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Review of doctoral thesis of Ronnie Azoulay entitled '*Sayyid Qutb
Reconsideration: Understanding the Impact of Qutb's Ideology on
Modern Radical Islamist Movement*' written under academic
supervision of Professor Radosław Fiedler, Ph.D., and secondary
supervision of Dr. Artur Pohl

1. General Overview

The ideology of radical Islam is quite a popular subject of research among researchers representing a wide spectrum of sciences, i.e. political scientists, sociologists, those interested in international relations and many others. Thus, Sayyid Qutb's ideology named also *qutbism* is one of the most interesting and important subjects undertaken by researchers dealing with Islamic issues, terrorism, international relations in the Middle East or internal policies of Middle Eastern states.

Nowadays, many radical Islamic groups are influenced by Qutb's ideology and thus they can justify their activity and terrorist acts. Using the notions of qutbism, they feel more legitimate among themselves and their supporters. The analysis of Qutb's ideology is, however, still not coherent and characterised by a lot of disparities. It is for this reason that researchers, experts, journalists as well as clergymen often make diverse interpretations of Qutb's assumptions and thoughts.

As stated by Ronnie Azoulay (a Ph.D. candidate) – Qutb's ideology needs to be analysed from many different perspectives (p. 3) . The analysis of this type should lead to a better understanding of Qutb's ideology, which I might agree with.

First of all, I would like to congratulate R. Azoulay on taking up a very difficult and specific topic. Analysing ideologies always causes a lot of trouble and brings about inaccuracies due to flexibility of interpretation and a fairly high potential for misinterpretation. Anyone who is an advocate of ideologies (obviously including qutbism) can extract some useful parts and try to prove his own right interpretation which can be in complete opposition to interpretations reached by other scholars. Thus, I would once again like to underline the importance of the subject matter chosen by R. Azoulay for his doctoral thesis.

Choosing such a subject matter made the Author conscious of many tasks that needed to be fulfilled during the time of preparation of the doctoral thesis. First of all, R. Azoulay had to become acquainted with fundamental writings of Sayyid Qutb. Then, he needed to make a selection of the most valuable ideological issues for his thesis. Finally, R. Azoulay had to evaluate all the different perspectives of Qutb's ideology that he had decided to consider and analyse in his thesis. This task involves many "traps", like a risk of taking a non-objective attitude, for example if a researcher is against radical Islamic movement and organisations, he might take for granted that Qutb's ideology is a collection of invaluable notions, and he may thus present a much more critical stance on the issue in question. On the other hand, if a researcher identifies himself with ideological values, he also represents a non-objective attitude and can easily misinterpret the ideological foundations and elements. In case of scientific research, both attitudes are inappropriate. It should be pointed out, however, that R. Azoulay effectively avoided such a biased perspective.

2. Topic of doctoral thesis

The topic of doctoral thesis properly relates to the contents of the thesis. In the title the Author uses the word 'reconsideration' which describes renewed analysis of Qutb's ideology, which is correct given the contents of the thesis. In the title much emphasis is also put on the impact of ideology on modern radical movement. In this way the Author covers the main problem of his thesis. Due to an increasing impact of Qutb's ideology on radical Islamic movements, this issue needs to be definitely reconsidered. A lot of radical Islamic groups that use terrorist methods label their own activity with Qutb's ideological notions and become deeply influenced by qutbism. In many cases, Qutb's ideology is misunderstood and accounts for many disparities.

3. Structure of the thesis

The Doctoral Thesis consists of the introduction; a glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms; seven chapters and references. The structure of the thesis is generally coherent and correlated with the thesis title. However, I have a few remarks and suggestions as to the structure of the dissertation. The first few are elementary and concern the composition of the thesis. The glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms should be placed before the introduction, because the introduction forms an integral part of the contents and it should not be separated by any other components.

Besides, the first chapter entitled 'Main Problematic Issues in Islamic Fundamentalism' plays a theoretical role in the thesis and is an appropriate component of the structure. Chapters two-six represent the essence of the thesis and focus on showing the ideology of Sayyid Qutb from a different perspective and with many reflections. In general, I consider this part to be a valuable content, although I also have a few serious remarks. In my opinion, the second chapter is inappropriately located due to deep analysis of gaps in research into Qutb's legacy. I might agree that this is an important and valuable chapter, yet I think that a different one should be created to include a description of fundamental assumptions of Qutb and the pillars of his ideology. It should be placed at this stage. Furthermore, analysis of the 'gaps in research into Qutb's legacy' should follow chapter five, which is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the most influential books of Qutb.

So, the structure of the thesis must be prepared in historical order with synchronic preservation of problematic order. In the thesis of R. Azoulay, the historical order got inappropriately mixed with the problematic order. It is unacceptable to place any issue regarding modern research before the historical chapters. It is not possible to explain views or perspectives of modern researchers without providing an explanation of the historical context of the analysed issues, in this case the ideology of Sayyid Qutb, applied as a basic introduction.

In my opinion, the thesis should be structured as follows: first, a theoretical chapter (originally located correctly); then the new chapter should be inserted to explain fundamental issues in the ideology of Qutb. This chapter might be linked with the original chapter five which relates to contribution of main Qutb's writings to the theory of Islamic

fundamentalism. The chapter on Muslim thinkers who influenced the ideology of Qutb should be next, followed by the chapter on the active and non-active radical Islamic groups which adopted the ideology of Qutb, while at the end the Author should include a reflection on the main stream of Western researchers, which should be combined with chapter two, originally – ‘Sayyid Qutb’s Legacy scarcely expressed in Modern research’. Finally, chapter seven entitled ‘Discussion, Analyzes and Conclusion’ should not be included as a chapter. It is obvious that the 11-page part of the thesis is just a conclusion and it should be presented in this way.

I have also some remarks concerning the composition of references. The Author did not differentiate bibliography in terms of types of sources, which is obligatory in scientific research. All of the sources are lumped together and I have no idea why R. Azoulay did not put in a little more effort to organize it properly. It should be organized in order: documents; monographs, edited publications; articles; internet sources. However, due to the topic related to Qutb’s writings, all his works used in the thesis might be located in the part ‘documents’.

4. Methodological Evaluation

The description of methodological issues is contained in the introduction. The Author presents there: aims of research; main research thesis along with research questions as well as the defined methods and analyses he applied in his work in order to verify the main research thesis. All these components must be located in the introduction, and it was done so by R. Azoulay. However, I would like to make some remarks on this part of evaluation of the thesis. First of all, the methodological description is not composed properly. The Author should point out the aims, research thesis alongside research questions and also methods and analyses one by one, to make it more clear and orderly. In the reviewed thesis, the methodological issues are described in a chaotic manner, which makes the reviewer confused. First of all, research hypothesis (p. 4) is directly connected with research questions located at the end of the introduction (p. 8). Additionally, the Author puts some different questions (page 3) just below his description of the aims of the thesis. I presume that these two questions are part of research questions in the thesis, so the Author is the only one who knows why the set of research questions has been split.

Research hypothesis is correlated with the aims of the thesis, which is in my opinion a key to methodological compliance. As aims of the work the Author considered a contribution of Sayyid Qutb's work to Islamic groups activity, and because of the al-Qaeda attacks in 2001 the need for analysing the ideology of Qutb's greatly increased, so it pushed the Author to re-examination of Western researchers' claims of high influence of Qutb's theories on radical Islamic movements. Due to a large number of disparities in the examination of Qutb's thoughts this need has been thoroughly proven.

The Author selects the Western researchers group and their attitude to the ideology of Qutb as a sort of subject of his thesis. Although it has not been admitted by the Author, I presume that he places himself among the Western researchers group, and as a broadly defined representative of Western research, he tries to re-examine this problematic issue. In fact, the assumption is clear, yet the attitude of Islamic researchers should be also presented in the thesis. It enables an attempt at comparing the different stances and attitudes with the subject of research. Because the attitude of Islamic researchers to the ideology of Qutb is not included, the analysis carried out in the thesis might be considered incomplete.

R. Azoulay pointed out that 'qualitative approach' is a key method of analysis applied in his work. First, I am deeply concerned about the proper use of this method and I cannot agree with its description included in the thesis. Qualitative methods are widely used in political science works and they are mainly applied in the framework of such techniques as observation or interview. R. Azoulay did not make any observations and did not carry out any interviews that would contribute to his thesis. Secondly, I do not agree that 'qualitative approach is fundamentally descriptive'. It is descriptive in the form of analyses of results after the application of a technique typical of this method. I strongly recommend that the Author should get acquainted with the book *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (London 1995) edited by David Marsh and Gerry Stoker and in particular with chapter 7 devoted to qualitative analysis.

On page 6 the Author lists ten principles of research methodology. In my opinion, it is unnecessary and I have no idea why this list has been compiled. It is not a collection of methods or techniques used in the thesis. It seems to be a collection of definitions of techniques and attitudes serving the analysis set in no order whatsoever. If the Author wanted to make such a set of definitions he should have described and listed the techniques used in the thesis, which has not been done.

According to the information on methodological issues, the Author applied the qualitative approach only. Assuming that it has not been done properly, the quantity of applied methods in the thesis is not satisfactory. However, the Author used a few more methods which have not been mentioned in the introduction, thus he might be unaware of using them. They include: a comparative method when he compares attitudes and interpretation of Qutb's writing made by different researchers; statistical analysis characterised by a set of percentage values in surveys (i.e. p. 32); historical analysis with regard to historical explanations of the phenomena actually applied by the Author in relation to Islamic thinkers who shaped the Qutb's theory for instance, and obviously, the analysis and interpretation of the source documents, i.e. Qutb's writing in case of the thesis.

R. Azoulay separated from the introduction the part entitled 'literature review' in which he carried out critical analysis of available books, articles and materials used in his doctoral thesis, which has been done correctly. R. Azoulay concentrated on the names of authors and the selected books as regards perception of Qutb's ideology. Another thing worth doing might be presenting his personal attitude to the selected books and indicating the most valuable ones and the ones that appear to be useless.

5. Evaluation of the contents

The Author has become well acquainted with the writings of Qutb. The analysis of his works, particularly the two sources: *Milestones* and *Shade of the Qur'an*, is solid and profound. It shows that R. Azoulay, applying many different perspectives, can define his own stance in relation to all the disparities in Qutb's theories. In his thesis, the Author a large number of times shows the existence of a cause and effect relationship leading to a logical line of reasoning in the writings of Qutb. This logical explanation of reasons to support radical Islamic theories has fascinated politicians and leaders as well as ordinary members of radical Islamic groups, similarly as many researchers throughout the world including R. Azoulay, who devoted a lot of time to compose his own thesis in order to present the results of Qutb's ideology reconsideration.

R. Azoulay clearly presents theories of all the thinkers that had an impact on the ideology of Sayyid Qutb. He explains the specificity of ideological foundations of Ibn Taymiyya,

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, Mawlana Abul Ala al-Mawdudi who contributed a lot to the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism.

The Author selected Qutb's writings and considered these two aforementioned sources (*Milestones* and *Shade of the Qur'an*) as the most valuable and representative of the ideology of Qutb, which I consider an adequate choice. As regards presentation of radical Islamic groups influenced by the ideology of Qutb, the Author selected the most important groups and movements like the Taliban, the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and also referred to Shia groups in the subchapter entitled "Shia". In particular I have a number of remarks as to the part relating to Shias influenced by the ideology of Qutb. First of all, the chapter is devoted to radical Islamic movements or groups, so the subchapter 'Shia' is not properly named, it does not refer to any radical group, and it is in contradiction to the titles of the other subchapters, such as 'Taliban', 'Islamic State' or 'al-Qaeda'. The Author tries to prove that Shia thinkers and revolutionists, like Ayatollah Khomeini, were deeply influenced by Qutb's writings drawing a comparison that Qutb was against the Nasser regime and treated it as illegal, while Khomeini had a similar opinion on the Shah regime. Besides, I do not find convincing the similarities between Qutb and Khomeini's theories pointed out by R. Azoulay, for example that both of them supported the idea of Islamic government. Actually it is obvious, because Qutb, similarly as Khomeini, demonstrated an anti-Western and pro-Islamic approach. I think that R. Azoulay should put more emphasis on the comparison of ideological details of these two ideologies (qutbism and khomeinism). Instead of this, he describes the Shia religion specificity and customs looking back at the history, which in the conceptualization of the thesis is redundant.

Finally, I would like to make a few spelling remarks which also form part of the review. In general, the thesis is written in accurate language, and English terms from the domain of political science and international relations are used appropriately. The knowledge of Islamic vocabulary is also impressive. The Author does not make mistakes in the use of Arabic religious terms and, in many cases, he precisely explains their meaning. There are a few misspelled words, though. For example, there are numerous instances (p. 2 and p. 107 – twice) of 'Abdul Ala al-Mawdudi' although it should be – 'Abul Ala al-Mawdudi. In addition, I have found a few more minor mistakes and inadequacies. On page 34, there is a reference to Israeli parliamentarian 'Shahak' and the Author does not give exact information who is on his mind. On page 9 the Author refers to a publication of Dobrosława. Actually this is her first name,

while the surname of the person concerned is Wiktor-Mach, and R. Azoulay also failed to include it correctly in the bibliographical references.

6. Conclusion

The doctoral thesis presented by R. Azoulay represents a high standard research. It is a significant and valuable contribution to political science, in particular within the domain of radical Islamic ideology. I appreciate all the explanations of problematic ideological issues and scientific deliberation provided by the Author in his thesis. Despite all the suggestions and remarks made in the review, I have to admit that the doctoral thesis entitled '*Sayyid Qutb Reconsideration: Understanding the Impact of Qutb's Ideology on Modern Radical Islamist Movement*' **complies with all the requirements of a doctoral thesis, and thus, I grant Ronnie Azoulay, M.A. my permission to proceed further with his Ph.D. promotion.**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to the reviewer or supervisor, positioned to the right of the conclusion text.