Tyranny or divine sovereignty

– A content analysis on Sayyid Qutb´s concept of sovereignty in
Milestones

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Abstract

This text examines the sovereignty concept in Sayyid Qutb´s final book *Milestones*, with a focus on the political and non-political aspects of the concept. The analysis also examines potentially radical and extreme aspects in the concept. The findings show that Qutb´s sovereignty concept is a practical theology focused on what God´s sovereignty means for Muslims in belief and practice. God´s sovereignty is an encompassing concept to Qutb, which means that His exclusive right to sovereignty should permeate through the souls of Muslims and guide their actions in all spheres of life, including in politics. In a concrete form, this means that God´s law and principles should be implemented. Qutb´s sovereignty concept is not extreme, but radical because it challenges established secular orders and the hegemonic assumption in modern discourses that human beings have a right to sovereignty.

Keywords: Sovereignty, *Hakimiyyah*, Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, Islamic political theology

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1 Introduction

"A person who takes a stand against the direction of the society – its governing logic, its common mode, its values and standards, its ideals and concepts, its error and deviations – will find himself a stranger, as well as helpless, unless his authority comes from a source which is more powerful than the people, more permanent than the earth, and nobler than life...Indeed, the Believer is uppermost – uppermost on the basis of the authority which is behind him and his source of guidance"[1]

The quote above was written down in a cell in the notorious Egyptian *Tura* prison in the early 1960s. The author was Sayyid Qutb – a public intellectual and leading ideologue in the Islamist social movement called the Muslim Brotherhood. Qutb authored several books, but this quote is taken from his final and most controversial book *Milestones,* which was published only two years before he was executed by the secular nationalist government that ruled in Egypt.[2]

Qutb´s role as an intellectual and academic combined with his situation "on the ground" with the political activists, as someone who lived through the severe state oppression, makes *Milestones* a particularly interesting reading. It is a theological text, focused on what it means for a Muslim to believe in God, while there is an emphasis on the practical and political implications and consequences of this faith. An especially prominent theme in *Milestones* is the concept of sovereignty.

In the Quran, *hakim* (sovereign) is a name or attribute of God. He is sovereign over the world, and He gives people jurisdiction to act, to rule and judge, on earth as His vicegerents, and He commands prophets and messengers to judge and rule (*fa-uhkum*) according to His law.[3]

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[1]Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones.* 1st ed. USA: SIME Journal, 2005. p. 97-98.
[2]Gardell, Mattias. *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan: Globalisering och framväxten av politisk islam.* Stockholm, Leopard förlag, 2005. p. 70-90
[3]Khatab, Sayed. *The power of sovereignty: The political and ideological philosophy of Sayyid Qutb.* Ist ed. London and New York: Taylor and Francis group, 2006. p. 16-18

Sayyid Qutb makes this attribute of God a central point in his advocacy for political action and an Islamic political system. He finds exhortations to practical action in the reality of God as sovereign – as the One with exclusive, independent power and influence over the universe and the affairs of human beings.

Understanding Qutb´s concept of God´s sovereignty is therefore not only crucial to understand his political thought and his ideology in general, but the question of sovereignty is also related to the fundamental question of who has the legitimate right to rule supreme, which makes the question of sovereignty crucial for understanding the foundation and basis of any political system or ideology. Political thought on sovereignty is not simply a clarification of who has autonomous power over a state or who rules and governs without external influence, it is also a question of who has the right to rule, who´s authority is legitimate, who we should accept as ruler and why, and who is a rightful sovereign with the right to be obeyed. This is the depth and ground of political thought and ideology, and if we want to understand something on a deep level, we ought to study its ground and foundation – that which all action and preaching stands on.

1.2 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Sayyid Qutb´s concept of sovereignty, with the aim of understanding both what his political thought stands on as well as the other aspects that God´s sovereignty entails. I make a distinction between the political and non-political aspects of God´s sovereignty because sovereignty is commonly used to refer to state and politics, while the Quranic meaning also refers to God´s supreme, independent rule over the world. In the thought of Qutb, sovereignty is a vast and encompassing concept which both entails politics and several other aspects of human life. To reach a comprehensive understanding of Qutb´s conception of sovereignty in his book *Milestones*, the following questions will be answered:

- How does Qutb view the sovereignty of God in the political sphere?
- How does Qutb view the sovereignty of God in spheres outside of politics?
- Can his conception of sovereignty be categorized as radical and/or extreme?

The last question will be answered through the use of a theory about the meaning of radicalism and extremism among North African Islamists. In other words, it is a context-focused theory, which is based on empirical research in Qutb´s geographical and religious proximity (see part 1.5). It is important to include the potentially radical and extreme aspect of his concepts, sometimes, because the book has had a great influence on different militant groups and movements.[4] It is also interesting to examine if the radical and extreme aspects of the book are present in his foundational concept of sovereignty, and if so, how we can understand what he truly meant with the radical and violent exhortations.

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[4]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 90.

1.3 Material

Sayyid Qutb was an avid writer. He wrote a number of monographs, novellas, news paper articles and political programs, as well as his Quran commentary "In the shade of the Quran", which is one of his most influential works.[5] *Milestones* is a shorter book of around 111 pages, that are split into twelve chapters that deal with different themes. Qutb has also included parts of his Quran commentary in *Milestones.*[6]

My choice of Milestones instead of other works by Qutb is first and foremost because the theme of sovereignty, which is the interest of this thesis, is particularly prominent in *Milestones*. Another reason for the demarcation is that Qutb mainly wrote in Arabic, and as a non-Arabic speaker, I have to rely on English or Swedish translations, which greatly limits my accessibility to his writings.

Milestones is Qutb´s last book, and it was written in the early 1960s in the infamous *Tura* prison where Qutb and other members were tortured and isolated for long periods.[7] Gardell contrasts *Milestones* with Qutb´s equally influential book *Social justice in Islam*, published in 1949, where he laid the foundation for what Gardell calls a social-democratic Islamism - a vision of an Islamic society built on principles of social justice, the equality of all human beings and absolute freedom of opinion, where the interests of the individual and the collective are balanced against each other.[8]

Gardell describes *Milestones* as a program for the revolutionary Islamic vanguard, and claims that the brutality of the "concentration camp" contributed to Qutb´s radicalization. Qutb´s legacy in Islamist circles is far from uniform.[9] The Islamists who attempt to establish the Islamic society with non-violent methods tend to read the earlier Qutb, while activists in more radical circles that advocate for armed struggle are influenced by the later Qutb.[10]

The elitist vision of a pure Islamic vanguard attracted a new generation of Islamists. From the late 1970s, they came to branch out into different militant groups, all with the aim of taking over state power with violence and implement "the good society" from above. As Qutb advocated, they broke with the surround-

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[5]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 71.
[6]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 5.
[7]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 79.
[8]Ibid, p. 70-71
[9]Ibid, p. 89
[10]Ibid, p. 70

ing *jahiliyya* ("ignorance", which Qutb terms societies that are ignorant of God´s sovereignty, see 1.7 for a more extensive explanation) and formed small, underground and closed militant collectives. From this perspective, Qutb became a divider within political Islam between a revolutionary and a reformist wing.[11]

Qutb came to influence several "radical jihadist groups", in Egypt and outside, such as the Islamic Liberation Front (FIS) who won democratic elections in Algeria in the 1990s and the Palestinian Hamas, which is a militant offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood who won democratic elections in 2006. He has even inspired Shiite groups such as the Lebanese Hizbullah.[12]

Hjärpe questions if Qutb would have accepted and approved of the conclusions in concrete militant action, including terror actions, that different groups have drawn from his ideas. Hjärpe sees it as impossible to know, but believes that Qutb would have distanced himself from it. He was executed over a decade before the practical consequences of his "jihadist" thoughts were seen, and Hjärpe believes that he most likely would disprove of terrorist actions that kill and harm people who are not in power.[13]

This is an important point, since the acts of those who found inspiration in *Milestones* are not testimonies of the words in the book. Indeed, the violence that he advocates for is rather vague and unspecified[14], and he did not advocate violence to implement Islamic law in all areas of life immediately. Instead, he saw it as legitimate to resort to violence once a state had used viollence against the Islamists.[15]

The radical aspect in *Milestones* is, however, a relevant factor to keep in mind when reading and researching this book, since it has led to real, concrete consequences. The radical aspect is also connected to the context in which the book was written, both if one is to agree with Gardell and Hjärpe, that torture and oppression leads to radicalization[16], and because the definition of the word radical is inherently relative and related to the norms of the society and context in which the label is given (see part 1.5). To be able to analyse the radical aspect further I will

[11]Ibid, p. 89-90
[12]Hjärpe, Jan. *Islamismer: politisk-religiösa rörelser i den muslimska världen.* 1st ed. Malmö: Gleerup, 2010. p. 69
[13]Ibid, p. 69-70
[14]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 33-49
[15]Esposito, John L. and Shahin, Emad El-Din (eds.). *Key Islamic political thinkers.* USA: Oxford University Press, 2018. p. 67-68
[16]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 89; Hjärpe, *Islamismer*, p. 66.

use an empirically grounded theory of radicalism and extremism as the theoretical framework of this analysis (see part 1.5).

The problem of translation must also be addressed. *Milestones* was written in Arabic, and there are several English translations. I have chosen the most recent one I had access to, which was published in 2005.

The good thing about translations is that we get access to writings we would not have access to otherwise, and how limiting would it be to only be able to read and study what has been written in the languages that we speak fluently.

I do not believe that we should limit ourselves to non-translated works, as that would limit most of us to one or two cultures and traditions. However, we must keep in mind that translations are not the literal word of the author, but a form of interpretation. Therefore, I will not be analysing and noting the specific words in the book, but will instead try to exegete the message and meaning of what Qutb is saying. Even if specific words can differ in translations, the message and general point remains the same, and that is what I´m attempting to extract in this paper.

1.4 Method

I will use qualitative content analysis as the method to extract what the text is expressing. This means that I will conduct a careful reading of the book *Milestones*, and extract the parts that deal with the concept of sovereignty, with a particular focus on sections where the word "sovereignty" occurs in English (see part 1.7 for further motivation for use of English definition). I will then categorize his points related to sovereignty (which will be under subheadings in part 3) to make his thoughts structured and to identify patterns within them. After this I will analyse the findings, by using a theoretical framework that relates to radicalism and extremism (see part 1. 5) and finally present my conclusions in part 4.

The advantage with content analysis is that it involves working with already existing texts or sources, which reduces the bias of the researcher, as compared to producing your own material, for example by conducting interviews. It also allows us to do historical research by using older sources[17], which is appropriate since I am examining a book that was written in the 1960s. It is also an advantage that I will not be influencing or leading the correspondence (the speech or writings of my research subjects). Instead the material is already there, and anyone can go back to the text and recheck if my interpretations of the authors are reasonable – it allows for intersubjective testability. It also allows for different researchers to go to the same texts and find different aspects and messages of the text, depending on the framework of analysis the researcher uses.

The method is, however, not entirely objective. It has been argued that meanings are brought to texts by the researcher who designs the analysis through using specific theoretical frameworks and carefully interprets the results. It is a textual analysis and is thus reader-dependent. Stausberg & Engler write that meanings in texts are *constructed* through interpretation, rather than *discovered*. Texts are not considered to have a single meaning, but depend on the researcher´s perspective and definitions. This also means that intersubjective agreement is not desirable.[18]

This thesis is, of course, not simply an exegetical work, where I only explain what Qutb is saying about sovereignty, but the theoretical frameworks related to

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[17]Nelson, Chad and Woods, Robert H. Jr. Content analysis. In *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion,* Stausberg, Michael and Engler, Steven (eds.), s. 109-121. Abington, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011. p. 111.
[18]Ibid, p. 112

radicalism ans extremism add to the analysis and the conclusions. I would, however, disagree that this fact compromises the objectivity of the information, or that the texts do not have any meaning without someone´s interpretation. I would argue that a central purpose of research is to understand what a writer is saying, and the claim that there is no meaning without an interpretation is quite exaggerated. The subjectivity of the researcher, and the theoretical frameworks that are chosen and used, "customizes" the paper, i.e. highlights certain aspects and layers of a text, but it does not change what the primary source texts actually express. I believe that intersubjective agreement is relevant and crucial in certain cases, in order to avoid contradiction or misunderstanding. There is a difference between seeing different aspects of an expression – that is complementary – and seeing contradictory things in the same expression, which would show that there is a misunderstanding by someone. Not all conclusions and interpretations are equally logical or coherent.

As for the practical part of content analysis, it allows me to categorize and identify ideas related to the relevant theme, that are present in the texts, and to identify patterns of ideas.[19] That will lead to clarity and structure with regards to Qutb´s views on sovereignty.

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[19]Ibid, 113

1.5 Theoretical frameworks

Qutb is commonly associated with both radicalism and extremism. The terms "radical" and "extreme" are often used interchangeably and without being defined, even though there is a crucial divide between the terms, according to Joffé.[20]

Before presenting the theoretical framework I will be using, it is meaningful to first clarify and get a grip on the dictionary definitions of the terms. The definition of "radical" is someone "advocating thorough or far-reaching change" or "supporting an extreme section of a party".[21] Radicalism is a "belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change"[22]

Radical can also mean "very different from the usual or traditional: extreme", and someone "favouring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions", which are "associated with political views, practices, and policies of extreme change", "advocating extreme measures to retain or restore a political state of affairs"[23]

It is interesting to note that something that is "very different from the usual or traditional" is defined as extreme. It shows how relative and context-depended the label is. It is also crucial to note that the word extreme occurs in the definition of "radical", which makes the interchangeability between them understandable.

Extremism is defined as "the fact of someone having beliefs that most people think are unreasonable and unacceptable"[24], and as "advocacy of extreme measures or views: radicalism". Extreme is defined as "going to great or exaggerated lengths: radical", "exceeding the ordinary, usual, or expected", and "situated at the farthest possible point from a centre" and "a very pronounced or excessive degree" and ""highest degree".[25]

The terms are clearly intimately related, as they occur in the definitions of each other, and it is often difficult to pinpoint the difference. For example, is not

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[20]Joffé, George (ed.). *Islamist radicalisation in North Africa: politics and process*. London, Routledge, 2012. p. 1-2
[21]Ibid, p. 1
[22]*Camebridge English Dictionary.* 2021. RADICAL | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary (Accessed 2012-05-25).
[23]"Radical."*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.
[24]*Camebridge English Dictionary.* 2021. *EXTREMISM | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary* (Accessed 2021-05-25).
[25]"Extreme."*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/extreme. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

"far-reaching" the same as "the farthest possible point from a centre"? Well, the latter is slightly further that simply "far". The difference between the terms, then, can be said to lie in the length that they go to. Where radical is "very different from the usual or traditional", extremism contains "beliefs that most people find unreasonable and unacceptable". Extremism also contains words such as "exaggerated" and "excessive", and thus contains the inherently negative meaning of going too far, of immoderation and uncalled for responses, while the extreme lengths in radicalism do not bear the meaning being disproportionate to the situation. In other words, a radical response can be reasonable and needed, in an extreme situation, while extremism is inherently negative by being disproportionate.

The terms radicalism and extremism are both context-dependent terms to a great extent, since the labels depend on "what most people think" and "the usual or traditional". If Qutb´s views are to be categorized as radical or extreme, I would need to relate them to a context, and explain from which perspective he was radical or extreme. Were his views radical from a 1960s Egyptian perspective, or was he radical within Islamic political thought, or was he extreme within the Muslim Brotherhood movement that he lived and worked within, or is he radical from today´s modern, Western, i.e. liberal democratic perspective?

In order to claim that Qutb´s views were radical or extreme from one of these perspectives, one would have to prove that certain norms were prevalent in one of these contexts, which is not an impossible task. It would, however, require extensive contextual focus, and in order to keep the focus of this thesis on Qutb´s writings, while still to a certain extent relating it to the context in which it was written, I have chosen a more extensive theory on the difference between radicalism and extremism - one that is also more analytically useful that mere definitions.

George Joffés distinction between radicalism and extremism is based on the findings in his anthology "Islamist radicalisation in North Africa". His conceptualization of radicalism and extremism, and the distinction between them, is thus based on the empirical study of existing militant and non-militant political Islamic groups and movements in North Africa.

Joffés conception of political radicalism involves challenging an established order or a hegemonic discourse, and radicalisation is the process of alienation from a hegemonic discourse, which is most often associated with the legitimisa-

tion of the state and its dominant political elites. Radicalisation is "concerned with dissent over normative and hegemonic assumptions about the nature of the state. When it expresses the views of a significant minority or majority of people in the state it can become "the ideological driver of a social movement which is not necessarily violent."[26]

Radicalism is most often expressed both on the individual level and through social movements where the alienation is articulated in such a way that it resonates as a shared interpretive overview or schemata that becomes prescriptive. These frames reflect both the objective factors that engender demands for change, as well as the shared cultural values that might legitimise them. They also inform mobilising structures of social movements and contribute to shaping the political environment in which the movement can flourish and become "an organized political vehicle of contention with the state."[27]

Extremism, on the other hand, is the "active adoption of an ideology and associated praxis to challenge the state and its elites, usually through violence". This violence commonly takes the form of asymmetric warfare, which often allows the state to label it aberrant and criminal.[28]

Extremism is usually expressed in minorities, often minorities who are marginalised both by the state and by social movements, and much of its vehemence is related to its exclusion from the political discourses.[29]

Joffé points out that groups that fall into this description should not be labelled extremist when the state represses the slightest sign of opposition or challenge, which forces social movements that contend with their discourse to chose between submission and confrontation.[30]

When it comes to the organisational and mobilisational mechanisms, extremist groups tend to take the form of networks rather than movements, which is in line with their habit of having a restricted number of members, because of their fear of repression if discovered. They commonly operate in clandestinity, and use violence with the purpose of challenging the state´s monopoly on "legitimate violence", and to challenge the very existence of the state.[31]

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[26]Joffé, *Islamist radicalisation in North Africa*, p. 1.
[27]Ibid, p. 1-2
[28]Ibid, p. 1
[29]Ibid, p. 2
[30]Ibid, p. 2
[31]Ibid, p. 2

This theory will be used to analyse if Qutb´s conception of sovereignty can be considered radical or extreme. Emphasis is here on the concept of sovereignty, I am not, in other words, attempting to determine if the entire book can be considered radical or extreme. If the theory shows that Qutb´s views on sovereignty are neither radical or extreme, it does not mean that none of his ideas in *Milestones* are neither radical or extreme. It is, however, important to examine if this interesting and central part of his thought, in his final and perhaps most influential book, should be excluded from the labels of radical or extreme, or if it fits into it. The aim is to understand his concept of sovereignty, with radicalism being a possible aspect of it.

This theory is also useful in relating thought to the social and political context in which it was written. The theory does, of course, focus on groups and movements rather than ideology and thought, but I will use it to examine if Qutb´s ideas contain advocacy or propagation for radicalism or extremism.

1.6 Previous research

Sayyid Qutb is a well researched thinker, and *Milestones* is a well researched book. However, most of the research (at least English language research) on *Milestones* is related to jihad, militancy and radicalism. In 2006, Khatab wrote that no in-depth study had been conducted on the important theory of *hakimiyyah*, which is the Arabic term Qutb uses for sovereignty, except some studies that touch briefly on the concept, in spite of the fact that it has "influenced all shades of Muslim thought since the second half of the twentieth century; and it´s not likely to go away soon".[32] Some of the articles on Qutb´s sovereignty concept are published recently, as late as 2021, which perhaps indicates a renewed academic interest in this fundamental concept.

Given the centrality of the concept of sovereignty in Qutb´s thought, and the continued influence of Milestones, continuous research on this is interesting and important if we want to understand Qutb and those who are influenced by his ideas today.

The most extensive work on Qutb´s conception of sovereignty is a book titled "The power of sovereignty: The political and ideological philosophy of Sayyid Qutb", published in 2006 by Sayed Khatab. He examines the relationship between *hakimiyyah* and *jahiliyyah* (ignorance of the divine guidance and sovereignty, see part 1.7 for further explanation) in Qutb´s thought, and how Qutb uses them to critically assess the political establishments and ideologies, such as nationalism, capitalism, socialism and secular democracy. Khatab also examines how Qutb´s sovereignty concept has influenced radical and extreme groups, such as al-Qaida.[33]

According to Khatab, Qutb articulated a coherent Islamic ideology that was mainly centred around his concept of sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*) – a political concept that has puzzled and frustrated both the media and the political establishment.[34] A central point, however, is that Qutb´s concept of *hakimiyyah* cannot be separated from his concept of *jahiliyyah*. The Islamic movements of today divide the world into two camps, according to these two concepts. The camps of *hakim-*

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[32]Khatab, *The power of sovereignty*, p. 2.
[33]Ibid, p. 2; 119-170.
[34]Ibid, p. 1

iyyah and *jahiliyyah* are binary opposites and a future civilizational clash will be between these two camps.[35]

In an earlier work from 2002, Khatab argues that Qutb conceives of Islam as both a religion and a state. He means that Qutb´s concept of *hakimiyyah* involves an inseparability between politics and religion, and since the two are inseparable, he concludes that Qutb´s *hakimiyyah* concept leads to a conception of Islam as both a religion and a state.[36]

In contrast to this understanding of religion and state being on the same plan in Qutb´s thought, Pasha concludes that Qutb´s political theology is a theology that "is always already political", which suggests that Qutb is arguing for a political theology in modernity rather than a theological politics.[37] In other words, theology is primary and politics secondary in Qutb´s thought.

Pasha describes Qutb´s political theology as a panacea, where *hakimiyyah* is a centrepiece that can free the Muslim community from the allure of *jahiliyyah*. He claims further that divine sovereignty is not a political slogan for Qutb, "but a program for spiritual renewal, recovering the original ethos of Islam".[38]

This conclusion is part of an article titled "Political theology and sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in our times", where Pasha examines the political-theological nature of Qutb´s theories and how it relates to non-Western understandings of the term sovereignty. He finds an alternative view of modern sovereignty in Qutb´s concept of *hakimiyyah*, which he translates as "God´s sovereignty". The difference lies in the modern concept seeing a distinction between political sovereignty and sovereignty in a theological sense, whereas there is no clear line between political and theological sovereignty in Qutb´s thought. A consequence of that is an absence of social spheres that are independent of God´s law.[39]

Pasha, however, problematizes the modernist aspect of Qutb´s sovereignty concept in a book chapter titled "Modernity´s Islamicist: Sayyid Qutb´s Theo-

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[35]Ibid, p. 2

[36]Khatab, Sayed. *Hakimiyyah* and *Jahiliyyah* in the thought of Sayyid Qutb. *Middle Eastern Studies.* Vol 38, no. 3, 2002: 145-170. doi: **"Hakimiyyah" and "Jahiliyyah" in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb (uu.se)** p. 145-157.

[37]Pasha, Mustapha Kamal. Political theology and sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in our time. *Journal of International Relations and Development.* 22, 2019: 346-363. doi: **Political theology and sovereignty: Sayyid Qutb in our times (springer.com)** p. 360-361

[38]Ibid, p. 360-361

[39]Ibid, p. 346

centric Reconstruction of Sovereignty".[40] Here Pasha argues that Qutb neither fits into the category of "traditionalist-religious" or "modernist-secular". Instead "modernity is subsumed under God´s sovereignty (*Hakimiyyah*)" in Qutb´s thought. The individual believer has the freedom to interpret God´s revelation, while still having a responsibility to collectively strive to bring about an Islamic society.[41]

He proposes that Qutb should be read as an Islamist proponent of the sacralization of politics, and as a theorist of *modern* sovereignty, but within an Islamic discourse. He thus challenges the popular perception of Qutb and Islamists as resistant to modernity. In other words, Pasha claims that Qutb´s conception of God´s sovereignty in relation to politics does not originate in old Islamic thought, but is rather a new, modern view. Qutb resists the traditional separation of polity from faith, and presents a "sacralization of politics", where there is a faith dimension to the political aspect of Islam. This suggests that Qutb´s reconstruction of traditional notions of sovereignty goes against the image of Islamic fundamentalism as an anti-modern project.[42] At the same time, by sacralizing politics, Qutb removes the modern distinction between social spheres.[43] Thus, Qutb´s concept of sovereignty is neither traditional from an Islamic scholarly perspective or modern in a secular way. He does not therefore fit into the category of traditional-religious or modern-secular, but could rather be categorized as modern-religious.

Qasim Zaman also argues for a modernist interpretation of Qutb´s hakimiyyah concept in his article "The sovereignty of God in modern Islamic thought". He writes that Qutb´s view on God´s supreme power and authority (which relates to His sovereignty) is a modern view, and that the term *hakimiyyah*, which Qutb uses for sovereignty, is a neologism, even though it´s derived from the Quranic term *hukm.[44]*

Qasim Zaman believes that Qutb has sovereignty as a political concept in mind when he writes about God as the exclusive source of all power. This idea of God´s sovereignty lies at the heart of Islamist conceptions of state, law and Islam

[40]Pasha, Mustapha Kamal. Modernity´s Islamicist: Sayyid Qutb´s Theocentric Reconstruction of Sovereignty. In *Modernity´s Classics*, Humphreys, Sarah C. and Wagner, Rudolf G.(eds.), p. 101-120. London: Springer-Verlag, 2013.
[41]Ibid, p. 101
[42]Ibid, 102-104
[43]Ibid, 111
[44]Qasim Zaman, Muhammad. The sovereignty of God in modern Islamic thought. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.* Vol. 25, no. 3, 2015: 389-418. doi: **The Sovereignty of God in Modern Islamic Thought (jstor.org)** p. 394

itself. The basis of an Islamic state in Islamist thought is therefore based on the re-cognition of God´s sovereignty, which means that no law other than God´s law has any claim, and that failure to submit to this concept of God´s sovereignty is disbelief.[45]

This concept of God´s sovereignty featured in the Indian Khilfat Movement, that fought against British colonialism in the early 1920s. They inspired the Pakistani Islamist thinker Mawdudi,[46] according to Qasim Zaman, who in turn inspired Sayyid Qutb.[47] Pasha also writes that Mawdudi was paramount in fleshing out the modern concept of *hakimiyyah*, a concept which views all social and political practices as legitimate only when they are derived from divine guidance.[48]

The focus on God´s sovereignty, in other words, appears to be prominent in modern political Islamic thought. This is important to keep in mind because it places Qutb and his *hakimiyyah* concept outside the traditional Islamic scholarly tradition, and instead places him in a modern intellectual thought context.

[45]Ibid, p. 394
[46]Ibid, p. 396-403
[47]Ibid, p. 394-395
[48]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 114

1.7 Terminology and concept definitions

The previous research shows that much of the study on Qutb´s sovereignty concept has focused on his definition of *hakimiyyah*, or sovereignty, and many have concluded that it has a vastly different meaning than the modern, Western understanding of the term sovereignty.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of "sovereignty" is "supreme power especially over a body politic; freedom from external control; controlling influence; especially referring to an autonomous state. Synonyms to sovereignty are autonomy, freedom, independence, liberty and self-government.[49]

In other words, a sovereign state is a state that governs itself independently, without being controlled by other states. This definition is especially referring to an autonomous state, so it is indeed a political word, but if we use this definition to describe the meaning of the sovereign of the world, it would be one who has supreme power over the world, who is not controlled or influenced by anything external, but is instead controlling everything. When Qutb speaks of God´s sovereignty, it is thus either about God as the sovereign of the world, or as sovereign of political entities (such as a state), or a combination of both.

However, Qasim Zaman claims that the concept of sovereignty has its roots in European political thought, and emerged in relation to the modern state. The Arabic terms *al-mulk* and *al-hukm*, which are commonly translated as "sovereignty", have a different meaning and different Quranic associations, and thus mean something different than sovereignty in European political philosophy.[50] The term *hakimiyyah* that Qutb uses, is not, however, a Quranic term, but it acquires the character of an Islamic term through what Pasha calls rhetorical finesse.[51]

Hakimiyyah is derived from the Arabic root word *hkm*, which means "rule", and the *nomen agantis hakim* is a ruler or governor, or someone who exercises judicial authority or domination.[52] The term *hukm* and its derivations appear over 250 times in the Quran, where it has both legal and governmental connotations.

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[49]"Sovereignty."*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.
[50]Qasim Zaman, *The sovereignty of God in modern Islamic thought,* p. 389
[51]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 105
[52]Khatab, *The power of sovereignty*, p. 16

Khatab writes that *hukm* in the Quran means to rule and judge according to God´s law, which is outlined in His revelations.[53]

Khatab translates *hakimiyyah* as "sovereignty in which rests the highest legal and governmental authority"[54], while Pasha translates *hakimiyyah* as "divine sovereignty", and claims that Qutb´s "expansive" use of the word encompasses all human activity.[55]

Since this thesis is written in English, and an English translation of the primary source material is used, it is reasonable to consider the English definition of the term sovereignty when I exegete and analyse the book. However, given the Arabic origin of Qutb´s concept of *hakimiyyah* or sovereignty, I will also include the meanings and associations of *hkm* in the analysis.

Another crucial concept to clarify is Qutb´s use of the term *jahiliyyah,* and its adjective form *jahili*. The Arabic word is commonly translated as "ignorance", and used to describe the Arabs before they received the divine revelation of the Quran. The time of *jahiliyyah* was a time of ignorance, a time without the divine revelation.[56]

Qutb, however, also describes the world of today as *jahiliyyah*. Pasha translates Qutb´s concept of *jahiliyyah* as "human sovereignty", and explains it as Qutb´s view of contemporary society as divorced from divine sovereignty.[57] Similarily, Khatab describes Qutb´s concept of *jahiliyyah* as "a condition of any place or society where Allah is not held to be the ultimate sovereign".[58] This contrast between *hakimiyyah* and *jahiliyyah* in Qutb´s thought, this concept of the two as polar opposite, makes *jahiliyyah* an inseparable part of his concept of *hakimiyyah*, or sovereignty.

Lastly, a concept that is present in Qutb´s writings, particularly in *Milestones*, though Qutb never uses the word himself, is *takfir*. It is simply the pronouncement that a Muslim is actually an unbeliever (*kafir*) and thus no longer a Muslim.[59]

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[53]Ibid, p. 17-18
[54]Ibid, p. 18
[55]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 113
[56]Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Jāhiliyyah". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14 Feb. 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/jahiliyah. Accessed 3 June 2021.
[57]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 105
[58]Khatab, *The power of sovereignty*, p. 7
[59]"Takfir." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*., edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2319 (accessed 02-Jun-2021).

Much of Qutb´s discussion on sovereignty relates to what it means to believe in the Islamic creed, and thus what it means to believe in Islam and be a Muslim. When he lays this out, he directly or indirectly pronounces some Muslims as non-believers and non-Muslims.

The t*akfir* that occurs in *Milestones* is important because of its consequences. It is used in the modern era to sanction violence against leaders of Muslim states who are deemed irreligious, and it´s a central ideology within some militant groups. Many Islamists, however, reject the practice of *takfir*. Even Hasan Hudaybi, who was the general counsel of the Muslim Brotherhood during Qutb´s time, opposed his *takfir*.[60]

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[60]Ibid

2 Background

Sayyid Qutb was born on the countryside in Asyut in Upper Egypt in 1906. His father was an active nationalist, and Qutb himself was active in the leftist nationalist *Wafd*-party in his youth.[61] He became a teacher and studied at university, whereafter he started working at the department of education. During that time, he wrote novels and poetry, reviewed literature and produced many newspaper articles. In 1948, the department sent him to the USA to study at different universities, including Stanford, and he received a masters degree from the University of Northern California.[62]

During his time in the USA, and his visits to Europe, he reacted strongly against its racism, loose sexual morale and strong support for Israel. According to Hjärpe, it was at this time that he began to see an antagonism between Islam and the Western world, and he joined the Muslim Brotherhood (MB hereafter) after his return to Egypt in 1951. He soon became the editor of the movement´s weekly magazine, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*, and he came to join its leadership.[63]

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, who, like Qutb, was a school teacher from the Egyptian countryside. Banna has described the MB as a "(r)evolutionary revival movement that embodied ´a Salafi message, a Sunni path, a Sufi truth, a political organisation, an athletic group, a cultural association for education, an economic enterprise and a social idea` (my translation from Swedish).[64]

Gardell describes the MB in the 1930s as the interpreter of the social problems of Egypt´s new class that had arisen as a consequence of mass urbanisation, which included the landless farmers, the professional middle class, state officials, bazaar people and the inhabitants of the slums. By the 1940s, the MB had 500 000 members and kept spreading to wider parts of the Arab speaking world.[65]

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[61]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 71
[62]Hjärpe, *Islamismer*, p. 65-66
[63]Ibid, p. 66
[64]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 66
[65]Ibid, p. 60-61

Social responsibility was central to Banna, and the religious duties were not only viewed as moral principles for the individual, but as something that ought to be institutionalized in state institutions. Hjärpe describes Banna´s thought as a sort of Islamic-socialist modernist vision, and claims that it is characteristic of many Islamist movements to view Islam as a *minhaj* (method, program), which is significant because there was a shift from religion as religiosity to religion as state system.[66]

Banna was critical of the Muslim establishment, and blamed them for the regress of Islam. The MB criticized *al-Azhar* (the prestigious Islamic institution, that has produced Islamic scholars and jurists since 970) for turning away from the social realities and its problems, and escaping into a world of increasingly archaic texts. Gardell writes that the MB thought that they produced good exegetes but did not manage to make Islam relevant in today´s society. Banna still kept friendly relations with *al-Azhar´s* leadership, and the students of its teacher´s association became an important parts of the MB´s activists.[67]

This is a significant fact, because Qutb, like Banna, was not a traditional Islamic scholar, but a modern, political intellectual. He was educated in secular universities, not in the old Islamic institutions, and it was in this context that he wrote. He was an intellectual, not an Islamic jurist or traditionally educated Quran exegete.[68]

Pasha criticizes Qutb for overlooking centuries of serious Islamic jurisprudential scholarship, and claims that his approach to Quranic interpretation and exegesis gives personal faith a supreme status. This openness to interpretation and "dethroning" of traditional intellectuals was not unique to Qutb, but is instead a common occurrence in modern history.[69]

Qutb is, in this respect, not traditional and he was not writing in a traditional Islamic context, but he very much worked and wrote within his lived, contemporary context. He was a member of the MB, which can be summarized as a modern Islamic social and political movement.

According to Hjärpe, the term Islamism has mainly been associated with the MB. There are several offshoots and branches in different countries, and its

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[66]Hjärpe, *Islamismer*, p. 63
[67]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 62
[68]Hjärpe, *Islamismer*, p. 71-72
[69]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 117-118

founders and leading ideologues continue to influence and inspire different movements as well as the contemporary debate on political Islam through their writings.[70] In other words, the significance of the MB and its leader for modern Islamism cannot be overstated.

After the MB´s participation in the war for Palestine in 1948, the movement was suppressed by the Egyptian monarchy, and Hasan al-Banna was murdered by the king´s security police on an open street in central Cairo the following year.[71]

The MB and the nationalistic "Free Officers" cooperated both in the war for Palestine and in the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952, but Gardell underlines that it was a pragmatic rather than ideological alliance. This became increasingly clear when the "Free officers" gained power and developed and drove a secular nationalist ideology with Kemalistic characteristics,[72] which meant that religion was considered subordinate to nation building, the Sharia courts lost their autonomy and the state dictated the Islamic educational plans.[73]

Even though the MB and the Free Officers were united in their anti-colonial struggle, they had different visions for a post-colonial Egypt. The MB did not see national independence as the end goal. Instead, Banna questioned why Muslims should define themselves according to nations, whose boundaries had been drawn out by the colonial powers, when they had access to the cross-border message that God directed to all of humanity, irrespective of race, skin colour and language - Islam. The fight against British colonial rule was seen as a step towards forming an Islamic homeland - a homeland defined by nationality rather than religion was not the goal of the MB. They argued against the other anti-colonial fighters´ demand for a national independence and a secular constitution, and advocated for an Islamic anti-imperialism, loyalty to the Islamic "nation" and the importance of establishing an Islamic state under the motto "The Quran is our constitution" – a slogan that guides many Islamists to this day.[74]

This is an important backdrop, because Qutb belonged to the latter camp, and was oppressed by the secular nationalists that took power after the rule of the British and the monarchy. Qutb´s thought thus belongs to this postcolonial, Egyptian

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[70]Hjärpe, *Islamismer*, p. 61-62
[71]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 68
[72]Ibid, p. 69-70
[73]Ibid, p. 79
[74]Ibid, p. 61-62

by origin but Islamic by ideology, tradition. He belongs to the Islamic side of the anti-colonial and postcolonial struggle and nation building. The disparity between seeing the ideal constitution as secular or as the Quran (and seeing the primary identification marker as nationality rather than religion) is related to who and what is considered the rightful sovereign of the land, within and beyond its borders.

The relationship between the Free Officers and the MB was initially good, but when the MB criticised the government, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, for lack of Islamization and their demands for influence was rejected, the relationship worsened.[75]

Nasser dissolved the MB in 1954 and imprisoned many of its members and leaders. After the mass arrest, Qutb was severely tortured, and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He also witnessed the torture of other prisoners, including one occurrence in 1957 where several MB members were killed. Hjärpe claims that his views became strongly radical as a result of these experiences, and he points out that many leading figures in jihadist movements have become radicalized after imprisonment and torture. It was after the prison experience that Qutb began to declare that violence was legitimate against ungodly regimes in the Muslim world.[76]

Qutb was released after external pressure in 1964, only to be rearrested the following year. The trial was quick and behind closed doors, since Qutb had begun to expose the torture and ill treatment. Without any evidence for accusations of a planned state coup, Hjärpe writes, Qutb was sentenced to death and executed in 1966.[77]

Whether Qutb´s radicalisation can be blamed on torture or not, Hjärpe makes an important contextual point nonetheless. Namely, that Qutb wrote *Milestones* in what can only be described as an extreme, political situation. A situation of extreme political oppression. When the politics, as in this case, is deeply religious, it is not only a political oppression, but also a religious oppression. It is crucial to understand *Milestones* as a product of this context, as a text written under judicial injustice and political imprisonment and severe torture.

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[75]Hjärpe, *Islamimser*, p. 65
[76]Ibid, p. 65-66
[77]Ibid, p. 66-67

3 Results

3. 1 Sovereignty, lordship and authority

Qutb writes that the whole contemporary world is steeped in *jahiliyyah* (ignorance), which is clear based on the sources and foundations of modern ways of living. It is a *jahiliyyah* that differs from the ancient "simple and primitive" form *jahiliyyah*. "This *Jahiliyyah* is based on rebellion against God´s sovereignty on earth. It transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of God, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others." This *jahiliyyah* "...takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behaviour, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed."[78]

Qutb claims that this rebellion against God´s authority has resulted in the oppression and humiliation of His creatures. The humiliation of men under the communist system, and the exploitation of people under the capitalist system are both consequences of rebellion against the authority of God and the dignity that God has given human beings. The Islamic system differs from all other systems since the latter involves some people worshipping other people in some form, while in the Islamic system, men worship God alone, and are freed from servitude to other men. They derive guidance only from God, and only bow before Him.[79]

In other words, Qutb is saying that modern ignorance or *jahiliyyah* is an ignorance of the fact that the only legitimate sovereign is God. It´s an ignorance caused by a denial of God´s rightful authority and rebellion against it. Human lordship and legislation is always usurped from God, because He is the only rightful and legitimate sovereign over the lives of men. The usurpation of God´s sovereignty will always lead to oppression of other people.

This claim is interesting when you consider the equality of human beings that modern, man-made value systems such as human rights, democracy and to some extent liberalism proclaim. In Qutb´s view, these systems must be unjust since

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[78]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 3-4
[79]Ibid, p. 4

they are based on a usurpation of God´s exclusive right to sovereignty and legislation.

Qutb is almost labelling himself as a radical here, since he claims that the entire world is stepped in *jahiliyyah* – a global norm which he is opposing. To use Joffés words, Qutb is expressing dissent over normative and hegemonic assumptions about the nature of states, and he is challenging an established order and hegemonic discourse – a non-Islamic order that permeates the entire world, by non-Islamic I mean orders that deny God´s exclusive sovereignty.

This begs the question, however, if we can prove that this form of *jahili* hegemonic order exists. That could demand extensive research, but if we consider the prominence of secular and man-made political- and value systems in the modern world, and accept the meaning of *jahiliyyah* as ignorance or denial of God´s sovereignty, it would not be a stretch to see this proclamation of God´s exclusive sovereignty as a challenge to an established order and hegemonic (secular political) discourse.

The labelling of the entire world as *jahili* raises the question of how and if Qutb differentiated between Muslim majority countries such as Egypt and what we might call non-Muslim countries. He makes a notable point about the disparity between God´s sovereignty and nationalism that reflects his own contemporary, post-colonial, Egyptian context.

In chapter two, he suggests that the Prophet Mohammad could have gathered his people around a nationalistic message, and once they were under his leadership and authority, he could have introduced the Islamic message of monotheism. Qutb points out that many Arabs were under the rule of foreign empires at the time, and he claims that they would have been more susceptible to the message of Islam that way, which would have saved the Muslims from the oppression that they suffered in the early history of Islam. But that was not the right way.[80]

> The way is not to free the earth from Roman and Persian tyranny in order to replace it with Arab tyranny. All tyranny is wicked! The earth belongs to God and should be purified for God, and it cannot be purified for Him unless the banner "No deity except God", is unfurled across the earth. Man is servant to God alone, and he can remain so

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[80]Ibid, p. 13-14

only if he unfurls the banner, "No deity except God", - "*la ilaha illa allah*" – as an Arab with the knowledge of his language understood it: no sovereignty except God´s, no law except from God, and no authority of one man over another, as the authority in all respects belong to God. The "grouping" of men which Islam proclaims is based on this faith alone, the faith in which all peoples of any race or colour – Arabs, Romans or Persians – are equal under the banner of God.[81]

These passages contain several meanings. Firstly, Qutb believes that people are more willing to accept nationalism than Islamic monotheism, which enforces the uniqueness of his own position of acknowledging God´s sovereignty, and since it is a challenge to a hegemonic order, it is a radical standpoint.

He is also claiming that the Islamic creed "No deity except God" contains the meaning of acknowledging God´s exclusive sovereignty, and this creed should be unfurled across the world – it is a universal message of faith which transcends ethnic, cultural and geographical borders. Again, he views any ideology which denies that the earth belongs to God, and denies the primacy of faith, and puts different forms of nationalism above faith, as tyranny. One man´s authority over another, as in racist world views, goes against God´s exclusive right to authority. It is a striking peak towards the Egyptian, Arab nationalist government. In line with the MB ideology (ref), Qutb is expressing dissent over how British and French colonial tyranny was replaced by Arab nationalist tyranny, when in fact, he along with the MB were fighting against colonial tyranny to replace it with an Islamic system that acknowledges God´s exclusive sovereignty on earth.

He is challenging the legitimisation of the Egyptian state and its dominant elites, which is radical when it relates to an established order or hegemonic discourse. However, given the popularity of the MB at the time and the prominence of Islamist world views and its continued challenge to the state, it might be incorrect to consider the Arab nationalist ideology as an established order or hegemonic discourse, so it is doubtful if this is a radical stance. This touches on an important difference in context – that the hegemonic ideology in the global political

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[81]Ibid, p. 14

or ethical discourse differs from hegemonic assumptions in specific countries, such as Egypt at this time.

One daring and controversial claim Qutb continuously makes is that denial of God´s sovereignty on earth is a form of disbelief. When you consider the fact that he labels non-Islamic political systems as denial of God´s exclusive sovereignty, he indirectly labels a great number of self-identified Muslims as non-Muslims. He is, in other words, doing *takfir*, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly by defining Islamic faith in a narrow sense which excludes a great number of Muslims from the category of "real" Muslims.

Qutb writes that mankind, with few exceptions, has denied God´s existence and His sovereignty over the universe, but people have gone wrong in comprehending His real attributes or in taking gods besides God. The association of gods besides God has taken the form of belief or worship, or in "accepting the sovereignty of others besides God." Qutb labels both kinds as *shirk* (idolatry or polytheism), since they take people away from God´s religion, brought to them through prophets. The belief of people remains correct for some time after a prophet´s mission, but later generations gradually forget the true religion. "They started again on the way of Shirk, sometimes in their belief and worship and sometimes in their submission to the authority of others, and sometimes in both."[82]

> Throughout every period of human history the call toward God has
> had one nature. Its purpose is Islam, which means to bring human be-
> ings into submission to God, to free them from servitude to other hu-
> man beings so that they may devote themselves to the One True God,
> to deliver them from the clutches of human lordship and man-made
> laws, value systems and traditions so that they will acknowledge the
> sovereignty and authority of the One True God and follow His law in
> all spheres of life.[83]

Again, if we accept that *jahiliyyah*, or human sovereignty in the form of man-made value systems and ideologies has a hegemonic status in global discourses,

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[82]Ibid, p. 28
[83]Ibid, p. 28

Qutb´s dissent over these hegemonic assumptions (that human beings have any right to sovereignty, authority and lordship) and his challenge to this established world order, should be considered radical. However, the absence of violent or organisational or operational details in these passages excludes them from the extremist label.

With his continuous connection of sovereignty with authority and lordship, he is pointing out that acknowledging God´s sovereignty is to acknowledge His exclusive right to sovereignty, which excludes all human beings from any right to sovereignty. In practice, accepting someone´s authority and accepting someone as lord (or as subject) is to accept their sovereign rule. But how does this relate to the definition of sovereignty?

The dictionary definition "supreme power especially over a body politic; freedom from external control; controlling influence; especially referring to an autonomous state" is in line with Qutb´s claim that no one except God has the right to rule human beings with supreme, exclusive power. Synonyms to sovereignty are autonomy, freedom, independence, liberty and self-government, which underline the exclusivity of God´s influence and the fact the He is the only sovereign, independent of all human or other intervention.

However, "especially referring to an autonomous state" is opposed to Qutb´s sovereignty concept where God´s sovereignty over state affairs is merely one part of His all-encompassing sovereignty, which will be further demonstrated in part 3.2. and 3.3.

Notice also how Qutb is consistently discussing how it should be, rather than how it is – God´s sovereign rule should prevail on earth, but the reality is that people have usurped the attribute of sovereignty, which He has the exclusive right to. Qutb´s *jahiliyyah* concept is a description and analysis of reality on earth, while his *hakimiyyah* concept is an exhortation and a view of how it ought to be. Qutb is not talking about the reality of God´s sovereign power and influence over the world and human beings, but instead of God´s right to sovereignty over us, and what God´s exclusive right to sovereignty should mean for Muslims in practice – that no man is lord over another, and no man has the right to exercise authority over another. The fact that Qutb continuously brings sovereignty back to authority

underlines the fact that his sovereignty concept is a concept of legitimacy, a concept of what constitutes rightful, legitimate sovereignty.

Anyone can be a sovereign on earth, but the reality of practising sovereignty does not mean that your sovereignty is justified or theologically legitimate. Authority means "the moral or legal right or ability to control",[84] and if we focus on the "right", authority becomes a crucial part in a *legitimate* and *justified* sovereign rule. Qutb is making the point that God´s sovereignty entails that He is the only rightful authority, the only One with the right to be obeyed. For that reason, all forms of human lordship is a usurpation of God´s exclusive legitimate right to sovereignty.

> This religion is really a universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and from servitude to his own desires, which is also a form of human servitude; it is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that He is the Lord of all the worlds. It means a challenge to all kinds and forms of systems which are based on the concept of the sovereignty of man; in other words, where man has usurped the divine attribute. Any system in which the final decisions are referred to human beings, and in which the sources of all authority are human, deifies human beings by designating others than God as lords over men. This declaration means that the usurped authority of God be returned to Him and the usurpers be thrown out – those who by themselves devise laws for others to follow, thus elevating themselves to the status lords and reducing others to the status of slaves. In short, to proclaim the authority and sovereignty of God means to eliminate all human kingship and to announce the rule of the Sustainer of the universe over the entire earth.[85]

This raises the question of how Muslims are supposed to go about their lives and order their affairs, and how to order the different spheres of society without any human hierarchy and authority. Qutb offers an answer by saying that the way to

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[84]*Camebridge Dictionary.* 2021. **AUTHORITY | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary** (Accessed 2021-05-26).
[85]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 36

establish God´s rule on earth should not be confused with giving priests or the church the authority to rule, or some spokesmen of God, as is the case in theocracies. Instead, establishing God´s rule means enforcing His laws and giving them the final decision in all affairs.[86]

The way to avoid usurping God´s sovereignty is then simply to rule by His revealed law. The Quranic connotations of the word *hukm* ("rule") are helpful in understanding this concept that Qutb has of sovereignty. A *hakim* is a ruler or governor or someone who exercises judicial authority or domination, but *hukm* in the Quran also means to rule and judge according to God´s revealed law.[87] This understanding of the word, which is commonly translated as sovereignty, shows that persons can rule and govern and exercise judicial authority and domination, while still acknowledging and accepting God´s exclusive right to sovereignty and authority, simply by ruling according to God´s revelation rather than from his own will and desires.

Qutb connects the idea of lordship as an aspect of sovereignty to military battles in a chapter titled "*Jihad* in the cause of God". He criticizes those who claim that *jihad* (note) merely entails defensive wars, and sees it as a sign of a defeatist and apologetic mentality. He argues that physical power and *jihad* can and should be used to abolish *jahili* organizations, authorities and systems that prevent people from learning about Islam, and keeps them in a state of servitude to "human lords" instead of God. He underscores that this does not involve forcing people to become Muslim, but it "tries to annihilate all those political and material powers which stand between people and Islam, which force one people to bow before another people and prevent them from accepting the sovereignty of God."[88]

Jihad bi-sayf ("striving through fighting")(note, the translations explanation, though it literally means "striving by the sword") was a movement to "wipe out tyranny and to introduce true freedom to mankind". Qutb says that if we are to view *jihad* as defence, we must expand the meaning to include a defence of man against elements that limits his freedom, which can come in the form of beliefs and concepts or political systems based on economic, racial or class distinctions.[89]

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[86]Ibid, p. 36
[87]Khatab, *The power of sovereignty*, p. 15; 17-18
[88]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 34-36
[89]Ibid, p. 39

> When we take this broad meaning of the word "defence", we understand the true character of Islam, and that it is a universal proclamation of the freedom of man from servitude to other men, the establishment of the sovereignty of God and His Lordship throughout the world, and the end of man´s arrogance and selfishness, and the implementation of the rule of the divine Shari´ah in human affairs.[90]

The purpose of military battles are, in Qutb´s view, to free human beings from *jahiliyyah* – illegitimate human sovereignty, which has led to oppression and inequality of peoples – and to establish God´s sovereignty on earth. Human sovereignty always leads to some form of oppression, or, as I understand Qutb, human sovereignty is illegitimate, it is always usurped, and thus will always go against the natural order of things.

He is saying that only the acknowledgment of God´s sovereignty on earth will make people free, and he defines freedom as servitude of God rather than servitude of human beings, which raises question over what he means by freedom. I understand this sort of freedom to entail a balance, a correctness and a natural order of the inner and outer life of human beings. That is a sort of peaceful order of things, which gives a feeling of freedom and liberation. A liberation from disbelief and wrong ways, which is a spiritual freedom. To follow the shariah is freedom, because if we don´t follow God´s law, we are following someone else´s law and we give someone else authority over our lives, which is a notable claim about human psychology.

This is an interesting contrast to modern, secular liberalism, that highlights and values other forms of freedom.[91] It is also interesting in relation to democracy which is based on a belief that supreme power (i.e. sovereignty) is vested in "the people",[92] which Qutb would call *jahiliyyah*, which is servitude of men which

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[90]Ibid, p. 39
[91]Ball, Terence, Dagger, Richard, Girvetz, Harry K. and Minogue, Kenneth. "Liberalism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 Feb. 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism. Accessed 2 June 2021.
[92]"Democracy."*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

leads to tyranny and oppression. However, this is a vast discussion, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Another crucial point is that this was written in a context where those who proclaimed God´s exclusive sovereignty were severely oppressed by an Arab nationalist government – one which proclaimed the sovereignty of the Arab Egyptian people, not over the world, but over the state.

These passages also show the centrality of the sovereignty concept in military fights. Qutb even writes, with regard to Islam, that we should not "forget that the fundamental question here is the sovereignty of God and the obedience of His creatures; it is impossible for a person to remember this great truth and still search for other reasons for Islamic *Jihad*".[93]

God´s sovereignty is thus a crucial part of the reason for going to war, according to Qutb – to establish His sovereignty on earth and fight against the oppressive *jahili* systems and concepts (those based on belief in human sovereignty in some form).

With regard to Joffés extremist definition, this exhortation can be considered extremist because it can clearly be categorized as an ideology and associated praxis to challenge the state and its elites through violence. One could also interpret it as an exhortation to asymmetric warfare, given the imbalance of force that existed between the writer (Qutb) and the oppressors that he calls for wars against. It is a possible, but certainly not a necessary interpretation. Qutb is general in these passages, with regard to what form and targets this warfare should take. It is, for example, not clear if this army should come out of a network or movement or something else. His focus is on the justification for jihad and its goal and purpose, while the details of how it should be performed are left out. This opens up for different interpretations and different ways of adopting and implementing these ideas for readers.

Furthermore, Qutb´s use of *takfir* shows that he considers this view and practice to exists in a minority, and this minority is certainly marginalized by the state, though not clearly marginalized by social movements, given the fact that Qutb wrote and worked within the MB movement, which was widespread in Egypt. Neither is his vehemence focused on his exclusion from the political dis-

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[93]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 47

course, but instead on the exclusion of God´s sovereignty from the political arena. The extremist tendencies in these passages are therefore marginal, and the fact that the Egyptian state repressed most political opposition and challenge excludes Qutb´s potentially extremist advocacy from Joffés extremist label.

If we accept that human lordship is an established order, which would not be difficult in a repressive dictatorship, or that human sovereignty has a hegemonic position in the political discourse, which was a crucial part of the legitimisation of the Egyptian, nationalistic state, Qutb is again challenging this established order, which is radical.

3.2 God´s sovereignty encompasses everything

One crucial aspect of Qutb´s conception of sovereignty is the totality of God´s sovereignty – it is not limited to the political sphere. As Pasha writes, this mixing of theology and politics leaves no social sphere independent of God´s law[94], and this is a central principle in Qutb´s sovereignty concept. *Hakimiyyah*, or the meaning of God´s sovereignty, encompasses literally everything. It is a belief that God´s sovereignty rules and should rule every sphere of existence, from the inner life of a Muslim, to his social and political affairs, while also acknowledging God´s sovereignty over the universe or creation.

Qutb writes that callers to Islam should invite people to accept Islam´s fundamental belief, namely that Islam means to accept the creed *"la ilaha illa allah"* in its deepest sense, which is that "every aspect of life should be under the sovereignty of God, and those who rebel against God´s sovereignty and usurp it for themselves should be opposed; that this belief should be accepted by their hearts and minds and should be applied in their ways of living and in their practices".[95]

Qutb writes that the universe and everything in it obeys God and submits to His will, law and authority. That includes human beings, through our physical needs. However, God has prescribed the shariah for voluntary actions, and the only way to be in harmony with the universe and creation and our own human nature, as creatures of God, is to follow His prescribed shariah.[96]

Qutb finds a sign of this need for harmony in the conversation between Prophet Abraham and Nimrod in the Quran. The latter was a tyrant who "claimed absolute sovereignty over his subjects; yet he did not claim sovereignty over the heavens, the planets and stars." Nimrod went speechless when Abraham argued that the One Who has authority over the universe also alone has authority over human beings.[97] Qutb quotes the Quran to demonstrate this point.

> Have you considered the case of the man who argued with Abraham
> concerning his Sustainer, because God had given him rule over a
> country? When Abraham said: "My Lord is He Who gives life and

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[94]Pasha, *Political theology and sovereignty*, p. 346
[95]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 21
[96]Ibid, p. 58-60
[97]Ibid, p. 62

Who gives death", he replied: "I give life and I give death." Abraham said: "Indeed, God brings out the sun from the east. Then do you bring it out from the west?" Then the unbeliever became speechless. And God does not guide the evil-doing people (Quran 2:258).[98]

Furthermore, Qutb writes that the only societies that exist are Islamic or *jahili*. The Islamic society follows Islam in belief, ways of worship, law and organization, as well as morals and manners. A society is thus not Islamic because people call themselves Muslim and pray, fast and perform pilgrimage, if Islamic law has no status.[99]

Jahili societies come in different forms, but all are ignorant of the divine guidance. One form is where God´s existence is acknowledged, but "His domain is restricted to the heavens and His rule on earth is suspended". The Shari´ah and the values prescribed by Him have no place in the scheme of life. People are permitted to visit places of worship, but the Shari´ah is not applied in the daily affairs of people. According to Qutb, these societies deny or suspend the sovereignty of God on earth, and he quotes Quran 43: 84 "It is He Who is Sovereign in the heavens and Sovereign (o)n the earth".[100]

This interpretation of God as sovereign in the heavens and on earth, this socio-political interpretation of its meaning, which leads to a dualistic world view and the exclusion of Muslims from the Muslim community – *takfir* – is a central aspect of Qutb´s *hakimiyyah* concept. The *hakimiyyah* concept revolves around what it means to believe in Gods sovereignty, which includes the practical signs or proofs that this true belief should take. It is confronting, because it puts the Islamic belief in God´s sovereignty down to a head – it specifies its practical, visible consequences.

Qutb specifies these implications further by claiming that the Islamic concept of the sovereignty of God means that all legal injunctions should be derived from God, and that we should judge according to those injunctions. He underlines that Shari´ah is not limited to legal injunctions, but refers to everything that God has legislated to order man´s life, including principles of belief, administration and

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[98]Ibid, p. 62
[99]Ibid, p. 63
[100]Ibid, p. 63

justice, morality and human relationships, as well as principles of knowledge. It also includes beliefs about God´s attributes, the nature of life and man, as well as political, social and economic principles, and principles of art and science "...with the intent that they reflect complete submission to God alone."[101]

Qutb finds that all artistic efforts are a reflection of a person´s concepts, beliefs and intuitions – the pictures of life and the world that exist in a person´s intuition. He therefore sees a need for a discussion about the relationship between art and literary thought, and divine guidance, and claims that this discussion will seem strange to "the common man" as well as writers about Islam and "Muslims who believe in the sovereignty of God in matters of law."[102]

In other words, a Muslim can believe in God´s sovereignty in legal matters, without seeing, understanding and acknowledging God´s sovereignty in arts and literature. By God´s sovereignty in arts and literature, it goes back to his concept of God´s sovereignty as encompassing not only the universe, human affairs, such as politics and social life, but a Muslim can and should also internalize the belief in God´s sovereignty so that it permeates through his mentalities or his "intuitions". This true belief in God´s sovereignty will then be reflected in the arts and literary writings of the Muslim.

Pasha´s understanding of Qutb´s *hakimiyyah* as an "expansive" conception of sovereignty, one which encompasses all human activity,[103] indicates that divine sovereignty should not include all human activity. It makes we wonder if it "should not" according to Islamic theology or according to a modern, English understanding of the meaning of sovereignty (which especially refers to an autonomous state), even when it refers to divine sovereignty. If the former, Qutb is challenging accepted interpretations in Islamic scholarly Quranic exegesis - a non-political, non-encompassing understanding of sovereignty.

Is this modern intellectual challenging the religious establishment with a new understanding of God´s sovereignty, which includes all spheres of human life? Is he not only a political radical but also a theological radical? He has already alienated himself and those who agree with his understanding from the mass of Muslims. No, I would argue. There is an important distinction that needs to be clarified between the belief in who God is, His attributes, and what these at-

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[101]Ibid, p. 73
[102]Ibid, p. 74
[103]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 113

tributes should mean for human action. Qutb is claiming that those who do not live by God´s sovereignty ruling and directing every part of life – the heart and inner beliefs, manners and morals, politics and social systems – do not actually believe in God´s sovereignty. His claim is still not focused on who God is, but rather on what one of His attributes means for human practice. This distinction is of course not completely separate, but it is still a matter of different focus – a focus on the divine or a focus on human beings. The human focus, the faith aspect of *hakimiyyah*, is what constitutes the political, theoretical aspect of Qutb´s sovereignty theology.

Apart from being a challenge to a secular, established order and dissent over assumptions about the nature of the global reality, Qutb´s views on the encompassing nature of God´s sovereignty is not clearly radical nor extreme, in spite of the totality of the view.

If Qutb had sovereignty as a political concept in mind when he wrote about God as the exclusive source of all power, as Qasim Zaman claims,[104]is difficult to prove or disprove. What I understand Qasim Zaman to mean by this is a primacy of the political over the theological thought of Qutb, which I would disagree with. However, Qasim Zaman is also saying here that Qutb´s conception of sovereignty is a political one, that he has a political understanding and definition of sovereignty, which lies at the heart of Islamist conceptions of state, law and Islam itself.[105] This is significant, though a theory, because it indicates that Qutb´s understanding of the Quranic words *hakim* and *malik* – names or attributes of God – have a political rather than cosmological meaning, or that the cosmological meaning includes a political meaning to Qutb. This latter understanding makes sense, since Qutb clearly has a cosmological and political, and actually total or all-encompassing, understanding of God´s sovereignty in Islam.

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[104]Qasim Zaman, *The sovereignty of God in modern Islamic thought,* p. 394
[105]Ibid, p. 394

3.3 From the heart to the state, not from above to below

God´s sovereignty is encompassing, but there is also a ladder or steps that the belief in God´s sovereignty must take in a particular order. A process of spiritual purification must take place before a Muslim is ready to practice belief in God´s sovereignty in politics.

Regarding the earliest generation of Muslims, Qutb claims that they were granted the great trust of the awareness of being God´s representatives on earth only when they had become morally pure. This moral purity was manifested in their steadfastness, their relinquishment of personal desires and pride of lineage, nationality, country, tribe or household, and when they were not expecting any reward in this world and desired the victory of the Islamic message and the establishment of Islam on earth by their hands.[106]

> Since they were pure in faith, the requirement for which is that God´s sovereignty alone extended over hearts and consciences in human relationships and morals, in lives and possessions, in modes and manners, God Most High knew that they would be true guardians of the political authority, which would be entrusted to them so that they would establish the divine law and the divine justice. He knew they would not use it to benefit their own selves or their families or tribes or nation, but would dedicate this authority purely to the service of God´s religion and laws, as they knew that the true source of authority is God alone and that they were only trustees.[107]

In other words, God´s sovereignty cannot coexist with another´s sovereignty in any sphere. The only way to rule, politically or otherwise, on earth without usurping God´s sovereignty is to acknowledge that He is the giver and source of the authority and power that you have been given. Internalizing this message and truth takes time and effort, and is accomplished through a process of spiritual purification.

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[106]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 18
[107]Ibid, p. 18

Pure faith means that "...God´s sovereignty alone extends over hearts and consciences in human relationships and morals, in lives and possessions, in modes and manners". It is thus an awareness of God´s complete sovereignty over all spheres of life. This faith should be reflected in everything from mentalities and behaviours to practical matters in the social and political world, and when it does, a Muslim is ready to receive political power.

This faith aspect of the sovereignty concept is perhaps what is unique and striking in Qutb´s political thought. He does not focus on the specifics of what Muslims should do politically, not the form and practical details of an Islamic government. He advocates for the necessity of practical action, and the practical implementation of God´s law in human life and politics, but it remains general. It is a point and an idea, not a worked out system. This allows different readers to subscribe to his sovereignty concept, while their method of implementing and working towards it can differ greatly.

This faith-focused and general aspect of the sovereignty concept excludes it from most radical and extremist criteria. Extremism usually includes violence in the form of asymmetric warfare, a marginalisation from the state and social movements, a vehemence related to the exclusion from the political discourse, networks with a restricted number of members rather than movements as well as clandestine operations and use of violence to challenge the state´s monopoly on violence and the existence of the state. Qutb is most often general enough not to fall into these categories, while many groups who are influenced by his ideas easily could.

The only radical aspect that is consistently present in his sovereignty concept is the challenge of the established, secular order of today´s world and any discourse that excludes God as exclusive sovereign over every sphere of human life, and it would possibly not be difficult to show that such a hegemony exists in our liberal democratic contemporary global political discourse, and other discourses. The belief that God´s sovereignty should permeate every aspect of human life, and that only those who have reached this spiritual purity will rule the polity with justice and the natural order of the universe, is indeed radical in a post-enlightenment, liberal and democratic context, where human autonomy a freedom (synonyms to

sovereignty) is highly valued and political power is based on a belief that sovereignty should come from the people.[108]

The claim that a Muslim should be spiritually pure before receiving political power shows that Qutb does not advocate for a "from above to below" approach to religion and politics, where religion should be imposed on people through political authorities. Instead, people should purify themselves, by acknowledging God´s sovereignty in all spheres of life, and only after that will they be mature to practice political influence and power. He is not then, directing his propagation to non-Muslims.

He writes that Islam is a practical religion that has come to order the practical affairs of life. Its legislation, however, is only concerned with societies that have accepted the sovereignty of God. Islam is not a mere theory, but rather is a religion that works with reality. A Muslim community that believes in "*la ilaha illa allah*", committed to only obey God, deny all other authority and challenge the legality of any law that is not based on the creed must therefore come into existence in order for Islam to be implemented in a society and polity.[109]

According to Qutb, the confession of faith "*la ilaha illa Allah*" (there is no deity except God) contains a meaning of sovereignty. Specifically that *uluhiyah* (worship) means sovereignty.[110] This is an interesting claim because the creed is sometimes translated as "none has the right to be worshipped except God".[111] If worship means sovereignty, it is indeed in the actual creed, and therefore absolutely crucial to Islamic belief. However, one wonders where Qutb got this translation and understanding of *uluhiyah*. Either way, Qutb futher claims that this exclusive sovereignty of God meant taking away the authority of priest, leaders of tribes, the wealthy and the rulers.[112]

It meant that only God´s authority would prevail in the heart and conscience, in matters pertaining to religious observances and in the af-

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[108]Ball, Terence, Dagger, Richard, Girvetz, Harry K. and Minogue, Kenneth. "Liberalism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 Feb. 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism. Accessed 2 June 2021; "Democracy."*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.
[109]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 19-20
[110]Ibid, p. 13
[111]Bin Baaz, Abdullah. *Clarifying the meaning of la ilaha illa Allah.* Al Hujjah Publications, 2014. p. 1
[112]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 13

fairs of life such as business, the distribution of wealth and the dispensation of justice – in short, in the souls and bodies of men.[113]

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[113]Ibid, p. 13

3.4 A practical theology

Qutb´s concept of God´s sovereignty is focused on what it means to believe in God, which crucially includes His sovereignty. The concept can perhaps be described as a doctrine or an interpretation of what God´s sovereignty means for Muslims. The starting point for his political advocacy is always God, His attributes and belief in God. For that reason, I would argue that Qutb´s concept of sovereignty is a theology, in which political thought is an aspect, and it is thus not a political philosophy. The foundation is theology, and one thing that follows from the theology is a political system and political action. Therefore the sovereignty concept should be understood as a theology, but a practical theology, since the practical implications of this theology are an inherent part of the theology.

> The theoretical foundation of Islam, in every period of history, has been to witness "*la ilaha illa allah*" – which means to bear witness that the only true deity is God, that He is the Sustainer, that He is the Ruler of the universe, and that He is the Real Sovereign; to believe in Him in one´s heart, to worship Him alone, and to put into practice His laws. Without this complete acceptance of "*la ilaha illa allah*", which differentiates one who says he is a Muslim from a non-Muslim, there cannot be any practical significance to this utterance, nor will it have any weight according to Islamic law.[114]

He also argues against those who view Islam as a theory, and something to merely be studied academically, and claims that it is instead both theory and practices, that movement and action, putting the religion into practice whilst also believing in its foundation, is the true Islamic method.[115] He writes about those people "...as if nothing were lacking except for the enforcement of the Islamic Law except research in jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and its details, as if everyone had agreed upon the sovereignty of God and were willing to submit to His laws…"[116]

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[114]Ibid, p. 29
[115]Ibid, p. 22-26
[116]Ibid, p. 26

This could be a critique of the Islamic scholars, who "studied increasingly archaic texts instead of making Islam relevant today",[117] as well as a critique of his own intellectual, secular university environment. He speaks like a true activist.

It is notable that he alienates himself from several of his contexts – he criticizes the academic environment, or at least its belief in its own sufficiency, he alienates himself from the Muslim community by making *takfir* on those who do not live out God´s sovereignty in every sphere (see above), and he criticises the Islamic jurisprudential environment.

A criteria for radicalism is that dissent and challenge is expressed on the individual level and through social movements, where alienation is articulated so that it resonates as a shared overview or schemata which becomes prescriptive. Qutb´s concept of God´s sovereignty is a challenge to society and the state order, as well as communities that he is a part of, and his emphasis on its practical implications is prescriptive. It is both focused on individual, spiritual purity and that those who become spiritually pure should challenge the state, take it over to implement God´s laws and His sovereignty. If these rebels should form a social movement or a clandestine network, which would be extremist rather than radical, is not entirely clear.

Qutb is critical of research scholars with the "defeated mentality" that have adopted the Western concept of religion, which is defined as mere belief in the heart, void of the practical affairs of life. For that reason, they see religious wars as wars to impose belief on the hearts of people. He claims that this does not apply to Islam. Instead, Islam is the divinely ordained way of life, which "establishes the Lordship of God alone – that is, the sovereignty of God – and orders practical life in all its daily details." *Jihad* then means to strive to make this divine system dominant in the world. He underlines that belief depends on personal opinion and there should be no obstacles to freedom of personal belief.[118]

This raises questions around the details of how this divine system should be implemented and how it would look in practice. Either way, it is clear that he advocates for religious freedom, while still having a polity and society that submits to and implements God´s laws and principles. The implementation of Islamic

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[117]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 62
[118]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 49

laws, of God´s rightful sovereignty on earth, is thus compatible with freedom of religion and freedom of faith. God´s sovereignty in practical matters of state and society does not involve oppression or imposition. This shows that Qutb directs the political advocacy and call for *jihad* towards political elites and systems rather than the populations within states.

This is further enforced when he writes that the task of establishing the dominion of God on earth, abolishing the dominion of man, taking away sovereignty from the usurpers to revert it to God, and enforcing the divine Law and abolishing the man-made laws, cannot be accomplished through preaching alone, since the oppressive usurpers will not give up their power through mere preaching.[119]

> This declaration of the freedom of man on the earth from every authority except that of God, and the declaration that sovereignty is God´s alone and that He is the Lord of the universe, is not merely a theoretical, philosophical and passive proclamation. It is a positive, practical and dynamic message with a view to bringing about the implementation of the Shari´ah of God and actually freeing people from their servitude to other men to bring them into the service of God, the One without associates. This cannot be attained unless both "preaching" and "the movement" are used.**[120]**

Again the lack of specifics around the form of this "movement" makes it impossible to know if he imagines a clandestine network (extremist) or a social movement (radical). Keep in mind that this is a translation from Arabic, so the use of the word "movement" does not necessarily indicate a social movement in the English sense that we imagine. It is unspecified how this movement should operate and what form it should take. What is clear, however, is that it should challenge the state, indeed any state that is not based on the exclusive sovereignty of God.

The radical criteria of challenging an established order that is usually associated with the legitimisation of the state and its dominant elites, is clear in these

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[119]Ibid, p. 36-37
[120]Ibid, p. 37

passages, where Qutb completely undermines the legitimacy of secular (which includes nationalist) states and secular rulers, and advocates for *jihad* against it (if we consider the political establishment as an established order).

This practical theology, and the call for jihad, is undeniably prescriptive, and since the dissent over the prevailing norms is expressed as an individual struggle as well as something that should take the form of some sort of movement in society, it can be considered radical. Especially when considering that Qutb (in part 3.2) articulates the alienation of true believers from the mass of people in his dualistic doctrine of the world as divided into *jahiliyyah* versus *hakimiyyah*. In other words, the articulation of the alienation of true believers in God´s sovereignty is prescriptive, so the *hakimiyyah* concept resonates as a shared interpretive overview of schemata of the world and politics and society which becomes entirely prescriptive through its emphasis on practical action and practical reflections of true belief, which includes *jihad*. These facts mean that the *hakimiyyah* concept is radical according to Joffés definition.

These examples from *Milestones* overall makes it clear that Qutb´s sovereignty concept is a theology that also involves, and is inseparable from, practical and political action. I therefore agree with Pasha that Qutb´s sovereignty concept shows that his thought is a political theology rather than a theological politics.[121] Basically everything Qutb claims about politics is grounded in his view of God, in theology. God´s sovereignty is the starting point and the foundation of his ideas about what Muslims should do, how they should act, and political action is one part of human life. Politics is thus a subcategory in the theology of *hakimiyyah*.

I would therefore disagree with Khatab´s view that Qutb sees Islam as both a religion and a state.[122] This claim naturally raises the question of what is meant by "religion" in this case, but whatever the definition is, it puts religion and state on the same level in Qutb´s thought. A mix between two things does not necessary exclude a hierarchy between them. Making two things inseparable does not make them equal. Instead, it is quite clear that Qutb has religion – by religion I mean faith and theology, i.e. a view of God – as the starting point and foundation for

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[121]Pasha, *Political theology and sovereignty*, p. 360-361
[122]Khatab, *Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah in the thought of Sayyid Qutb,* p. 145-157

political claims. Politics and state is thus a category under or within religion in Qutb´s thought in Milestones.

Perhaps Khatab makes this sort of connection because Qutb´s concept of divine sovereignty makes politics an inseparable aspect of Islamic faith – you cannot be a Muslim without believing in God´s sovereignty, and belief in God´s sovereignty includes political ideology and state system. When something is inseparable from something else, they land on the same level, in some sense. However, just like Qutb sees politics as a crucial aspect of Islamic faith and belief, there are many social and spiritual aspects of belief in God´s sovereignty, and we would not say that Qutb views Islam as both a religion and a prayer, or as a religion and a fast. There is thus a problem in putting an aspect (state) of a whole (Islam, religion) as a companion of the whole rather than leaving it as an aspect or part of the greater, encompassing thing (religion).

I would argue that the distinction between political thought and theology is important, because we need to understand what something is to engage in it and join the discourse in a meaningful way. If we understand Qutb´s sovereignty concept as political thought and ideology, our response to it and engagement with his writing will probably fall in a political framework, where you discuss the form of political systems and advantages and disadvantages with different political practices. If we understand his thought as a theology, first and foremost, we realize that we must engage with the theology to get anywhere in the discussion. We must realize that the discussion is a theological one with political consequences, rather than a mere political discourse that follows a political framework.

This is important because of the centrality of the concept of God´s sovereignty in Islamist ideologies and political movements and projects. It is the basis and foundation of most projects for an Islamic state or polity, not only for Qutb and those who subscribe to his ideas, but many Islamic political thinkers and movements.[123]

The mixing of religion and politics is a notable aspect of modern Islamic (political) thought, and it puts Qutb in his Muslim Brotherhood context. As Hjärpe writes, a characteristic of Banna and Islamist movements today is to view Islam as a *minhaj* (method, program), which entails a shift from religion as religiosity to

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[123]Qasim Zaman, *The sovereignty of God in modern Islamic thought,* p. 390; 394

religion as state system.[124] This fact makes it important to keep in mind that the politics spring out of the theology, rather than it being a political ideology which includes religious principles. Religion is primary and politics secondary, which means that the theology is the basis and foundation of the political thought and action. I would argue that discussions and debates that deal with details and forms often become fruitless when the foundation that they stand on is ignored or put aside.

Pasha´s description of Qutb´s sovereignty concept as a sacralization of politics, which resists the traditional separation of politics and faith in Islam, and instead recognizes a faith dimension in Islamic politics,[125]is an encompassing description of Qutb´s sovereignty concept in my opinion. Qutb´s discussion on God´s sovereignty is not focused on the technicalities of what Muslims should do politically, or the details of how a true Islamic state should operate, or what is politically correct action according to Islam, but instead the focus is on what it means to believe in God and His sovereignty, and how that should manifest in practice in political action and organization. It is general and deeply theological, despite being a sort of program for a revolutionary vanguard[126] This is further evidence that the sovereignty concept in *Milestones* should be classified as theology rather than political thought.

[124]Hjärpe, *Islamismer*, p. 63
[125]Pasha, *Modernity´s Islamicist*, p. 102-104
[126]Gardell, *Bin Laden i våra hjärtan*, p. 89

4 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to reach a comprehensive understanding of the concept of sovereignty in *Milestones*, through answering the questions of how Qutb views God´s sovereignty in the political sphere, in spheres outside of politics, and if these ideas can be considered radical and/or extreme.

It has become clear that Qutb views politics as a crucial part of the belief in God´s sovereignty. It is necessary for Muslims to let God´s laws and the Islamic principles that He has revealed be the always-relevant guide in political affairs. That is how we acknowledge His sovereignty over us and over the earth, and that is how we avoid usurping His exclusive right to legitimate sovereignty, which always leads to tyranny, inequality and oppression of human beings.

Qutb proclaims that political systems and political action should be based on God´s exclusive sovereignty, and the aim of political activism and *jihad* should be to implement His sovereignty in the political sphere. God´s sovereignty should not, however, begin in politics and be imposed on people "from above", instead Muslims should start by purifying their souls from ignorance of God´s exclusive sovereignty, so that the belief in God´s sovereignty rules their souls. After that, they will be ready to practice political power in a way that is in line with God´s sovereignty, and the pure society will be ready to accept the divine political system.

Qutb´s conception of God´s sovereignty in the political sphere has one theological and one human focus. The theological aspect relates to his focus on political legitimacy, in other words, his proclamation that God is the only legitimate sovereign, that He is the only one who has any right to sovereignty, and that all human sovereignty is illegitimate and usurped from God.

The human aspect of the sovereignty concept relates to Qutb´s focus on what it means to believe in God as Sovereign. Or what it should mean in the practices and actions of a Muslim. A consequence of his conceptualization of what it means to believe in God´s sovereignty, and by extension the Islamic creed, and thus what it means to be a Muslim, is that he excludes a great number of self-proclaimed

Muslims from the category of Muslim – he makes *takfir* – sometimes rather bluntly and sometimes indirectly through his narrow definitions of what it means to believe. Belief in God´s sovereignty should, for example, entail that a political leader rules and judges by what God has revealed. If he does not acknowledge God´s exclusive sovereignty, and forms systems and practices based on his own will or inclinations, he is a denier of God´s sovereignty, which involves a denial or rejection of God himself.

This acknowledgment or denial of God is, however, not limited to the political sphere. True belief in God´s sovereignty is a concept of totality. This belief should permeate through every aspect of a Muslim´s soul and life. His attitudes and mentalities, manners and behaviour, as well as social and political systems and practices, should all be ruled or led by the acknowledgement and awareness of God as the only true sovereign. This state of being will then be reflected in the art and literature that truly Islamic societies produce.

Qutb´s conception, which is an interpretation and understanding, of God´s sovereignty in Islam, means that a Muslim should let every aspect of life, the inner as well as the practical life, be ruled and guided by God´s sovereignty, which in concrete form means that the principles, values and laws that He has revealed should be followed, as well as acknowledging this truth in one´s heart. From this perspective, Qutb´s sovereignty concept is not a political concept, but rather a theological concept which includes political action, among other things.

The extremist tendencies are barely present in this concept, given the absence of marginalisation by social movements, vehemence over political exclusion, and specified ideas of working in clandestine networks and using asymmetric warfare. The only criteria of extremism that the *hakimiyyah* concept fits into is "an active adoption of an ideology and associated praxis to challenge the state and its elites, usually through violence"[127], since Qutb finds a necessity to fight *jihad* against states and their elites when they usurp God´s sovereignty.

However, the general and non-specific exhortations to political action and revolution and *jihad*, keeps the text open to different, including extremist and excessively violent, interpretations of the text and different ways of implementing God´s sovereignty in a polity.

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[127]Joffé, *Islamist radicalisation in North Africa,* p. 1

The fact that Joffé excludes individuals and groups from the extremist label in cases where the state suppresses all opposition leads to the important point that *Milestones* is a product of an extreme political situation, where opposing views led to torture and imprisonment. Joffés exclusion underlines the fact that what is extreme in a free and open society is different from what is extreme in an Egyptian prison where activists are tortured and executed.

Qutb´s concept of God´s sovereignty consistently fits into the category of radicalism, since the concept itself is a challenge to established secular orders in society and politics. It challenges the legitimisation of the Egyptian Arab nationalist state, by claiming that political sovereignty on the basis of ethnicity or nationality is entirely illegitimate, instead God´s sovereignty is the only legitimate one.

It can be question whether the belief in human sovereignty, which is the binary opposite of God´s sovereignty, had a hegemonic status in the Egyptian political and ethical discourse when *Milestones* was written, given the prominence of the MB and other Islamist movements, who usually based the Islamic state project on the rightful sovereignty of God.[128]

From a modern Western perspective, however, it would be easier to prove a hegemony of human sovereignty in political and social discourses, given the prominence of secular ideologies such as liberalism, democracy and human rights. These ideologies are based on a belief in human autonomy, and in the case of democracy, that supreme power (sovereignty) is vested in the people within a nation state.[129] To proclaim that God is the only legitimate sovereign and that we should design our social and political systems according to His sovereign right to rule, is a challenge to the very foundation of these ideologies, and it challenges the hegemonic assumption that human beings have the right to legislate their own laws and be sovereigns over themselves. When you consider the expansionist goal of some of the proponents or missionaries of these ideologies, the *hakimiyyah* concept also challenges human cultural lordship and human ethical authority.

Radical ideas are interesting and dynamic because they challenge hegemonic assumptions, which forces us to question and reflect over that which we take for granted, and it can lead us study the history of the contemporary norms of our

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[128]Qasim Zaman, *The sovereignty of God in modern Islamic thought,* p. 390; 394
[129]"Democracy." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy. Accessed 2 Jun. 2021.

own society. Radical ideas are confronting because they do not allow us to keep our assumptions without being able to defend them intellectually. They shake our foundations, and from it spring the deepest and most interesting conversations.

Qutb´s concept of sovereignty contains several discussions. It is a discussion on what it means to believe in God in Islam, and how to practice Islam in our new, modern world. To Qutb, it is a dualistic world, where either the tyranny of human sovereignty rules, or the rightful sovereignty of God. This is also an interaction with this modern reality, and a challenge to its foundations.

The fact that much of the previous research has focused on the meaning of *hakimiyyah* and the concepts related to it, such as *uluhiyyah* (worship) and *jahiliyyah* (ignorance) in Qutb´s thought, as well as the influence it has had on radical and militant movements, there is a base to build further, more specified research on. Given the prominence of ideologies and philosophies such as liberalism, human rights and democracy in our modern world, and the disparity between their foundation and the concept of *hakimiyyah*, it would be interesting and fruitful to focus further research on the relationship between these philosophies and Islamist discourse with regard to the concept of legitimate sovereignty.

"It was possible for the Believers to save their lives by giving up their faith; but with how much loss to themselves, and with what a great loss to all mankind? They would have lost and would have killed this great truth, that life without belief is worthless, without freedom is degrading, and if tyrants are allowed to dominate men´s souls as well as their bodies, then it is entirely depraved."[130]

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[130]Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 105

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