

**Doctoral theses**

MÁTÉ LAKATOS

**To believe and to act:**

**the relationship between faith and action and their background  
in religious teaching by Sayyid Quṭb through the examination of  
the term *ḡāhiliyya***

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## 1. Previous research, problem

### 1.1. Previous research

The two works most often named as the essential works of the (early) history of the Muslim Brotherhood are by Mitchell and Carré and Michaud. MITCHELL (1969) presents the history of the movement and its organizational structure and ideology until 1954, to the beginning of the deterioration of the relationship between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers. CARRÉ and MICHAUD (1983) also present the history of the great persecution, which began in 1954 and lasted until the early 1970s, the decade that followed it, and the activities of the Syrian branch of the movement. ZOLLNER (2009) examines perhaps the busiest period in the history of the Brotherhood; which includes the 1952 revolution, the internal power struggle, the ideological vacuum surrounding the election of al-Ḥudaybī, which began with the death of founder Ḥasan al-Bannā, and the persecution of the movement, until founding the *modus vivendi* along with the power. The value of her work is increased by the payment of close attention to Ḥasan al-Ḥudaybī and his ideology, as well as the question of the authorship and compilation of *Du'āt lā quḍāt*, which topics have received little attention in the literature on the history of the Brotherhood. ABED-KOTOB (1995) and MASOUD (2013) focus on the presentation of organization and ideology in their study (especially in the post-persecution period) and examine the extent to which the goals

and means of the movement can be considered moderate and the movement itself as compromise-seeking.

The relevant literature on Quṭb can be divided into two parts: one that includes details of his life and one that focuses mainly on his system of thought. We can know his life from the work of ABU RABI (1984), CALVERT (2000, 2001), HAGLER, KEPEL (1985), KHATAB (2002a), KHATAB és BOUMA (2007), MOUSSALLI (1992), MUSALLAM (1998), USHAMA (2007), ZOLLNER (2007, 2009) and QUTB's (2005) autobiography, presenting his childhood.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, several book chapters and studies discussed Quṭb's ideology and its significance. BINDER (1988), CHOEIRI (1990), HADDAD (1983a, b), ḤĀFĪZ DĪJĀB (1987), KEPEL (1985), MOUSSALLI (1992), MUSALLAM (1990), SHEPARD (1989) and SIVAN (1985) have achieved a lot together in presenting and analyzing Quṭb's system of thought, however, they have been less successful in defining the circumstances that played a role in shaping his ideas and examining the processes through which these thoughts were formulated - writes CALVERT (1993). Therefore, he pays attention to this in his work and examines the issue in its context in his later (2011) work. Also crucial in this regard are the works that explore the impact of the years spent in the United States on Quṭb's system of ideas (e.g., CALVERT, 2000 and 2001, HAGLER) and the two Zollner works mentioned above, which examine the role of the prison years and their possible exclusivity in the radical turn of his thoughts.

Another group of studies deals with the impact of Quṭb's teachings. IRWIN (2001), ZIMMERMAN (2004), and KHATAB (2011) examine the influence on Bin Lādin, the events of September 11, and al-Qā'ida. AZOULAY (2015) revolves around whether the ideals of al-Bannā and Quṭb have an impact on the Muslim Brotherhood today.

MOUSSALLI (1992) and MUSALLAM (2005) present the whole of Quṭb's intellectual biography, development, and changes. Of all this, KHATAB (2002b, 2006a, 2006b), SHAH BIN JANI (1998), and SHEPARD (2003) focus on one term only and on its quṭbian interpretation.

Finally, I would like to mention two further works by KHATAB (2007, 2009), in which he is practically the only one in the relevant literature to seek the voice of democracy in Quṭb's ideology.

## **1.2. Points of consideration**

There is no doubt that Quṭb, or perhaps more accurately, his ideology, has had and continues to have a significant influence on radical, fundamentalist Islamist movements to this very day. Often this is why they deal with his personality and ideology and thus underpin its significance,<sup>1</sup> and it may seem that they are trying to place it on the religious and ideological map of the Islamic world. The dissertation approaches a slice of his system of ideas on his own and the "causes" on the one hand, i.e., based on his personal experiences, beliefs, and

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<sup>1</sup> ALLEN, 2011, IRWIN, 2001, LANE 2016, MASOUD, 2013, MUSALLAM, 2005, SHEPARD, 2007, ZIMMERMAN, 2004.

the environment around him, and not on the effect of his ideas after his death without bringing into question the legitimacy of this line of inquiry.

*What is faith, and “how” does one believe?*

Most topics in Muslim theology deal with *what* to believe. On the other hand, the theology of faith seeks the answer to what faith itself is and *how* one should believe. Is faith a credo that one considers to be true, an oral creed, or subjugation of the whole of our inner self and our deeds to Allah's service? What is the connection between faith and action according to Qutb?

## **2. Methodology**

The dissertation seeks to discover the indepth relationship between faith and action according to Qutb through the examination of the term *ġāhiliyya* and the background of his system of thought in religious teaching. Therefore, the study directs its focus on the texts themselves.

The starting point is *ġāhiliyya* because the backbone of any theory is its terminology, which is perhaps the most important term for Qutb, and because he thinks this is the main problem of the era, and Islam being the only possible solution.

The work is broken into three main parts.

*The first part: the historical background (Chapters II-III)*

It describes the political, economic, intellectual, and cultural environment surrounding Quṭb.

*The second part: the subject of the dissertation (Chapters IV-VII)*

Chapter IV examines the lexical and Koranic roots of the term *ḡāhiliyya*, which is at the heart of Quṭb's system of ideas, and examines if a Western equivalent exists.

Chapter VI and VII are based on the three works of Quṭb: *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān*, *Ḥaṣā'is al-taṣawwur al-islāmī wa muqawwimātuhu*, and *Ma'ālim fī 'l-tarīq*. Chapter V briefly describes their content, the purpose and the circumstances of their writing, which contributes to the correct interpretation of their content.

Chapter VI explores the term *ḡāhiliyya* and, through it, the religious background of Quṭb's ideology, relying on *Fī zilāl* and *Ḥaṣā'is*. *Fī zilāl* is a modern *tafsīr* and is therefore indispensable in exploring the religious background of Quṭb's teachings. From this, we can learn how Quṭb interprets the early appearances of *ḡāhiliyya*. *Ḥaṣā'is* also helps to explore the relationship between religious teaching, Quṭb's system of thought, and action.

Chapter VII focuses on *Ma'ālim* and the term *ḡāhiliyya* in it. This is the last work published in Quṭb's life, in which the term *ḡāhiliyya* appeared in its most mature form, with a strong emphasis on faith and action. The introduction of this chapter presents in detail the

method of analyzing the term. Finally it seeks to answer what he means by this concept in this work, the solution to *ġāhiliyya*, and the connection between the concept and the movement, religious teaching and action.

*The third part: Results of My Study (Chapters VIII-XI)*

It presents the study's main results in the form of answers to twelve questions and presents two possible directions for further research.

### **3. New results**

By examining the term *ġāhiliyya*, this work aims to provide an overview and analysis of how faith and action relate in Quṭb's system of thought and their religious background. The main results of this study are presented below in the form of answers to twelve questions.

- 1. Textual tradition or context?*
- 2. Terminology as the backbone and essence of the theory?*
- 3. Radical? Fundamentalist?*
- 4. What is faith?*
- 5. What is Quṭb's mission and where does it originate from?*
- 6. Is the apologetics of Quṭb reactive or promotive-initiative?*
- 7. What is the meaning of the term *ġāhiliyya*?*
- 8. Why does he not use the term *kufr*?*
- 9. Can secularism be the Western equivalent of *ġāhiliyya*?*

10. *What is the religious background of Qutb's system of thought, and what are its roots in religious teaching?*

11. *What makes the movement necessary?*

12. *How can a Muslim live, or can he live at all, in a state in which the laws do not match the teaching of his religion?*

Seven most important of these are presented below.

### *2. Terminology as the backbone and essence of the theory?*

At the heart of this work is a term of Qutb's system of thought, *ġāhiliyya*. We were able to see that in order to determine the exact meaning, we had to familiarize ourselves with other vital concepts (e.g., *ḥākimiyya*, *ṭalī'a*, *ulūhiyya*, *rubūbiyya*); on the other hand, we also learned the answers to important questions in relation to the study, such as: what is faith, what is the religious background of his ideas, what is his mission and where does it originate from.

Therefore, we can say that my assumption that my work supports the fundamental proposition that terms form the backbone of a theory is confirmed. By knowing them accurately, the essence of a given system of thought becomes understandable.

### *3. Radical? Fundamentalist?*

Qutb's system of thought has had and continues to have a profound effect on radical, fundamentalist Islamist movements. This study approached the final form of Qutb's system of ideas on its own, on the one hand, and on the basis of his background and the environment



around him, not of its effects, and sought to place him along the radical – moderate and fundamentalist - “non-fundamentalist” axis.

On the former axis, he is closer to the radical due to, among other things, the extent of change, the rejection of any compromise, the stereotype of Islam – *ğāhiliyya*, and activism. However, due to the lack of a clear “call” for using force, Quṭb is not at the radical end of this axis. Some later “users” of his thoughts, on the other hand, go well beyond him in the radical direction.

There are two correct answers regarding the latter axis, depending on what we mean by the term ‘fundamentalist.’ If used in the sense of *uṣūliyya/uṣūlī*, Quṭb is a fundamentalist. If according to the Western meaning, then no.

#### 4. *What is faith?*

Faith is not merely accepting religious teaching and the utterance of *ṣahāda* but also action. For Quṭb, the latter divides into two parts: on the one hand, the believer must adapt his actions to Islam, and on the other hand, he must invite others to do the same. The fact that he mentions among the unchanging components of the Muslim idea that there is only one thing that can be used to distinguish between people, *which is fear of God and right deeds*, shows the importance of faith and action.<sup>2</sup>

He does not consider it right to separate deeds to *‘ibādāt* and *mu‘āmalāt* because there is no human activity in the

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<sup>2</sup> *Haṣā‘iṣ*, 77–78.; *The Islamic Concept*, 46–47.

Muslim idea that is not *'ibādāt*<sup>3</sup> and because it corrupts religion.<sup>4</sup> So, Islam is the faith and the action that arises from it, which is necessarily inseparable from it.

### 7. What is the meaning of the term *ğāhiliyya*?

This study relies on three sources regarding the meaning of *ğāhiliyya*. In *Fī zilāl* there are four main pillars of the meaning of the term: **(i)** a (social) state when it can therefore exist anywhere and anytime; **(ii)** it is the opposite of Islam because it does not “give” to Allah the *ulūhiyya* and human laws replace *ubūdiyya* and its laws; **(iii)** a person is subject to other people, **(iv)** a way of life. Of the four Qur'anic appearances of *ğāhiliyya*, these can be attributed primarily to, or extracted from, the Qur'an, 5,50, and 48,26. He does not yet oppose *hākimiyya* here, although the **(ii)** and **(iii)** properly speaking describe this.

In *Haşā'is*, five pillars can be defined, four of which correspond to the four pillars in *Fī zilāl* (**A-i**, **B-iv**, **C-iii**, **D-ii**), while the fifth (**E**) is a new one and an essential element from the point of Quṭb's understanding of *ğāhiliyya* and his system of thought, namely, that *ğāhiliyya* is the opposite of Allah's *hākimiyya*. It is important to draw our attention to two things about *hākimiyya*: first, except for Mawdūdī, he did not appear to earlier thinkers as the opposite of *ğāhiliyya*; and second, Quṭb's system of ideas is based on the Qur'an

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<sup>3</sup> *Haşā'is*, 114.; *The Islamic Concept*, 70.

<sup>4</sup> *Haşā'is*, 113–115.; *The Islamic Concept*, 70. *Haşā'is*, 114.; *The Islamic Concept*, 70.

and while his *ğāhiliyya* is a Qur'anic term, *hākimiyya* is not, it is a neologism.

In *Ma'ālim*, the meaning of the term is based on six pillars, five of which correspond to those in *Haṣā'is* and four of which are in *Fī zilāl* (A1-A-i, A2-D-ii, A3-E, A4-C-iii, A5-B-iv, A6). We find two differences from *Haṣā'is*: on the one hand, *ğāhiliyya* and *hākimiyya* are contrasted here, and on the other hand, he calls *ğāhiliyya* an active movement.

With this in mind, we can make the following statements about the concept of Quṭb's *ğāhiliyya*:

- 1) The six main elements of its meaning are: a state, a way of life, man is subject to man, the opposite of *hākimiyya*, it contrasts and opposes Islam and is an active movement.
- 2) The meaning of *ğāhiliyya* appearing in *Haṣā'is* and *Ma'ālim* is essentially the same as that found in *Fī zilāl*; that is, what Quṭb says is the meaning of the term in the Qur'an. He only supplemented it by clearly contrasting it with *hākimiyya*.
- 3) It differs from the historical/classical interpretation of the term because it considers *ğāhiliyya* to be a permanent existence alongside Islam, a state that is not limited in time and space to pre-Islamic times and the Arabian Peninsula. That is, it brings something new in that the term goes back to the original meaning of the Qur'an, if

one likes, as it is meant in the Qur'an as a whole, a specific moral state, and it tries to adapt it to its own era.

- 4) With the meaning of the term in Ma'ālim, Quṭb offers something new compared to all previous interpretations by also considering his *ḡāhiliyya* as an active movement.

As for the similarities and differences between Mawdūdī's and Nadwī's concept of *ḡāhiliyya*, who can be considered Quṭb's direct predecessors in the use of the term, the following can be said:

- 1) Mawdūdī describes a state with *ḡāhiliyya* which is the opposite of *ḥākimijja* and does not call someone *kāfir*, who does not live according to *ḥākimiyya*. One can find these three elements also in Quṭb's *ḡāhiliyya* term, presumably under the influence of Mawdūdī.
- 2) Regarding the relationship between *ḡāhiliyya* and Islam, Mawdūdī and Quṭb both exclude that *ḡāhiliyya* can coexist with Islam.
- 3) At Quṭb, however, we do not find the categorization of Mawdūdī which distinguishes between two main types: *ḡāhiliyya ḥāliṣa* and when the result follows from contemplation over perceptions, imagination (*wahm*) and analogous inference. Another difference is that Quṭb sees the whole world in the state of *ḡāhiliyya*.
- 4) Quṭb wrote the preface to Nadwī's *Mādā ḥasira al-'ālam bi-'l-inḥiṭāt al-muslimīn*. He writes appreciatively that in the book, *ḡāhiliyya* does not denote a historical period

but a spiritual state. We have seen that even for Quṭb, this is the essential feature of the term's meaning.

- 5) The common denominator of Nadwī's and Quṭb's ḡāhiliyya term is that materialism, ungodly ideologies, and sexual promiscuity are also the signs of it, and both of them use this to describe contemporary Muslims as well.
- 6) According to Nadwī, it is often difficult for an individual to remain faithful to Allah in an ungodly environment, which Quṭb sees in the same way, and he, therefore, considers it necessary to establish a Muslim community.
- 7) Both Nadwī and Quṭb believe that those who want to confront their ḡāhiliyya should know not only the teaching of Islam but also ḡāhiliyya.
- 8) Considering that Nadwī is one of the earliest channels of Mawdūdī's ideas to Arab Islamists and that he developed Mawdūdī's concept of ḡāhiliyya further we can assume that the direct source of Quṭb in connection with ḡāhiliyya, was Nadwī, and through his filter could Mawdūdī's ḡāhiliyya term have influenced him.

8. *Why does he not use the term kufr?*

- 1) The criteria for ḡāhiliyya set by Quṭb are essentially “external labels” and are therefore more precise and more objectively verifiable, unlike in the case of *kufr*, which is linked to “internal labels.”

- 2) He wants to describe and classify a moral, socio-political phenomenon rather than individuals, and *ġāhiliyya* is better suited for this.
- 3) Using *ġāhiliyya* does not provide an easy target for those who disagree with it, and it does not have more severe consequences (e.g., death penalty) as it would, was he using *kufr*.

In summary, *ġāhiliyya* is more adequate for describing the phenomenon and better suited for Quṭb's purposes than *kufr*.

Quṭb's use of the term, contrary to the claims that he saw the world in black and white, proves that he also saw "gray." Furthermore, this puts the question of Quṭb's radicality into context, and that a straight and exclusive path would lead from his system of thought to the system of ideas of radical/extremist and jihadist groups.

*10. What is the religious background of Quṭb's system of thought, and what are its roots in religious teaching?*

Quṭb held the view that Islam provides a solution to every problem, and vice versa, the lack of Islam is the root of all problems. He uses a Qur'anic term, *ġāhiliyya*, to describe this set of problems. He saw the root of the troubles of Egypt, the Muslim world in general, and even the whole world, in the shortcomings of the correct knowledge of *ʿaqīda* and the experience of faith (*manḥaġ*). If Islam is indeed the solution, three things stem from this fact:

- 1) One must know exactly one's basic teachings (*‘aqīda*). The starting point is the first of the five pillars of Islam, the *tawhīd*. For Quṭb, it necessarily follows that to this one God must man submit himself and follow his teaching in all areas.
- 2) It follows that Islam cannot remain at the level of religious practices but must become a way of life in which the Qur’an is the leading guide.
- 3) For someone to be able to live according to Islam in their daily lives and not be hindered by external circumstances, they need a community. However, *ḡāhiliyya* does not allow this. Therefore, and because every system in Quṭb’s time was such, the Muslim community must fight against them. This therefore brings us to the question of the movement.

#### *11. What makes the need for the movement?*

For Quṭb, it follows directly from the fact that Islam must become a way of life that a Muslim needs a community for this. The *ḡāhiliyya*, on the other hand, does not allow this, so the Muslim community must take up the fight against it.

There are two main driving forces behind this necessity: an internal one and an external one. The interior stems from the inner essence of Islam that it is not just a religion but a comprehensive vision of life, according to which life must be organized, and that is the number one task of Islam. The outer stems from the nature of *ḡāhiliyya*: it is everywhere, not just a system of ideas but an active movement.

This is where religious teaching and Quṭb's idea that a movement is needed are linked. The first generation of Muslims also exemplifies this: after the creeds were clarified and strengthened in the early years, they were organized first into a community, a "movement," and then into a state to take up the fight against *ḡāhiliyya*. This is how religious teaching is put into practice and embodied in a movement, a vanguard.

So, both the individual's action and the activity of the *da'wa* and the community, the movement, and the formation of the vanguard necessarily stem from the essence of Islam. *Ḡāhiliyya* is only a catalyst for this process.

This way, faith at the individual level, from a question of conscience, morphs into a matter of lifestyle and thus moves from the individual to the community, then to the social level, and finally to the political level. For Quṭb, therefore, politics is only a means for enforcing religion and religious teaching.

*12. How can a Muslim live, or can he live at all, in a state whose laws do not match the teaching of his religion?*

Quṭb makes it clear that Islam is not merely a set of rites but a system of government. The revelation of Allah should be the basis of judgment, Allah should be relied upon in the making of laws, and they should govern them. Quṭb's answer to the question is, therefore, clearly no.

Quṭb expects the practical application of the teaching of Islam in all areas to free people from a state of subjugation to other



people and thus provide a better life for the whole society in this world. At the same time, in his three works examined in the present work, it is not emphasized that Allah also intended revelation to designate a way of life that people would benefit from not only in this life, but in the afterlife as well.

#### 4. Publications on the theme of the dissertation

##### *Articles*

LAKATOS Máté: A fogalomtól a koncepcióig, Sajjid Quṭb *ḡāhilijja* fogalma a *Maʿālim fī al-tarīqban*, in: *Az Avicenna Közel-Kelet Kutatások Intézete Évkönyve 2015-2017*, ed. Maróth Miklós, Piliscsaba (Avicenna Közel-Kelet Kutatások Intézete), 2018, (*Annales* II), 195–238.

LAKATOS Máté: Sajjid Quṭb élete és intellektuális fejlődése, in: *Keletkutatás*, 2014. tavasz, 21–44.

LAKATOS Máté: Sajjid Quṭb *ḡāhilijja* fogalmának értelmezése, a *ḡāhilijja* terminus értelmezése a szakterület tudósainál és ezek összehasonlítása, in: „*Hiszek, hogy megértsem!*”, eds Gér A. L., Jenei P., Zila G., Budapest (Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, L’Harmattan Kiadó), 2015 (*Károli Könyvek tanulmánykötet*), 95–106.