The Failure of Political Islam

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OLIVIER ROY

Translated by Carol Volk

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MANY IN THE West seem to view the end of our century as the era of the "Islamic threat." The irruption of Islam into the political landscape is often perceived as an anachronism; how is it possible, late in the twentieth century, to return to the Middle Ages? We envision bearded mullahs everywhere, surging forth from mosques and villages to attack the modern-day Babylons, seeking to create a reactionary, irrational, and violent world. Yet history has taught us that barbarity is inherent in cities and has never signaled a return to what came before. It is not that the Middle Ages are invading our modern world, but rather that modernity itself produces its own forms of protest.

In our prevailing outlook we remain prisoners of the old schema of the Enlightenment whereby there is only one form of Progress: as we see it, political modernity, embodied in parliamentary democracy, goes hand in hand with economic development, the easing of moral codes, and secularization. In this respect our memory is short and selective. How many revolutions have been fundamentally puritanical, even profoundly religious, from Cromwell to Robespierre? How much industrial modernization has occurred under dictatorships, from Napoleon III to Mussolini? How many dictatorships have been secular, even antireligious, from Mexico to the Soviet Union?

Islamism as a Third World Movement

The Islamist sphere of influence spans the entire spectrum of activist groups who, in the second half of the twentieth century, see their actions as an extension of the concepts elaborated by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949),

and by Abul-Ala Maududi (1903–1978), the creator of the Jamaat-i Islami party on the Indian subcontinent. Revolutionary Shiite political thought shares many elements with the Muslim Brotherhood but remains distinct (both more leftist and more clerical): it has drawn inspiration from the Ayatollahs Khomeini, Baqir al-Sadr, and Taliqani, as well as from the secular Ali Shariati.

From the outset, then, we find Islam divided into three geographic and cultural tendencies: the Sunni Arab Middle East, the Sunni Indian subcontinent, and Irano-Arab Shiism; Turkey, isolated from the Arab world, has its own organizations. These groups are as distinct politically as they are geographically, which is why it is more appropriate to speak of an Islamist sphere of influence than of an international union. The largest organizations are those of the Arab world's Muslim Brotherhood (MB), vaguely dependent on their Egyptian leadership but in reality organized on a national basis; several dissident and minority groups, generally influenced by the most radical ideas of the MB's Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), have branched off from this common base (Hizb al-Tahrir in 1952, the Islamic Jihad in the 1970s, and so on). Next we find organizations on the Indian subcontinent (the various Jamaat-i Islamis of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh), the Afghan *mujahidin* (Hizb-i Islami, Jamaat-i Islami), and, more recently, the North African Islamists (the Algerian FIS, or Islamic Salvation Front; the Tunisian Nahda party) and the Islamic Renaissance Party in the former Soviet Union. This bloc has recently tended to merge with older, apolitical fundamentalist movements (the Saudi Wahhabis, the Pakistani Ahl-i Hadith), thus somewhat losing definition. As for the revolutionary Shiite movement, it is the only one to have taken power by way of a true Islamic revolution; it has therefore become identified with the Iranian state, which used it as an instrument in its strategy for gaining regional power, even though the multiplicity of Shiite groups reflects local particularities (in Lebanon, Afghanistan, or Iraq) as much as it does the factional struggles of Tehran.

Colonel Qaddafi's Libya, despite its activism (which in fact was more financial than ideological), has been outside the Islamist sphere ever since Qaddafi outlawed the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood in 1973 and effected the disappearance of the charismatic head of the Lebanese Shiites, Musa al-Sadr, in 1978.

The Islamist movement has developed over half a century, beginning more or less in 1940. Concepts have of course evolved, historical circumstances have changed, and splits and differences have brought diversity. Nevertheless, there are a conceptual matrix and a sociological base common to all the groups.

Indeed, as much from a sociological as from an intellectual point of view, these movements are products of the modern world. The militants are rarely mullahs; they are young products of the modern educational system, and those who are university educated tend to be more scientific than literary; they come from recently urbanized families or from the impoverished middle classes. Islamists consider Islam to be as much a religion as an "ideology," a neologism which they introduced and which remains anathema to the ulamas (the clerical scholars). They received their political education not in religious schools but on college and university campuses, where they rubbed shoulders with militant Marxists, whose concepts they often borrowed (in particular the idea of revolution) and injected with Quranic terminology (*da'wa*, designating preaching/propaganda). Emphasis is placed on the organization, a framework reminiscent both of Leninist-type parties (in which the amir replaces the secretary-general and the *shura*—the advisory council—the central committee) and of Sufi brotherhoods. F them, taking control of the state will allow for the spread of Isla in a society corrupted by Western values and for a simultaneou appropriation of science and technology. They do not advocate return to what existed before, as do fundamentalists in the strict sense of the word, but a reappropriation of society and modern technology based on politics.

The masses who follow the Islamists are not "traditional" or "traditionalists" either: they live with the values of the modern city—consumerism and upward social mobility; they left behind the old forms of conviviality, respect for elders and for consensus, when they left their villages. These followers are fascinated by the values of consumerism imparted by the shop windows of the large metrop-

olises; they live in a world of movie theaters, cafés, jeans, video, and sports, but they live precariously from menial jobs or remain unemployed in immigrant ghettos, with the frustration inherent in an unattainable consumerist world.

The Islamist adaptation to the modern, urban setting is striking—from the use of modern weapons and communications technology to the organization of large demonstrations. Their militant actions exist in symbiosis with their urban environment: except in Afghanistan and Kurdistan, the guerrillas of the contemporary Muslim world are city-dwellers.

Thus, far from being a strange irruption of an irrational, archaic phenomenon, the Islamist movement is in keeping with two preexisting tendencies. One, of course, is the call to fundamentalism, centered on the *sharia:* this call is as old as Islam itself and yet still new because it has never been fulfilled. It is a tendency that is forever setting the reformer, the censor, and the tribunal against the corruption of the times and of sovereigns, against foreign influence, political opportunism, moral laxity, and the forgetting of sacred texts. The other tendency, more recent and therefore more difficult to see, is that of anticolonialism, of anti-imperialism, which today has simply become anti-Westernism—from Cairo to Tehran, the crowds that in the 1950s demonstrated under the red or national flag now march beneath the green banner. The targets are the same: foreign banks, night clubs, local governments accused of complacency toward the West. The continuity is apparent not only in these targets but also in the participants: the same individuals who followed Nasser or Marx in the 1960s are Islamists today.[1] There is an abundance of coming and going and of connections between Marxist groups and the Islamist sphere (the secular Palestinian Ahmad Jibril, for instance, has close ties with the Lebanese Hizbullah). Without question the Shiites have provided the best bridge between the two Third World movements: Ali Shariati, an ideologist of the contestant Shiite movement, was a great reader of Frantz Fanon. And of course it is the Islamic revolution in Iran that has best embodied the Third World continuity of the Islamist movement by expressing the North–South opposition in religious terms.

The secular, Marxist, and nationalist revolutionary movements of the Third World were caught off-guard by their victories, and their ideals were corrupted by the practice of power. Islam has taken up the torch of the Third World, but with slogans that can no longer be shared by Western leftists or by other Third World movements: religious universalism has killed universalism plain and simple.

The parallels between the Muslim and Christian worlds are nonetheless striking with regard to recent history, no doubt because the two intelligentsias shared common political references. The 1950s and 1960s were years of communion: the Algerian guerrilla fighter and the Palestinian activist seemed the brothers of progressive Western militants. Their violence made sense. The divorce occurred in the 1970s: one could no longer understand the new militants of political Islam. Yet in their social origins, their relationship to knowledge, and even in the values that replaced their Marxist-leaning universalism, they are still the cousins of the Western "militants" of the 1970s: they have in common the cult of the return to the past, of authenticity and purity; the concern with dress, food, and conviviality; the rebuilding of a "traditional" way of life in a context and by methods that presuppose that the tradition is obsolete; the shift into terrorism for the most radical fringe. For the most sectarian, *hijra,* hegira, in the caves of Egypt[2] is akin to a return to the countryside. There are analogies between the Italian Red Brigade and the new extremist Muslim intelligentsia: its members, "microintellectuals" whose social integration falls short of their expectations, hurl themselves into political violence on the basis of self-taught Marxist (or elsewhere Islamist) dogma. The hair-splitting logorrhea of the communiqués of the French "Action directe" movement is a good example of this relationship.

The connection between the two Third World tendencies is stronger than it seems: previously, in the Marxist-leaning sphere of influence, we found the same synthesis between revolution and Christian theology ("liberation theology"), the same voluntarist activism, and the same quest for an "authenticity" that would break with Western, including Soviet, models. The Marxist-leaning revolutionary currents of the 1970s—Hafizullah Amin in Afghanistan,

Pol Pot in Cambodia, the Shining Path in Peru—all sought, beneath a dogmatic Marxist line, to invent a new "national" model built around a "lumpenintelligentsia," particularly the "indigenous" or traditional sectors of the population (tribes, peasants, Indians). Curiously, whereas the Marxist guerrillas were peasants, the Islamists were urban, and thus *sociologically* more modern. The parallel between Islamism and Third World movements extends to their decomposition and the shift of their most radical sectors into terrorism, which is a product of the 1970s and not an Islamic invention. But we have lost the common frame of reference, the Third World Marxist vulgate that allowed some to "understand" the Baader-Meinhof Gang or the Red Brigades, even the Palestinian hijackers, but not the Hizbullah hostage-takers.

Not that we have heard the last of the Third World. The collapse of the Soviet Union and of communism makes it likely that Islam will long remain the dominant force in the mobilization of the Muslim world's masses in times of crisis, and the Third World is still in crisis. But unlike Marxism, Islam cannot reach beyond its cultural sphere: the age of converting entire peoples is past. Religious universalism spreads only through individual conversion and defines a community separate from others: it thus draws its own limits and produces a "culture war" effect that makes it difficult to see the relationship between Third World contestation and Islamist self-assertion. Today's Islamist activists are obsessed with conversion: rumors that Western celebrities or entire groups are converting are hailed enthusiastically by the core militants. Indeed, even as a political ideology Islamism cannot evade the issue of individual belief, whereas Marxism allowed one to explain and thus to influence a social movement on the basis of group determinisms. Religion requires individual conversion, transforming the dynamic of conversion to Islam among Christians into a matter of simple arithmetic rather than a mass sociopolitical phenomenon: you keep adding until the number of converts shifts the balance of the society. But here is where the difficulty lies: anyone in a Christian environment who converts to Islam is psychologically choosing a sect structure, which generally indicates a marginalized person, a fanatic, or a true

mystic—in other words, a loner, which thus precludes desire for a mass movement.

Where Does Political Modernity Come From?

That said, comparisons don't prove anything. To show the modernity, and thus the deep historicity, of Islamist movements is interesting in terms of political sociology, but goes against the Islamists' own arguments. For them, there is only one Islam, that of the age of the Prophet, which has since lost its way, for modernity is loss. But this vision of Islam as possessing a single essence is not unique to the Islamists, since we find it both among traditionalist ulamas and among many Western Orientalists, who are in turn adopting Max Weber's reading of Islam: a culture, a civilization, a closed system. Islamist and Orientalist thinkers are in disagreement, of course, as to what constitutes the essence of Islam, but all speak in terms of a global, timeless system—a mirror effect that no doubt explains both the violence and the sterility of the polemics. The pages that follow will seem at times to accept this presupposition, by the mere fact that we take at their word the arguments of the actors: to which conceptual configuration are they referring when they conceive of Islam as a political system? To what extent does this configuration function in their political action?

The "Orientalist" presupposition consists, among Western specialists or essayists, in defining a timeless "Islamic culture," a conceptual framework that structures both political life and urban architecture, the thought of the ulamas and of their detractors, and whose consequence would be the nonemergence of capitalism (M. Weber) and the absence of an autonomous space for politics and institutions (B. Badie). A timeless civilization in which everything is interrelated and reflects a same structure, from the stucco arabesque to the legal treatise, but a civilization brutally confronted with the challenge of a modernity arisen from outside. According to this view, "Islamic culture" is the major obstacle prohibiting access to political modernity.[3]

What is this presupposition of political modernity? We find

today under the bylines of many authors, after the Third World moment during which the West masochistically beat its breast, the Weberian idea according to which a single civilization—that is to say, Europe—invented a true universalist culture.[4] In the political domain, the invention of modernity lies in the emergence of an autonomous political space, separate from both the religious and private spheres and embodied in the modern, law-based state. Secularity and politics are born of a closing in of Christian thought onto itself. This is not to deny that there has been some remarkable historical and political research addressing the birth of politics and the modern state.[5] But the consequence of this work has been to posit that there is no salvation (no modernity) outside of the Western political model. The "popularized" argument that is put forth, based on these works and aimed at Muslim intellectuals, is twofold: (1) parliamentary democracy, the ideology of human rights, and the law-based state are ethically desirable and economically more efficient; (2) historically, this configuration comes out of Christian Europe. In postcolonial settings this argument is very badly received, and not only in Islamist or traditionalist circles. The Gulf War showed that even among secular, Westernized, and "democratic" Muslim intellectuals there was a conscious choice, whether tortured or enthusiastic, in favor of Saddam Husayn, who all agreed was a dictator . . . a bad Muslim. This passionate reaction implies an admission of failure: the absence of an alternative aside from a miracle, a sign from God. It is this absence of an alternative thought that we should examine without anchoring it to "Islamic culture," which we imperceptibly tend to transform into a psychological category, especially since the self-satisfied defense of the Western model proposed for the benefit of the Third World (and which also serves as a form of self-therapy after the Third-Worldism of the 1960s) has been divided, internally, by increasingly virulent debate about the crises of politics and values in Western societies. We therefore need to break away from these mutually defensive arguments.

The problem is comparativism. Comparativism tends to take one of the elements of the comparison as the norm for the other, finding that there is either a resemblance or a lack of one, but never questioning the original configuration. Comparativism thus risks isolating the two entities, ignoring not only their individual dynamics, but particularly the dialectic of the relationship between one and the other: this dialectic tends both to fix in the imagination differences that are more emblematic than real and to obscure their factual specificity. While there is definitely an Islamic political corpus, from the traditionalist ulamas to the Islamists, it is difficult if not downright specious to posit a simple equivalency between a civilization and a history on the one hand and this corpus on the other.

In comparativism, one is constantly moving between the Islamic corpus (the texts produced by scholars and intellectuals) and the concrete sociological reality: the "lack" of modernity in Muslim countries is explained at times by the effects of the absence of a conceptual category that is present in Western thought (for example, since the concept of a state based on territory is absent from the corpus of Islamic politics, it is impossible to achieve a modern state, which is by definition territorialized); at times by the existence of a sociological category not reflected in the corpus (the patrimonial state, the segmentation into "solidarity groups," *asabiyya*).[6] The first approach confirms the impossibility of the emergence of an autonomous political authority within the framework of "Islamic culture"; the second, in contrast, highlights the autonomy of the political authority—albeit a premodern political authority (a patrimonial state)—with respect to Islamic thought.

But far from being inherently and originally marked by a lack, Islamic political thought is inscribed within a different configuration of the relationship between power and the law. That this configuration is in turn a source of difficulties is not in doubt, but one must measure it in relation to its original meaning, not in relation to the Western state. What is original is the place of the *sharia*, Muslim law, with respect to power. The *sharia* has two characteristics: its autonomy and its incompletion. The *sharia* does not depend on any state, on any actual, positive law, on any political decision; it thereby creates a space that is parallel to the political space, to power, which, it is true, can circumvent the *sharia* or manipulate it (hence the

strong theme of the corruption of the judge), but which cannot make it into something other than what it is: an autonomous, infinite commentary. For the *sharia* does not depend on any official body, church or clergy; the *fatwa*, formal legal opinions that decide matters not mentioned in the text, are always pronounced in the here and now and can be annulled by a subsequent authority.[7] The *sharia* is never closed, for it is based not on a core of concepts, but rather on an ensemble of precepts which is at times general, at times precise, and which expands to include the totality of human acts through induction, analogy, extension, commentary, and interpretation. While the basic precepts, as they are explicitly formulated, cannot be called into question, their extension is a matter of casuistics. The work of the judge is not to apply a principle or a concept, but to bring the case before him back into the realm of what is already known.

These two "weaknesses" in the *sharia* (no institutional closure, no conceptual closure) also make totalitarianism, understood as the absorption of the entirety of the social realm into the political realm, foreign to Islamic culture: its warning symptoms appear only when this culture is in shambles (Iraq). At the same time, no one can lay claim to Islam and simultaneously contest the *sharia*: secularity can result only from violence (Ataturk's Turkey) or from escheat, through a change in lifestyles and customs.

The excess of state, which is latent in the place the state occupies in the West, is totalitarianism. It is not surprising that Western contemporary thought on the birth of the state would also be a reflection on and against totalitarianism.[8] In Islam, it is because there is a weakness in the political space that totalitarianism does not occur, which naturally does not mean that there is no state or arbitrary violence, which, when it occurs, is considered to be "unjust tyranny," *zulm:* the opposite of tyranny, in the Islamic political imagination, is not liberty, but justice. Ethics, and not democracy, is the watchword of protest, clearing the way for every kind of populism. This is how one must interpret the weakness of democratic demand in a Muslim country. It is not that there is an acquiescence in dictatorship, but that a different demand is made: first of all, the respect for privacy, for the family space, the home, honor *(namus);* next, the demand for justice (the recurrence of the theme of the good sovereign). Liberty is demanded in the sphere of the family, in the private sphere, and not in the political domain, where the value expected is justice.

These brief reflections aim to show that there are different configurations and problematics in the relationships between the state and society in Islamic and Western cultures. To investigate the first culture on the basis of the concepts of the second, elevated to the level of universality, can only bring to light an absence, a lack—the lack of a modern state—without making it clear that what prevents the emergence of this state (the *sharia* and the horizontal bonds of solidarity groups) is also what makes Islamic totalitarianism impossible. This doesn't mean that I am equating the *sharia* with Western democracy: simply that comparativism must be viewed as a conclusion and not as a premise. It is a question of methodology.

The Muslim responses to the "Orientalist" discourse are often stereotypical and can be sorted into three categories: (1) the nostalgia argument ("it was Islam that brought civilization to the West"); (2) rejection of the hypothesis ("in what way are Western values superior?"), combined with a denunciation of Western doubletalk, which applies its strict requirements only to others; (3) the apologia for Islam ("everything is in the Quran and the Sunna, and Islam is the best religion"). The first two are defensive: they evade the question while accepting as fact that there is a modernity that produces its own values. The third constitutes the topic of this book.

In fact both Islamism and the traditional fundamentalism of the ulamas have difficulty posing the real question: why does Western Orientalism study Islam *sub specie aeternitatis,* while approaching Western civilization as a "socio-historical configuration"?[9] The reason is simple: the Islamic political imagination accepts and even demands the presupposition according to which Islam exists *sub specie aeternitatis.* The dominant corpus in Sunni Islamic culture, that of the ulamas, as well as those of the Salafist reformists and contemporary Islamists, conceive of Islam as timeless, ahistorical, and beyond criticism.[10] We must therefore understand the rea-

sons for the hegemony of the argument for "oneness" among Muslim scholars and intellectuals, a hegemony that entails the marginalization of other points of view; it is interesting to see that it is "Western" researchers who uncover the atypical thinkers of the Muslim world (such as Ibn Khaldun), whose thought then becomes, in turn, suspect to many Muslim intellectuals. But is it legitimate, considering the nonhistoricity that Islamic thought attributes to itself, to infer that Muslim societies are incapable of achieving political modernity?

The Islamic Political Imagination

We refuse to allow ourselves to establish a relationship of causality between, on the one hand, the manner in which the Islamic tradition thinks of politics and, on the other, the reality of the regimes and institutions in Muslim countries, or even to consider that one is a direct expression of the other. Yet this tradition cannot help but have an effect. There exists unquestionably what one might call an "Islamic political imagination" (in the sense of a horizon of thought), which recurs in the corpus of the ulamas and is explicit in the texts of the Salafists (nineteenth-century reformers) and the Islamists. This "imagination" is not "Islamic culture," for we must be wary of unruly generalizations. There is another classical corpus (philosophy); there are other thoughts, other practices; there are intellectuals who think outside this horizon. But one need only skim the literature of the ulamas or the Islamists, or listen to the sermons in the mosques, to admit that there is an Islamic political imagination dominated by a single paradigm: that of the first community of believers at the time of the Prophet and of the first four caliphs.

Independently of its historical reality, this model offers the militants of political Islam an ideal for Muslim society. Islam was born as a sect and as a society, a political and religious community in which there existed neither institutions nor clergy nor specialized functions, and in which the Prophet Muhammad was the sole narrator and interpreter of a divine and transcendent law that governed all human activities. An egalitarian, undifferentiated society, placed under the auspices of a man who didn't legislate, but who stated the

revelation: this oneness (tawhid), extends to the individual, whose practices are considered in the aggregate and not classified according to the area in which they are implemented (the social, private, devotional, political, or economic sphere). This paradigm would definitively mark the relationships between Islam and politics even if the original community, nostalgia for which haunts Islamic political reflection, was never to be rebuilt. This paradigm of the original community, which rejects any internal segmentation (ethnicities, tribes) and derives its unity from a charismatic leader, would even be reinterpreted in secular fashion and included in Arab nationalist ideology.[11]

From this paradigm result a certain number of recurring themes in Islamic political thought. The nonseparation of the religious, legal, and political spheres is affirmed. The *sharia* should be the sole source of law as well as the norm for individual behavior, both for the sovereign and for the simple believer. The definition of an autonomous political space, with its own rules, its positive laws, and its own values, is prohibited. Finally, the state is never considered in terms of a territorialized nation-state: the ideal is to have a power that would rule over the entirety of the *umma,* the community of the faithful, while actual power is exercised over a segment of the *umma* whose borders are contingent, provisional, and incomplete.

It is thus commonplace to say that in the Islamic political imagination, no distinction is made between the religious and the political orders. This idea is one of the deep convictions of the political actors in contemporary Islam: on the basis of this fact alone, independently of any theological analysis of its validity, it should be taken seriously. We therefore should study the effect it produces on thought and political practice, and not consider it a necessary fact in the history and the actual political practice of Islam, which would mean an absence of a specifically political authority.

The Debate on the State in Muslim Society

According to the Orientalist perspective, the intellectual configuration described above has been an obstacle to the appearance of a political space and to the emergence of a modern state. This is not

the place to revisit a historical debate. But there are two problems we cannot circumvent: the appearance of a political space in the practice of power in classical Islam, and the nature of contemporary states in Muslim countries.

In reality, since the time of the original community there has always been a de facto autonomous political space in the Muslim world: what has been lacking is a political thought regarding the autonomy of this space, which has therefore been perceived by the traditionalists as contingent and by the Islamists as deviant. As early as the end of the first century of the hegira, a de facto separation between political power (sultans, amirs) and religious power (the caliph) was created and institutionalized. But this separation always resulted from a division that was different from the one that developed in the West. No positive law emanates from the center of power: the sovereign reigns in the empirical, the contingent. Any intervention into the private sphere is perceived as arbitrary, precisely because social relationships, regulated by the *sharia*, are not supposed to be subject to arbitrariness and violence, contrary to the image of the capricious despot that Western chroniclers often sent home. It is because Islam occupies the sphere of law and of social regulation that the power of the sovereign, even of a fair and good sovereign, cannot help but seem contingent and arbitrary, for he can intervene only in what is outside the domain of the *sharia*, and thus only in nonessential matters. There is, in Islam, a civil society indifferent to the state. There is no "Oriental despotism."[12]

Yet according to the tradition, the sovereign has a "religious" function: to defend Islam and the *sharia*. The state, too, has a goal: to enable Muslims to live as good Muslims.[13] The state is an instrument and not an end in itself. Thus treatises on Muslim law contain a section devoted to the exercise of power. The good sovereign is one who fulfills this function; the bad, one who exercises an "unjust tyranny" *(zulm)*. "Justice" *(adala)* is at the center of this ethic of the good prince. The sultan (power in fact) is not the caliph (a successor to Muhammad), and yet the Muslim must obey the sultan if he institutes the *sharia* and defends the Islamic community against its enemies. The sultan is a sword *(sayf al-din,* the "sword of religion,"

an often conferred title), not an ethical model, but his virtue is nonetheless important. Similarly, his legitimacy is indirectly religious, in that he ensures the public good *(maslaha),* enabling the believer to observe his religion: this legitimacy is symbolized by the right to coin money and to have the Friday prayer *(khutba)* said in his name.

This configuration is meaningful for the "classical" period. There is no question that it marks the imagination and beliefs of traditionalist mullahs. But if we look at recent history and at the nature of existing Muslim states, "Islamic culture" as applied to politics tends to lose a good deal of its pertinence: there are genuine historical developments in Muslim societies and the emergence of modern state tendencies in the early nineteenth century.

In the post-Weberian critiques of the state in Muslim countries, we find two analyses explaining its precariousness, its lack of legitimacy, and its seizure by solidarity groups *(asabiyya).* The one (Badie), as we saw earlier, views this as a consequence of "Islamic culture": the absence of an autonomous political sphere and the confusion between public and private spaces bring about a kind of neopatrimonial state. The other (M. Seurat) explains it by the imported and recent nature of the modern state in the Middle East: "The modern state in the Middle East . . . is a successful *asabiyya,*"[14] which is to say that a solidarity group, generally a clan or a minority, seizes control of the state apparatus and turns it into an instrument for the economic exploitation of the society; such a state is predatory and lives off unearned income (oil proceeds, money extorted from rich countries by threat of harm, proceeds from influence peddling and speculation). Seurat's analysis applies perfectly to Syria and Iraq: a minority group (the Alawis in Syria, the Sunni Takritis in Iraq) first infiltrates the army, then takes over the state, which it turns against its own society (dictatorship and massacres); this state in fact lives from external predatory practices (direct in the case of Lebanon, and, for a few months, of Iraq in Kuwait; indirect in the case of Syria, which cashes in on its power as a potential menace to obtain Saudi subsidies), from oil dividends (Iraq), and from taxes on foreign trade (sale of export licenses, "farming out" sources of private revenue to

dignitaries: drugs, customs, technical ministries). But as Seurat emphasizes, Syria and Iraq are secular states, engaged in bloody battle with the Islamists. M. Seurat's work, which refers constantly to Ibn Khaldun and not to the corpus of the ulamas, shows that the position of the state in the political configuration of the Middle East is not necessarily a consequence of "Islamic culture," but rather a "Third World" type of phenomenon, resulting from the brutal importation of the European model into a segmented and unstructured society. In fact, the patrimonial state, employed as a source of revenue by a group or a family, is a phenomenon that exists in every culture, from the Marcoses' Philippines to Mobutu's Zaire.

But can we generalize and say that the Middle Eastern state is simply an optical illusion?

The contemporary Muslim world is no more the medieval Muslim world than the European state according to Machiavelli was that of Thomas Aquinas. There is a genuine history of the state in the Middle East, but this history is inseparable from the encounter with the West, which figures into the political makeup of the current Islamic world for better or for worse, just as it figures into Islamist thought and the consumer values of today's societies.

There is a historical process to the construction of states, dating from before colonialism (Morocco, Egypt, Iran, and even Afghanistan). In the nineteenth century, the latter three countries and the Ottoman Empire began a transformation of the state from the top down, based on the model of enlightened despotism and beginning with an army and the construction of a modern state sector (schools, universities, and so on). It is true that Europe continually broke the wings of these states, which were poorly implanted in any case. Military operations (Egypt in 1840, Iran in 1907, the coup against Musaddiq in 1953), growing indebtedness, the arbitrary erection of borders (in 1918 and at other times) have always shattered the impulse toward the construction of stable states. The most recent war, the Gulf War, was not followed by an effort to restructure the political landscape: the same actors and the same regimes were used to reenact the same play according to a different strategic power

relationship. In short, from Disraeli to Bush, by way of Clemenceau and Kissinger, the West has never been concerned with encouraging political modernization in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, as cynical as this policy is and as acerbic as the critiques of Arab intellectuals have been regarding the role of the West, one fact is undeniable: the nation-states currently existing in the Middle East have held up, with or without legitimacy. After each crisis, they again become the keys to negotiations; the longer they last, the more reality they acquire. These states have resisted all the "pan . . . ism" crises: pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. Arab nationalists have secularized the notion of the *umma* and in theory reject the territorialized state: Egypt (whose official name from 1958 to 1972 was the "United Arab Republic"), Syria, and Iraq consider themselves to be parties, "regions," in a future Arab nation. And yet all the plans to unite (the most serious of which was the Syrian-Egyptian union of 1958) have failed: each time there is a return to the preexisting states. Similarly, the exaltation of the Arab combat against Israel cannot hide the fact that each state pursues its own interests, to the detriment of the Palestinians if need be. The same is true of pan-Islamism: the Iraqi masses, who as Shiites are victimized by their own state, did not join the Iranian revolutionaries during the first Gulf conflict. The latest Gulf crises saw the same states, the same leaders, the same borders reemerge, now legitimized by the peace proceedings.

Since the Iranian revolution, the countries of the Middle East have experienced great stability in their regimes and leaders. Is this proof of the patrimonial nature of the state? Perhaps, but this is an insufficient explanation. For even if these states hold together by the great personalization of their leaders, by the absence or weakness of a democratic space, by the disdain for rules of law, even if they have often been taken over by factions, by an *asabiyya*, and are based on an overabundant and corrupt bureaucracy, they exist. There are state mechanisms, sectors of the economy tied to the existence of the state, strata of the population (in particular the new intelligentsia) that live solely from the state, modern armies. The last Gulf war, for example, showed the capacity of the Iraqi state apparatus, which survived a

military defeat, to remain in place. Even if these states maintain themselves mostly because of the weakness of the opposition, the lack of democratic "demand," or the separateness of the civil society, their persistence shows that there is a "state fact" more resistant to analysis and to events than was formerly believed. Regimes can change, but the states remain.

The existence of these states is also fixed by the globalization of politics: the great powers and the United Nations guarantee the world map, thus the borders, thus the territories, and thus, ultimately, the states that incarnate them. Territorialization, characteristic of the modern state, may not be inherent in the thought either of the "Islamic imagination" or of Arabism, but it is part and parcel of the balance of international forces. The Kuwaiti identity might have been weak before the Gulf War; now it is very real, especially since Kuwait is certain to subsist under the American umbrella. Today's political globalization operates in favor of the consolidation of the existing states. Inclusion in a world order gives these states a sociopolitical consistency as well, no doubt, as a psychological reality in the minds of their "nationals."

Yet these states are not revolutionary. Their politics cannot be explained, as Seurat aptly demonstrates, without reference to the concept of the *asabiyya,* to segmentation and esprit de corps, which is to say to the establishment of clientele networks more concerned with their own prosperity than with that of the state. But these networks do not represent the permanence of a tradition behind a mere facade of modernity. The structures of the traditional *asabiyya* were dismantled by urbanization, by the shuffling of society, by ideologization: they rebuilt themselves along different lines (political patronage and economic mafias), but they may also disappear. The modern *asabiyya* are recompositions of the esprit de corps based on the fact of the state and the globalization of economic and financial networks; they are translations of a traditional relationship of solidarity into the modern realm.[15] It is still important to know who is from which village, who married whom, but also who is of what rank at the military academy or who studied with which theology professor. The modern *asabiyya* are not merely the permanence of

tribalism or religious communalism: they may be reconstituted on the basis of modern sociological elements (the new intelligentsia versus the old families), but they function as predators and perpetuate themselves through matrimonial alliances. Their space is no longer the grandfather's village but the modern city. The militia of Beirut may function as old urban *asabiyya*—the *futuwwa,* brotherhoods of bad boys who ensure order and "protection" in the areas poorly patrolled by the palace—while political parties may function as patronage networks around important notables, but these militia and these parties are still something other than the continuation of an old tradition: the stakes they represent, the type of activities they engage in with regard to international conflicts, the insertion of the bazaar into a globalized economy—all this makes them into something other than surviving remnants, the residue of tradition in modern times. Even in a traditional society such as Afghanistan, the network that develops around a smalltime local commander, himself plugged into an "international" network for the circulation of goods (arms, and sometimes drugs), is no longer the clan that existed before, but a recomposition of the traditional segmentation around a new political elite and the globalized flow of wealth.

Challenging the Orientalist vision of the state in Muslim countries are critics from three milieus in the Muslim world: the "Westernized" intellectuals (those who accept the values of the modern state), the ulamas, and the Islamists.

The first denounce not the Western model of the state, but the doubletalk by which the West does everything in its power to prevent the universal model it proposes from becoming reality. This argument, which is often well founded, nonetheless carries with it an intellectual danger: that of blaming the foreigner for all one's problems. Segmentation is seen as a Western plot (Berberism, Kurds . . .) and charismatic dictators as the best response to Western duplicity. The worse legacy of the West was no doubt to offer the Muslim people a ready-to-wear devil: conspiracy theory is currently paralyzing Muslim political thought. For to say that every failure is the devil's work is the same as asking God, or the devil himself (which

is to say, these days, the Americans), to solve one's problems.[16] Between the miracle that doesn't happen and the pact in which one loses one's soul, there is plenty of room for discontent.

Among the ulamas, mullahs, and their followers, the historical evolution of the Muslim world has had little effect on the political imagination derived from the paradigm of the "Islamic society," a paradigm that also recurs in Islamist movements. The "Islamic political imagination" has endeavored to ignore or disqualify anything new. Not that the ulamas have always fought innovation: on the contrary, by allowing sovereigns to render *fatwa* they legitimated the establishment of a new state order (for which they would later be reproached by the Islamists); however, aside from a segment of Shiite clergy, they simply neither developed a new form of thought nor integrated the new facts into their discourse. The atemporality of the mullahs' and ulamas' discourse is striking to this day. History is something that must be endured; whatever is new is contingent and merits only a *fatwa* from time to time. Modernization exists side by side with the old discourse.

As for Islamist thought, it sees itself as a response to the problematics of the imported state and of segmentation: it has something to say about the Muslim world's backwardness by comparison with Europe, about industrialization, about the Islamic economy, and so on. It notes, rightly, that secularity and nationalism are not *ipso facto* modernization.[17] The seizing of power by *asabiyya* in the secular and nationalist states of Syria and Iraq, the role of tribalism and patronage, and the formation of social strata born of and parasite to the state are constant themes of Islamist propaganda. Islamist protest occurs in the name of the universality of the social body (conceived of as the religious community) against the particularism of the state, against segmentation, against both the new state-managed and the old tribal societies. Islam is seen as the introduction of a universal outlook and the common good against particularism and communalism.[18]

The modernity of Islamist thought is in this quest for a universal state. The Islamists' reference to the original society and their rejection of history are not enough in and of themselves to mark their thought as archaic. Another fundamentalist mode of thought,

the Protestant Reformation, was, as we know, one of the best instruments for access to economic and political modernity. Referring to the Tradition (with a capital T) of the Prophet allows one to evade the tradition issued from history and thus to integrate a modernity which is no longer a purely external phenomenon, as it is for the Salafists, but which is a fact of Muslim society.

But does Islamist thought fulfill its program? This is the subject of our inquiry. In my view, it has failed because Islamist thought, at the end of an intellectual trajectory that tries to integrate modernity, ultimately meets up with the "Islamic political imagination" of the tradition and its essential premise: politics can be founded only on individual virtue.

The Internalized West

With respect to the effect of Western domination, it is necessary to examine not only the economic and political structures of the contemporary Muslim world (political backwardness would thus be an effect of neocolonialism, evoking emotional identification with the *umma* even at the price of secular dictators such as Saddam Husayn) but also the thought of this world, the conceptual framework of Islamist intellectuals. One thing is indeed striking: most Islamists were educated in a "Westernized" environment, yet they hold to the corpus of the ulamas (whom they accuse in passing of having poorly managed this corpus). All their literature insists on the rationality of religious prescriptions; this militant rationalism is a sign that modernity has worked its way into the very heart of Islamist discourse, which is so rationalist that it ends up denying its own religious practices.

But does Islamist discourse truly dominate the Muslim world? In addressing this question we should consider neither the number of books published nor the opinions of professors or journalists, but the networks through which these works are distributed, and the places and languages in which they are written—in other words, the public that is touched by them. The publication and distribution networks are financed today by conservative, often Saudi milieus. The Islamists have their own public which cannot or does not want

to read Westernized intellectuals. Aside from some ephemeral Marxist writings, and at least with respect to the Arab world, it is as if the only audience for Westernized Muslim intellectuals writing within the framework of the modern social sciences were in fact within the Western world. On the Indian subcontinent, "modern" Muslim intellectuals write in English, leaving the writings for the masses, whether Islamist or neofundamentalist, in Urdu. We will no doubt witness the same phenomenon in central Asia, where Russian will long remain the language of the social sciences. The Maghreb is divided into three languages (French, literary Arabic, and Arabic dialect): in choosing a language, one chooses an audience. Only Turkey, Iran, and Egypt produce social science texts in the vernacular. In France, and especially in the United States, we are witnessing an astonishing "brain drain" of non-Islamist intellectuals, particularly in the social sciences. With the elite gone, the world of thought has been inhabited by "new intellectuals."[19] And as we shall see, these new intellectuals have a "religious" relationship to their own knowledge. They will not be the ones to open up the ulamas' corpus. The modernity they brought to the reading of Islam exhausted itself in a repetitive, uncritical and undemonstrative defense of Islam, which for them has answers to all the problems of the modern world.

But Islamism's ultimate failure in its attempt to address modernity doesn't prevent modernity from turning into sociological facts and movements. Modernity creeps into Muslim countries regardless of Islam, and the Islamists themselves play a part in this secularization of the religion. They are a stage toward the "disenchantment of the world."[20] By rejecting a Westernization that is already in place, they express the myth of authenticity in a borrowed, inauthentic language. For they borrow from this modernity the refusal to return to the real tradition in the name of an imaginary Tradition: they reject popular religious practice, the village, Sufism, philosophy. They themselves deny and undermine what is and was Muslim civilization and ensure the triumph of fast food (*halal,* of course—religiously correct), of jeans, Coke, and English. The urban culture (in the ethnological sense) of the Islamists strikingly resembles that of any modern Western suburb. And the reinvention of a vestiary tradition that never existed (raincoats, gloves and scarves for women, beards and parkas for men) will not bring about a new authenticity. The Tehran of the mullahs has a very American look.

Modernization occurred, but outside any conceptual framework: it happened through rural exodus, emigration, consumption, the change in family behavior (a lower birthrate), but also through the cinema, music, clothing, satellite antennas, that is, through the globalization of culture. It also occurred through the establishment of states that, fragile, corrupt, and clientele oriented though they may be, are nonetheless profoundly new in their method of legitimation, their social base, and their division into territories frozen by international agreements. Protest against the West, which includes contesting the existing states, is on the same order as Western ecology or anti-immigrant arguments: they are arguments one propounds when it is too late. Just as France will never return to a preindustrial society, and its immigrants are there to stay, so Muslim cities will never return to the harmony of the bazaar and of guilds. It is a hybrid world, a world of nostalgia. Only when it is too late do we dream of the past, and then our dreams incorporate everything we want to deny. The tradition of which the nostalgic dream, like the tradition condemned by modernists, never existed.

The Failure of Islamism

In retrospect, it appears that the political action of the Islamists, far from leading to the establishment of states or of Islamic societies, falls in either with the logic of the state (Iran), or with traditional, if reconfigured, segmentation (Afghanistan). No matter what the actors say, any political action amounts to the automatic creation of a secular space or a return to traditional segmentation. Herein lies the limit of the politicization of a religion, of any religion. Our problem, then, is not to survey to what extent Islam allows for a secular space in its texts and age-old practice (this would pose considerable problems of methodology and amounts to returning to the conceptual categories of those whom one is critiquing), but to study a coherent ensemble, limited in time and space, of texts, practices, and political organizations that deeply marked the political life of

Muslim countries and their relationships with the countries of the North, while tending to alter the Muslims' perception of Islam in a stricter moral direction.

The thought of the movements we are studying oscillates between two poles: a revolutionary pole, for whom the Islamization of the society occurs through state power; and a reformist pole, for whom social and political action aims primarily to re-Islamize the society from the bottom up, bringing about, *ipso facto,* the advent of an Islamic state. The split lies not on the question of the necessity of an Islamic state, but on the means by which to arrive at one and on the attitude to adopt with respect to the powers in place: destruction, opposition, collaboration, indifference. The entire spectrum of attitudes is possible: the Jordanian MB participated in parliamentary elections, the Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan and the Sudanese MB supported military putsches, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad launched a campaign of assassinations of government personalities. Can the two poles be placed on a chronological scale that would move from Islamization from the top down (Islamism) to Islamization from the bottom up (neofundamentalism)? Yes and no. On the one hand, there is no systematic correspondence between intellectual radicalism and political extremism: the Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan, which is radical in its demand for a fully Islamic society, has always remained within a legal framework, even when its results in elections were laughable; in Afghanistan, it is often difficult to comprehend the ideological differences between the Hizb-i Islami and the Jamaat-i Islami, although the first has carried out sectarian and quite violent actions, and the second has always proved to be a party of openness. What is more, the Islamist movements themselves constantly oscillate between political activism and neofundamentalism, that is, between primacy accorded the political struggle and that given to the Islamization of the society. Al-Banna, for one, has at times advocated the rejection of compromise, at times called for collaboration. Certain things have remained constant, of course, over the last fifty years: the Ayatollah Khomeini has always advocated a radical break (but in language that is at times traditionalist, at times revolutionary); the Arab Muslim Brotherhoods stepped over the line into armed confrontation only when forced into it by external repression (Syria); the Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan has continued to act legally; the revolutionary movements—the Iranian sphere of influence, the Afghan Islamists, and radical Arab groups (Jihad, Takfir wal-Hijra)—emerged only later, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.[21]

The revolutionary path was a failure: the Iranian revolution got bogged down in internal struggles and the economic crisis, the activism of the MB dissident groups never managed to achieve a change in regime in an Arab country. The Sunni extremist groups marginalized themselves, the Shiites, on the contrary, became pawns in state strategies (the manipulation of terrorism by Syria and Iran). But Islamism has profoundly marked the political landscape and contemporary Muslim society.

Toward the end of the 1980s, the failure of the Islamist revolutionary idea brought about the drift of a revolutionary, political, Third World type of Islamism, incarnated in the Iranian revolution, toward a puritanical, preaching, populist, conservative neofundamentalism, financed until recently by Saudi Arabia but violently anti-Western, particularly since the end of the East–West confrontation has ceased to cast communism as a foil. The Algerian FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) is the prototype for this sort of group: a conjunction of the political heritage of Islamism, Saudi money (until 1990), and the influence of a more pious than political return to Islam. Yet the distinction that we are exploring here between Islamism and neofundamentalism has no chronological cutoff point; it is a difference in emphasis. Islamist militants did not suddenly become neofundamentalists starting in 1984 or 1985. On the other hand, the shrinking prospects for political revolution, the growing influence of Saudi money, the inability of Islamist thought to go beyond the founding texts, the appearance of a new generation of militants less politically educated and more concerned with the *sharia* and respecting rituals than with an Islamic revolution, all this set a different tone for the Islamist movement and confused, without erasing, what differentiated it from traditional fundamentalism. This is why it is important, on a given point, to note the differences

between Islamism and neofundamentalism (the inversely proportional place accorded the *sharia* and women, the concept of revolution) and, on other points, to note the similarities (the relationship to knowledge, the critique of the official ulamas, the definition of the economy).

Islamist ideas have spread throughout broad sectors of Muslim societies, losing part of their political force in this popularization. An obvious re-Islamization is occurring in high places and on the street. Since the end of the 1970s, the states have reintroduced principles from the *sharia* into their constitutions and laws; secularity is receding in the legal domain (family statute in Algeria in 1984). From below, one may note the increased visibility of fundamentalist Islam (in attire: the wearing of beards by men, and of veils or scarves by city women) and a greater externality of practice, with the sprouting of neighborhood mosques uncontrolled by the state.

Yet basically, the influence of Islamism is more superficial than it seems. The *sharia* has been put only partially into practice in the most conservative states (Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan). The existing regimes have proved stable in the face of Islamist contestation; the leaders have experienced great political longevity: in the 1980s, from Morocco to Pakistan (with the exception of Lebanon, Sudan, and Afghanistan), the only heads of state who disappeared did so as a result of illness or death (Bourguiba, Khomeini, Zia ul-Haqq); all the others (Hasan II, Chadli Benjedid, Mubarak, Husayn of Jordan, Asad of Syria, Fahd of Saudi Arabia, Saddam Husayn, Jabir al-Sabah of Kuwait, Qabus of Oman, Abdallah Salih of North Yemen) remained in place the entire decade.

Re-Islamization has in no way changed the rules of the political or economic game. The geostrategy of the Middle East is connected to the existing states, not to the popular or international Islamist movements. The victory of Islamist movements such as the FIS in Algeria will not give rise to a new pan-Islamism, but on the contrary to "Islamo-nationalisms." Everywhere, even within the Islamist sphere of influence, the repressed is resurfacing: ethnic and tribal segmentation, political maneuvering, personal rivalries, but also evil . . . corruption, speculation. These mechanisms are not thought out.

The essential premise of the Islamist movement is that the political model it proposes presupposes the virtue of individuals, but that this virtue can be acquired only if the society is truly Islamic. All the rest is plot, sin, or illusion.

The vicissitudes that marked the minds of so many during the 1980s have ultimately had little influence on the facts and history: in the end we find the countries, states, regimes and borders that existed ten years earlier. After the second war in the Gulf, the dependence of Muslim countries on the North has never been greater.

Nonetheless, the socioeconomic realities that sustained the Islamist wave are still here and are not going to change: poverty, uprootedness, crises in values and identities, the decay of educational systems, the North–South opposition, the problem of immigrant integration into the host societies. The Islamic revolution, the Islamic state, the Islamic economy are myths, but we have not heard the last of Islamist protestation. The coming to power of movements such as the FIS will only make more apparent the emptiness of the phantasm of the "Islamic state."