

## POLITICAL ISLAM

1. The fatal error lies in thinking that the emergence of mass political movements identified with Islam is the inevitable outcome of the rise of culturally and politically backward people who cannot understand any language other than that of their quasi-atavistic obscurantism. Unfortunately, such an error is not only widely circulated by the dominant simplifying media; it is also echoed in the pseudo-scientific discourses on eurocentrism and awkward “orientalism”. Such views are based on the biased assumption that only the West can invent modernity, thereby confining Muslims in an immutable “tradition” that makes them incapable of apprehending the significance of the necessary change.

Muslims and Islam have a history, just like those of the other regions of the world. It is a history fraught with diverse interpretations concerning linkages between reason and faith, a history of mutual transformation and adaptation of both society and its religion. However, the reality of this history is denied not only by eurocentric discourses but also by the contemporary movements associated with Islam. In fact, the two entities have the same cultural bias whereby the “specific” features ascribed to the different careers of their own peoples and religions are allegedly intangible, infinite and trans-historical. To the Western world’s eurocentrism, contemporary Political Islam solely opposes an inverted eurocentrism.

The emergence of movements claiming to be Islamic is actually expressive of a violent revolt against the destructive effects of the really existent capitalism and against its attendant unaccomplished, truncated and deceptive modernity. It is an expression of an absolutely legitimate revolt against a system that has nothing to offer to the peoples concerned.

2. The discourse of the Islam proposed as an alternative to the capitalist modernity (to which the modern experiences of the historical socialisms are clearly assimilated), is political by nature, and by no means theological. The “fundamentalist” attributes often ascribed to Islam by no means correspond to this discourse, which, moreover, does not even allude to Islam, except in the case of certain contemporary Muslim intellectuals who are referred to in such terms in western opinion more than in theirs.

The proposed Islam is in this case the adversary of every liberation theology. Political Islam advocates submission and not emancipation. It was only Mahmoud Taha of Sudan who attempted to emphasize the element of emancipation in his interpretation of Islam. Sentenced to death and executed by the authorities of Khartoum, Taha was not acknowledged by any “radical” or “moderate” Islamic group, and neither was he defended by any of the intellectuals identifying themselves with “Islamic Renaissance” or even by those who are merely willing to “dialogue” with such movements.

The heralds of the said “Islamic Renaissance” are not interested in theology and they never make any reference to the classical texts concerning theology. Hence, what they understand by Islam appears to be solely a conventional and social version of religion limited to the formal and integral respect for ritual practice. The Islam in question would define a community to which one belongs by inheritance, like ethnicity instead of a strong and intimate personal conviction. It is solely a question of asserting a “collective identity” and nothing more. That is the reason why the term “Political Islam” is certainly more appropriate to qualify all these movements in the Arab countries.

3. Modern political Islam had been invented by the orientalist in the service of the British authority in India before being adopted intact by Mawdudi of Pakistan. It consisted in “proving” that Muslim believers are not allowed to live in a State that is itself not Islamic – anticipating the partition of India -- because Islam would ignore the possibility of separation between State and Religion. The orientalist in question failed to observe that the English of the 13th Century would not have conceived of their survival either without Christianity!

Abul Ala Al Mawdudi therefore took up the theme stipulating that power comes from God alone (wilaya al faqih), thus repudiating the concept of citizens having the right to make laws, the State being solely entrusted with enforcement of the law defined once and for all (The Shariah). Joseph de Maistre had already written similar things accusing the Revolution of inventing modern democracy and individual emancipation.

Refuting the concept of emancipatory modernity, Political Islam disapproves of the very principle of democracy – the right of society to build its own future through its freedom to legislate. The Shura principle is not the Islamic form of democracy, as claimed by Political Islam, for it is hampered by the ban on innovation (ibda), and accepts, if need be, only that of interpretation of the tradition (ijtihad). The Shura is only one of the multiple forms of the consultation found in all pre-modern and pre-democratic societies. Of course, interpretation has sometimes been the vehicle for real changes imposed by new demands. However, the fact remains that by virtue of its own principle – denial of the right to break with the past – interpretation leads into deadlock the modern fight for social change and democracy. The parallel claimed between the Islamic parties – radical or moderate, since all of them adhere to the same “anti-modernist” principles in the name of the so-called specificity of Islam – and Christian-Democrat parties of modern Europe is therefore not valid, strictly speaking, even though American media and diplomatic circles continue to make allusion to the said parallel so as to legitimise their support of possibly “Islamist” regimes. Christian-Democracy is an element of modernity of which it upholds the fundamental concept of creative democracy as the essential aspect of the concept of secularism. Political Islam refuses modernity and proclaims this fact without being able to understand its significance.

Hence, the proposed Islam does not deserve at all to be qualified as “modern” and the supporting arguments advanced in this regard by friends of “dialogue” are extremely platitudinous: they range from the use of cassettes by its propagandists to the observation that these agents are recruited from among the “educated” classes – engineers for instance! Moreover, these movements’ discourse solely reflects Wahabite Islam, which rejects all that the interaction between historical Islam and Greek philosophy had produced in its epoch, as it merely turned over the unimaginative writings of Ibn Taymiya, the most reactionary of the theologians of the Middle Ages. Although some of his heralds qualify this interpretation as “a return to the sources”, it is actually a mere reference to the notions that prevailed two hundred years ago, notions of a society whose development has been stalled for several centuries.

4. The contemporary Political Islam is not the outcome of a reaction to the so-called abuses of secularism, as often purported, unfortunately. It is because no Muslim society of modern times – except in the former Soviet Union – has ever been truly secular, let alone appalled at the daring innovations of any atheistic and aggressive power. The semi-modern State of Kemal’s Turkey, Nasser’s Egypt, Baathist Syria and Iraq merely subjugated the men of religion (as it often happened in former times) to impose on them concepts solely aimed at legitimising its political options. The beginnings of a secular idea existed only in certain critical intellectual circles. The secular idea did not have much impact on the State, which sometimes retreated in this respect when obsessed with its nationalist project, thereby causing a break with the policy adopted by the Wafd since 1919, as testified by the disturbing evolution inaugurated even at the time of Nasser. The reason for this drift is perhaps quite obvious: whereas the democracy of the said regimes was rejected, a substitute was found in the so-called homogeneous community, with its danger obviously extending to the declining democracy of the contemporary Western world itself.

Political Islam intends to perfect an evolution already well established in the countries concerned and aimed at restoring a plainly conservative theocratic order associated with a political power of the “Mameluke” type. The reference to this military caste that ruled up to two centuries ago, placed itself above all laws (by pretending to know no law other than the “Shariah”), monopolised profits from the national economy and accepted to play a subsidiary role in the capitalist globalisation of that era – for the sake of “realism” – instantly crosses the mind of anyone who observes the declined post-nationalist regimes of the region as well as the new so-called Islamic regimes, their twin brothers.

5. From this fundamental point of view, there is no difference between the so-called “radical” movements of Political Islam and those that wanted to appear “moderate” because the aims of both entities are identical.

The case of Iran itself is not an exception to the general rule, despite the confusions that contributed to its success: the concomitance between the rapid development of the Islamist movement and the struggle waged against the Shah who was socially reactionary and politically pro-American. Firstly, the extremely eccentric behaviour of the

theocratic ruling power was compensated by its anti-imperialist positions, from which it derived its legitimacy that echoed its powerful popularity beyond the borders of Iran. Gradually, however, the regime showed that it was incapable of meeting the challenge posed by an innovative socio-economic development. The dictatorship of turbaned men of religion, who took over from that of the “Caps” (military and technocrats), as they are referred to in Iran, resulted in a fantastic degradation of the country’s economic machinery. Iran, which boasted about “doing the same as Korea”, now ranks among the group of “Fourth World” countries. The indifference of the ruling power’s hard wing to social problems facing the country’s working classes was the basic cause of its take-over by those who described themselves as “reformers” with a project that could certainly attenuate the rigours of the theocratic dictator, but without renouncing, for all that, its principle enshrined in the Constitution (“wilaya al faqih”), which constituted the basis of the monopoly of a power that was therefore gradually induced to give up its “anti-imperialist” postures and integrate the commonplace compradore world of capitalism of the peripheries. The system of Political Islam in Iran has reached deadlock. The political and social struggles in which the Iranian people have now been plunged might one day lead to the rejection of the very principle of “wilaya al faqih”, which places the college of the men of religion above all institutions of the political and civil society. That is the condition for their success.

Political Islam is in fact nothing other than an adaptation to the subordinate status of the compradore capitalism. Its so-called “moderate” form therefore probably constitutes the principal danger threatening the peoples concerned since the violence of the “radicals” only serves to destabilise the State to allow for the installation of a new compradore power. The constant support offered by the pro-American diplomacies of the Triad countries towards finding this “solution” to the problem is absolutely consistent with their desire to impose the globalised liberal order in the service of the dominant capital.

6. The two discourses of the globalised liberal capitalism and Political Islam do not conflict; they are rather complementary. The ideology of American “communitarianisms” being popularised by current fashion overshadows the conscience and social struggles and substitutes for them, so-called collective “identities” that ignore them. This ideology is therefore perfectly manipulated in the strategy of capital domination because it transfers the struggle from the arena of real social contradictions to the imaginary world that is said to be cultural, trans-historical and absolute, whereas Political Islam is precisely a communitarianism”.

The diplomacies of the G7 powers, and particularly that of the United States, know what they do in choosing to support Political Islam. They have done so in Afghanistan by describing its Islamists as “freedom fighters” (!) against the horrible dictatorship of communism, which was in fact an enlightened, modernist, national and populist despotism that had the audacity to open schools for girls! They continue to do so from Egypt to Algeria. They know that the power of Political Islam has the virtue – to them – of making the peoples concerned helpless and consequently ensuring their compradorisation without difficulty.

Given its inherent cynicism, the American Establishment knows how to take a second advantage of Political Islam. The “drifts” of the regimes that it inspires – the Taliban for instance – who are not drifts in any way but actually come within the logic of their programmes, can be exploited whenever imperialism finds it expedient to intervene brutally, if necessary. The “savagery” attributed to the

peoples who are the first victims of Political Islam is likely to encourage “islamophobia” and that facilitates the acceptance of the perspective of a “global apartheid”-- the logical and necessary outcome of an ever-polarising capitalist expansion.

The sole political movements using the label of Islam, which are categorically condemned by the G7 powers, are those involved in anti-imperialist struggles – under the objective circumstances at the local level: Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. It is not a matter of chance.