

Islamist Texts in Practice: Commemorating Qutb in Turkey before and after the Arab Spring¹

Dunya D. Cakir

National University of Singapore

Abstract

In the past two decades, scholars have shown increasing interest in unpacking the ideational content of Islamic revivalism. Amidst modern Islamist ideologues, Sayyid Qutb received special attention from regional experts, historians and most recently political theorists who have produced critical exegeses of his political thought. Most notably, some read Qutb's writings through a comparative theoretic lens, juxtaposing his work to Western and Islamic traditions of political thought. By contrast, in this paper I outline the *lived* hermeneutics of Qutb's thought among contemporary Islamist activist-intellectuals affiliated with Özgür-Der, an Islamist civil society organization that has been a principal agent of Islamic revivalism in Turkey since its establishment in 1999. To that end, I examine three instances of commemorating Qutb at public events organized by Özgür-Der in 2001, 2009 and 2013 in Istanbul. Through these events, one can trace the continuities and novelties in how Islamist activists read Qutb in light of changing historical circumstances.

The paper argues that the Arab Spring uprising provides a rough turning point in occasioning different interpretations of Qutb's primary relevance to Islamist struggle in Turkey. What has been constant in Islamist readings of Qutb has been the emphasis upon the merging of faith and deed, working toward the rebuilding of a Qur'anic generation, the first followers of the Prophet. What changed in light of the Arab Spring have been the specific forms in which the integration of piety and praxis took shape. This analysis seeks to further our understanding of Qutb and Islamist politics in two ways: reading Qutb through the discursive practices of Qutbians helps recuperate the living and dynamic imprint of Qutb's political thought and flesh out the ways in which his intellectual legacy implicates Islamic activism in specific localities. Secondly, a micro-analysis of the specific politics that are inspired by influential Islamist texts helps us refine the more formulaic descriptions of the

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political project of Islamism—such as rejecting secularism or submitting to *shari'a*. Attending to that lived and living hermeneutics is necessary for a more nuanced, contextualized understanding of contemporary Islamist thought and practice.

Key words: Sayyid Qutb, Islamist intellectuals, Turkey, Özgür-Der, lived hermeneutics, commemoration, martyrdom, Arab Spring

Introduction

In the wake of 9/11, against the backdrop of popular depictions of Sayyid Qutb as “the philosopher of Islamic terror”,² scholars have shown increasing interest in unpacking his political thought. Approaching modern Islamist texts from an empathetic vantage point geared to understand and explain, regional specialists, historians and most recently political theorists have produced critical exegeses of Qutb’s writings.³ For instance, Andrew March reads Qutb in conjunction with Rousseau, Marx, and Rawls, highlighting converging and diverging concerns across distinct theoretical traditions.⁴ Roxanne Euben seeks to place Qutb’s fundamentalism, particularly his critique of modernity, alongside the active current of Western political thought that has taken modern rationalism as its object of criticism. Partaking in comparative political theory, these exegeses seek to treat Qutb as a political theorist rather than a pathology, putting his ideas into conversation with Western thought and highlighting common preoccupations. As Euben puts it, Qutb is not as “unfamiliar as he initially appears.”⁵

By contrast to exegeses that read Qutb’s texts with an intention of connecting his ideas to those of his contemporaries and predecessors, in this paper I outline the *lived* hermeneutics of Qutb’s thought.⁶ In other words, this paper reads Qutb through

² P. Berman, “The Philosopher of Islamic Terror,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2003.

³ For examples, see R. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism, A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); J. Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); A. March, “Taking People as They Are: Islam as a ‘Realistic Utopia’ in the Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb,” *American Political Science Review* 104 (2010), 189–207.

⁴ March, “Islam as Realistic Utopia,” 189–207.

⁵ R. Euben, “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism,” *Journal of Politics* 59/1 (1997), 28–55: 31.

⁶ The term “lived hermeneutics” refers to the ways in which a text is interpreted and lived by its own adherents. I derive the term from Farah Godrej’s “existential hermeneutic,” which refers to “a praxis-oriented existential transformation in which the reader learns to live by the very ideas expressed in a text.” As such, it is the opposite of treating a text as “an object of inquiry to be approached in a neutral, scientific manner.” Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.

Qutbians:⁷ it investigates not the thought of Qutb himself, but how his texts are read, interpreted, and deployed at specific moments in time and space by Islamist actors who adhere to his intellectual project. To do so, I focus on the Islamist activist-intellectuals affiliated with Özgür-Der, an Islamist civil society organization that has been a principal agent of Islamic revivalism in Turkey since its establishment in 1999.⁸

This paper works toward bridging the gap identified by Euben “between Qutb’s intent and how his arguments are disseminated, received, and reinterpreted.”⁹ To that end, I examine three public commemorations of Qutb’s martyrdom, held in Istanbul in 2001, 2009, and 2013, in which Qutb’s thought and example are raised as inspirations for Islamist activism.¹⁰ Through these events, organized by Özgür-Der, one can trace the manner in which activists read Qutb in light of changing historical circumstances. In these cases, I argue that the Arab Spring uprisings provide a rough turning point in occasioning different interpretations of Qutb’s primary relevance to Islamist struggle in Turkey. Prior to the Arab Spring, Özgür-Der activists invoked Qutb’s message as part of a critique of modernist, pro-liberal Islamic groups and politics in Turkey. With the Arab Spring, these activists read Qutb as the catalyst for a transnational solidarity among pious Muslims. To illustrate, whereas activists harked to *cabiliye* (ignorance of God’s authority, Arabic: *jabiliyya*) in 2001 and 2009 as part of an internal critique of Turkish Islamism, they spoke through the concept in 2013 as part of a critique of ongoing Western colonialism. These different readings also reflect and respond to political power in Turkey. Prior to the Arab Spring, Özgür-Der literati had frequently associated the pro-West, pro-market, pro-liberal politics of the AK Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) with the expansion of *cabiliye*. But with the pro-Islamist turn in the AKP’s foreign policy in

⁷ Being Qutbian, as understood by Islamist activist-intellectuals of Özgür-Der, does not and should not mean “idolizing Qutb,” which “Qutb himself would have objected to.” Instead, it corresponds to “conscious intellectual and political efforts to follow his example, and teachings while dynamically adapting his ideas to contemporary circumstances.” Interview with Bülent Yılmaz (head of Diyarbakır branch of Özgür-Der) on Sayyid Qutb, available online at: <http://www.haksozhaber.net/seyyid-kutub-pasifizme-cagirmadi-31966h.htm>.

⁸ Özgür-Der, Society for Free Thought and Educational Rights, was founded in 1999 in Istanbul to contest the official ban on wearing an Islamic headscarf in higher education, and other rights violations of the military intervention of 1997 that targeted Islamic sectors. Since its establishment, Özgür-Der has mounted an Islamist criticism of official secular ideology, militarism and nationalism promoted through the educational system. Moreover, it has been actively engaged in cultural and intellectual efforts to disseminate “a correct (*sabib*) Islamic consciousness” through its alternative education seminars, thematic panels and youth camps across the country. Qutb’s thought has been central to the group since its inception.

⁹ R. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism, A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁰ The empirical sources for the textual analysis of these three instances of public, Islamist readings of Qutb at commemoration events are: the published proceedings of the 2001 symposium, participant observation by the author at the 2009 public reunion, and the video recording of the 2013 Qutb night (broadcast live on Islamic TV channel). All translations from Turkish are the author’s.

the wake of the Arab Spring, the battle against *cabiliye* was seen as being waged abroad by the AK Party itself. While the concept remained central to the discourse of Turkey's Qutbians across time, changing circumstances altered its significance and purpose.

Ultimately, I argue that a praxis-oriented, local hermeneutics of Qutb's writings furthers our understanding of Islamist politics in two ways. First, reading Qutb through the discursive practices of Qutbians helps recuperate the living and dynamic imprint of Qutb's political thought and flesh out the ways in which his intellectual legacy implicates Islamic activism in specific localities. For a contextualized discussion of Islamist ideas in practice, it is necessary to attend to the creative engagements between texts and situated actors who feel urged to articulate concrete answers to the pressing issues of the present through these texts. Secondly, a micro-analysis of the specific politics that are inspired by influential Islamist texts helps us refine the more formulaic descriptions of the political project of Islamism—such as rejecting secularism or submitting to *shari'a*. As this paper seeks to demonstrate, Qutb's writings are continuously reinterpreted by specifically positioned Islamist groups and intellectuals around the world in the light of the contemporary developments that they face. Attending to that lived and living hermeneutics is key to an applied, contextualized understanding of contemporary Islamist thought.

Qutb Goes to Turkey

Qutb's ideas began to achieve an audience in Turkey following the February 1965 publication of "The Genuine Muslim: Sayyid Qutb" in the Islamist journal *Hilal*.¹¹ While containing sparse biographical data, it summarized the works of Qutb, including "Social Justice in Islam" and "This Religion is Islam." In 1966 *Hilal* worked again to publicize Qutb, announcing the news of his execution together with news of his latest publication, *Milestones*. Publicized in Turkey as "the book that brought execution," *Milestones* was translated in Turkish two months later. For Hamza Türkmen, a prominent intellectual within Özgür-Der, Islamic revivalism in Turkey received its initial sparks from Qutb's *Milestones*. Alongside burgeoning Islamic revivalism in Turkey in the 1970s, Qutb's works, especially after the Turkish translation of *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, were received with suspicion and criticism by traditionalist, right-wing Muslim intellectuals such as Sezai Karakoç and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek for its critical revision of Islamic history that equated the reign of the third caliph Uthman Ibn Affan (r. 644-56) with the beginning of Islam's fall into *jabiliyya*. The early reaction of the conservative Islamic sector notwithstanding, Qutb's books continued to be translated in Turkish by the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations in Kuwait and local publishers alike.

Since the 1960s, Qutb's ideas have profoundly shaped the worldview of Islamist groups in Turkey, though, as Bülent Yılmaz notes, "Qutb's ideas took on different

¹¹ This section borrows from Hamza Türkmen, who outlines the process of transculturation of Qutb's ideas in H. Türkmen, "Seyyid Kutub'un Mesajını Anlamak ve Geliştirebilmek" [Understanding and Developing the Message of Sayyid Qutb], in *İslami Mücadelede Öncü Şahsiyetler* [Pioneering Figures in the Islamic Struggle] (Istanbul: Ekin Yayınları, 2009), 242–44.

manifestations [*tezahür*] in different communities.”¹² In line with other Islamist activist-intellectuals at Özgür-Der, Yılmaz considers the two essential contributions of Qutb’s thought to be (1) his call to return to the Qur’an and (2) a gradualist, society-centered method of Islamic struggle predicated on the ways in which the first generation of Muslims (the direct addressees of the revelation) understood and “lived” the Qur’an. Yılmaz considers Islamist actors in Turkey to have historically misread this message: some understood Qutb’s Qur’anic generation to suggest a hasty, state-centered struggle to institute Islamic governance from above, whereas others misinterpreted his call to return to the Qur’an as demanding dissociation from worldly affairs.

Similarly for Türkmen, Qutb’s mature message in his post-1960 writings has not been sufficiently understood and furthered, nor has his Qur’an-centered project of *islâh* (reform) been socialized in a concrete and didactic manner among the Muslims in Turkey.¹³ In particular, he singles out the writings of a prominent Muslim intellectual, Ali Bulaç, as representative of a more general misunderstanding of Qutb. Bulaç, in his 2001 article “Terror and the Trajectory of the Islamic Movement”, accuses second-generation Islamists such as Qutb and Mawdudi for the heavy emphasis they placed upon a state-centered “formal Islam” (*resmi* Islam) instead of the “civil Islam.”¹⁴ This reading, for Türkmen, fails to grasp the intellectual evolution of Qutb’s thought and contradicts his objective to resuscitate the Qur’anic generation, which, “can only be explained with reference to such concepts within the Islamic tradition as *islâh* and *sunnetullah*,”¹⁵ instead of sociological constructs such as civil versus formal Islam.”

For Türkmen, such prevalent misreadings have been partly due to the meager efforts to disseminate a correct understanding of Qutb’s intellectual project.¹⁶ Indeed, until relatively recently Qutb remained a peripheral figure in Islamist public discourse in Turkey. Public events such as panels and symposiums that address Qutb’s message had been limited to two panels organized by IDKAM (Islamic World Cultural Center) on August 26, 1995 and August 24, 1996, entitled “Sayyid Qutb and the Qur’anic Generation”, followed

¹² *Islah Haber*, a Diyarbakır-based Islamist news website, interviewed Bülent Yılmaz on the contemporary meaning and imprint of Qutb’s thought, as part of their “interview series on Qutb” carried out in August 2012 to commemorate the 46th anniversary of Qutb’s martyrdom. References in this paragraph are taken from this interview. Full script is available at: <http://www.haksozhaber.net/seyyid-kutub-pasifizme-cagirmadi-31966h.htm>.

¹³ Türkmen laments the relative lack of understanding of Qutb’s message not only in Turkey but also among Egypt’s *Qutbiyyun* (active followers of Qutb) such as groups among the Muslim Brothers, salafist communities, at-Takfir wa al-Hijra, Jamaat-i Muslimin etc, in comparison to such Western scholars as “the young orientalist” Roxanne Euben. Türkmen, “Understanding Qutb,” 249-50.

¹⁴ A. Bulaç, “Teror ve Islami Hareketin Seyri”, *Zaman*, November 15, 2001. Quoted in Türkmen, “Understanding Qutb,” 258.

¹⁵ The word literally means the custom or the way of God. In the Qur’an, the term is used in the context of the unchanging universal laws of divine origin, which men ought to observe.

¹⁶ Türkmen, “Understanding Qutb,” 248.

by the “Sayyid Qutb Symposium” organized by Irfan Vakfi on December 21–22, 1996, on the 30th anniversary of Qutb’s martyrdom.

But in recent years Qutb and his thought have become more prominent in Islamist debate and politics in Turkey. The 35th and 40th anniversaries of his execution were commemorated in panels organized by Islamic associations (by Özgür-Der in 2001 and Medeniyet Derneği in 2006). Importantly, since 2009 Özgür-Der has been active in planning regular public events in commemoration of Qutb’s martyrdom, featuring lectures by Islamist public intellectuals, Qur’anic recitation, short videos on Qutb’s life and legacy, and mini-concerts by Islamist music bands. In addition, local branches of Özgür-Der, operating across Turkey, have hosted regular lectures on Qutb and his vision of a revived Qur’anic generation, aspiring to build a community of believers who would center existence and Islamic struggle around the Qur’an, understood not as an ossified “object” but “a constructive subject” (*inşa edici özne olan Kur’an*).¹⁷

What explains this efflorescence of Qutb in Turkey? The increase in Qutb-related public events is largely grounded in a flourishing Islamic civil society under the AK Party government, which, over the course of its rule, has sponsored the proliferation of Islamic organizations and educational initiatives. To put it another way, the easing of the secular state’s restrictions on Islamic civic life has led to a burst of activism and more vibrant intellectual debates among Turkey’s Islamists. But this broadened platform that enabled Islamic activists to expound their ideas has also provided the conditions for an Islamist *critique* of the AK Party. Until recently, Özgür-Der literati had used Qutb’s notion of an authenticated, pristine Islamic identity to question AK Party’s moderate Islam, one which allied Muslim identity with secularism, neoliberalism, and pro-Western politics. From the perspective of Özgür-Der’s Islamism, AK Party’s reconciliation of Islamic politics with Western modernity contravened Qutb’s project of an exemplary generation of Muslims purified of all un-Islamic ideological influences.

As promoted by Özgür-Der intellectuals, Qutb’s mature thought proposes a method of Islamic activism that envisions a long and arduous process of raising an exemplary pious generation, one which begins with “planting the seeds of Islamic morality, discipline [*terbiye*], and faith in society.”¹⁸ Qutb’s Qur’anic generation ideal posits the companions of Prophet Muhammad, who reconstructed their subjectivities after the Qur’an upon receiving its revelatory message, as role models to be emulated by contemporary Muslims. Accordingly, this amounts to scrutinizing and re-making one’s past sensibilities, habits, emotions, deeds and thoughts in line with the teachings of the Qur’an. In keeping

¹⁷ Abdülhakim Beyazyüz, board member of Özgür-Der’s Diyarbakır branch, interviewed by Islah Haber as part of their “interview series on Qutb,” carried out in August 2012 to commemorate the 46th anniversary of Qutb’s martyrdom. Full script is available at: <http://www.haksozhaber.net/seyyid-kutub-modasi-gecmis-bir-onder-degildir-32116h.htm>.

¹⁸ Excerpt from Ali Ihsan Kayagil’s lecture in the panel entitled “Seyyid Kutub’un Çizgisi ve Kur’an Nesli Ideali” organized by Özgür-Der’s Beykoz branch (Istanbul) as part of their monthly panel series, on January 31, 2014. A summary of the panel is available online in *haksozhaber.net*.

with their criticism of Turkey's wayward Islamists, Özgür-Der intellectuals also highlight the individual's duty to spread the Qur'anic message, inviting fellow Muslims to true piety.

The next sections will focus upon precisely this effort at dissemination, examining public events organized by Özgür-Der in commemoration of Qutb's martyrdom in 2001, 2009 and 2013. As will be shown, even though the doctrinal anchors of a Qutbian Islamist struggle, as understood by Islamist activist-intellectuals, resonate across time, the changing political contexts bring about different discursive practices, adversaries, polemics, and road maps for Islamist struggle. In each instance, Qutb's texts, though historically finite, are creatively read in the present and reconfigured in relation to the changing political dynamics that encapsulate (reading) actors, ones who revisit Qutb's ideas to illuminate their changing realities.

Reading Qutb prior to the Arab Spring: *Cabiliye* as Muslims' Intellectual Disunity and Capitulation to Western Modernity

On August 29, 2009, a local branch of Özgür-Der marked the 43rd anniversary of Qutb's martyrdom with a commemorative event in the Bağcılar district of Istanbul. Coinciding with the holy month of Ramadan, and following the fast-break at sunset, the meeting started at 9pm and lasted until midnight, hosting approximately 500 participants in the Bağcılar Municipality's Cultural Center in the outskirts of Istanbul's European side. Beginning with Qur'anic recitation, the event program included public lectures, the screening of a short documentary on Qutb's life, and a live performance by the Islamist music band Grup Yürüyüş.

In the conference hall hosting the event, both sides of the stage facing the audience were blanketed with a large Turkish flag on one end and an equally massive poster of Atatürk, the founder of the secular Republic, on the other. Imbued with the visual symbols of the Turkish state, the interior of the conference room was otherwise plainly dressed for the occasion: a handful of Özgür-Der flags carrying its symbol (a flying bird) and its (then) motto "resistance, justice, freedom" were posted on the wall behind the speaker's stand, together with a medium-sized poster of the event.

Three Islamist public intellectuals, Hamza Türkmen, Beşir Eryarsoy and Mehmet Pamak, delivered lectures on the content, meaning, and contemporary relevance of Qutb's legacy for Turkey's Muslims, drawing upon anecdotes from Qutb's life and struggle under Nasser's regime. The lectures were followed by the brief greeting speech of Iman Reyhan, the daughter-in-law of Nizan Reyhan, a Hamas member who died together with the rest of his family members in Israel's 2009 attack on Gaza. In contrast to the calm and monologic atmosphere during the lectures, the appearance of the guest

speaker from Hamas on stage stirred up a public display of solidarity among the audience, and led into *tekbir* calls¹⁹ by a vanguard cluster of standing men who had steadily congregated on both sides of the stage in the course of the event.

Türkmen's speech started off with a disclaimer: "we did not gather here today to extol Qutb."²⁰ The objective of this public reunion, he went on, was instead "to learn, analyze and take lessons from Qutb's life of struggle and the strategic expansions (*stratejik açılımlar*)" that he introduced to Islamist thought and method. Summarizing the trajectory of Qutb's life, Türkmen underscored the historical context of his birth and upbringing in Egypt as the high point of Western *cabiliye*²¹ and British imperialism. "It was a time when European imperialism, taking advantage of the internal dissolution of the fabric of Muslim *ümmet*²² that in due course had strayed away from its Qur'anic references, carved the Muslim geography into twelve new states, republics and kingdoms." Surveying Qutb's intellectual development, Türkmen particularly dwelled upon Qutb's post-1960 period culminating in *Milestones*, which presents "the hallmark of his mature thought and a manifesto the value of which has not been adequately understood by Muslims as it was by Nasser." In *Milestones*, Qutb sought to "render possible Islamic movements and communities that he respected and took part in, calling them to revise their methodological equipment, and renew themselves." A central contribution of this work, according to Türkmen, is Qutb's instrumentalist, strategic conception of Islamic communities (*cemaatler*) as stepping stones in the formation of "clusters of a Qur'anic generation" (*Kur'an nesli öbekleri*) that would eventually lead the world's Muslims in the re-construction of the transnational Muslim *ümmet*.

In his stage of intellectual maturity, Türkmen recounted, Qutb emphasized two priorities. The first duty of Muslims is to understand and disseminate the correct message of the Qur'an. The second is to form a Qur'anic society, a society of brotherhood grounded upon the principle of mutual consultation (*istişare*) and composed of individuals who craft themselves anew through Qur'anic commands and morality. This however should not be taken as a utopia, as an idealistic, abstract, political narrative. Instead, per Türkmen, Qutb's thought shows Muslims the possible and feasible, rather than calling them "to linger around with a master vision and unrealistic expectations." This vision is

¹⁹ The term refers to the proclamation that God is (the) greatest. To express faith and solidarity, one member shouts "*tekbir*" [Arabic: *takbīr*] and the audience responds "*Allahu Ekber*" [God is (the) greatest].

²⁰ The proceedings of the 2009 public meeting were recorded by the author during the event. References to individual lectures are based on the author's transcriptions and translations.

²¹ Türkmen describes Qutb's use of the term *cabiliye* [Arabic: *jabiliyya*] as social orders and structures that are not governed with divine provisions and do not recognize divine sovereignty in all spheres of life. He adds that Qutb borrowed this term from Mawdudi's "Mabadi al-Islam" to refer to "every occasion that gets estranged from Islam." Rather than a historical period, *cabiliye* connotes a renewable state of the *ümmet* breaking from Islam. H. Türkmen, "Seyyid Kutub Anlaşılabilir mi?" [Could Sayyid Qutb Be Understood?] *Haksöz Dergisi* 53/9 (1995), 14–29.

²² The term refers to the transnational community of Muslims [Arabic: *umma*].

grounded on the re-building of the *ümmet*, prioritized as a goal over the formation of an Islamic state. To that end, Qutb calls for a rejuvenated Qur'anic generation, united in its holistic approach to faith and deed, to lead the battle against the values and institutions of modern *cabiliye*. Appropriating this vision for contemporary Islamist struggle in Turkey, Türkmen told the audience that "the construction of a Qur'anic generation is our primary project, and the end goal of our struggle." In working toward the realization of this vision, "we must arm ourselves with the morals of revelation and pursue divine, revelatory politics (*vahyi siyaset*) rather than formal, realpolitik." This distinction between a state-centered and society-centered method of struggle is a central strategic expansion Qutb brought to Islamist struggle. Moreover, this note hints at Özgür-Der's differentiation of its Qutb-inspired Islamism from the formalized, electoral politics of Islamic parties such as the AK Party and its predecessors.

Türkmen, in common with other speakers, emphasized Qutb's call to "emigrate from nationalist, sectarian, Sufi deviations, and define one's beliefs, terms, culture, and morality through the guidance of the Qur'an like the first vanguard community of the companions of the Prophet." But, how does one practice this sort of intellectual estrangement necessary for becoming an authentic, exemplary *ümmet*? In a brief moment of digression, and straying away from his lecture notes, Türkmen gave an unscripted illustration of the Qutbian imperative to emigrate from all *cabili* structures and values. Drawing the audience's attention to the saturation of the municipality's conference room with symbols of official ideology, he asserted:

This municipal space that we are in, that by definition must belong to the public, is besieged by the symbols of the secular Republic. Yet, we are Muslims . . . The government today speaks of democratic opening [through official recognition of minority cultural rights extended to Kurds and Alevis], then why are we constantly subjected to the icons of the nation-state and its heroes?"

Mehmet Pamak, speaking last, echoed Türkmen's critical remarks, inviting the audience members to pressure the (AK Party-run) municipal government to rid public space of such signifiers of official ideology. This shared problematization of the flag and the omnipresent representations of Atatürk is illustrative of the speakers' reading of Qutb. The intellectual and practical emigration required by the reconstruction of the Qur'anic generation encompasses all manifestations of un-Islamic values, including the symbols of the secular state.²³

In his speech, Eryarsoy echoed Türkmen on what he considered a central contribution by Qutb to the process of Islamic revivalism in Turkey: his holistic message calling Muslims to integrate their beliefs into their everyday praxis, that is, to treat Islam as regulative

²³ Türkmen and Pamak's discussion of Qutb's call for emigration from "un-Islamic deviations" resonates with Said Hassan's discussion of emigration from non-Muslim to Muslim societies, this issue. It is possible to argue that Türkmen and Pamak's (lay) perspective shares some of the tenets of the (juridical) "alienation approach" to emigration, as reviewed by Hassan in this special issue.

of all spheres of life. At the time Qutb's books began to be translated in Turkish in 1960s, Islamic political consciousness in Turkey were subsumed under a nationalist, right-wing, traditionalist, Americanist (anti-communist) orientation. "Muslims in our geography took the Qur'an to be a book read for the beloved dead on holy nights, and later hidden in a dark corner of the house" where it stays for the rest of the year. From Qutb, he added, Turkey's Muslims learned to see in the Qur'an not only the regulation of faith, but of worldly life as a whole. Pamak corroborated Eryarsoy's remark on the radical impact Qutb's translated works had on a whole generation of Islamists in Turkey coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s. In a personal note, Pamak stated that Qutb enabled his own journey to true faith (*hidayettime vesile oldu*) when he was 36 years old, "around the same age that Qutb migrated from his own *cabiliye* into divine guidance." In that sense, Pamak and Eryarsoy identified Qutb's imprint as the leading of Turkey's Muslims to the critical realization that fulfilling the ritual requirements of Islam does not amount to understanding its message.

The speakers' common emphasis on Muslims' responsibility to reconstruct a Qur'anic generation underscores what they consider to be the central message of Qutb's mature thought, the exemplary integrity of faith and deed manifested in a Qur'an-centered collective existence. By contrast, in 2009 contemporary regimes of power seemed designed to redirect the ideological substance of Islamic revivalism toward a less threatening hybridization of Islam with modernity. In this context, Türkmen and Pamak referenced Qutb's concept of "American Islam," which Türkmen described as "the imperial project that sought to imprison Islam in houses, mosques, and convents and to sever Islam's connection to life and politics by confining it to rituals of worship." Today, Türkmen added, we encounter modern variations of this old project in the form of US-based efforts to propagate a moderate or compromising (*uzlaşmacı*) Islam for Muslims.²⁴ On numerous occasions, Özgür-Der intellectuals identified the AK Party as the domestic poster child of moderate Islam, with its "conservative democratic" agenda that integrated Islamic politics with the secular state and the free market, promoting Islam as a matter of individual faith, identity and lifestyle.

Subsequent to Türkmen, Pamak took up this question, further elaborating on the contemporary derivatives of "American Islam" in the context of Turkey. His reflexive criticism of Islamist struggle in Turkey problematized the process of change that many Islamists have undergone in the last decades under the growing hegemony of liberal ideology in the post-Cold War political climate. He asserted, "those who used to read Qutb's concept of 'American Islam' yesterday, operate today as carriers of moderate Islamism; American Islam's modern-day equivalent."²⁵ Pamak maintained that these circles,

²⁴ This critique could possibly extend to the *fiqh* organizations examined by Hassan in this issue, such as the *Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah*, with its origins in colonial era Egypt; Western-based *fatwa* committees; and the European Council for *Fatwas* and Research. From Türkmen's perspective, such groups that preach a conciliatory position between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim polities may appear susceptible to charges of "propagating a moderate, compromising Islam for Muslims."

²⁵ For an example of European and American efforts to promote a moderate Islam in colonial Southeast Asia, hoping to "engender pliant and devout 'good Muslims,'" see Gedacht in this issue.

including erstwhile radicals who joined AK Party's ranks after 2001, had walked away from Qutb-inspired efforts to transform the totality of social life, and ended up integrating Muslims ever more firmly into the modern *cabili* system. Against this backdrop, Pamak's speech capitalized on his sense of disillusionment with the achievements of Turkey's Muslims in terms of understanding and carrying Qutb's project further.

Where are those who read Qutb, those who joined with the Qur'an upon reading *Milestones*? Or, has anyone changed the milestones? Where are those who call to the Qur'an [*Kur'an davetçileri*]? They should be the honored witnesses [*şahitler*] calling us to the Qur'an, and not to political practices and parties that stand for annexation into and reconciliation with the secular, capitalist system [a tacit reference to the AK Party]. Why do those who are supposed to confront *cabiliye* head-on want us to lean on one form of *cabiliye*? [...] Before forming first a nucleus, then a full-blown community [*ümmet*], the Qur'anic message cannot be lived, nor disseminated. That is what Qutb's message amounted to.

In Özgür-Der's 2001 commemoration of Qutb's martyrdom, Pamak more bluntly specified his targets of criticism. Four Islamic groups in Turkey, he argued, had replaced the goal of transforming society with a reformist agenda perpetuating the *existing* social order: modernist Muslim intellectuals, Islamist parties, followers of Fethullah Gülen, and Islamic human rights organizations. These Islamic groups have since the 1970s moved towards reconciliatory, democratic, even secular tracks, pursuing and defending projects that deploy discourses of legal pluralism, multiculturalism, and tolerance.²⁶

Exemplifying this hybrid reformism among Islamic actors in Turkey, Pamak cites Muslim intellectuals such as Ali Bulaç who have taken "a democratic pledge" to "adapt the Compact of Medina for pluralist, multicultural projects of social co-existence among different constituencies, while resigning from the call to transform the society in all its registers." Another manifestation of that reformist logic had been the *Adil Düzen* (Just Order) project promoted by the Islamist Welfare Party (AK Party's predecessor) in the 1990s. In Pamak's eyes, this project "synthesized the normative benchmarks of global imperialism and modernity with Islamic motifs." Moreover, he accused the Islamic NGO, Mazlum-Der, which he himself founded in 1991, for deviating in time into a "democratic human rights" struggle emptied of Qur'anic concepts, references and guiding principles. Finally, Pamak attacked the Abant Councils²⁷ for popularizing "reconciliation based

²⁶ M. Pamak, "Kur'an Nesli İnşası, Toplum ve Sorunlarımız" [The Building of the Qur'anic Generation, Society and Our Problems], in *Kur'an Neslinin İnşa Sorumluluğu: Sempozyum* [The Responsibility to Build the Qur'anic Generation: A Symposium] (Istanbul: Ekin Yayınları, 2001), 111.

²⁷ Organized by the Abant Platform, Abant Councils refer to the regular panel and roundtable discussions first held in Lake Abant in the city of Bolu. The honorary president of the think tank sponsoring the Councils, the Abant Platform, is Fethullah Gülen. Pamak's critical reference to the "Abant Councils" for that reason implies a broader criticism targeting the Gülen community and its modernist hermeneutics of the Islamic tradition in conformity with the official ideology of nationalism, statism and secularism.

upon tolerance.” The Abant meetings, for Pamak, represented Gülenist attempts to engineer an intellectual accommodation of the Qur’an with secularism and democracy. With these threats in mind, Pamak argued that the struggle for a revived Qur’anic generation must include a critical awareness of the “reconciliation paradigm,” corresponding it to “global imperialist forces and their local collaborators,” and seeing in it a carrot policy designed to tame and contain the threat of Islamic revivalism.²⁸

Scholars of Muslim politics have long considered the ideological transformation of radical, revolutionary Islamism into pro-system movements a healthy development, and described this process as rationalization, democratization, secularization or passive revolution (the absorption of radicalism into a market-driven, partially democratic and even pro-Western conservatism).²⁹ Pamak’s lecture, however, read this sociological process identified by social scientists, the absorption of erstwhile Islamists into neo-liberal, democratic, pro-Western politics in Turkey, as a strategy of domination and containment that, until fully exposed and reversed, must be actively confronted. If, per Pamak, the cultural-political referents of Western modernity such as individualism, secularism, capitalism, and liberalism should not be borrowed to envision and construct “another world” free of oppression, exploitation and injustice, recent anti-globalization movements and the “postmodern” paradigm upon which they rest are equally inadequate in creating a viable, alternative road map for Muslims.³⁰ A healthy opposition to the system, for Pamak, should be constructed on the sole means of salvation Muslims possess, which is the Qur’an. He added, “it is imperative on each Muslim to disseminate this blessing of salvation to those who fail to transcend Western paradigms in their quest for a counter-hegemonic stance.”

As demonstrated in this section, the besieging domination of *cabili* forces on the collective intellect of Turkish Muslims was a central thread in local Islamist exegesis of Qutb. Prior to the contentious events of the Arab Spring, Özgür-Der literati had promoted a reading of Qutb that reveals and counters the process of hegemonic absorption of Islamic thought and practice into liberalism and postmodern intellectual trends such

²⁸ Pamak, “Building of the Qur’anic Generation,” 116.

²⁹ G. Cavdar, “Islamist New Thinking in Turkey: A Model for Political Learning?” *Political Science Quarterly* 121/3 (2006), 477-97; M. Cinar, “Turkey’s Transformation under the AK Party Rule,” *The Muslim World* 96/3 (2006), 469-86; V. Nasr, “The Rise of Muslim Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (2005), 13-27; G. Robinson, “Can Islamists be Democrats? The Case of Jordan,” *Middle East Journal* 51 (1997), 373-88; B. Turam, *Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); C. Tugal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

³⁰ In his 2001 speech, Pamak called out “the process of individualization stimulated by modernity and postmodernism” as a site of Islamic struggle inspired by Qutb. Accordingly, Islamic modernism ushered in rationalist, positivist hermeneutics of the Qur’an, whereas postmodern intellectual influences led some Muslims to relativize and historicize Qur’anic meaning. Against this pluralization and individualization of Islamic faith, he asserts, Islamic consciousness and praxis should be built “on our authentic, unique paradigm constituted by original references to the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet.” Pamak, “Building of the Qur’anic Generation,” 116.

as relativism and historicism. To that end, they particularly mobilized and elaborated on Qutb's concepts of "Qur'anic generation" and "American Islam," comparing and contrasting each with the errant Islamic actors of the day, including the AK Party, Gülenists, and other Islamist intellectuals. In their public lectures, excepting marginal efforts at an Islamic revival (such as their own), Özgür-Der's Islamist intellectuals construed present society as having surrendered to the intellectual siege by *cabili* norms and values produced by modernism and the most recent "postmodern diversions." Accordingly, the struggle to revive a Qur'anic generation against the hegemonic order should also be extended to those (fellow Muslims) who reconcile with and augment the power of the *cabili* system: the method of struggle must be to publicly oppose them and seek to correct their deviations. This Qutbian diagnosis of the present by Özgür-Der intellectuals—the *cabili* cultural siege and the resulting intellectual disunity of Muslims—bestowed a rather bleak tone upon the general atmosphere of the commemoration meeting in 2009.

Reading Qutb in the Shadow of the Arab Spring: *Şehadet* and the Resurrection of the Ümmet's Transnational Unity

Post-Arab Spring commemorations of Qutb give us a window into the ways in which hermeneutics are imbricated with the politics of the day. Since 2011, public discussion of Qutb's message has reflected the series of "intifadas" taking place in the region, especially Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria. This becomes clear in the public commemoration of the 47th anniversary of Qutb's martyrdom on August 29, 2013, entitled "Sayyid Qutb night and Egypt's resistance," which came on the heels of the Egyptian military's toppling of President Mursi, Egyptian security forces' raiding of pro-Mursi protests in Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiya square as well as anti-government protests across Turkey.³¹ We see three divergences or innovations that distinguished the 2013 event from the foregoing gatherings: first, a new reading of Qutb's concept of *cabiliye*, second the raising of the idea of *şehadet*, and third, the identification of the audience and contemporary Islamist struggle in the region with Qutb himself. Both the concept of *şehadet* and the forging of spiritual identifications across time and space had the effect of calling the audience to perform Qutb's message. These innovations mark a turn in Islamist activism of Özgür-Der's

³¹ The 2013 commemoration was organized by Özgür-Der's local branches in Bağcılar and Başakşehir (Istanbul). The program, broadcast live on Islamic channel Hilal TV, took place in an open-air auditorium in Başakşehir gathering an audience of roughly 500 people. In addition to lectures by Hamza Türkmen, Adnan Inanç and Abdurrahman Dilipak, the program also featured a video screening and the live performance of Grup Yürüyüş. By contrast to the 2009 event, conspicuously absent were the symbols of the republic. On the walls that framed the auditorium, large posters read "we support the resistance of our Muslim brothers in Egypt" and "regards from Istanbul to honorable Egyptians" in Turkish, Arabic and English. Facing the audience, the stage was blanketed with large placards that read: "murderer Sisi, murderer Esad, their partners in crime: Abu Suud, Russia, Iran, they will drown in the blood they shed." On both sides of the stage stood two massive banners in Turkish that read "brotherhood demands a price" and "it is not enough to stand against the Pharaoh, we must stand with Moses."

literati: if the 2009 meeting sought to form an internal, intellectual critique of statist, conciliatory Islamist politics in Turkey, the 2013 event trained its vision externally, upon the Muslim world as a whole.³²

First, in common with the 2009 commemoration, speakers at the 2013 Qutb night mobilized Qutb's concept of *cabiliye* to identify contemporary sites of Islamic struggle. But they did so in a new way. Discussed in 2009 mainly in relation to modernity's intellectual siege on Islamic groups within Turkey, Islamist intellectuals invoked *cabiliye* in 2013 to refer primarily to contemporary Western strategies to stymie the transnational unity of Muslim societies in the Middle East. For instance, Türkmen's 2013 speech associated *cabiliye* with the context of a continuing process of colonization of Muslim societies. This process, he argued, began with the creation of separate nation-states in the Middle East and continues today in the realm of culture and governance, marked by the infiltration of Western norms and values into the social fabric of the region.

Qutb was maybe the first after the Prophet to speak of the *cabili* society, a society of *ifsat* [chaos, disorder] and of colonization, that is, the nation-societies that have been imposed upon us, in Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, Syria, Egypt etc. [...] These names do not exist in the history of Islamic civilization, they have been built in our geography by western colonizers who divided up our lands with artificial borders and cut off our hands from each other [...] The project of creating nations out of the *ümmet* is a project of colonization of the lands of Islam, of converting Muslims into western *cabili* values, that is, a project designed to westernize us. [...] The tendencies of westernization manifest in governance and social landscape turned us into the orphans of the Muslim *ümmet*.

Abdurrahman Dilipak, a prominent Islamist public intellectual, took up Türkmen's remarks on historical and contemporary manifestations of *cabiliye* and added to it the "un-representative" character of power-holders who governed the region through policies "that were not grounded in the beliefs, culture, and preferences of the people." Seen as such, the predominance of authoritarian, secularist, military regimes and conservative monarchies in the postcolonial era can be explained primarily through Western powers' imperial agenda and geo-strategic

³² This article shares with Gedacht and Wellman (this issue) a focus on the political implications of practices of reconstructing historical memory and commemorating martyrs. Juxtaposed together, these three papers demonstrate the divergent political uses to which the memory of martyrs has been put by Muslim activists and officials in disparate historical and spatial contexts. Gedacht's analysis shows how the memory of holy war and martyrdom has been reinvented and harnessed by Acehnese Muslim activists in the context of the nascent Acehnese nationalism of the 1930s. In a similar vein, Wellman argues that state officials and regime supporters in post-revolutionary Iran have deployed the memory of martyrdom to sacralize the national landscape. By contrast, this article states that the memory of Qutb's martyrdom has been mobilized by Özgür-Der activists in the context of the Arab Spring to opposite effect, i.e. to engender a politics of Islamic transnationalism, critical of nation-states.

interests at odds with grassroots developments in the region. Adnan Inanç, the director-general of Hilal TV, voiced a similar distrust of “the former colonial powers of the West” that “unsurprisingly” fail to speak up for the rightful and the oppressed in the present era: “We can’t expect them [Western powers] to stand up against the coup in Egypt, we can’t expect sympathy or mercy looking at their history.” Accordingly, the history of colonialism provides testimony to the contemporary hypocrisy of Euro-Atlantic powers with regards to the military coup in Egypt and their reluctance to advocate democratic values and procedures on behalf of the deposed, first democratically elected President of Egypt.

Following Türkmen’s outline of a history of Western intervention and political ascendancy over Muslim societies, Inanç mentioned specific techniques of power deployed by the West to delegitimize Islamist parties’ electoral gains in the Arab Spring. Beyond determining the artificial boundaries of nation-states in the region, the West today projects a subtler, diffused power of propaganda and “perception management” to shape popular attitudes through traditional and social media—as illustrated by the media campaign pronouncing the dictatorial tendencies of Mursi and Erdogan. Islamist intellectuals’ reading of *cabiliye* had problematized Muslims’ absorption into secular liberal modernity before the Arab Spring, whereas in 2013 their diagnosis of *cabiliye* stressed Western powers’ strategies to reverse Islamist parties’ democratic appeal and hinder transnational solidarity among Muslims post-Arab Spring.

A second innovation that framed Islamist intellectuals’ discussion of Qutb in 2013 was a collective reference to *şehadet*, with a double meaning of bearing witness to the message of Islam and martyrdom for the cause of Islam. Using the word’s ambivalent semiotics to intertwine the two meanings, Türkmen’s speech identified Qutb’s *şehadet* as the apogee and exemplification of his message of faith-deed integrity. Encapsulated in his decision to sacrifice his life, contemporary Muslims can find the Islamic prerogative to live and bear witness to the Qur’anic struggle against all forms of injustice and tyranny. In a similar vein, Abdurrahman Dilipak emphasized that the Muslim Brothers’ resistance in the Adawiya square gives a Qutbian lesson of *şehadet* to Muslims, a lesson that promises to reunite the broader Muslim world behind the dictum to live Qur’anic and prophetic ordinances (such as speaking up against all forms of injustice and cultivating a transnational ethic of responsibility towards all Muslims).

Seen in the light of Qutb’s (realistic) utopia of a reconstructed Qur’anic generation, the Muslim Brothers’ unsuccessful resistance to restore Mursi to power should not betray the victory enclosed therein. For Türkmen, the sit-in in Adawiya square and the symbols of resistance it produced have trans-historical and transnational implications beyond Egypt in actualizing the Qutbian utopia. From his vantage point, Muslim Brothers’ “principled resistance to the military state brings into being a vanguard force,” evoked in *Milestones*, that rekindles the reconstruction of an exemplary, authentic *ümmet*.

They're asking, did the Muslim Brotherhood win in Egypt? They won *us* at the very least, they gained the hope of reviving the *ümmet* [...] People attribute new meanings to the rabia sign,³³ [it symbolizes that] our fates in Libya, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Turkey are interdependent.

In contrast to pre-Arab Spring readings of Qutb that problematized the *cabili* deviations of Muslims, the Qutb night in 2013 proffered a hopeful, animated vision of the immanent unity of Muslims as an *ümmet* triggered by Islamic resistance to authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Syria. Echoing Türkmen, Abdurrahman Dilipak began his emotionally laden narrative by noting the newfound sense of unity among Muslims across the region, sparked by the martyrdom of more than 500 Muslim Brothers in Adawiya square by Egyptian security forces.

The blood of those martyred in Syria and Egypt is resurrecting the *ümmet*. Their blood turned into an elixir. We're confronting the Book once again, we're becoming Muslim anew. Their blood is drawing us closer, bringing us together across 20 cities. They died once, we revived 1000 times today. We are all Mursi. We are all the daughter of el-Beltagy.³⁴ Today is a new beginning [...] The Euphrates and the Nile are brothers.

This new beginning, however, bestows individual responsibilities on pious Muslims. For Dilipak, *şebadet* as a mode of existence that applies divine commands enclosed in the Book and the *sünnet*³⁵ of the Prophet, is not something to be uttered but has to be actively cultivated in a process of internal self-scrutiny. Turning away from “western powers” and “comprador traitors,” Dilipak’s discussion of *şebadet* mobilized the register of individual responsibility for servicing God, realizing His will on earth, and uniting with fellow Muslims. Per Dilipak, the Qutbian struggle against tyranny and imperialism starts from within the pious self, and in a seemingly trivial front: smoking. Through an interactive exercise, he subjected the audience to a test of sincerity and courage to live up to the ideas distilled from Qutb’s life and works. Living in accordance with one’s beliefs, standing up against injustices should not be mere slogans, but internalized as a *modus operandi* of daily, mundane existence.

³³ Rabia stands for the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque in Cairo that became a symbol of the months-long sit-in organized by supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood demanding a reversal of the coup d'état that deposed President Mohamed Mursi on July 3, 2013. Over the course of summer 2013, the black and yellow logo “R4BIA” became a popular sign standing for the peaceful resistance of Muslim Brothers to the Egyptian army’s coup, and was widely circulated through social media. The logo also popularized a special hand symbol (or greeting as it is also called, “*rabia selami*”) raising four fingers—*rabaa* in Arabic also means “fourth, four.”

³⁴ The reference is to Asmaa el-Beltagy, the 17-year-old daughter of the secretary-general of Freedom and Justice Party, who was shot by Egyptian security forces during a sit-in in a Muslim Brotherhood protest camp on August 14, 2013.

³⁵ *Sünnet* [Arabic: *sunna*] refers to the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad.

It is easy to shout *tekbir*, I dare you to throw at me the devil's herb you carry in your pockets. Come on, can you do it? Let me see your valor [*yiğitlik*]. Consistent worship is more acceptable (*makbul*) than ample worship. You can't be casting a curse on imperialism while you have Marlboro cigarettes in between your fingers, the devil would mock you! [...] "Down with America," here drink some Coca Cola! This cannot be! *We must be prepared to make sacrifices in relation to the things we say.*

Thereby exposing the "hypocrisy within", Dilipak's persistent call to the audience to publicly dispense with their cigarettes encouraged an initially embarrassed audience into participating: the lowered, guilty faces of some men seated in the first few rows steadily relaxed with more cigarettes flowing down to the stage floor. Dilipak administered the event through unrelenting, passionate encouragement, augmented by the cheerful applause from audience members. His encouragement fused the religious and political meanings of the act of giving up on smoking: he kept asking for evidence of manliness, and shouting God is great while raising his four fingers as per the "rabia" symbol.

Subsequently turning towards women in an equally provocative tone, Dilipak called upon women in the audience to critically question their past efforts, in their fundamental role as *mothers*, in working for divine consent.

Ladies, if what you're wearing on your head is a headscarf, a symbol of faith, of freedom—and freedom for us is not to be a servant to servants, not to take others as deities, it is instead an absolute submission to God, his messenger and his Book—if the brain you carry inside your head does not possess these values, what you cover it with is not a headscarf, but a piece of cloth [...]. Women don't give birth only to children, but to society. Where are those mothers who would say "go my child, come either a veteran or a martyr," where are you? You give your children away to the system [*düzen*] as cheap laborers, as servants. They fear everyone and everything but God.

Şebadet, as an encapsulation of Qutb's message, requires individual Muslims to bring their practices in line with their beliefs in a Qur'an-centered life through constant self-surveillance and discipline. Moreover, Islamist intellectuals' discussion of *şebadet* in 2013, taking its cue from the exemplary struggle of Qutb, sought to join personal piety to transnational Islamist solidarity in the region. Seen against the vantage point of pre-Arab Spring commemorations of Qutb that deplored insufficient socialization of Qutb's project, the 2013 Qutb night interpreted the present as the unfolding of Qutb's utopia. The blood of martyred Islamists in the region ushered in a fervent and hopeful vision of an immanent transnational solidarity within the *ümmet*, which would undo the *cabili*, colonial structures that presently govern it. Moreover, in 2013, the targets of Islamist intellectuals' Qutbian critique of the present changed from domestic Islamic actors such as the AK Party cadres, Gülen community, and modernist Muslim intellectuals and organizations to authoritarian, Arab nationalist regimes in the Middle East.

The call to *şebadet* overlaps with or informs the third characteristic of the 2013 event, Qutb's ideas and legacy had become something *to perform*. The difference between the

2009 and 2013 meetings, in this regard, is stark. The former was marked by a sequence of formal lectures read by speakers from behind a lecturer's stand, with a less interactive atmosphere between the speakers and the audience. In the latter, the speakers adopted a more informal, rhetorical, and interactive style of speech, moving back and forth on stage instead of reading from behind a stand. Correspondingly, the audience was much more involved in the proceedings. They themselves decorated the 2013 event, carrying Turkish and/or Egyptian flags,³⁶ pictures of Qutb as an inmate behind prison bars, pictures of Egypt's deposed President Mursi with captions that read "*sizinleyiz*" (we stand with you), "r4bia" banners and other placards sending God's peace and blessing to the Muslim Brotherhood. Their verbal participation was orchestrated by a man who would shout a different slogan at regular intervals in the course of speakers' talk, using a microphone, which would then be repeated by the audience: "Sayyid Qutb, your path is our path", "the Islamic movement cannot be obstructed," "*tevbid*, justice, freedom," "*lebbeik ya Allah* [here I am, O Allah]." In other instances, the audience participated in the event through a more spontaneous emotional response, as during the video screening of collated visuals of violent clashes between pro-Mursi demonstrators and Egyptian security forces in Rabaa al-Adawiya square. Mounted to an emotional poem "brother, you are free" written by Qutb in prison and exalting martyrdom, these visuals provoked tears and *tekbirs*. In addition, Grup Yürüyüş sang revolutionary marches in tribute to martyrdom and the global intifada against imperialism and Zionism. In the light of this performative, participatory character of the proceedings, the 2013 Qutb night resembled a public demonstration, a rally to express solidarity with the ongoing resistance of the Muslim Brotherhood and similar-minded Islamic groups in Egypt and Syria.

This rally-like format was especially conducive to achieving the purpose of commemoration events: a lived hermeneutics of Qutb's message. The event's organizers and the speakers sought to provoke this performance through a series of identifications forged across time and space: between Qutb and Moses, between Nasser and Assad-Mubarak-Sisi, between Qutb and the Brothers in Adawiya square, between the audience and the martyred Brothers, between the audience and Qutb. Degirmenci's introductory speech was the first to forge a historical analogy, a relation of direct equivalence between the conditions and message of Qutb's martyrdom in Nasser's Egypt in 1966, and the martyrdom of Muslim Brothers in August 2013, by the Egyptian security forces.

Qutb has attained a correct [*sabib*] direction in the shadow of the Qur'an and become one of the most important, distinguished and honored travelers [*yolcu*] of this path. The line of resistance, this universal testimony [*tanıklık*] that he bore, refusing to apologize to the Pharaoh to escape execution, is still alive and has been staged for months in Egypt.

³⁶ In clear contrast to the 2009 commemoration during which Islamist speakers framed the Turkish flag on the wall as an unwelcome imposition of state ideology, the 2013 Qutb night featured the flag waved by audience members as a signifier of the transnational solidarity of Muslims across borders.

In a similar vein, Türkmen presented Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood as the spiritual and practical embodiment of Qutb's message, fighting a Qutbian battle against the military state in the summer of 2013:

The present shura council of the Muslim Brotherhood, each member being a Qutb and Banna, together with Muhammad Bedii, the Supreme Guide, reached a collective reason in trying to apply Qutb to real life [...] Asmaa [the daughter of Muhammad el-Beltagy] became a martyr, shot on her back, striving for the goal of re-uniting the *ümmet* like rings that unite in a chain [...] Their tactic is peaceful resistance: it was as if they were updating the struggle of the Prophet against the infidels, the oppressors and the polytheists in Mecca, as if they were updating the first martyr Sumeyye [bint Hayat]. Bedii said, "we will gain our freedom with our blood, our martyrdom." God tells us, "do not say what you will not do." They (the Muslim Brotherhood) demonstrated an exemplary leadership to Islamic history.

In his analysis of the contentious events of summer 2013, Türkmen framed the Muslim Brothers' resistance to the overthrow of Mursi as an exemplary revivification of the struggle of the first Muslim community—harking back to Qutb's message in *Milestones*. It is clear, from the speaker's lectures, that the Muslim *ümmet* that needs to model itself after the first Qur'anic generation does not only wage a battle of survival against disbelievers from without (read exogenous, neo-colonial powers). The transnational unity of the *ümmet* has to be imagined and forged at the expense of "comprador traitors" from within, a dynamic and fluid category. Both the General Sisi-led government in Egypt and the Assad regime in Syria are construed as "murderers who martyred our brothers", a contemporary manifestation of the *ashabi ubdud*, an ancient tribe, mentioned in the Qur'an, that deserved God's wrath for torturing and killing believers solely because of their faith. Some of these "comprador traitors" may appear pious at first glance but the Qur'an also includes a lesson that scorns those who make show of their pious deeds without reflecting on the meaning of piety.

Sisi, who ordered the armed forces to fire on civilians, is a man of prayer, his wife wears the chador [*çarşaf*]. Nasrallah, who was our honor when fighting against Israel, today supports Assad and joins the fight against Muslims; he is also a man of prayer, his wife is similarly veiled. But our God says, "woe to those who pray." They both have their hands in blood, deep in massacre.

In the current political juncture, where the Qur'anic battle between justice and tyranny is being re-staged with novel actors, Türkmen asks the audience "to turn our prayers into practical, operational (*fiili*) prayers." A heartfelt, spiritual association with the martyrs is a first step in activating prayers, followed by an active participation in Islamist public events such as conferences, symposiums, demonstrations, and public funeral prayers on behalf of martyred Islamists:

How will we make our prayers practical? In platforms such as this, in the public squares of Turkey, in Adawiya squares we will build, against the tyrants who burn the students of Qutb in Adawiya, in Nahda, in Damascus and Aleppo. Brothers, we must absolutely take part in events such as this, and funeral prayers in abstentia [*giyabi*]. This may be the first time since February 28³⁷ that we are in public squares with such vigor and participation.

Türkmen's equation of religious worship with a politics of transnational Islamist solidarity is the cornerstone of his effort to read Qutb's legacy in present-day Turkey. Individual association with Islamist martyrs of the Arab Spring in Libya, Egypt, Syria and a collective will to "stand up in unison against an injustice or attack" against believers: these are the pillars of updating and living Qutb's integration of faith and deed, amidst the present political dynamics and circumstances of the region.

To conclude, through an updated reading of *cabiliye*, an emphasis on *shahadet*, and the identification of the audience, and post-Arab Spring Islamist mobilization in the region, with Qutb himself, the 2013 commemoration underlined the immanent making of an *ummet* in the image of Qutb's Qur'anic generation. The event leaders and audience were in unison creating a conscious slippage between personal piety and a transnational Islamist activism. By evoking the memory of Qutb's ideas, his struggle and execution, and provoking the audience to live up to his example, the commemoration served a profoundly political end: it re-created the audience in the image of the nucleus of a reinvigorated Qur'anic generation.

Conclusion

Qutb believed that "by the efforts of a 'righteous remnant', a vanguard of true believers, the sovereignty of God over the earth could be restored, first among Muslims and then more expansively."³⁸ In one sense, the public commemorations of Qutb's martyrdom, where Islamist public intellectuals disseminate a Qutbian reading of the present and a present re-reading of Qutb, could be seen as localized instances of the making of this righteous remnant. These public events present both discursive and performative aspects. As detailed in the paper, Qutb's martyrdom has become a rallying force for Islamist activist-intellectuals, outlining the significance of Qutb's thought to contemporary Islamist struggle and perspective. Yet, these are not quasi-academic events stripped of devotional emotions. To differing degrees, as is made visible in the juxtaposition of the 2009 and 2013 public commemorations, these events also opened up and were produced in the very interactive space between speakers and the audience. As such, they blurred the boundaries between the discursive and the performative, between intellectual narratives and pious activism. In that respect, the reciprocal production of

³⁷ This refers to the 1997 military memorandum that dissolved the Islamist Welfare Party-led coalition government, and sought to contain Islamist mobilization by curbing Islamic education in Turkey.

³⁸ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 2.

the event by its participants on both sides of the stage (especially in 2013) amounted to the embodied performance of *faith-deed integrity*, which Özgür-der's Islamist intellectuals consider and propagate as the principal heritage of Qutb.

In sum, a comparative examination of Islamist intellectuals' re-readings of Qutb, disseminated at these public events that commemorate his martyrdom, help us identify a set of constant and variable themes in local, Islamist exegeses of Qutb's mature thought. Even though from 2001 to 2013 Özgür-der's intellectual cadres have understood and promoted the integrity of beliefs and practices as the doctrinal linchpin of Qutb's works and struggle, what integrating piety and praxis meant took historically specific forms. To recapitulate, prior to the Arab Spring, Özgür-Der intelligentsia interpreted Qutb's intellectual project as a summons to reveal and criticize the prevalent tendencies towards ideological hybridization among Islamic actors in Turkey. They promoted a reading of Qutb's call to rejuvenate the Qur'anic generation, which problematized "those [Muslims] who drifted to reconciliatory positions, accommodating Islam with democracy and liberalism."³⁹ In the context of growing domestic and international popularity of the AK Party as the epitome of moderate, pro-liberal Islam, Qutb's legacy was mobilized by Özgür-Der activists to arrest what was perceived as a hegemonic trend among Muslim intellectuals and politicians to forge an overlapping consensus between Islam and Western modernity. While commemorations of Qutb before the Arab Spring underscored the intellectual disunity of Islamic intellectuals and politicians due to *cabili* influences, all three speakers at the 2013 Qutb night framed the post-Arab Spring Islamic resistance in the region as setting in motion the unification of the *ümmet* divided by arbitrary colonial borders. In this Qutbian reading of the Arab Spring, domestic Islamic actors such as Muslim intellectuals, Islamic organizations, AK Party officials, and Gülenists were conspicuously absent as a target of Islamist intellectuals' criticism. With the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the pro-Islamist turn of AK Party's foreign policy, Islamist commemorations of Qutb yielded shifting exegeses of Qutb away from a bleak commentary on the (post) modernist "degeneration" among Islamic sectors toward an optimistic, animated reading of the immanent transnational unity of the *ümmet*.

By engaging, through a diachronic analysis, the dynamic interpretation of Qutb by Islamist activist-intellectuals in Turkey, this paper aimed to capture the local interpretations and experiences enacted by Islamist texts at particular contexts, from within the perspective of their adherents. This shifting local, Islamist exegesis of Qutb points towards the historical embeddedness of Islamist hermeneutics. Attending to this historical dynamism guards us against essentialist and over-simplified conceptions of Islamist politics as a negation of modernity, secularism, or the modern state. As a result, unpacking the "lived hermeneutics" of Qutb's thought among contemporary Qutbians in Turkey contributes to a more nuanced, contextualized, and multi-faceted understanding of Qutb as well as Islamist politics on the whole.

³⁹ The quote is taken from Mehmet Pamak's speech during the 2009 commemoration meeting.

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