyyah), only if we understood Arab nationalism as a step on the road. All the Arab land is part of the land of Islam. If we liberate the Arab land, it means we liberate part of the body of the Islamic homeland (al-watan

164 Probably in homage (ironic or not) to the Anglophone Mirabeau (d.1791), spokesman of the French Revolution.
Qutb used the revolution as a way to try and ensure the continuity of the Islamic revolution: the objective gains of the Free Officers revolution could only be measured against the impending caliphate. Through the particular, the universal. But only if it speaks its name.

Nasser continued to not speak its name. He was a nationalist at heart (the union with Syria would never come to anything because of this), and Islam was firmly not on the cards. Shortly after coming to power, al-Azhar, the great old university, was abruptly modernised, and asked to accept birth control.

As Nasser moved further away from Qutb’s demands, Qutb correlativelly found himself further removed from the Revolutionary Council; in the end, he was caught up in the backlash against the Muslim Brotherhood. Qutb was the editor of al-İkhwan al-Muslimu, the paper of the Brotherhood, but held the post for only two months before Nasser closed it down in reaction to the Brotherhood’s opposition to the Anglo-Egyptian pact of 1954.

Things then started to move fast. After an attempt on Nasser’s life by a Muslim Brother in the same year, the association was declared illegal, and thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested, including Qutb.

He spent the rest of his life in and out of jail. In The Shade of the Quran was revised there: in it, he draws attention to what he considers to be the error of the nationalist program:

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For Qutb Arabism must be contained within Islamism, or else it is empty; strategically, the revolution offered a possibility to Qutb: to use the state to bypass itself. As it proved, the state found itself concerned with its own self-preservation (the Anglo-Egyptian pact). Crucial here is a question of borders. As in Saudi Arabia, there is a constant tension in states that lay any sort of claim to a Muslim legacy about the proper domains of their territory. In both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the tension is between an Islam that sees Dar-al-Islam as the proper territory of intervention, and a state that needs to preserve itself.

In prison, Qutb does not, as some might do, formulate a plan to take over the state, nor does he write tracts about how the revolution was betrayed – the fate of many of those who were disabused of the Communist project – his attachment to the revolution was never more than ambiguous in the first place. Instead, what marks his thought in prison is its insistent emphasis on interiority: on purely developing the potentiality for the Islamic caliphate, without any thought to how it will be actualised. Part V will develop why this thought should not – paradoxically – be considered as a lack, but as a fullness; a thought freed of the concern of state power, which is modern in its unrelenting emphasis on the subject.

For Qutb, fitra, the innate human disposition of man, is to know tahwid; to know mans submission to God is central to all things. Fitra forms a trinity of concepts in Qutb: with ubudiyyah [the submission of man to God] and hakimiyyah [God’s absolute sovereignty]. In sum, it means that acknowledging God’s sovereignty over every aspect of one’s life is absolute:

In the Islamic view, all human beings are one nation (umma wahida). Thus, there is no race, or homeland (watan) that can exploit other races or the homeland of others... When Islam abolishes both those geographical bounds and racism (unsuriyyah), upon which the idea of the national homeland (al-watan al-qawmi) is established, it does not abolish the idea of homeland completely but preserves its righteous meaning, that is the meaning of association (tajammu), brotherhood, cooperation, system, and the meaning of the common goal with which the group is associated. This makes the idea of homeland (watan) an idea in the consciousness (fikrah fi al-shu’ur), not a piece of land. In the shelter of this idea, the peoples of all races, colours, and territories can associate as people of one homeland (watan wahid). They are brothers in the name of Allah, cooperating for their welfare and the welfare of humanity as a whole. This idea is Islam — ‘The true believers are brothers’ [Qur’an, 49:15]. Here the idea of Islam replaces the idea of homeland (watan) in its righteous meaning... What emerges from this [idea] is the feeling that every territory under the shelter of Islam is the homeland (watan) of all Muslims and they are all its citizens.”

What is notable about this early tract is that the idea is not a geographical locality, but an “idea in the consciousness” — it is an ideal that does not require the taking of state power in a specific locality, nor does it necessarily exclude other types of association. Indeed, it specifically allows other types of association (just as Qutb allied himself with a nationalist movement) as long as they are subordinate to the struggle to bring an Islamic society on earth.

There are two important implications of this shift. As we have seen, Qutb’s reworking of the concept of jahiliyya means that ignorance could be found in dar-al-Islam: this is also anticipated in the early passage quoted above: for if associations are not necessarily against Islam, they are not necessarily for Islam either: everything must stand solely in terms of the future goal of an Islamic society, and no objective correlation to an institution can guarantee that one is for Islam.

Second, it means that one cannot think merely in terms of strategic objectives: an Islamic society cannot come about through moral reformism (see I.II): it must be inculcated in each person; just as Muhammed functioned

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170 The terms objectify and subjective here require a word of explanation. To objectify here is to transfer a subjective disposition into a thing: an external object about and through which people can agree or contest the subjective: a marriage contract then, would be an objectification that may (or may not) have a correlate to the feelings of the wedded. It is the not the necessary correspondence here that is important, but the creation of an institution apart from a sentiment which cannot be correlated to external law. To recalls Weber’s famous distinction: objectivity means no distinction between is and ought: the translators live solely in a world of ought.
as an example, so can anyone (as an example of a good Muslim, not, of course, as a prophet): rather than seeing the role of Islamism as being to create moral laws, Qutb sees it as establishing examples.

Such a thought is diametrically opposed to the Marxist thinkers that inspired him: here, the end absolutely does not justify the means. Indeed, the only end that counts is the good Muslim, which is a question of intention and action, and not objective results - the institution of a new law, in accord with Islam, but instituted by an unbeliever, for, say, political gain, would not be a satisfactory action for Qutb.

In his work, Qutb conflates belief and faith in much the same terms as he conflates ends and means.

Traditionally in Islam, belief and faith are separated out: if one performs a forbidden - haram - act, then one is lacking in faith, but one cannot judge that person a non-believer if they claim to be a believer.

Bad behaviour could be simply a result of lack of faith, rather than a lack of belief. There are three categories that could excuse people who are acting badly. People could be acting in an ignorant fashion, they could be coerced, or they could simply be acting out of greed. If any of these conditions are met, then one cannot be declared an apostate [and thus, one cannot be killed].

Historically, one end of the debate has been represented by the Khawarij. In the seventh century, after the death of Uthman, the third caliph, Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, defeated most of his

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171 These conditions are equally followed by Al-Qaeda. Following an attack in Riyadh in which Muslims were killed, some supported the attack by arguing one of the victims was an advocate of obscenity. Al Qaeda responded by saying: the debauchery and sins mentioned in connection with that victim does not justify his killing." See: The operation of 11 Rabi al-Awwal: The East Riyadh Operation and Our War with the United States and Its Agents. FBIS translated text. 1 August 2003. Quoted in Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2006: Anatomy of the Salafi Movement. Studies in Conflict and Terrorism. 29: p.230. Given Al Qaeda’s evident flouting of these conditions, in could be asked if such discursive structures have any real import. Yet despite the theological justifications being severely strained by Al Qaeda actions, they are nonetheless a constraint on the types of action jihadi groups will consider. Equally, a reticence about judging Takfir from external actions is part of the reason the Saudi religious establishment has refrained from declaring Bin Laden an apostate, a decision that would have large reverberations.
rivals. Mu’awiyah ibn abu Sufyan, a close relative of Uthman, accused Ali of hiding his killers. Eventually, Ali conceded to place the matter before arbitration. Some of his followers were appalled by his decision and turned against him, feeling only God has the right to judge such matters. They became known as the Kharawarij, and declared Ali an apostate, killing him in 660.

The Kharawarij have largely disappeared, and aside for a few small communities they appear largely as bogeymen; a name for the ulema to throw at each other. Their position – and Qutb’s, though it is more complex – can be helpfully distinguished from several modern religious positions. In The Reasonableness of Christianity, John Locke makes the argument that a Christian can assent in faith to the scriptures, and that tolerance must be granted to belief. Religion here is an internal concern, not to be fought over in the public sphere. The position ascribed to the Taliban is diametrically opposed: religion should be instituted in the public sphere, but one cannot judge a man an unbeliever if he accords in matters of faith in the public sphere.

Qutb’s position is quite different. The public and private are not domains of Islam: there is no distinction. We must start with individuals, to be sure, created by God, because to start with the public reifies the divide. No person who does wrong can be a believer, and no unbeliever can do good works (a position completely opposed to that of practical necessity). There is no society here to be worked on, but merely individuals who must be tested: if they are true, then faith-belief (categories that Qutb conflates) will lead to an Islamic society.

Qutb’s thought is not against the state, per se, it merely does not think one can find any grounding for universal truth within it. Nor does his thought

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173 One could also add, genealogically, that to start with the public would be to attempt to seek an objective correlate for virtue that would not be forthcoming in view of the political situation in Egypt, and of the nature of Qutb’s thought (see section IV).
even mean, despite what the western media might tell us, that he even thinks the state should be an Islamic caliphate. For Qutb, no state ever received religious authority from God: the only way one can assume a position of power is with the assent of Muslims, who are not bound to any kin ties or previous political agreements. The only basis for authority is the commitment to institute sharia: there is a crucial difference for Qutb between the administration of authority and the authority itself (which is God-given).

Thus, strangely, though Qutb insists that Islam must be practiced in every area of life, and has been given the moniker of the chief theorist of Political Islam, in his lack of claims about the state, his position resembles the political quietism that marked Islam, and especially Shia Islam, for a millennia: religion and the state, clearly demarcated.

His thought, in sum, is an ethical one, and not a moral philosophy that has obvious political consequences (in terms of state politics).

However, that his thought does not mark out a plan for the state does not render it politically impotent. Nasser appreciated this, and the threat that Islamism’s truth claim represented to his regime, well enough. After a show trial, Qutb was convicted of plotting to overthrow the state, and two years after entering jail, was executed in 1966.

He did not live long enough to see socialism collapse. In 1967, with Qutb dead, and the war with Israel decisively lost, Nasser makes a speech, in which, amid the rumours swirling around that we had lost because we had

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175 Qutb’s thought about compulsion, I sadly concede, necessarily requires a caliphate. In *Milestones* he sets out his argument: There is no compulsion in religion, as the Quran states. One must be free to choose to be a Muslim. However, one can only be sure that one is free to choose if one is under an Islamic government [M:57]. However, if one takes only his line of thought regarding sovereignty, an Islamic government is not necessary.
abandoned God, he concedes that religion should play a greater role in society.

Not in politics, not towards a future caliphate. This speech, made as the secular dreams of the regions Socialists come crashing down, attempts to limit religion to society, while acknowledging its power. One is reminded again of Olivier Roy: “Only when it is too late do we dream of the past, and then our dreams incorporate everything we want to deny.”

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176 FPI:23.
II. Postcards to the Bishop

Oppression is worse than killing.

Quran. 2:217

The socialism of Nasser, like that of Nyerere (d.1999) in Tanzania, was of a different stripe to their supposed comrades in the East. Religion was never deemed incompatible with socialism: one could be a good nationalist Muslim socialist in Egypt (or Tanzania), and a good nationalist Christian socialist in Tanzania (or Egypt). The situations are, of course, quite different.

In broad brushstrokes, we find, in Egypt, a collapsed secular project giving way to a surge of religious politics occupying the space left by the broken dreams of socialism: the relationship between the state and Islam will continue to be fractious up until the present day. In Tanzania, by contrast, we find a Christian population at a distinct advantage during the colonial period, Muslims enthusiastically partaking in the independence movement, only to be marginalised under a Catholic President supported by the churches. The broken dream here occurred almost at the outset, with socialism failing to articulate a sphere for Islam, and, more importantly, failing to succeed on its own terms and raise the living conditions for large swathes of the population.

The independence movement in Tanzania started in the 1940's, with Nyerere founding the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in 1954, and finally becoming Prime Minister at independence in 1961, ascending to the Presidency two years later, and remaining there until 1985. He is still known

177 Not a resurgence, as this essay has pointed out time and time again: the political Islam that emerged out of the debris of socialism was structured by secularism in its appeal to the individual and quite different to any Islamic movement that pre-dates the Muslim Brotherhood (though with obvious antecedents: Ibn Taymiyya etc.): there is no resurgence of religion occurring today; there is a surge of religiosity, subjective feeling clustered around a religious universal.

as baba wa taifa, the father of the nation. Nyerere’s socialist credentials rest on the period of Ujamaa, socialist experiments that began in 1967 with the Arusha declaration. Just how socialist these experiments were is a matter of some debate. In Nyerere’s own words:

“Ujamaa”, then, or “familyhood”, describes our socialism. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man.

Ujamaa in the speech quoted above is a baggy animal: it explicitly repudiates class (a philosophy of inevitable conflict) while making an overture, like all good nationalist sentiment, to kinship. Despite the strange appeals, what is important to realise here, and this point holds true for much of the continent, is that socialism became so attractive because it offered a way to meld together religions and ethnic groups into a coherent nation after the experience of a colonial regime that had tried its best to exacerbate them.

Nyerere made continuous appeals to both religious communities to support the state project. Though the Christian churches were at first reluctant, especially in the early 60’s, fearing that TANU might become a communist party, by the late 60’s, after a campaign of sustained regime pressure and interference from the World Council of Churches, the Christian churches began to support TANU.

Thus began a divergence in Tanzanian politics. While Nyerere would claim to have a secular state, and despite Muslim enthusiasm for independence and Christian reticence, Christianity became the de facto state religion. This was

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179 One could equally ask just how socialist Nasser was, but then, you could ask that of every socialist.
summed up in Easter 1967, when Nyerere sent all the Catholic Bishops postcards with texts from the bible describing the communism of the early Christian community.\textsuperscript{183}

While Nyerere was succeeded by a Muslim, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who introduced multi-party elections, there is still a wide-spread sense of marginalisation in the Muslim community. This sense of marginalisation has long roots. A further example (see II.II.I) of “conservatism in la langue, and flexibility in la parole” can be seen here. In 1913, the Germans (who had colonised what was then German East Africa), had attempted to introduce pig farming to give the Muslims the taste for pork.\textsuperscript{184} In 1990, the “accidental” distribution of pork to Muslims led to riots;\textsuperscript{185} new tensions between Christian and Muslims fused onto older ones, and while the ways and means of expression might change, the fundamental structures of marginalisation and the incumbent patterns of thought, did not.

In the 60’s there was a Muslim presence in the state, in the form of the East African Muslim Welfare Society (EAMWS). However, its pan-Islamic ambitions were judged to be a threat to Nyerere and it was abolished in 1968, to be replaced by the National Muslim Council (BAKWATA), which is largely perceived by the Tanzanian Muslim community to be a submissive organ of the state.\textsuperscript{186}

The perception of a secular state that hides its Christianity has deep roots in the Muslim community, which are lengthened with every incident. Incidents such as:\textsuperscript{187

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\textsuperscript{184} IP:13.


\textsuperscript{186} IP:89-91.

\textsuperscript{187} Most of this information is taken from RVK:103.
February 1998. At least two Muslims are killed at the Mwembechai mosque in Dar es Salaam by the police. A priest claimed that Muslims had slandered Christianity.\(^{188}\)

January 2001: Between 30 and 70 people are claimed to have been killed after demonstrations following the presidential elections in Zanzibar. All are claimed to be Muslim.

August 2001: A man is sentenced to one and a half years in jail. He declared: “Yesu si Mungu”.\(^{189}\)

February 2002: Two people are killed during a remembrance for the victims of the Mwembechai mosque killings in 1998.

Each killing deepens the sentiment that the government is allied to the Christians. It is in this context that we should remember – I.III – Omar Sange saying that he wishes Christians and Muslims should be allowed to compete in the marketplace of ideas and register religious parties: there is already the sentiment that the secular government is Christian, and thus in allowing religious political parties, the Muslim community would be allowed to compete on equal terms, the religious nature of the debate made newly explicit.

As it is, the fear is of being undermined by the Christians. This fear, and the demands it places on Muslims in Tanzania, can be seen in reference to some of the pamphlets. Mussa Badawi, one of the foremost writers of pamphlets, explained to me he writes so that Muslims can practice the correct form of Islam. He placed this explicitly in terms of Christianity. “Islam is not like Christianity, it is a total faith, so the teaching we receive at the madrassa is not enough – we must receive instruction in all areas of life.”

As a justification for publishing leaflets, it is not convincing: his leaflets did not deal with the arcane relationships of Islam to working as, say, a plumber,


\(^{189}\) “Jesus is not God”.
but with precisely the basic matters of prayer one would be taught in a madrassa. Instead, what is notable about his speech is that he phrases Islam’s need for explication against Christianity, and that this explication requires a formalised basis. We have remarked on this formalisation at length in II.III and II.V, what this section will focus on is the importance of this knowledge being structured in contrast to Christianity.

While the vast majority of pamphlets are instructional, there is another category which is very popular.

Yajue Makundi Sita (6) ya Wanawake wa Mtoni\textsuperscript{190} is an intriguing piece of work. A small, virulent pamphlet complaining about debauched women, there is a note about the author on the back:\textsuperscript{191}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

While our dear reverend converted in 1997, the text was written in 2005: his conversion is emphasised as part of a continuing competition with Christianity. This competition had led to tension in 2000, when Muslim biblical scholars were banned from preaching.\textsuperscript{192}

This tension can equally be seen in a pamphlet we spoke about at the start of this essay: Baagil’s Majadiliano kati ya Mkristo na MuIslamu (see p.13), which contains an introduction by that well known Islamic thinker, Roy Earl Johnson.


\textsuperscript{191} “This book was written and offered [to the public] by Reverend Thomas Manoni [Evangelist Assembly of God]. Today, [he] is Sheikh Athumani T Manoni ([became a]Muslim 11/5/1997).”

In one sense, these leaflets are a way of making Christianity visible: they force that which the Muslim community feels is masquerading as secular, to manifest itself as Christian, in explicit comparison to an Islam that can then find a sense of identity in the contrast. These books are open to Christians - as are the newspapers, whose editors emphasised time and time again the importance of representing the Muslim community, rather than speaking to them.

It is this world, in which religious parties are excluded from power by a nominally secular government that the Muslim population feels is Christian, in which the religious hierarchy is divorced from politics and from Islamic Modernism, in which a secularly educated elite look for new means of expression that can reconcile Islam and what they construe as the modern, that the translation of Qutb emerges into.

Qutb’s emphasis on individual adherence to Islam, uncoupled from culture, allows the translators to negate their own traditions on the basis of their tradition, and to begin to think about an Islamic politics outside of the state. The extent to which Qutb’s thought is successful in offering such a domain is the subject of the next chapter.

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193 This is the old principle of identity about which Frederik Barth wrote; ethnic, or indeed religious, identities, emerges most strongly when they are most under threat. See Barth, F. 1969: Introduction. In Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organisation of culture difference (ed.) F. Barth. Illinois: Waveland Press.
Part IV: Islamism, or the absence of translation in translation.

The revolutionary desire to realize the kingdom of God on earth is...the inception of modern history.

Schlegel.\textsuperscript{194}

In Gauchet’s sweeping depiction of religion before the state, he argues “similarly, we can see how, in a system where the legislative past is beyond reach, there was no place for politics, in the sense of a society’s active control over itself through a separated power, because that space was operated by the reign of the original and the customary.”\textsuperscript{195}

This claim needs careful unpacking. In this age, the sense of the world is given through an originary time terminally separated from our own. It can be repeated in ritual, but it cannot be overcome, nor even related to: it is ever present in all things, and it is not available to be mediated with.

The entrance of the state changes this relationship: it simultaneously makes God present, because the state must in some way mediate the originary moment; the original moment – the ordering sense of the world – can return in some way. There is a possibility of making the origin present again. However, because God is now singular, and removed from everyday affairs – he needs to be mediated – he is also absent, and thus must be interpreted, called upon.

Thus Schlegel’s contention: to realise the kingdom of God on earth is to refuse the present, and more importantly, it is begin a notion of temporality: a possible history starts from the moment the origin can be found again, and life is no longer condemned to repetition.


\textsuperscript{195} DW:13.
Islam set out a revelation. “By the Sharia of God is meant everything legislated by God for ordering man’s life; it includes the principles of belief, principles of administration and justice, principles of morality, and human relationships, and principles of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{196} These principles were revealed at a particular point in history – they were not lost to an unknowable original time – and these principles, from this point, act as a calling: we can live according to this principles again. Hence, though the history of mankind since this point has been the history of failed attempts, this does not neglect our duty to live up to, and in accordance with, this time.

As we have seen, this is not a question of positive law. It is crucially a temporal question: a question of how, in the practical necessity of the historical moment, we connect to the universal truth of Islam. For Qutb this is first a foremost a question of the virtuous individual in submission to God, with a virtuous Islamic society appearing almost miraculously as a necessary correlate. He gives no explanation of how virtuous individuals might bring about a virtuous society, nor indeed, in such a virtuous society, how one might determine if people are virtuous.

There are compelling reasons these questions are not answered. Because Islam is not a religion of the state, and not of positive law, “Islam does not prescribe any definite form for the formation of the consultative body or bodies for the simple reason that it is a universal religion meant for all time.”\textsuperscript{197}

One cannot let Mawdudi and Qutb off quite to easily however. There is a thought of the state in Islam – the 1979 revolution in Iran produced a body of thought about the state, as did Sunni political theory in the Hanafi and Hanbali madhabs. What is crucial here is to emphasise the degree to which Mawdudi and Qutb’s rejection of tradition leads to a correlative rejection of

\textsuperscript{196} M:107
objective orderings of subjective principles. It is because they refuse any ijma, or consensus, and set themselves up to negate the rules of transmission by which objective judgements are transferred in Islam, that it becomes structurally impossible for them to have a thought of the state. In refusing any authorisation and negating the Islamic tradition on the basis of an appeal to a purer Islam, they also negate their own possibility of establishing an objective thought about the type of state in which Islam may come about.

This is in principle then, a question of authorisation. As Olivier Roy notes of political Islam:

The existence of an Islamic political society is a necessary condition for the believer to achieve total virtue, but on the other hand such a society functions only through the virtue of its members.

The question of virtue here is one not unknown to the 19th and 20th centuries. How one finds an objective correlate to a subjective political truth was perhaps the question for both the French Revolution – in Hegel’s reading – and the Communist project – in Badiou’s.

Almost everyone I have written about in this essay invokes the term vanguard: from the vanguard of the free officers for Nasser, to the vanguard of Islamists for Qutb and Mawdudi. Understanding the problem of the vanguard is key to understanding the difficulty of virtue.

The vanguard first emerges in the thought of Lenin, it is intimately related to the idea of the party: the vanguard prepares for the party, works for the party. It is necessary to work for the party in Communism because the objective class (the working class) does not yet think in the way that it should (according to theory): it may not correctly perceive its class interest. The party is the mediating principle which allows the objective strata to be transformed into a political subjectivity.

198 Though both thinkers did think quite a lot about empirically existing states, this was not accompanied by state thought in de jure.
199 As FPI is set out to prove: when Islamists to obtain power, they suffer precisely the same collapses as their reformist colleagues.
200 FPI:145.
The party as an object of Marxist discourse emerges out of the events of the Paris Commune. Here, a heterogeneous set of forces were roundly crushed by the state. In Marxist thought there are two clear positions regarding the lesson to be drawn from these events. The first, set forward by Marx in The Civil War in France, argues that the commune clarifies the immediate political objectives of the (working) class with regard to the state – the task is to break the dominance of the state, without coming to occupy the same position. However, this analysis does not set out how the working class is to break the dominance of the state; it rests at a level which reads the subjective and objective as part of the same movement: objective considerations of the actually existing working class (they way they are inserted in a system of domination, for instance) are not distinguished from the subjective movement whereby the working class realises itself as proletariat: as a force which overcomes the system of class distinctions upon which the state is based.

The necessity for such a position is first theorised by Lenin, and his understanding of the Paris Commune constitutes the second clear position regarding the lesson to be drawn from these events. Lenin's position, at its simplest level, argues that without a form of organisation that can condense the forces we see at play in the Paris Commune, there can be no duration to any working class political movement. The party, for Lenin, is thus posed principally as a question of time: Lenin “proposed a solution to the problem. What type of organization does the proletariat need to really and enduringly break the enemy state machine?”

The party then, emerges as a paradoxical figure: designed to ultimately, destroy the state machinery and the oppositions on which it is based, it also

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requires fixing the working class as the proletariat in order to accomplish this destruction.

The problem that Lenin answers is that of duration: how to give a figure of the I/We relationship (where I am understood as a collective, rather than as part of a body where I submit to a sovereign) that could be given duration. Lenin answers, in a simple sense, the question of time: how we can stay together for a long time, and correspondingly, how can the subjective political body enter history.

For the party is not simply a form that gives organisation to the proletariat, for, in giving a structure, several fundamental things change. If, initially, the working class is part of an objective situation: a class which has a place in an economic system, then it is the party, by giving a status to the working class over and above their naming in the situation, that allows the working class to emerge as proletariat – as a subjective force in history that is outside of the objective situation; outside in a precise way, because the proletariat is not created simply through enunciation: it is not the case that one could equally create any political subject from the objective situation. The proletariat is the one class that can form itself as a revolutionary subject precisely as a result of an objective dispossession (they are not counted in the situation) and a subjective divestment; the universal truth that they proclaim is precisely that which is outside of any class relation: the end of class relations.

There are structural differences in the thought of Sayyid Qutb. There is no class which is represented: the vanguard of Qutb does not awaken the existing socio-economic reality of the society, it is largely indifferent to it. The vanguard does not speak to the proletariat, but to all humans. For Qutb, the human fitra, our basic and innate dispositions, is the acknowledgement of the one God and his singular sovereignty in all things. The vanguard, though it might emerge in a particular period, speaks to a universal which is fundamentally less historical than that of class. For Marx, class is the motor of history, and with Communist society, history ends (along with class). If
Schlegel is correct, and the attempt to realise the kingdom of God on earth is the inception of modern history, then correlatively, the realisation of the Kingdom is the end of history. For Qutb, Islam is the reconciliation of man with himself: the reconciliation of us with ourselves, and with that, the end of the striving to achieve it.

Despite these differences, there are clear links: there is an appeal which is not heard, there is the need to transform the existent situation in the light of a truth which is not yet acknowledged by the world.

For Alain Badiou, in his account of communism, the trouble begins when one attempts to ensure the passage from an existing situation (the working class as part of the socio-economic class structure) to a subject with political subjectivity (the proletariat). The function of the party with regard to the proletariat here is to ensure its freedom from the existing situation and its constitution as a political subjectivity with duration. As Badiou states in the Petit Manuel d’inesthétique: “the idea of the link (lien), or of the relation (rapport) is fallacious. A truth is unlinked (déliée) and it is towards this local point where a link is undone that a truth procedure operates.”

For the subjects of the truth of communism, in this case the members of the Communist Party, we can say that access to the truth is equivalent to what Hegel what consider the practice of freedom. The subject cannot be bound to the party by objective conditions – precisely what the party is set up to overcome – but can only be so by the strength of its own adherence. “The eventual nomination has always already taken place... and this already is our only guarantee. The rest is a matter of faith.”

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205 M:92
206 Though in the case of Communism, it is a truth that cannot be heard (must necessarily be outside of the situation), which is not the case for Islam.
In being bound only to itself, the fidelity to a truth procedure which is called the party resembles nothing so much as Hegel’s account of absolute freedom in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is worth briefly considering this incredible text, for its uncanny resemblance to Roy’s critique of political Islam.

*This undivided Substance of absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it...What made the notion into an existent object was its diremption into separate subsistent spheres, but when the object becomes a Notion, there is no longer anything in it with a continuing existence...It comes into existence in such a way that each individual consciousness raises itself out of its allotted sphere, no longer finds its essence and its work in this particular sphere, but grasps itself as the Notion of will, grasps all spheres as the essence of this will, and therefore can only realise itself in a work which is the work of the whole...In this absolute freedom, therefore, all social groups or classes...are abolished; the individual consciousness that belonged to any such sphere, and willed and fulfilled itself in it, has put aside its limitation; its purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law, its work the universal work.*

For Hegel, the French Revolution presented the subjective figure of absolute freedom. This figure is not defined by its interest in particular spheres in society (the bourgeoisie, for instance, and their class interest), but precisely and only in itself. It “grasps all spheres as the essence of this will.” In a time of revolution, the question arises: how does one know that the individual is indeed taking his place in absolute freedom: that his work is the universal work, his purpose the general purpose?

This problem arises because absolute freedom, relating only to itself, is not bound to any particular conception of the good: it is self-authorising. The society of absolute freedom must be created by all of its members. In the quote given above, it is evident that such a society must be both the creation of decisions of the will, and that the decisions of the One are taken by the All. Such requirements run precisely contrary to the requirements of an institution.

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210 PoS:357. Italics in the original.

211 As Charles Taylor succinctly says: “The dream of absolute freedom cannot tolerate any structures and differentiation in society whereby people would have different functions in relation to the state...But, argues Hegel, this means no working state can be created...[for] this is the negation of absolute freedom; for according to this each man would will everything that the state did, would thus create by his will the totality of political and social conditions in which he lived; and this is incompatible with the kind of differentiating structure which gives man his place and function.” Here we see most explicitly the divide between knowledge
In Hegel’s account, this lack of authorisation means that nothing can ensure absolute freedom in the French Revolution. Because nothing can authorise this name other than itself, everyone, and everything, is suspected of being merely the semblance of virtue. This is to say, paradoxically, that at the height of the revolution, what one sees everywhere is corruption. Thus, the essence of absolute freedom comes to be: the fight against corruption in the name of an ideal that cannot be verified. In an attempt to assure absolute freedom, this means that everyone is a suspect. In the absence of a criterion by which virtue can be judged, it is precisely in the overzealous identification with virtue that one finds corruption. In an attempt to re-establish the link between the world and absolute freedom, the situation must be constantly purged, and purged precisely of those who seem to embody the general will the most. Hegel finishes his section on the terror by remarking that the logic of purification at play here can only end in nothing, in death. This is the meaning of the peculiar conjunction used by Sainte-Juste: “What do they want who want neither Virtue nor Terror?” His response is well known: they want corruption, another name for the failure of the subject.²¹²

In the thought of Sayyid Qutb, state power can never be sovereign: God’s name cannot authorise anything but itself, and one cannot seek, in institutional guarantees, any certitude that what one is doing is Islamic. The subjective spirit remains without any sort of verification available to it. In the two examples we have taken, the French Revolution and the 1917 revolution in Russia, this sort of subjective political spirit gives rise to terror.

Furthermore, in the practical need to build institutions, in Russia, for instance, the spirit recoils on itself, attempting to fix itself, and in doing so, betrays itself. In The Failure of Political Islam, consciously or not, Olivier Roy traces a similar path for the few Islamist governments to actually have

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and truth that is the cornerstone of Badiou’s work, anticipated in Hegel’s dialectic.
occurred (e.g. in Algeria, however briefly). Unable to think through the institutionalisation of subject spirit, they collapse into what Roy calls “neo-fundamentalism”, the concentration on moral reform that Qutb precisely sought to avoid, which sees positive laws being passed which give society the veneer of being Islamic (the imposition of sharia, women being dressed ‘appropriately’) while its basic ground is still secular.\textsuperscript{213} This neo-fundamentalism seeks objective correlation for a subjective spirit where none is to be found.

As with communism, we can say, there has not been an Islamist state: the structure of the thought makes it impossible. Given my emphasis in the methodological introduction in not making a Euro-centric reading of Qutb’s work, and finding it faulty vis à vis great European authors, I should make clear why I believe this comparison to be a viable one. Both communism and Islamism emerge out of an encounter with a state that occludes their existence (albeit in very different ways); both attempt to speak a historical truth that exceeds a particular situation: in the case of Islamism, its words are profoundly shaped by communism;\textsuperscript{214} though, absent a thought of the state, these words seem strangely hollow.

Hollow. The real euro-centrism here, I contend, is two-fold. The first would be to essentialise Islam and not to acknowledge the profound intellectual connections between Qutb and the Marxist tradition. The second would be to see this hollowness as an insufficiency: to ask – why don’t they have a thought of the state and not – what does this thought, which never becomes more than the potential thought of a subject, allow?

\textsuperscript{213} We see this process mirrored in contemporary Saudi Arabia, a society with a religious police in the social sphere, and a secular political elite.

\textsuperscript{214} As Mohammed Arkoun notes: “the debate with the colonialist West transforms religious language into an ideological language, that is to say, the mythical intention into an immediate historical object. Nevertheless, it never attains the Marxist level of efficiency, for...the ideological discourse remains ensnared as a subjective imagery of the past and present. See Arkoun, Mohammed. 1978: \textit{L’Islam hier-demain (Deux milliards de croyants)}. Chastel: éditions Buchet. p.66.
Part V: To be oneself in the darkness of the world

The failure of political Islam leads to the triumph of ethical Islam.\(^{215}\)

The domain of the moral is the case, the domain of the ethical, the example.

On the basis of cases, one constructs laws - things are passed on (laws, traditions), and with this passing on, this tradition, we have things we can talk about, measure up to, evaluate, and even dismiss.

This is some comfort.

\(\text{The destructive character is the enemy of the étui-man. The étui-man looks for comfort, and the case is its quintessence. The inside of the case is the velvet-lined trace that he has imprinted on the world. The destructive character obliterates even the traces of destruction.}\(^{216}\)

The case leaves a trace in the world: an explicit judgement which can be followed. The destructive character (see II.), eliminates even the traces: tradition must be found solely within the present, without external support. As such, the destructive character cannot leave us a case,\(^{217}\) but his work of destruction can be an example to us all.

The example is not a matter of morality. One might, make an example of someone: demonstrate the power and presence of the law, but, in the act of making someone an example, one creates an exceptional situation, not a norm (though it may be a norm that one wishes to institute). The example inspires. As such, it belongs to the domain of ethics, and not to morality.

\(^{215}\) LJ:132. The idea that Islamism is primarily concerned with ethics, and not with politics as traditionally understood, is Devjis. The reading that I give here however diverges significantly from his account – noticeably in my emphasis on understanding Islamism through the history of 20\(^{th}\) century political thought, and the correlative emphasis on potentiality.

\(^{216}\) DC:55. Here Benjamin makes a play on the French word, étui: which is a small case or bag. The etymology, of which I suspect Benjamin was fully aware, is from the old French estui, or prison; estui man is trapped in his case, and leaves his traces within it.

\(^{217}\) Correlatively, there can be no school of Benjamin, in the way Durkheim could found a school. Malgré tout, there is a school of 'Benjaminians', albeit that they would be unrecognisable to him.
Islam is first and foremost an ethical religion. It follows an example: the imitatio Muhammadi which “became the standard for ethical behaviour among Muslims, forming the basis for Islamic law and setting the standards for even the most mundane activities.”\textsuperscript{218} It does, equally, subsume everything beneath the Law, but this is not a dogma. There is never an absolute correspondence between imitatio and positive law.

There are many histories of Islam one could tell. There is one – at least – I am aware, that would look to the developments following al-Shaf'i’ and see Islam as the gradual closing down of itjihad and ethics in favour of morals and cases. One cannot position Qutb as an equally powerful force in the history of Islam, he is, today as before, on the margins of the margins. Nevertheless, his thought does not occur in the margins, though it may be placed there. It occurs at the very centre of Islam – it constitutes an ethical attempt to purify the religion of its every reference to the world, through a fundamental, active engagement within it.

So while Qutb may seem a marginal figure, not only does he make manifest a central tension in Islamic thought, he also, in his adoption of secular structures of thought, and in his insistence on ethics, makes manifest some of the most fundamental changes to have effected politics in the last fifty years. Ethics offers examples. Today, insofar as we have something we could recognise as a global political sphere, it is a sphere of the example, and not of the case.

To return to where we started, the '98 embassy bombing in Dar es Salaam. A question repeated as nauseum after 9/11 was, what do they want? As if one could simply give a set of political criteria that could be satisfied, and the bombers would go away. If we begin to see the attack in '98 as an ethical performance, then the question of motivation can no longer be answered so simply. The attack\textsuperscript{219} does not refer to an objective political goal,\textsuperscript{220} but to the

\textsuperscript{218} RT:1.

\textsuperscript{219} Precisely the opposite viewpoint, which attempts to demystify such attacks in comparison to state violence, is given by Asad, Talal. 2007: \textit{On Suicide Bombing}. New York: Columbia University Press.
cultivation of an inner subjectivity (to act and think the truth of tahwid in every aspect of life) without reference to the objective political strata. There is no political movement here, just a string of imitations initiated over the globe. To quote Devji’s slightly trite formulation: “Islam became a global fact by destroying its own traditions and recycling them in novel ways.”

The emphasis on ethics in Islam is recycled in negation of its own tradition, through a secularism that demands an individual action that is intended to manifest a subjectivity that attempts to not refer to the world in which it is given.

Here, we must return, for the last time, to Qutb’s notion of jahiliyya. When the Muslim world is inscribed within ignorance – and thus becomes exterior to itself – there stop being definitive territorial units to which the Islamist project refers. This shift reveals the state as a truly territorial thought, as indeed morality, insofar as it can be correlated to sovereignty, is also a territorial thought. To which state, to which territory, did the ’98 bombings refer?

They made an appeal to the global umma, but equally to Christians and to secular states; Islamism is not against states, so much as fundamentally indifferent to them, as much as Qutb was only interested in Nasser insofar as he was a milestone on the path to Islamism. It is important to emphasise that the ethical takes place within a territory – it is the rule of the transcendental taking place in the particular. In Egypt, in Tanzania, in Europe, in each case the ethical will manifest the same differently, depending on the local conditions in which it can be enunciated. This is expressed homologously in reference to time: the universal truth of the example, the imitatio, is expressed in line with a particular time, through and defined by a particular tradition, even as it negates the tradition through its destruction.

220 Thus, as is so often the case, there is not, after a suicide attack, even a definitive perpetrator, let alone a demand.
221 LJ:211.
It is perhaps easier to comprehend this notion of ethics in reference to something like suicide bombing, which so clearly runs against our notions of utility and political efficacy. It is perhaps here we can understand another of Devji’s formulations: “we might say that a religious universality that expressed itself in the vision of converting the world transferred into the conversion of vision.”\(^{222}\) One could, if one had time, study how these displays of religiosity have transformed the way we see the world, and mirror—though do not causatively create—a whole series of other movements that act in terms of examples and effects: the environmental movement immediately springs to mind.

But our question is not that, it is instead a question of translation.

Ethics has no book of law to be referred to, no cases to be studied. It has examples which are made manifest.\(^{223}\) These manifestations are not simply available, however. If we return to the quote that began this essay, Alliy Kilima says:

\[\textit{We chose to translate Qutb because he has a message for the man of today: the Quran is not just for the past, but also the present and the future, and each generation must interpret it on their own terms.}\]\(^{224}\)

One must take up the example in a particular period: it needs to be translated. “The translator’s task consists in this: to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original can be awakened in it.”\(^{225}\)

I want to suggest that not just is the translation an attempt to discover the power of the original in the present in terms of its content, but also, that the form of the translation itself should be considered, along with suicide bombing and internet broadcasts, a form of the ethical itself.

\[^{222}\] LJ:92.

\[^{223}\] Here, I would not want to suggest that law, or cases do not need to be interpreted just as much as examples do. It is merely that the claim is different: in the latter case, at least for Qutb, the example is necessarily clear and manifest. That it, very clearly, is not, is the fundamental rock on which his entire project runs adrift.

\[^{224}\] See page 12.

\[^{225}\] TT:158.
We should not think about any of these actions in terms of efficacy or political strategy. The effect of the translation? Zero. But, in the choice to write it in Swahili, in its content, the translation aims to offer the possibility to the reader of a direct, immanent experience of Islam without reference to traditional structures, and more importantly, manifests this subjective disposition in the translators themselves: the action of conveying is identical (in Qutb’s faith-belief-act constellation) to the message being conveyed.

In the case of the translation of Sayyid Qutb – for this is an essay that deals in cases and not in examples – we do not see political efficacy: there is no market for the book, no insertion point into the objective situation (the political state of Tanzania, the political quarrels between factions in Dar es Salaam). There is the negation of both, and the promise of a vanguard to come. The translation forms an ethical example.

On its own terms, the project is a failure. Not because it has no thought of the state, but because one never has an immanent experience of Islam. The literalism of Qutb’s reading of the Quran cannot be sustained. Even this thought, however, is perhaps what makes Qutb so attractive.

Without a thought of the state, his ideas resound with those so politically marginalised that a political Islam is not thinkable, and an ethical life consequently very attractive. The impossibility of his immanent appeal also allows one the proper space for interpretation of the example: the space in which, for instance, one can modify Qutb’s understanding of the Islamic language, and adapt it to Swahili.

Regardless of whether we think Qutb’s project is a failure or not, its influence is a fact, and it is a fact that brings with it the need to understand society in a totally different way. When ideas function in terms of effect, when they bounce like this around the world, jumping between places on the basis of negation rather than adaptation, we require a more considered

226 Is this not precisely paralleled in those in the West who attempt to lead a good life and eat biological food, while not taking part in any political movements?
anthropology, a practical philosophy, which takes up and understands statements archaeologically even as it attempts to place them genealogically.

Social scientists would do well to look to Alliy S. Kilima, Said Bawaziri and Sayyid Qutb in order to understand how one might begin such a project.
Because this essay is about books, the bibliographic information contained here is more extensive than it would usually be: for the books published or sold in Dar es Salaam, bibliographic references contain, where it can be found, information on the location of the printers as well as the publishing house.


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