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Constructing the Revolution:

The Social Psychological Development of Radical Spiritual Leaders

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Figure One. Sayyid Qutb in an Egyptian Jail

Sayyid Qutb's call for loyalty to God's oneness and to acknowledge God's sole authority and sovereignty was the spark that ignited the Islamic revolution against the enemies of Islam at home and abroad. The bloody chapters of this revolution continue to unfold day after day.

- Ayman al-Zawahiri

If anything ail a man, so that he does not perform his functions, if he have a pain in his bowels even... he forthwith sets about reforming — the world.

- Henry David Thoreau

Sayyid Qutb is widely acknowledged as the unchallenged Islamist ideologue of the past century. Virtually every piece of contemporary literature about Islamic terrorism makes at least a perfunctory reference to the radical spiritual leader. The dawn of the 20th century gave birth to several movements in the Middle East. Zionism, Arab Nationalism, and Radical Islamism, all came to the world stage in varying degrees, and it was Qutb that became the godfather of Islamist thought. Due to his role as the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), he was executed by the Egyptian government in 1966. Nevertheless, his legacy lives on.

Since the British occupation in 1882, modernity, secularism, and Western-style education were becoming more prevalent in Egyptian society. The rapid infusion of commerce, political diversity, and progressive culture created friction with Egypt's Islamic traditionalists. Perceived oppression under British rule was further exacerbated by the British Mandate of Palestine, the United Nations Partition of Palestine, and the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Israelis know it as The War of Independence, while Arabs know it as *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe). Calls for reform could be heard in Egypt long before 1948. However, the events that unfolded after the British Mandate of Palestine engendered an unforeseen level of discontent in the Arab world. Sayyid Qutb and the MB capitalized on this anger.¹

Qutb was born in 1906, in the northern Egyptian farming village of Musha. His family was caring, religious, and well-respected in the community.² While he may have been considered a pious child, nothing indicates his views were ever radical. Rather, the popularly-held belief is that his radicalization occurred over time. Several historical events are usually cited: the British occupation, *al-Nakba*, Qutb's experiences in the U.S., and the events he endured during imprisonment in Egypt. There is no doubt that all of these events played a major factor in his intellectual maturation. However, looking at these events alone reveals little about the social psychological reasons behind radicalization.

The Social Psychological Approach

Many social psychologists consider analyzing extremist behavior through an individual perspective to be hazardous, due to the fact that it does not take into account situational issues.³ Therefore, this study will focus on societal, situational, as well as individual issues. By dissected Qutb's culture, environment, and psychological development, the variables affecting his radicalization will be illuminated and greater issues about extremists can be raised.

There has been a dearth of literature dedicated to the mental makeup of terrorists and much of that literature will be utilized in this study. But the goal is to isolate an oft-overlooked subset of this research: the social psychological development of the radical spiritual leader. It is wildly irresponsible to make blanket statements about those involved in terrorism. Spiritual leaders cannot be grouped in with suicide bombers. Although we will encounter overlapping themes about how a leader and a follower are radicalized, the two are different cases. This distinction is critical for the purposes of this research.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Modern Islamism can best be understood by looking at the type of culture with which it is associated. Most social psychological research classifies cultures as either "individualist" or "collectivist." People of individualist cultures are more likely to be concerned with personal goals and achievements, and less likely to be bothered with social responsibilities or duties. Individualists also feel more compelled to be unique than to conform to societal standards.⁴ Collectivists, on the other hand, usually come from more traditional, religious, and ethnically

¹ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (New York: University of New York Press, 1996), 11.

² Sayyid Qutb. *A Child from the Village*. (Cairo: Dar al-Sharuq, 1946) xvi

³ Marc Sageman. *Leaderless Jihad*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 17

⁴ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. (Boulder: Westview, 1995) 51

homogenous environments.⁵ The individualist versus collectivist dynamic is critical to understanding the logic behind people's actions. No culture is completely individualist or completely collectivist⁶, but the direction a culture leans has a significant impact on its people.

Recently, a New York man was stabbed on the street while coming to the aid of a woman in distress. He lay in a pool of his own blood for over an hour as numerous people walked by and did nothing. By the time authorities arrived, the man was dead.⁷ This is a grim consequence of an individualist culture.⁸ Collectivist cultures have an equally troubling attribute: a tendency to commit political violence.

As this study progresses we will break down the more complex characteristics of collectivist cultures, and how they apply to Egypt during the time of Qutb. Egypt certainly falls into the collectivist realm.⁹ All cultures behave in unique ways, but there are overriding characteristics that differentiate collectivist from individualist cultures. Certain situational factors engender certain types of cultures, and the citizens of these societies inherently develop corresponding attributes. As the situational issues about Qutb's culture are raised, we will be able to identify the factors affecting his radicalization. Obviously, these factors are not absolute variables. Not every child from Musha grew up to be a radical Islamist. Nevertheless, by focusing on the themes involved in his development, we can gain an understanding about the cultural conditions that are most likely to produce radical thought.

Debunking Personality Disorder Explanations

Social psychological research has long dismissed the idea of terrorism as an act of irrationality or a product of a personality disorder.¹⁰ Attributing terrorism to insanity is a dismissive generalization that is not only inaccurate, but irresponsible. Little research supports the idea that terrorists have psychiatric debilities.¹¹ Terrorists may be misguided and hate-filled, but they are seldom "insane."^{*} Few terrorist organizations are going to accept a mentally unstable person, as they would undoubtedly serve as a security risk.¹² Indeed, al-Qaeda is no more likely to enlist a psychotic than the CIA. In fact, some psychologists have argued that most terrorists possess one fundamental characteristic: normality.¹³

The root causes of political violence cannot be explained through psychopathology and personality abnormalities. It is imperative that this be stated before more constructive topics are addressed. While people may find it comforting to think of terrorists as "crazy", the argument

⁵ Ibid. 87

⁶ Daphna Oyserman. "The Lens of Personhood: Viewing the Self and Others in a Multicultural Society" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol 65. (1993) 994

⁷ A. G. Sulzberger & Mick Meenan. "Questions Surround a Delay in Help for a Dying Man" *New York Times*. 4/25/10

⁸ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 104.

⁹ R. Hrair Dekmejian. *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*. (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1985) 10

¹⁰ Martha Crenshaw. "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century". *Political Psychology* (2000): 405

¹¹ Jerrold M. Post. *Leaders and Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior*. (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2000) 124

* Insanity is not a term used by behavioral scientists. It is a legal term that merely *implies* psychosis.

¹² Ibid. 124

¹³ J. Horgan. "The Search for the Terrorist Personality". *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Vol. 50, (2006) 121

has no grounds.¹⁴ We will find that aspects of Qutb's personality did play a role in his developmental process, but it was the societal and cultural factors that were most impactful.

The Individualist-Collectivist Dynamic

Individualist and collectivist cultures are distinguished by the actions and traits of “in-groups” and “out-groups”. Collectivists belong to in-groups. They are allegiant to its members, the group, and the group's overarching goals.¹⁵ By nature, collectivist groups are hostile towards out-groups. Out-groups are those not adhering to in-group ideology. An individual or any ambiguous collection of people can be considered an out-group. The only requirement is that it not be a member of the in-group.¹⁶ In-groups foster great disdain for those choosing not to conform. This means that collectivists are likely to conduct violent acts against out-groups as well as dissenting in-group members.¹⁷ This creates an environment where violence is tolerated as long as it serves the purposes of the group. The key theme to keep in mind is not necessarily the identity that collectivists take on, but rather the result that this identity has on their interactions with out-groups. Next we will examine the factors of Qutb's life and how they aided his radicalization. By identifying the key variables, we should be able to better understand how these in-group traits engender hostility.

Traits of the Collectivist

Collectivists are made, not born. There is no genealogical explanation for collectivism.¹⁸ It is a person's developmental process that dictates intellectual maturation. This means that parental influence often plays an important role. Not only do parents teach children about how to act within their in-group, but they show them how to interact with out-groups.¹⁹ Qutb's mother and father were powerful influences on his life. His father's piety and generous nature²⁰ significantly impacted young Sayyid. In his book, *Mashadid al-qiyamah (Scenes of Resurrection in the Quran)*, Qutb spoke of his father's impact. He stated, “When I was a young child you imprinted on my senses the fear of the Day of Judgement... Your daily life was an example of a man who was always aware of the Day of Accounting.”²¹

His mother's influence was equally powerful. After her death, all four of the Qutb children wrote an anthology, *al-Atyaf al-Arba'ah (The Four Phantoms)*, in her honor.²² In Qutb's earlier years, his mother was adamant about his spiritual obligations. She insisted that he attend the school that would best facilitate a religious education. In his book *al-Taswit al-fanni fi al-Quran (Artistic Portrayal in the Quran)*, Qutb wrote:

¹⁴ Jerrold M. Post, “Bret to the Bone: Psycho-Cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism”. *Political Psychology*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Aug., 2005) 616

¹⁵ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 9

¹⁶ Ibid. 10

¹⁷ Ibid. 111

¹⁸ Ibid. 179

¹⁹ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 64

²⁰ Sayyid Qutb. *A Child from the Village*. xvi

²¹ Sayyid Qutb. *Scenes of Resurrection in the Quran* (Cairo: Islamic Book Services, 2001) dedication page

²² Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. (New York: Praeger, 2005) 30

*When you sent me to the primary school in the village your greatest wish was that Allah might open my heart to memorize the Qur'an and that He might provide me with a melodious voice so that I could chant it for you...I have memorized the Quran and fulfilled a part of your wish.*²³

Qutb's parents did not radicalize him, but they generated the conditions where radicalization was most likely to occur. Religiosity is the most basic trait of collectivist cultures. China, one of the most widely-acknowledged collectivist societies, is greatly influenced by Confucius, Taoism, and Buddhism. All of which promote group responsibility and a dutiful temperament.²⁴ These are certainly ideals that existed in the Qutb family.

Obligations to the In-Group

Qutb developed a sense of duty early in life. His father was revered in the Musha community for his charitable acts. He donated sugar and tea to the local school and allowed destitute villagers to work on his farm for food and clothing.²⁵ Qutb was greatly influenced by his father's benevolence. Many of those working on the family farm were from neighboring villages. Young Qutb is known to have helped these men read and write letters.²⁶ Qutb's father was also an active member of a local nationalist party. While the party was not radical in its views, it is indicative of the elder's political activism.* Due to his philanthropic and intellectual disposition, illiterate villagers would often gather at his father's house. By the age of ten, Sayyid was reading the newspaper to them.²⁷

The sense of responsibility to the in-group would grow to personify Qutb's demeanor. In one of his most famous works, *al-adala al-Ijtima'iyya fil-Islam (Social Justice in Islam)*, Qutb quoted the Quran as stating, "The likeness of the believers in their mutual love, mercy and compassion is that of a single body; when one part of it is suffering the rest of the body joins it in fever and staying awake."²⁸ This is the culmination of years of living in a household and a culture that emphasized group responsibility and religious devotion. Parents, of course, are not the only ones urging in-group members to perform their civic duties. It is a group-wide mantra. Islamist in-groups are especially known for their dedication to social service. The MB, Hamas, and Hezbollah, all engage in extensive charitable works.* This "practice what you preach" strategy is greatly beneficial to group solidarity.

Obliging by the duties of the in-group allows members to further submit to the collective identity. In fact, the word *Islam* means "to submit" or "to submit to God." Developing this group identity is a basic tenant of the religion. But it is most virulently professed by those within Islamist circles. In Qutb's most famous work, *Mu'alim fil-Tariq (Milestones)*, he stated:

Islam, which means to bring human beings into submission to God, to free them from servitude to other human beings [individuals] so that they may devote themselves to

²³ Sayyid Qutb. *Artistic Portrayal in the Quran* (Cairo: Islamic Book Services, 2001) dedication page

²⁴ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 90.

²⁵ Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. 33

²⁶ Ibid.

* The MB was also a quasi-nationalist party, in that it sought to achieve a nation where there was no distinction between religion and state.

²⁷ Ibid. 32

²⁸ Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam* (Islamic Publications International, 2000)65-66

* Hezbollah's social services are so extensive that they even garner support from non-Muslims.

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.^{29*}

Submission to an individual, or to your own individual goals, is unacceptable. No human being is worthy of service.*

The period of time before the arrival of Islam is known as the era of *jahiliyyah* (ignorance), meaning humans were ignorant until the arrival of the prophet Mohammed. Qutb was famous for his theory on *jahiliyyah*. He used the term *jahili* to refer to anything un-Islamic. Qutb defined a *jahili* society as “any society other than the Muslim society...any society is a *jahili* society which does not dedicate itself to submission to God alone.”³⁰ An individual’s goals must be that of the *ummah* (community of believers). When the goals of the self are that of the group, you have collectivism.³¹ Those who develop the strongest allegiance to the in-group are most likely to endorse violent action against an out-group, or anyone else who poses a threat.³² It is the *group* that is at the forefront of the mind of suicide bombers. This, of course, is why radical Islamists refer to suicide bombers as martyrs. These are not ordinary criminals with materialistic aspirations, but altruists that seek to do what is best for the group.³³

Acknowledging the idea of terrorism as an act of altruism is crucial, because as mentioned, little research supports the idea that terrorists have psychiatric debilities.³⁴ There is a blurring of lines here between follower and leader, but as stated earlier, there are going to be some similarities in character, motivations, and logic. Specific attributes of the leader will be discussed later. Collectivists are far more likely to engage in political violence. But it is the in-group that engenders violence, not the individuals themselves. While certain inherent personal characteristics may have been responsible for making Qutb a leader, it was the system that made his radicalization possible.

Lack of Wealth

Although the Qutb family was better off than most in Musha, they were lower middle-class at best. In fact, the father was in financial debt for the majority of his life.³⁵ Economic hardship is a common characteristic of collectivists. In-groups are known to be most prominent in low-income environments.³⁶ There are varying theories for the reasons behind this phenomenon. Some purport that it is a result of parental influence.³⁷ The logic being that upper-

²⁹ Sayyid Qutb. *Milestones*. (Cairo: Islamic Book Services, 2001) 45

* This was written near the latter part of Qutb’s life, when his transformation to radicalization was complete.

* This is why images of Mohammed are forbidden. Mohammed was a prophet (i.e. a human being). Therefore, creating an image is perceived as idolatry.

³⁰ Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. 80

³¹ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 33

³² Leonard Weinberg & William Lee Eubank. “Cultural differences in the behavior of terrorists. Terrorism and Political Violence”. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 6 (1994) 28

³³ Bruce Hoffman. *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 37

³⁴ Jerrold M. Post. *Leaders and Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior*. 124

³⁵ Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. 33

³⁶ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 62

³⁷ J. R. Marjoribanks. “Sex composition of family siblings and family learning environments” *Psychological Reports* (1991) 97-98

class parents are more likely to instill individualist virtues in their children, by emphasizing the value of personal achievement, self-reliance, and wealth.³⁸ Lower-class families tend to preach dependence, conformity, and obedience. Therefore, when a child becomes an adult they will take on the qualities their parents advocated. A high-powered professional does not achieve upper-class status by conformity and obedience, but rather by goal-oriented entrepreneurial vigor.*

There is also data that suggests that occupations will dictate a culture's level of collectivism. Societies that are hunters, gatherers, and fisherman, are more likely to trade and interact amenably with other groups, which engenders a more pluralistic and individualist outlook. Agriculturally-based societies have less of a need to engage with outsiders, as they can ostensibly remain self-sufficient.³⁹ It may seem outlandish to suggest that Qutb turned to radicalism because his father was a farmer. Nevertheless, it is certainly worth noting. The attempt of this study is to identify the main situational factors that led to his radicalization, not one factor alone.*

Lack of Choices

With the exception of the Coptic Christians in the north, there are few other in-group options afforded to Egyptians. By and large, most citizens are conservative Muslims. When one in-group dominates a society, it has residual effects throughout.⁴⁰ Evidence shows that those living in these collectivist cultures have difficulty thinking counterfactually.⁴¹ It is difficult to doubt the in-group, when there is no out-group to raise questions. Therefore, one should not expect citizens raised in a monoculturalist society to possess a pluralistic disposition. It is not only the lack of in-group choices that affects societies, but also the lack of economic choices. This directly corresponds to the lack of wealth. A child raised by a wealthy family in a developed nation will inherently have a wider array of career options available to them. Qutb's writings gained him significant fame (most of it posthumously), but he certainly never achieved the kind of "success" that individualists seek.

One of the main causes of collectivism is "cultural simplicity" and "cultural tightness."⁴² Tightness and simplicity are factors of ethno-religious homogeneity, the presence of shared beliefs, and a relative equal distribution of resources.⁴³ Virtually all of these factors are applicable to Egypt. Individualist cultures, on the other hand, are complex and loose (multicultural). Cultures that are simple and tight emphasize conformity and discourage dissent.⁴⁴ Any deviation from the norm is met with severe criticism. Thus, in-group members often feel too embedded in their social environment to counter the culture's orthodoxy. This defense mechanism allows the in-group to weed out nonconformists and sustain conventionality.

³⁸ Ibid.

* The obvious counterpoint to this argument is the case of Osama Bin Laden. However, one could claim that his father's construction company aided the collectivist culture in Saudi Arabia by developing its infrastructure.

³⁹ M. Mead. *Cooperation and competition among primitive peoples*. Boston Beacon Press, (1967) 26

* Not every theory on situational factors can be mentioned here. For example, there have been some psychological studies dedicated to the effects a culture's climate has on its people. We will not address this issue.

⁴⁰ Jerrold M. Post. *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda*. (New York: Macmillan, 2007) 59

⁴¹ H. R. Markus, , & S. Kitayama, "Culture and Self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation". *Psychological Review* (1991b) 224

⁴² Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 57

⁴³ Ibid. 57-58

⁴⁴ Ibid. 53

The result is a system where enemies are easier to identify and perceived threats against the group are more pronounced.

Nothing indicates that Qutb ever entertained the idea of dissent. But the ability to suppress dissent is merely the result of a culture lacking viable alternatives. Intolerance for unconventional thought also applies to those ideas from out-groups. The obvious example of this is Islamist intolerance of the West. However, this consequence of collectivist culture is far more pervasive. Some psychological studies have even shown that students from collectivist cultures have difficulty integrating into individualist society life.⁴⁵

Before *al-Nakba* and his experience in prison, Qutb was a poet and literary critic. He was not yet the man he would become, but his collectivist tendencies were being formed. In 1946, he began writing for *al-Fikr al-Jadeed* (The New Thought)⁴⁶ an anti-establishment journal. His works received widespread attention from the MB and large swaths of Muslim youth. The journal was quickly shut down by the Egyptian government. It was determined that Qutb was to be jailed for his views. However, a former associate within the government sought an alternate solution. Qutb was instead sent to the U.S. to study at the Colorado College of Education.

The U.S. was a less than ideal destination for Qutb. He found fault in virtually all aspects of American culture. Qutb criticized everything from the relaxed nature of church services to the barbarity of American football.⁴⁷ He was even critical of jazz music, which he proclaimed, "...was created by the negroes to satisfy their primitive inclinations and their desire in noise on the one hand, and to arouse the vital dispositions on the other hand."⁴⁸ A beacon of tolerance Qutb was not. In a letter Qutb sent to a friend in Egypt, he summed up his views. He stated, "Here is alienation, the real alienation, the alienation of the soul and the thought, the alienation of the spirit and the body, here in that huge workshop they call the New World. I know now the extent of propaganda with which America inundates the world."⁴⁹

Qutb's distaste for Western culture was not something that occurred randomly. It was his years growing up in a collectivist culture that primed him for intolerance. Intellectual development manifests itself over an extended period of time.⁵⁰ Collectivism increases with age.⁵¹ If Qutb had traveled to the U.S. at a younger age, he likely would have been more accepting. His time in the U.S. did not radicalize him, but served as a mechanism to confirm his previously established belief in the West's moral and religious incompetence.

When Qutb returned to Egypt in 1950, his transition to extremist ideology was still not complete. His writings are evidence of this. The first theoretical piece produced by Qutb was *Social Justice in Islam*. Qutb would go on to publish seven different editions to the work. Each revision espoused a more fundamentalist tone. The differences are most apparent when juxtaposing statements from the first and seventh editions. In the first edition, Qutb wrote,

⁴⁵ W. R. Ulaszek. "Cultural differences in the perception of stress". Honors Bachelor of Science thesis. University of Illinois, Champaign. (1990)

⁴⁶ Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. 95

⁴⁷ Ibid. 117

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 118

⁵⁰ Craig D. Parks & D. Anh Vu. "Social Dilemma Behavior of Individuals from Highly Individualist and Collectivist Cultures" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Dec., 1994) 717

⁵¹ J.S. Noricks. "Age, abstract thinking, and the American concept of person". *American Anthropologist* 89 (1987) 667

"*Qiyas* (reasoning), *ijtihad* (interpretation) and wide authority left to *walt al-amr* (the head of state)... all these are living means for continual growth."⁵² By the seventh edition, that same statement was revised as, "*Ijtihad* is always open and wide authority should be left to the *imam* (leader) who governs by God's *Shariah* (law)."⁵³ The causes of this transformation were numerous. One could point to any number of collectivist situational factors that fueled such a stark transition, and none of these factors can be ignored.

Sense of History

History is more important to collectivists.⁵⁴ They feel a sense of belonging to an ancestral past. This imbues them not only with a bond to past in-group members, but an obligation to continue traditional practices. Individualists are less connected to their history. Anything that occurred in the past has no bearing on the personal goals they are currently pursuing. Real or perceived, there is a cyclical nature to Islam. The present day ascension to relevance of the *ummah* is referred to as the Arab Resurgence. Its arrival can be attributed to cyclicity. Religious fundamentalist groups often instill hope and pride in their members by pointing to periods of dormancy and revival. Consequently, any incident of great turmoil can be interpreted as a precursor to resurgence.⁵⁵ The perception of cyclicity gives hope to a culture that considers itself oppressed. So while the *ummah* may be facing a difficult situation, it is also undergoing an inevitable transformation.

Throughout history, leaders have arisen to return Islam to prominence. After the fall of the Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, and Ottoman empires, leaders such as Abu Hanifa, Salah al-Din, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, emerged to return distinction back to the faith.⁵⁶ Qutb is one of the main spiritual leaders of the current cycle. The idea of belonging to a collectivist culture is unlikely something Islamists contemplate. However, the idea of belonging to a group of extensive historical significance is a common talking point. In 1998, al-Qaeda issued their "Declaration to wage *Jihad* against the Jews and the Crusaders." It stated, "*Ulama* (Muslim intellectuals) throughout Islamic history are unanimously agreed that the *jihad* is an individual duty whenever the enemy tears into the lands of the Muslims."⁵⁷ Historical significance is not a concept that is lost by Islamists. Highlighting a group's place in history is an efficient device for radical spiritual leaders, because it is a natural trait of all collectivists.

Collectivist Traits in Focus

Not every trait of collectivist cultures can be addressed here. But hopefully the most poignant characteristics have been identified. There are various other ancillary indicators of collectivism, such as low-crime rate⁵⁸ and strong same-sex relationships.^{59*} But the main overriding characteristic that engenders collectivism is religiousness.⁶⁰ A firmly established

⁵² Sayyid Qutb. *A Child from the Village*. 205

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 10

⁵⁵ R. Hrair Dekmejian. *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*. (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1985) 9

⁵⁶ Ibid. 10

⁵⁷ Raymond Ibrahim. *The Al Qaeda Reader*. (New York: Broadway, 2007) 12

⁵⁸ M. R. Gottfredson, & T. Hirschi. *A General Theory of Crime*. (Stanford UP, 1990) 191

⁵⁹ W. B. Gudykuntz. *Approaches to the study of communications in Japan and the United States* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993) 18

* In Egypt, it is common for male friends to hold hands.

⁶⁰ Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism*. 87

belief system provides the framework by which structure, conformity, and obedience can be implemented. Religion alone is not responsible for radicalism, but it is the crucial prerequisite for collectivism.

The Leader

The uncanny powers of a leader manifests themselves not so much in the hold he has on the masses as in his ability to dominate and almost bewitch a small group of able men.

- Eric Hoffer in *True Believer*

Neither collectivism nor individualism is developed on its own. It is a process that occurs over time, due to situational factors, cultural attributes, and peer influence. While all these issues are relevant, it is influence that is most vital. Not parental influence, but influence from collectivist leaders. Without a leading voice to prop up in-group ideology, movements cannot gain strength and momentum. It is these voices that fill members with pride and remind them of their obligations. Mass movements do not rise unprompted.⁶¹

The radicalization process of followers and leaders is similar, but by no means identical. Leaders possess certain characteristics that distinguish them from others. The key trait of a leader is their ability to attract adulation from their peers.

Qutb was the youngest child in Musha to memorize the *Quran*. This garnered him much respect within his school. After conducting practice sessions with his fellow classmates, Qutb led recitation competitions against the local private school. In his autobiography, he described his school's success in the contests with great love and nostalgia.⁶² At the age of 13, Qutb began making speeches in mosques and public gatherings, denouncing the British occupation of Egypt.⁶³ These pieces of Qutb's childhood were early indications of his intelligence, piety, and leadership capabilities.

Osama Bin Laden was not a leader when he arrived in Afghanistan. He had to gain respect, demonstrate value, and display the ability to lead those around him. Leaders need followers,⁶⁴ but followers alone do not make a great leader. They must possess the ability to focus hatred on an enemy.⁶⁵ Just as Hitler unified the German people in their hatred of the Jews and Menachem Begin gained strength by voicing the threats to Israel from its Arab neighbors, Sayyid Qutb would eventually find his enemy to focus on.⁶⁶

The enemy serves as an explanation. Any difficulties collectives encounter cannot be attributed to the nature or actions of the group, because the group is infallible. Therefore, some out-group must be blamed. Imagine growing up in a poor rural area under occupation by a foreign army whose value and belief system runs entirely counter to that of your own. Your parents are deeply in debt and many villagers work for food alone. In a collectivist culture, the

⁶¹ Walter Reich. *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 12

⁶² Sayyid Qutb. *A Child from the Village*. 40

⁶³ Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. 32

⁶⁴ Jerrold M. Post. *Leaders and Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior*. (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2000) 6

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 7

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 102

presence of such profound grievances is volatile.⁶⁷ This is the environment that Sayyid Qutb was raised.

This is known as a “sense-making” explanation, which allows leaders to justify action against the enemy.⁶⁸ There are leaders and followers in individualist cultures. But as discussed, those in collectivist cultures are more obedient and cooperative. This is why collectivist followers are more susceptible to radicalization and collectivist leaders are able to promote a more extreme agenda.

The impact of a radical spiritual leader cannot be overstated. They are heroic figures that garner admiration and respect, often becoming the face of their group. Such stature is gained by experience, theological understanding, and charisma. To fully grasp the importance of a leader, one must consider the case of Sheik Ahmad Yassin (pictured right). As the founding spiritual leader of Hamas, Yassin was targeted by Israeli security forces. He spent over ten years in Israeli prisons, only being released during a prisoner swap in 1997. By this time, Yassin was blind, paraplegic, and bound to a wheelchair.⁶⁹ His return to Gaza was widely celebrated, as Hamas had sought his release for some time. Despite Yassin’s frail state, his reputation had grown to an even higher level. Therefore, he remained a target. In 2004, Israeli attack helicopters gunned down Yassin. The Israelis understood the effect of his influence.

In 1948, many people were looking for solutions after the Arab states failed to prevent *al-Nakba*. In 1948, Qutb wrote *Social Justice in Islam*, his first foray into Islamist literature. He did not become a Muslim Brother until 1951 or 1952, but his reputation as a leading voice in the Islamist movement was growing.⁷⁰

After the MB made an attempt on the life of Egyptian President Gamel Abdul Nasser in 1954, the group was promptly banned. Many MB members were either executed or incarcerated. Qutb was part of the latter. Although *Social Justice in Islam* was somewhat popular, it would be the work Qutb published after his time in prison that solidified his place in radical Islamist culture. While imprisoned he endured torturous conditions and witnessed the killing of numerous Muslim Brothers.⁷¹ Many believe that one event in particular affected Qutb.⁷² In 1957, 21 prisoners were beat to death in the Liman Tura prison. His two most famous books, *In the Shade of the Quran* and *Milestones*, were published following his release in 1964. But, it was *Milestones* that would serve as his penultimate diatribe. In it, he states:

The honor of martyrdom is achieved only when one is fighting in the cause of God, and if one is killed for any other purpose, this honor will not be attained. Any country which fights the Muslim because of his belief and prevents him from practicing his religion, and in which the Shari`ah (law) is suspended is Dar-ul-Harb (House of War), even though his family or his relatives or his people live in it, or his capital is invested and his trade or commerce is in that country; and any county where the Islamic faith is dominant and its shari'ah is operative is Dar-ul-Islam,

⁶⁷ Craig Summers & Eric Markusen. *Collective Violence: Harmful Behavior in Groups and Governments*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield) 180

⁶⁸ Jerrold M. Post, “Bret to the Bone: Psycho-Cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism” 622

⁶⁹ Jerrold M. Post. *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda*. 179

⁷⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *A Child from the Village*. xix

⁷¹ Ibid. xx

⁷² Adnan Musallam. *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*. 155

*even though the Muslim's family or relatives or his people do not live there, and he does not have any commercial relations with it.*⁷³

Qutb was released in 1964. However, he was quickly again accused of plotting against the government. He was rearrested several months after his release. *Milestones* served as the primary piece of evidence against him.⁷⁴ In 1966, Qutb was executed by hanging. A martyr was born. Qutb was radicalized by an array of factors. But few dispute that it was his time in incarceration where the process metastasized. The basic explanation, of course, is that prison conditions made Qutb angry and hate-filled. This explanation, however, is woefully insufficient.

One point of contention for social psychologists is the theory that radical leaders spout their frustration and anger at out-groups due to their own narcissistic tendencies (someone making public speeches at 13 would have to at least be considered self-absorbed). While the efficacy of theory is debatable, it plays directly into the psychological theory of the “mirror-hungry leader.”⁷⁵ A mirror-hungry leader relishes in their role. Their egos are fueled by the power and admiration they enjoy. If these leaders are prevented from playing this role, there are disastrous consequences. When this occurs, the theory is, “They will be destructive if the narcissistically wounded leader rages at the world for depriving him of ‘mirroring’ and enlists his followers in attacking it.”⁷⁶ Imprisonment of radical collectivist leaders like Sheik Ahmad Yassin, can raise their stature among the in-group. But as we see with the mirror-loving Qutb, it can also serve as a catalyst of the radicalization process. In-groups cannot survive without great leaders. There must be an icon upon which followers can relate to and idolize. If these icons do not exist, there can be no collective identity.*

It is the uniqueness of collectivist systems that engenders violence, not the individuals themselves.⁷⁷ While certain inherent personal characteristics were responsible for making Qutb a leader, it was the system that made his radicalization possible. Qutb is not without blame and his words are not to be dismissed, but the factors that shaped his intellectual maturation need to be acknowledged. He was an intelligent and passionate young man that succumbed to the anti-establishment fervor emanating in Egypt. His charisma and zeal could have been more peaceful and productive under ideal circumstances. Unfortunately, thousands are born daily into similar circumstances where a group's identity is defined more so by its hatred for an enemy than its own doctrine.

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* The “mirror-loving leader” is also known as the “destructive charismatic.”

⁷⁵ Jerrold M. Post, “Bret to the Bone: Psycho-Cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism” 192

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