

ISLAM, ISLAMISMS AND THE WEST

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Identity politics in the widest sense is now quite the norm, and it comes to us in many guises, in the actual conduct of politics as well as in political theories and analyses, from the right, the left, the liberal centre. Culturalism, or the view that culture is the primary and determining instance of social existence, is a by-product of this identitarianism, and wherever politics and religion come to inflame each other, religion itself becomes synonymous with culture, and culture with religion, so that, for example, a constitutive difference between Islam and Christianity, as regards the scope for egalitarian politics in their respective zones, can be posited from the left, while the most hard-nosed geopolitical prescriptions can come to us from the right, in the guise of a discourse on religion, culture and civilization.

Countries where Muslims were the majority and which were therefore designated as 'Muslim countries' until just a decade or so ago, in a sort of shorthand, are now called 'Islamic countries', shifting the nomenclature from the softer matter of plain demography to the harder, narrower matter of religious belief. Among Muslims themselves, the two terms are held to be distinct. For most, being a Muslim mainly signifies the fact of birth in a Muslim family, at best a Muslim sub-culture within a wider national culture (Egyptian, Nigerian, Lebanese or whatever); while religion, even when observed, is lived as one of the many ingredients in one's complex social identity, which is always specific, and hence deeply tied to language, region, custom, class, and so on; religious observance, if any, remains largely local and personal. This subcultural Muslimness itself is contextual, deeply shaped by history, geography, politics, the larger multi-religious milieu, myriad rhythms of material life. To be a Bengali-speaking Muslim in the Indian state of West Bengal is not the same thing as being a Bengali-speaking Muslim in neighbouring Bangladesh; the immediate surroundings impinge decisively. The religious dimension of this Muslim subcultural existence may itself be refracted through sectarian and ideological particularity: Shia and Sunni, for instance, or various sub-sects among the Shia, the more puritanical sub-sects

among the Sunnis such as the Wahhabi or the Ahl-e-Hadith, those others who may be inclined toward some transgressive tendency Sufic tradition, or still others who are inclined toward secular nationalism, communism, agnosticism, atheism, etc., and yet feel, existentially, part of a Muslim (but not Islamic) subculture.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country, and for the vast majority the culture of daily life bears notable imprints of Hinduism, in particular, and, in some places, even Buddhism. India has the second largest population of Muslims in the world, and the extensive research volumes published by the Anthropological Survey of India demonstrate that Muslims living in any particular region of the country (e.g. Kerala in the South, West Bengal in the East, Uttar Pradesh in the North) share well over 80 per cent of their daily cultural practices with their Hindu neighbours in the same region, and very little with Muslims of distant regions within the country; with their distant co-religionists they share some protocols of prayer and a common fear of the Hindu majoritarian communalism which has engulfed the country in the political domain.

Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country, was *born*, less than forty years ago, out of a secular nationalism which rejected the idea that a common religion was sufficient basis for the making of a nation-state (the 'idea' of Pakistan). The creation of Bangladesh was *opposed* by the Islamicists, as was the creation of Pakistan by the majority of the clergy, for a variety of reasons, in 1947. The emergence of a terrifying Bangladeshi Islamicist movement there is a recent phenomenon, and in considerable degree a part of the globalization of the armed Islamicist militancy which was first spawned by the Carter administration for the anti-communist jihad in Afghanistan. This example illustrates how politically motivated, historically contingent and ideologically fictive the making and unmaking of such religious and cultural identities can be.

The ecumenical popular Islam of Indonesia; the varieties of the lived Muslim subcultures in secular, multi-religious India; the vagaries of the 'Muslim nationalism' which provided the ideological justification for the creation of Pakistan; the incoherence of the linguistic nationalism of the East Pakistanis, which led to the creation of Bangladesh as a secular nation – all these indicate how misleading it is to ascribe to some inherent Islamic-ness of the polity or the culture as such. To refer to all these people as 'Islamic' is to occlude the specificity and novelty of Islamism in general, to posit hyper-Islamicity of Muslim peoples, and to succumb to the idea, propagated by the religious right as well as the Orientalists, that religion is the constitutive element of a culture, and hence also of its social existence and political destiny.

MAKING SOCIETIES ISLAMIC:
FROM AFGHANISTAN TO IRAQ

The charge of Islamic fundamentalists is, precisely, that these countries are *not* Islamic because their legal structures, social norms, the predominant educational systems, popular cultures, etc., are manifestly un-Islamic. Hence the projects of *Islamization*; they are Muslim but they are to be *made* Islamic. For the Sunni fundamentalist, Iran is un-Islamic for the simple reason that it is predominantly Shia. For the neo-Wahhabi opposition, out of which so many Saudi members of al-Qaeda have arisen, neither the ruling House of Saud nor the clerical establishment which legitimates it, can be called Islamic; Saudi Arabia itself has to be recaptured for *true* Islam. I shall return to the historical origins of these phenomena. Suffice it to say here that the distinguishing feature of the various Islamicist groupings which started becoming so prominent in diverse countries from mid-1970s onwards was that virtually every one of them, unconnected with others, grew within its national milieu and sought to transform their own nation-state. (The major exception here would be the Ikhwan al-Muslimun, the Muslim Brotherhood, which started in the 1920s as a specifically Egyptian phenomenon but was then patronized by some Gulf regimes after it was suppressed under Nasser during the 1950s and gradually became a pan-Arab phenomenon, with branches in various countries.) This was equally true of the neo-Wahhabi group in Saudi Arabia which created a world-wide media sensation when it captured the Mecca mosque in November 1979; of the several Islamicist groups in Egypt which came collectively to be known as Jamaa'at el-Islamiyya and whose most spectacular act in that period was the assassination of Sadat; and of General Zia ul Haq, the military dictator who initiated the state-led process of Islamization in Pakistan. The United States had of course been a staunch supporter of the Saudi regime despite its Wahhabi autocracy but it had also been systematically supporting the Islamicists, in a variety of countries, in opposition to communism and radical secular nationalism since the very inception of the Truman doctrine.

The singular achievement of the Carter administration was to bring together personnel from many of these groups – from countries as diverse as Indonesia and Algeria, the Philippines and the Sudan, not to speak of Egypt and Saudi Arabia itself – and organize them into a single, well-trained, well-financed, well-equipped force to fight communism in Afghanistan, well before any direct Soviet intervention and indeed – we have it directly from Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor – to *entice* the Soviet Union into the conflict.¹ Most of what is now called 'Islamic terrorism' and even

‘Islamofascism’, though not all of it, is a consequence of it. The Islamic Republic of Iran was born roughly at the same time, quite independently, but then got drawn into the wider regional configuration owing to a variety of pressures: Saddam’s invasion of Iran, Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the influx of Afghan refugees into Iran, etc. Hezbollah in Lebanon was and continues to be independent of the ‘Afghani Arabs’ (as CIA-recruited Arab jihadis in Afghanistan came to be called); infiltration of such elements into some Palestinian camps in Lebanon is a recent phenomenon and Hezbollah is opposed to them. The Islamicist parties in Pakistan have far older origins but the Afghan jihad, conducted from Pakistani soil, catapulted them from their marginal positions in Pakistani society to the very centre, with immense material and organizational resources at their disposal; they played the key role in the ideological formation of what later became the Taliban.

Even as the Afghan jihad was unfolding, some of these personnel were also infiltrating other regions, such as Kashmir, the then Soviet and predominantly Muslim republics of Central Asia, Chechnya, Bosnia and so on. The long-term consequence of this US strategy was not only that when these seasoned cadres were de-commissioned at the conclusion of the Afghan jihad they were free to create mayhem in their respective countries while maintaining that loose network of connections which is now called al-Qaeda. The origins of the term ‘al-Qaeda’ are obscure. It is said to have originally referred to the register/ledger which was kept during the anti-communist Afghan jihad for entering the names, allowances, etc., of the contingent of jihadis that had been assembled from numerous foreign countries. Osama bin Laden was by no means a central leader of this vast group and no one can plausibly suggest that it remained a cohesive, centrally-led group after its various members and sub-groups had been dispersed when that jihad ended. Afghanistan itself went through bloody internecine fighting among the mujahideen groups that the US had installed in power, and these groups were collectively overthrown by the new force of the Taliban. The country could not have remained a consistent central locus for directing so amorphous a globally dispersed phenomenon, the Taliban’s hosting of Osama notwithstanding. Indeed, the Taliban were preoccupied with stabilizing their own rule rather than waging a global jihad. What now gets called al-Qaeda is at best a loose network of affinity groups with very weak mutual linkages, even though the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have certainly contributed to a great expansion of such groups as well as to the numbers of freelance, self-styled martyrs.

The immense publicity that the US-led mass media gave them as ‘freedom-fighters’ bestowed upon them a global legitimacy and aura. One forgets

now that the force of Islamic jihadis which the US assembled in Afghanistan was called 'the mujahideen' (those who conduct jihad), and that when their leaders visited the Oval Office President Reagan introduced them as 'moral equivalents of our Founding Fathers'. The other two major contributions have come from the current Bush administration. The first was to treat the hideous events of 11 September 2001 not as an international crime for which the surviving criminals bore individual as well as group responsibility, but as an act of 'war' against which a global war was declared in retaliation: Afghanistan and Iraq – whose governments had nothing to do with that crime – were invaded, other countries of the region were coerced and threatened, and Israel was given a free hand in the Occupied Territories. As criminals on the run, sought not just by the US but by every law enforcement agency of the world, they would have been annihilated or forced to languish in obscurity. As partners in a globalized civilizational war, their aura was enhanced immensely; few people in the world had heard of Osama until then, and only some lunatic fringes in some Muslim countries celebrated the fireballing of the World Trade Centre; there were street demonstrations in Tehran in solidarity with the American people, and leaders like Arafat sent messages of sympathy and condolence, while the Taliban themselves denounced the act. It is the scale of aggression in the American response, coupled with ritual incantations of Osama's name as the mastermind, and the televising of the latter's defiant statements by outlets like al-Jazeera, which turned him into a household legend and even a hero for many. As some Muslim countries were invaded and others threatened with invasion, any number of footloose Muslim youth, ranging all the way from products of the Islamic medressas to LSE graduates, now wanted to join the new jihad. It needs to be reiterated that joining the jihad had been made fashionable by the US itself; the fashion now continued, against the US itself.

Second, after occupying Iraq, the US moved swiftly to communalize it as well, re-making it along sectarian lines, relying first on the exile luminaries and technocrats who had been re-imported from California and London, then shifting briefly to the CIA asset, Iyad Allawi, and eventually settling on outright fundamentalist Shiite organizations such as al-Da'wa and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which had long been nurtured, paradoxically enough, by the clerical regime in Iran. The exact date for the founding of al-Da'wa is unclear but it certainly was there from the 1960s onwards as a small, ineffectual Shia sectarian organization. Much of this organization shifted to Iran after the Islamic Revolution and the onset of the Iraq-Iran War, with a sizeable militia being confected for it by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. SCIRI was established later, on Irani-

an soil, reputedly on the express instruction of Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Its militia was nurtured by the Iranians with special care. Muqtada al-Sadr, the young firebrand cleric who joined neither organization, was also patronized intermittently, as was the Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, not a Shia but a foe of Saddam. When the US also turned against Saddam, especially after the first Gulf War, Iran facilitated amicable contacts between those two organizations and the US. When, in the pre-invasion days, US leaders claimed that Shias would welcome them, they weren't talking pure nonsense. They had been assured that these organizations and the higher clergy would keep the Shia masses out of the anti-imperialist militancy.

Meanwhile, the Sunni fundamentalist groups, inspired by and converging with the pan-Arab Ikhwan al-Muslimun (the Muslim Brotherhood), which had been fighting Saddam Hussein, now shifted to fighting the Americans and were quickly joined by the demobilized Baathists as well. These came to be called, successively, 'Saddam loyalists', 'Baathist remnants', and finally 'Sunni insurgency'. This was greatly complicated by two further factors. Under the new constitutional arrangements that were being devised, power and patronage systems were to be forged along sectarian and ethnic lines, which led to a competition of all against all, by all means fair or foul, to gain as much advantage as possible during this period of dire uncertainty. Second, and most crucially, the methodical dismantling of the Iraqi state – the disbanding of the entire Iraqi army and security forces, and the dismantling of civilian institutions under the rubric of 'de-Baathification' – led to complete social breakdown in a time of great adversity. Cumulatively, over the period of the pre-invasion 'sanctions' and during the occupation, close to a tenth of the Iraqi population is estimated to have died; an even larger number have become refugees, either inside the country or outside; by some calculations, unemployment runs to roughly 70 per cent; health and educational facilities have been reduced to a minimum; weapons are everywhere, and criminal gangs are let loose, often posing as militias. The scale of the ensuing sectarian strife – now a horrific bloodbath all around – has no precedent in Iraqi history.

The current US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, described the Israeli invasion of Lebanon approvingly as just a 'teething problem' in the birth of a New Middle East. The US can likewise pretend that the communal holocaust it has unleashed in Iraq is also a 'teething problem', that Shia-Sunni conflict was always there in Iraq, from time immemorial, and that it has now come to the fore because America's destruction of the Saddam regime has blown the lid off the seething emotions that had been kept under a tight lid by the Ottomans, the British mandate authorities, the Hashemite king, and

the various 'Sunni' dictatorships afterwards. This is dangerous nonsense.

Saddam's rule was a ferocious autocracy. The most fundamental requirement was personal loyalty, and he was prone to eliminating even his trusted advisors – including his close relatives – if he suspected them of disloyalty. His clansmen, from Tikrit, were given powerful positions because they could be trusted more than others. Then there was the party and one-party Baathist rule, at times in coalition with mainly emasculated 'allies'. The farther away you were from centres of power the less power you had, and certainly none if you were not a Baathist, but Tariq Aziz, a devout Baathist and personally loyal to Saddam, could be a key member of the cabinet and the inner circle; that he was a Christian meant nothing. The Shia clergy never approved of Saddam, nor did the Sunni fundamentalists; he suppressed both with equal relish and brutality. The Shia clergy commanded far greater institutional power, which made them and their followers, along with the public rituals which were staged to demonstrate their strength, the greater target of repression. Meanwhile, Karbala in southern Iraq remained the great pilgrimage centre for Shias of the world, and Najaf the chief seminary town, where Ayatollah Khoi, the senior cleric before al-Sistani, commanded probably far greater influence among the Shia, globally, than did any Iranian cleric until after Khomeini's rise to great earthly power after the revolution. Khomeini himself had lived all the years of his exile peacefully in Najaf under the Baathists, on Iraqi soil, until the very last few months when Saddam bowed to pressure from the Shah of Iran and requested Khomeini to leave. He left for France and, a few months later, returned to Iran as the hero of the revolution.

Only then did Saddam invade Iran, with the express purpose of toppling Khomeini, because he did not want an Islamic regime so close to his borders and on the soil of a country both powerful and traditionally in conflict, including even territorial conflict, with Iraq. Saddam's army was led by Baathist officers who tended to be of Sunni origin but the rank and file was composed of Shias as much as Sunnis and everyone fought; there is little history of Iraqi Shias refusing to fight Shia Iran, and the war was fought in regions with majority Shia populations. We might recall also that, for all its horrendous crimes, Saddam's treatment of the Kurds was not notably worse than that of the European, modern, democratic Turks. The point is not to exonerate the dead dictator but to keep things in perspective.

This perspective is all the more essential because the tendency now, even among some leftists, is to adopt a standpoint that converges alarmingly with the hyper-Islamicized version of recent Iraqi history that has been concocted by the Shia communal elite and the US-based Islamic Studies industry. Dur-

ing the Saddam period, Shia-Sunni intermarriages were common; as the Shia-Kurdish alliance took power under American tutelage, such couples were told at gunpoint to divorce each other, and when about a hundred such families formed an association for the defence of their collective rights several of them were shot and the association was disbanded. When hundreds of thousands of Shias streamed into southeastern Baghdad – later to be called Sadr City – during the Saddam period hardly any communal tensions ensued; after the US occupied the city, the first big anti-occupation demonstration began at a Sunni mosque with members of both sects participating and Shia clergy in the lead; four years later, every neighbourhood is being subjected to ethnic cleansing. Yet the characterization of the Saddam autocracy as a ‘Sunni regime’ has taken hold, even in some circles of the left. Saddam ruled Iraq for close to a quarter century, and readers of this essay may well ask themselves just when, how recently, did they come to hear of it as a ‘Sunni regime’.

As the invasion of Iraq was being prepared, some intellectuals who had been prominent on the left put forth a remarkable argument: since Saddam was a ferocious dictator, a latter-day Hitler of sorts, and since the West was manifestly liberal-democratic, the latter had the right to make war in order to overthrow the former and to liberate Iraq for liberal democracy; the analogy was with the Second World War when liberal-democratic states had fought a war to defeat the Nazi-fascist alliance. In this argument, there was no room for all the historical evidence that the United States had *never* invaded any Third World country in pursuit of peace and justice but *always* for the opposite reason. Nor did it matter that this argument, presented from the left, converged alarmingly with the kind of quasi-philosophical claptrap about ‘just wars’ that we were getting from the likes of Walzer and Ignatieff, both defenders of the imperium. Now, after the actual experience, there still appear to be people on the left who contrive to believe that elections held under the guns of the occupation army, on the basis of sectarian and ethnic electoral lists, under a constitution written by the Americans, are an advance toward democracy, and that the government that has ensued is a legitimate government. We can set aside the question of Marxism for the moment, as well as the Geneva Conventions which this kind of exercise specifically violates. Even by ordinary liberal democratic standards, an electoral design based on sectarian and ethnic divisions, which gives the sectarian majority an automatic plurality of seats in parliament, would be considered an instrument meant to perpetuate sectarian divisions and obstruct the emergence of liberal, secular democracy. One should have thought that the experience of Lebanon, where the French bequeathed the country just such a constitu-

tion as a power-sharing mechanism for the respective confessional elite and where civil wars have been endemic as these intra-elite arrangements break down, would be a lesson against following that precedent elsewhere. It turns out, instead, that this Lebanization of politics elsewhere is to be supported as a step toward greater democracy. How could this possibly be argued?

One would then have to argue several things: the Saddam regime was so fascistic that *anything* would be better than that – foreign occupation for a while, engineered elections, parliaments based on sect and ethnicity, whatever; so long as that ‘fascism’ is buried for good. One would also have to argue that Iraqi society as a whole – and other societies in the region: Syrian, Egyptian, Iranian – have been so brutalized by dictatorships that they really are not able to handle democracy of the kind the West has. They need a period of transition, and of tutelage; they have to learn to handle democracy. In this process, so the argument must go, you have to begin with their existing reality which is, above all, religious. The Shia majority in Iraq has lived for a long, long time under Sunni rule – under the Ottomans, during the Mandate period which imposed the Hashemite monarchy, under successive post-monarchical regimes which only extended this Sunni dominance, culminating in Saddam’s ‘Sunni’ regime – and so Iraq needs a period in which the Shia can taste the power that is rightfully owed to them as the most numerous of the sectarian and ethnic groups. Negotiations among sectoral blocs within a framework of some constitutional safeguards will, one would have to believe, teach all of them the fine art of negotiations which is at the heart of democratic rule. The contrary example of India, which has more Muslims in it than most Arab countries put together (minus Egypt), and which institutionalized universal suffrage and secular democracy at the very moment of decolonization, with much lower levels of literacy and per capita income, really doesn’t matter, because the vast majority in India is Hindu and Hindus are just civilizationally different. Muslim-majority countries don’t have that kind of a civilizational ethos. There is nothing in their religion or their early history which prepares them for egalitarian outlooks and their intellectual life is in any case still dominated by a medievalist clergy. And so on.

Ungrounded in historical knowledge, such arguments present themselves as high-minded and fearless but partake, willy-nilly, in eschatologies of primordialism and cultural differentialism. Whole peoples get essentialized in terms of their religious particularity; the distribution of political power along religious/sectarian lines is declared to be the essence of democratic multicultural/multidenominational societies; and religion itself, thinly understood, becomes the explanation for why certain Islamic extremist groups, of the fascistic kind, become prominent in politics in particular historical condi-

tions. The conjunctural fact can then be seen as a local expression of a permanent, primordial reality about Islam as such. This kind of commitment to the idea of intractable civilizational difference – and, implicitly in this case yet again, the hallowed idea of the intrinsic superiority of Christianity over Islam – ignores any number of utopian socio-political formations within the histories of early and medieval Islam, as well as any number of modern Muslim divines and believing Muslims who have held that Islam and Marxism are compatible and that the institution of private property is un-Islamic. The idea that Christianity is somehow more egalitarian, more a religion of the poor, dies hard, however. The depressing contemporary fact in any case is that even as many parts of Latin America are today convulsed by insurrectionary currents, what is spreading among the slum-dwellers of the great Latin American cities is not so much liberation theology as Evangelical Protestantism and the Pentecostal Church.

‘MUSLIMNESS’ AND THE WEST

We live at a time when governments of key capitalist countries, the mass media and much of the academic world, including some on the left, would have us believe in precisely that Islamic exceptionalism, that hyper-religiosity among the Muslims, that civilizational *difference* of Islam which the Islamic revivalists, fundamentalists and would-be martyrs would have us believe in. The secular intelligentsia in the Western countries are caught between these two extremes, all the more so because their guilty liberal conscience is bewildered by the brand new kinds of ‘Islamic’ communities formed in their own midst, thanks to the stresses of migration into racially-biased societies (race too becomes religion/culture in these postmodern climes) which then becomes an object of race relations management (e.g. in Britain) or multiculturalist management (e.g. in Canada), offering openings to entrepreneurs (social, political, academic, religious entrepreneurs) to pose as ‘community leaders’, simply because managing the multitudes that suffer discriminations of all sorts is easier through ‘dialogue’ with ‘community leaders’. The word ‘community’ (another word for ‘identity’) becomes sacrosanct, palpable and administratively manageable in the perspectives of a multiculturalist communitarianism that comes to us in the mutually comforting guises of government policy and postmodern rhetoric, while a diverse immigrant social mass comprised – for instance – of Somalis and Bangladeshis, urban Indians and rural Pakistanis, Iranian teachers and restaurateurs as well as Arab workers and kiosk-owners can all be jettisoned into ‘the Muslim community’ and can then Islamicize themselves as such – by invitation as well as by the circumstantial need to re-Orientalize themselves; because having lost their

original national identities, they cannot find in the race-ridden country of their adoption an identity at par with the identity of their white compatriots.

These diverse immigrant strata must therefore *forge a fictive* collective identity – an identity that gathers to itself all the performative density of a stage-managed refusal: dress code as visible sign, the mosque as designated site for the ingathering of males of the tribe, purification of food and beverage, excessive ritualization of private belief, and brand new social bondings across diverse origins which have no common roots in prior civil histories, but become necessities of immigrant life. Similar processes are afoot among Hindu immigrant communities in various Western countries, with all the stigmata of religious identity – dress, rituals, temple-building, getting virginal and traditional wives for the boys from the home country, etc. – and sections of this diaspora contribute substantial funds to extremist, fascistoid Hindu organizations in India, defend those organizations against criticism in the West, and open branches for them in what is called ‘the Hindu diaspora’. However, this Hinduized political extremism draws no ire from governmental agencies or media pundits, because the post-89 neoliberal state in India has opened up India’s vast markets to Western capital while the country is not only a key strategic ally of the United States but also the biggest buyer of Israeli arms. In turn, Indian rulers have their own ways of ignoring Hindu terrorism and focusing on the Islamic variety, which suits the US perfectly.

Just a couple of decades ago, when race itself was a permissible primary category of identification, these very different groups might have collectively represented themselves in racial categories (‘people of colour’, ‘non-white’, even the currently fashionable but nonetheless offensive term in liberal/multiculturalist Canada: ‘visible minorities’). Now, ‘culture’ has increasingly displaced ‘race’ in rhetorics of public representation and self-representation – while in relation to people of Muslim backgrounds culture itself has been made synonymous with religion – those same people are making claims as Muslim/Islamic, which is all the more convenient because a lot of Muslims just aren’t terribly dark-skinned but suffer from that other kind of anti-Semitism which is today directed not at Jews but at Arabs (in this symbolic configuration Iranians and other light-skinned Muslims become surrogate Arabs because they are all Muslims in any case).² These positionings required by immigrant life are, of course, greatly re-enforced by governmental/mediatic representations of their countries as ‘Islamic’ (we must have been *that*; I saw it on TV), and by the power and publicity that Islamicist establishments in their countries of origin have gathered unto themselves in this period of the decline of the left. Islamism is *the* big news: how long has it been since

Western TV audiences saw anything about Pakistan which was not connected with 'Islam', 'dictatorship', and General/President Musharraf's double game with Islam and dictatorship? Are there workers in Pakistan? Peasants in Pakistan? The work of foregrounding and occluding is almost magical.

Again, a forceful Islamism that is recent and conjunctural is lifted – even in the self-consciousness of these newly-branded 'communities' – into something of a perennial marker of a transnational civilization. Diverse people migrating into a new, threatening environment imagine for themselves a permanent, shared past that never was. They are branded and stigmatized anyway, and stigmatized even in phrases of patronising neglect ('not *all* Muslims are terrorists', as if a substantial number, possibly a majority, are). This daily stigmatizing strengthens, in turn, their rage, resolve and sense of civilizational difference. The hardened Islamic identity then serves as a vehicle for exiting proudly what they had once desired and no longer hope to become: just normal Westerners (British, Canadian, American, French) like their white neighbours or classmates, which is what their new citizenship papers had promised. In the process, those great numbers of secular individuals of Muslim extraction within Western countries who do not adopt an Islamic identity and do not participate in multiculturalist community claims get sidelined and occluded. They just don't make enough trouble to deserve much attention or publicity; they are not *real Muslims*, either for the Islamists or for their adversaries – the governmental agencies and the media – or even for their friends in the Western, secular, postmodernist, multiculturalist milieu; they represent only themselves, not a 'culture', a 'civilization', a threat. Some of them begin drifting into the Islamicist ranks, for a sense of belonging which the racialized character of Western liberal democracy denies them.

Like any other people who feel they are under siege, all varieties of Islamicists and would-be Islamicists, from the most benign to the most violent, pay a great deal of attention to what their enemies, real and/or imagined, are saying about them, about themselves, about the basis of differences and animosities between 'us' and 'them'. That has always been the case, but with limited literacy at home and the relatively undeveloped means of transcontinental communication during the colonial period, the means for gathering such knowledge were limited, and only the highly educated were to any degree conversant with discourses prevailing in the West. No longer. The postcolonial period has witnessed immense strides in literacy and general education in the rest of the world, and one of the effects of the immense growth and globalization of the electronic media is that many of the visible aspects of American power have entered their living quarters, even

when this does not take the shape of outright war and coercion; they read and see, on their TV screens, the West's representations of its own power, its identity, its civilizational difference and superiority. They don't know of the *Socialist Register*; Bush and Rumsfeld, Powell and Rice, Huntington and Wolfowitz are people they see and hear, and they know how the various participants in the wars of West Asia, including themselves, are portrayed in the US media. Many of them know of the power of the religious right in America and some may have even watched the evangelical preachers on TV. These images do not convince them of any essential secularity or benign Christianity in the West.

Remarkably large numbers of even the extremist Islamicists have had college education and they all come from countries that were colonized or otherwise dominated by European powers, some of which are now under occupation by the US; they see a continuity. They get to know what people who now have military, political, religious, or academic power in the aggressor countries are saying, and they see a connection between word and deed. Civilizational discourse becomes a two-way street, each begetting the other. Sophisticated Islamicists may be aware of the entire complexity of Western traditions and societies (the current speaker of Iranian parliament is also a translator of Kant), and secular intellectuals within the Muslim milieus may even understand that civilizations are not real entities but discursive and performative categories, with immense plasticity, so that the politically-motivated civilizational discourses of our time are essentially acts of bad faith. But the Islamicist militant is, above all, a simplifier and a literalist, with a unique mode of interpreting what he sees. From his exposure to the electronic media, this militant gets essentially two pictures of American society: one comes through the entertainment industry, and his puritanical imagination interprets all that as sheer corruption and degradation; the other is a picture of relentless war-mongering and word-mongering in favour of war, against Islam and the Muslims. The West becomes in their overheated imaginations a crusading Christendom in its religious life and an abode of sin in its secular life. The psychological reflex is that of revulsion, fear and fury. A call to arms ensues.

In the Arab world at least (and in Iran under the Shah), they have seen their rulers mortgaging their national resources to the West; squandering their rentier wealth on luxury for themselves and their ilk; and on building armies that may fight each other but never the invader and the occupier; and they have seen the armies of their secular nationalist leaders losing war after war against the US-Israeli juggernaut. They find no credible armies to join. They must make one of their own, stateless, in deep secrecy, loosely organ-

ized, not for pitched battles, for which their arms and numbers are much too inferior, but for spectacular action: propaganda of the deed. Power is so asymmetrical that their methods must reflect that lack of symmetry. And they have seen so many countless civilians getting killed by the Americans and the Israelis that they do not deem their own killing of civilians as terrorism, or even comparable to what their own people have suffered. If anything, they would consider themselves *counter*-terrorists.

They are entirely devoted to Islam but those who live and die on the extremist fringe tend to know little of its theology. Some of that theology makes them uncomfortable, since killing of civilians as well as suicide (and hence suicide bombings) are forbidden. So they make up new theological doctrines on the run, to justify preaching and doing in the name of Islam what is forbidden in Islam. In this sense, many of them simply do not qualify as fundamentalist or revivalist in any accurate sense. They are innovators, but the products of their innovation remind one not so much of some other period or incident in Muslim history as of some elite groupings of revolutionary terrorists in Czarist Russia, just as the horrendously punitive and arcane regime that the Taliban imposed on war-ravaged Afghanistan in the name of 'the true Islam of the Prophet' resembled nothing on earth as much as it resembled the regime of Pol Pot in an equally war-ravaged Cambodia. Invocations of Islam here, of communism there. In both cases, the US imperial aggressions had much to do with the ravages of the respective wars, the traumatization of entire national collectivities and with the utter destruction of social fabrics as well as the even minimally secure material means of daily life, that paved the way for the Pol Pots and the Mullah Omars of this world. One now fears a similar fate for Iraq.

At this point, though, I want to suspend the discussion of wars and their consequences, so as to return to the issue of the high-minded civilizational discourses which are also monitored in the Muslim world – by all sections, from the most secular to the most religiously inclined, and even by the some of the armed militants. The plain fact here is that ideas of civilizational difference are rooted in certain notions not only about the 'Islamic East' but also about its discursive opposite, 'the West'. The more sophisticated among the civilization-mongers hold certain views in relation to capitalism, the Enlightenment, the rationalist secularization of Christianity: sufficient capitalism in the West, versus insufficient capitalism among Muslims; the inherently egalitarian and rationalist kernel within Christianity, and the thoroughgoing secularization of Christian societies by Enlightenment thinkers, the French Revolution, etc. – all of which would then be contrasted with the lack of all these things in Muslim societies, as well as the unbridgeable

gulf that is said to separate Islam from secular Reason. The less sophisticated might speak of tradition versus modernization; still others, the postmodern ones, in terms of the authenticity, multiplicity and impermeability of cultures; for the hard right-wing, it is still culture, but cast in terms of the way biologically-defined racism has always functioned: this is *how* they are because of *who* they are. Cultural differentialism, which now animates so many of the epistemologies of matters social and political, is the ground on which several of these tendencies can intersect, even as they pull away from each other in other respects.

GEOPOLITICS: THE POPE, THE PRESIDENT AND THE PROFESSOR

There is a very benign idea which surfaces in many forms across the spectrum from the right to the left that the West is, despite all deviations from its own norm, and certainly in its present formation, essentially secular, liberal democratic and Judeo-Christian; the far right may be upset by the secularism and excessive liberalism, the left may find the West not sufficiently liberal or democratic, but there is a broad agreement on this characterization (the term 'Judeo-Christian' for 'the West' appears even in the work of as rigorous a cultural theorist as Fredric Jameson). Now, if the West is all these things (and peculiarly the West, because if others too were all that, there would be no reason to single out the West as a bearer of these virtues), it would require a relatively short step to start arguing that these various virtues are inter-connected parts of an integral whole, and that there is something in the very origins of the West which makes possible this integrative wholeness.

My own sense is that in all those areas where culture, religion and politics intersect, the 'Christian' West began describing itself as 'Judeo-Christian' so pervasively only in recent decades, essentially to accommodate Israel and, especially after the devastating Israeli victory of 1967, partly to compensate for its sense of guilt regarding the Holocaust and partly to identify with someone else's military victory at a time when the US was facing defeat in Vietnam; before that, anti-Semitism rather than some pride in Judeo-Christian identity was much more the norm. Furthermore, one would have to forget most of the pre-Second World War history of Europe to think of liberal democracy as a relatively uniform Western political practice ('value' is the preferred term in our culturalist times; democracy is a *value* to which the West is said to subscribe, eternally, practices of racism, fascism and Nazism, etc., notwithstanding). And, there is the interesting idea that you can be secular and Judeo-Christian simultaneously. Would it be possible to say that you are secular and Islamic at the same time?

Now, only an *a priori* assumption that Judaism and Christianity are wholly compatible with modern-day secularism and liberalism, while Islam intrinsically is not, could possibly sustain the idea that the West's self-description as Judeo-Christian can seamlessly fuse with its secular and liberal-democratic claims; whereas Muslim-majority societies owning up to the Islamic component of their heritage within their contemporary identity are manifestly not secular and cannot be. In this context, then, it is also very striking that Israel, an admired outpost of Western civilization in the geographical heart of West Asia, can constitutionally and emotively describe itself as a 'Jewish state' while a third of its citizenry is non-Jewish and subject to certain ethno-religiously defined restrictions, and still be regarded as a model of secular, liberal, Western-style democracy in a sea of autocracies and fundamentalisms.

One need pay no more attention to pronouncements of the American religious right, in the current context, than one does to those of Osama bin Laden (even though many of the pronouncements of bin Laden are more astute and even acceptable); one may refer, however, to a recent lecture by the present Pope to see how firmly and diligently these connections between the West, Christianity and Reason itself can be drawn, partly to demarcate the rational/Christian West from the world of Islam. This is particularly interesting because the Pope (formerly famous as Cardinal Ratzinger – or 'Cardinal Rat' in leftwing Catholic humour) enjoys an immense reputation for erudition among those sections of the Catholic Church who supported him all the way up to his august office.

The Pope delivered this much-publicized lecture at the University of Regensburg in Germany on 12 September 2006, and there are surely different ways of reading it. One could read the text in the context of the extreme religious sentimentalism that is now so pervasive among Muslims who claim to have been offended by the brief and obscure quotation that the Pope used in his lecture; and those expressions of anger, leading even to the burning down of some churches by Muslim vigilante groups in Turkey or Palestine, can then be cited as evidence of intolerance among Muslim communities generally, and in the Islamic faith as such. Or, one can read the speech, as the Pope himself urges us to do, as a politically neutral theological reflection upon the constitutive difference between Christianity and Islam on the one hand, and a profound identity between Christianity and Europe on the other. I would prefer to read the whole thing historically and in a variety of contexts within which the lecture makes its mark, from one of the most esteemed pulpits in 'the West'.

Let us begin with the offending quotation itself: 'Show me what Moham-

med brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached'.³ That particular observation in the 14th century had a specific context: the Byzantine Emperor was embroiled in a war with the Turks, from a position of inferior armed might, and was petitioning various powers in Europe to come to his aid, to organize yet another crusade, and so on; and, in turn, he was promising to unite the Western and the Eastern Churches. Nothing came of it, and Constantinople fell to the Turkish armies soon after the death of the said Emperor. The point nevertheless is that the words were penned at a time of military combat, and vilification of Islam served that precise purpose. One rightly wonders, therefore, why this obscure passage is being dredged up today – by yet another Pope, and a Roman one at that – in the midst of yet another global war that calls upon the democratic, Judeo-Christian West to unite against the global terror unleashed by what is now being called 'Islamofascism'. A secular war on religious terrain, so to speak.

The quotation appears in the course of a generally theological exposition of a fundamental, religious, civilizational difference between Christianity and Islam, in so far as, according to the Pope, the Christian faith has always been embedded, from its very beginning, in Greek conceptions of the Logos, so that an identity of faith and reason is fundamental to it; whereas Islam posits a transcendent God who has no integral relationship with Reason and is, in fact, so Absolute that He can – presumably, often does – issue injunctions which can in no way be justified in terms of the 'reasonableness of faith' which, the Pope said, is fundamental to Christianity. The purported injunction to spread Islam by the sword would then be an instance of the radical unreasonableness of the Islamic faith. To be sure, the Pope recognized in his speech that the Qu'ran at one point reads: 'There is no compulsion in religion'; but he explained this as related to 'the early period' when 'Mohammed was still powerless and under threat', while speaking throughout as if Christianity itself had no history of Inquisitions and violence of all sorts.⁴

The theological dispute between Islam and Christianity is not our concern here, though it is worth remarking that just as the Turkish prime minister criticized the Pope for his observations, the German Chancellor and several of her colleagues came forcefully to the Pope's defence. One therefore wonders whether the Turkish and German heads of states represent religions and civilizations, as Huntington might claim, or do they represent nation-states and therefore act under political compulsions arising in their respective states – coloured as the compulsions may be by religious considerations. In context, then, it is useful to recall that before taking up the mantle of the Papacy, Cardinal Ratzinger was a chief theologian of the Vatican and in that capacity

told *Le Figaro*, the French newspaper, that Turkey, since it was a Muslim nation, should not be admitted to the European Union: 'In the course of history, Turkey has always represented a different continent, in permanent contrast to Europe... [Turkey] could try to set up a cultural continent with neighbouring Arab countries and become the leading figure of a culture with its own identity'.⁵ Again a deep, unbridgeable civilizational difference – and remarks such as these, bearing upon Turkey's attempt to join the EU, might well explain why the Turkish prime minister was constrained to take such exception to the Pope's most recent innuendo about Islam as such. All this seems to sit rather comfortably with a Westocentric discourse in which academics such as Samuel P. Huntington can posit a fundamental 'clash of civilizations', and the Pope himself can speak of a theologico-civilizational incommensurability between the Islamic East and the Christian West.

Other features of that speech are actually just as striking. The Pope says that its intrinsically Hellenistic character is absolutely central to Christianity and gives to it – and to Europe – a distinctive identity. He goes on to name quite a few pernicious attempts to de-Hellenise Christianity, starting with the Reformation and coming right up to the current ideas of pluralism and multiculturalism which would exempt other cultures from the obligation to Hellenize themselves. He goes on to observe:

This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance... Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character only in Europe. We can also express this the other way around; this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.⁶

Now any number of literate Muslims (and not only Muslims) of course believe that medieval Muslim philosophical rationalism was an indispensable source for transmitting Greek thought to Western Europe; Islamic neo-Platonism predates European Humanism and the Renaissance. That, however, is not my point here. What I am suggesting is that the particular quotation which has given such offence to Islamic religious sentimentalism needs itself to be read not just in the larger contexts of Islamophobia and wars of purported Islamo-fascism, but also in the context of the Pope's own views on the Reformation, on pluralism and multiculturalism, on the identity of Europe and Christianity, on the inferiority of not only Islam but also Eastern

Christianity, on Turkey as a country civilizationally unworthy of full membership in the European Union, not to speak of an earlier characterization of liberation theology as a 'deviation' from true Christianity. As he put it during his tenure as Vatican's chief theologian, liberation theology's 'challenge to the Church' had to be avoided at all costs: 'It is the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the church willed by the Lord himself that is challenged. This position means that ministers take their origin from the people, and every affirmation of faith is ultimately subordinated to a political criterion'.⁷ He who is illiberal within his own Church can hardly be expected to be tolerant toward other religions.

However, we cannot ignore this simply as the fulminations of a particularly illiberal personage. Whether or not Turkey is civilizationally suitable for membership in the EU – whether Europe can accommodate so many Muslim citizens within its borders without losing its unique cultural character, whether it is prudent for Europe to admit a country with so large and powerful a Muslim military establishment – is a matter of open anxiety all over the EU, at all levels. What the Pope says is not only his personal opinion but a very large part of the European common sense. Similarly, the main body of Western scholarship would entirely endorse the Pope's proposition that the tie between Judeo-Christian religious heritage and Greek Reason and political thought is at the very foundation of Europe, its unique attribute, and that which has given to Western democratic and secular traditions their unique character. Even the matter of liberation theology, which does not surface in this lecture but which was a major preoccupation of the Pope when he was Cardinal and chief theologian, was by no means a matter internal to the Church; and the warnings against it by men like him were very much taken to heart by rulers of the United States.

In May 1980, as US presidential elections neared, with Ronald Reagan as the Republican candidate, a group of experts working for the party prepared a document that was to become a basic political 'primer' for Reagan, the famous Santa Fe Document. In the second part, entitled 'Internal Subversion', proposal No. 3 states:

United States' foreign policy must begin to confront (and not only react a posteriori to) liberation theology. In Latin America the Church's role is vital for the concept of political liberty. Unfortunately Marxist-Leninist forces have used the Church as a political weapon against private property and the capitalist system of production, infiltrating the religious community with ideas that are more communist than Christian.

If Afghanistan was the site for a confrontation between capitalism and communism, which was to be won with the aid of 'Islamofascism', Central America became the ground for a contest between North American hegemony and Latin American revolutionary insurgency, in which liberation theology was identified as a source of strength and sustenance for the revolutionaries, and against which, therefore, a different kind of Christianity – the US religious right, in all its shadings – was to be mobilized, funded, even armed if necessary, with the blessing of the Vatican no doubt, overt or implied.

The quotation about Muhammad was by no means germane to the argument of the Pope's lecture. A shrewd and highly political man, he went out of his way to include it in the knowledge that what was purported to be at stake in the contemporary wars against 'Islamofascism' was the very idea of 'the West' – the Hellenized, rational, Christian West – which is what he was defining in the first place. A civilizational war, if there ever was one.

His high status in the spiritual economy of the Church requires that the Pope must not spell out the policy implications of his theological discourse directly. There are no such compunctions for an academic with influence in Washington, such as Samuel P. Huntington whose famous book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, was published in 1996 with laudatory blurbs by Brzezinski and Kissinger, indicating a rare bipartisan enthusiasm for the author's strategic vision. One brings this up here not for the book's profundity but for its reach and influence. From an academic standpoint, it is a shoddy performance. Huntington chastises the Enlightenment thinkers for spawning the illusion that there would eventually be universal civilization and predicts that the 21st century shall be riven with wars between cultures (he uses 'culture' and 'civilization' interchangeably), but he is not sure how many civilizations there really are: seven or eight, he says.

At the heart of his argument, Huntington identifies Western civilization with *Western* Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, so as to distinguish it sharply not only from the world of Islam but also of the Orthodox Church because that would bring in Russia, Serbia, Levantine Christianity and so on. Latin America poses a problem for him, however, since Latin America too is overwhelmingly Catholic and Protestant. Huntington goes through all kinds of contortions to argue that Latin America is in some fundamental ways different and should be regarded either as an autonomous civilization or an auxiliary of the Western one; he seems unsure. His two paragraphs on Africa begin with the word *perhaps*, in parentheses, followed by the observation that '[m]ost major scholars of civilization except Braudel do not recognize a distinct African civilization'. His subsequent sentence

suggests that there may *perhaps* be such a civilization but, if so, that exists only in the southern half of the continent; the upper half plus a thin strip on the eastern coast are parts of the Islamic civilization, not African. In his cartography, African Christians seem to belong to no civilization at all. India is said to be squarely a Hindu civilization despite the fact that some 200 million Indian citizens subscribe to other religions and the country prides itself on its secular constitution; at the time of this writing, India has a Muslim president and a Sikh prime minister while a Roman Catholic woman of Italian origin is politically the most powerful person in the country. As regards the Orthodox Church, Huntington laments as something anomalous the fact that Greeks, who subscribe to an Orthodox Church of their own, are also members of NATO, which Huntington regards as an indispensable security alliance of the Western civilization, as well as to the European Union which, according to Huntington, should include only those who subscribe to Western Christianity. He goes so far as to say that there is so much dissent against US policies and the role of NATO in Greece only because Greeks, in their religious affiliation, do not really belong to the West. He insists that religion is the marker of each civilization and therefore feels constrained to treat Confucianism too as if it were, for all practical purposes, a religion.

Huntington's categorizations are incoherent but the policy recommendation is sharp:

The West's universalist pretensions increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China... The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their western identity and westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-western societies... In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural... We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know who we are against...⁸

What is being staged here is actually a geopolitical scenario of permanent conflict in the name of a civilizational discourse, with a virtually Schmittian distinction between friend and foe, us and them: we know ourselves only when we know who our enemies are. The main enemies of the West are Islam and China, but there are some lesser complications as well. While for Huntington the West includes Europe and North America, plus far flung cousins in 'settler countries' like Australia and New Zealand, there is actu-

ally a 'central dividing line' in Europe itself. This line, shifted eastward with the fall of the Iron Curtain, is now also religious: 'It is now the line separating the peoples of Western Christianity on the one hand, from Muslim and Orthodox peoples on the other...'.⁹ In the clash between Christianity versus Islam, the Orthodox Church and China, America must lead and the West must unite to defend itself. The problem with the West has been that it has had universalist pretensions. Repudiation of universalism thus yields, in Huntington's vision, not mutual accommodation or respect among diverse cultures but a state of permanent warfare. No postmodern, benign relativism here! Invert Huntington and you get Osama bin Laden.

VARIETIES OF ISLAM: ATTENDING TO HISTORY

We have so far reviewed various discourses which present issues involving Islam in terms of 'civilization', but we cannot avoid also discussing the issue of terror, or violence, which a select group of Islamists have adopted as their chosen mode of confrontation. This focus on terror or violence, which has been forced upon us by the discourses, right and left, dominant in the West today, is especially unfortunate because it leads to a concentration on tendencies which were until recently marginal elements in their own societies, and continue to remain so in most places. This focus of Western discourses is rooted in a rampant Occidentalism which divides the world of Muslims into a simplistic binary of secularists and Islamicists, and looks at all Islamicists as belonging to the same conceptual and ideological universe – which not only exonerates all secularists as at least the lesser evil, however corrupt or dictatorial they may be, but also treats all Islamicists as being at least potentially terroristic. Here, I cannot review the historical evidence which proves that in the past fifty years or so the vast majority of politically active Islamicists have been pro-Western, and that it is only the extreme aggressivity of Western-Israeli policies that has driven so many of them into the anti-Western camp; increasingly since the Western-backed Israeli victory of 1967, and especially since the unfolding of Western wars on what is now called 'Islamofascism'. I just wish to address the issue of the uses, and abuses, of 'Islamism' (or 'fundamentalism') as a convenient all-purpose category.

Like any political movement of any ideological complexity that commands a substantial mass base, Islamism has everywhere comprised various currents. By and large, the currents that have sought to use political and electoral processes to achieve their objectives have been dominant within Islamicist politics, while those who reject such processes and wish to impose Islam through the gun – and in the case of some of them, only through the gun – have been very much in the minority. Among the Shia, Khomeinism

was a stunning innovation, with its doctrine of the *Vilayat-e-Faqih*, which held that the clerical order should itself take hold of worldly government and that armed insurrection was a legitimate means for bringing this about. The dominant view among the Shia had been that while the Twelfth Imam was in hiding, all government was basically illegitimate and the collectivity could do little else than wait for him to re-appear and set things right (the quasi-messianic doctrines of Occultation and *Intezar*, which in English-language scholarship have gone under the heading of ‘Quietism’); in the interim the task of the clergy was to refrain from the exercise of political power and guide the community of believers in their religious, social and cultural life as best as it could. In modernist terms, one could say that this doctrine effectively restricted the direct power of the religious institution to the domain of civil society and allowed the construction of secular power in the political domain, with the hope that the legal structures of the political state would be as close as possible to the basic principles of Islamic justice.

It is possible to argue, in the opinion of this author, that it was the peculiar combination of (1) the suppression of the leftist and secular anti-imperialist forces in Iran by the CIA-sponsored coup of 1953, and by the regime that followed it, (2) the extreme autocracy of the Shah, and (3) the extremely close ties of the Shah’s regime with the US, which account for the success of the Khomeini’ite forces in Iran, other possibilities having been foreclosed by the successful elimination of the secular opposition to the monarchy. Those other traditions, which are not Khomeini’ite, and which continue to believe in much milder versions of the relation between Islam and modern politics, are still alive wherever there are sizeable Shia populations, but they are very much on the retreat as they are no longer faced with free choice and rational dialogue but with extreme forms of Western aggression. This same distinction, and shifts from one viewpoint to another, prevail in countries with Sunni-majority populations.

In Algeria, which has recently witnessed a vicious war between the Islamicists and the state, the vast majority of Islamicists participated in national elections, won the first round, and were poised to form government by winning later rounds, when the state called off the electoral process altogether, with loud support from Europe and the United States, which then helped the substantial jihadi elements in becoming dominant within Algerian Islamism. In the case of Egypt, some of the most famous of the gun-toting Islamicist militants and organizations have arisen there but to this day the parliamentary party of the Muslim Brotherhood has an incomparably greater following. Mubarak, one of the great darlings of the US in the Arab world, rigged the recent elections, jailed leaders of the Brotherhood, and is in the

process of passing laws that would make it at least very difficult for Islamicists of any stripe to participate in elections. With the electoral route barred to them by a government which fears that they are likely to win the elections, will the bulk of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers go the way of their Algerian counterparts? Only time will tell.

In Palestine, Hamas rejected the Oslo Accords because they were deemed capitulationist, a position that was adopted by even as sober and large-hearted a secular intellectual as Edward Said, but the entire political program of Hamas is premised on the idea that a two-state solution is entirely possible if Israel vacated the Palestinian territories that it occupied in 1967 and accepted that the borders it had before that occupation were indeed its final borders. This perspective on what can be a final solution reflects the aspirations of the vast majority of Palestinians, who have also come to believe, after forty years of occupation and the dismal failure of Oslo, that Israel will never agree to it without pressure from an armed Palestinian resistance. Furthermore, the sheer corruption and incompetence of the Palestine Authority (PA), led by Fatah, made the general Palestinian population look for an alternative, which Hamas provided by organizing the social services which PA was unwilling to offer, and through a leadership that lived among the masses of Gaza and whose frugal life and incorruptibility was transparent. The masses of the Occupied Territories voted overwhelmingly for Hamas but when this entirely legitimate government was formed, the West decided to strangle economically the Palestinian electorate which had voted out the West's favourites, President Abbas and his notorious security chief Dahlan; and pressed Abbas and Dahlan to destroy the popularly elected government by any means, fair or foul, while Israel went ahead with its policy of so-called 'targeted killings' – in plain language, assassinations – of any Palestinian leadership which did not accept the Israeli diktat. Any number of Hamas' parliamentarians and ministers were jailed by the Israelis, and the prime minister's own home was bombed. How much longer can the Hamas leadership go on impressing upon its mass base that politics of the electoral field should be its main form of expression, while the business of armed struggle is left to its militia?

In Lebanon, Hezbollah has gone through many transformations. The least one can say is that since Nasrallah firmed up his grip on the organization there has been a clear policy: selective and restrained armed struggle against Israel so long as the latter holds on to any sliver of Lebanese territory and holds large number of Lebanese citizens in its prisons, but strictly electoral and political means – including, at times, mass demonstrations and street actions to gain its political objectives – within Lebanese society, with a complex set of alliances with other political forces, Muslim and non-Muslim

alike. The declared US policy of not seeing it as a legitimate political party in Lebanese politics, and categorizing it as simply a ‘terrorist’ organization – a policy, moreover, that is backed by major European players such as France, as well as by powerful US-allied Arab regimes such as that of Saudi Arabia – is again strengthening the tendency within Hezbollah which argues that the West (including Israel) has no respect for electoral processes in Muslim countries, and so the gun is the only viable means of struggle.

We can point to similar developments in other countries as well, such as Somalia or Sudan or Pakistan. The precise developments which are causing this rapid shift within Islamicist movements, from moderate electorally-inclined Islamism, to armed extremist Islamism, are undoubtedly specific to each situation. There is, however, a nefarious combination of domestic, anti-left, and mostly autocratic right-wing regimes on the one hand and, on the other, determined imperialist-Zionist policies, which are creating the objective conditions within which ‘moderate’, democratic Islamism is itself giving way, in so many places, to the extremist, millenarian variety. The West thus has to account for three successive sins over a period of roughly half a century. First, it helped Islamism flourish by recruiting it as a force against ‘communism’, which encompassed not only the broadly-based communist movements that had arisen among the Muslim peoples but also any regime which subscribed to economic nationalism against Western corporate capital. The Western left typically underestimates all that history as a minor episode in what it too calls ‘the Cold War’, a term it has borrowed from the imperialist vocabulary. Second, by ensuring the overthrow of those secular regimes that were not communist (most of them were actually anti-communist) but which either tolerated communists (the Sukarno regime in Indonesia), or refused to align with the West (Sukarno again, but also Nasser in Egypt), or were even mildly nationalist in the economic domain (Mossadegh in Iran) – the West ensured the narrowing of the space for secular politics and therefore the emergence of varieties of Islamism, moderate as well as militant: Sadat, who succeeded Nasser and brought Egypt into the US-led camp, patronized the moderate wing of the Muslim Brothers but was gunned down by the armed ones who had broken with their parent organization, precisely on the question of Sadat’s alliance with the US and what they regarded as a capitulation on the question of Israel. Third, when Islamism became a powerful tendency in so many of those countries, the West played a cynical game of extreme pragmatism: continued support for regimes like the Saudi one; the organization of the jihad against Afghan communism, as if what developed there was just a ‘Soviet invasion’, with no domestic basis; support for the most autocratic regimes, such as

that of Mubarak in Egypt, against the Islamicists, adding to their claim to be 'anti-imperialist'; displaying nothing but contempt for those Islamicists who had actively demonstrated their belief in electoral politics (in Algeria, in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, in Lebanon) and treating them as just 'terrorists'.

All this is then connected, in very condensed ways, with the question of Israel, its long-lasting occupation of Palestinian territories; its treatment of the subject populations; its turning of Gaza into a vast prison; its carving up of even the West Bank in such a way that roughly 40 per cent of the Occupied Territories are already annexed in one form or another; American support for and European collaboration in Israel's policies; and the Western-Israeli attempts to prop up their own friends in the Palestine Authority using brutal means, in opposition to a popular electoral mandate by the Palestinians in favour of Hamas. The wound is deep. A settler state was established, through what the Israeli scholar Ilan Pappé describes as a full blown ethnic cleansing, at precisely the time when much of Asia and Africa were being decolonized. This has been crowned by an occupation that has lasted for forty years and has involved not just a regime of periodic atrocities against the population under occupation, but also the flagrant flouting of international law. Islamicists just don't believe that Western law – the very law that the Western discourse regards as the very foundation of civilized existence – will ever give them justice.

In this context, then, the rest of us have to undertake a dialectical analysis so complex as to be almost impossible: to take the full measure of the histories that have produced such points of view, make distinctions between one tendency and another, not succumb to any of their various modes of comprehension or their conclusions or their favoured lines of action, and yet attempt to see those histories through their eyes, with at least some degree of empathy, so that, at the very least, they do not appear to us as just so many primitives that need to be contained, disciplined, perhaps even annihilated, selectively, in 'just wars' waged by us, the civilized. If they can be seen as particular kinds of human beings who have been produced not by civilizations or religious frenzies and fatalities but by histories, then one can at least begin to attend to these histories.

It is very difficult, however, to say much that can apply to the various Islamist currents generally. Far from being various expressions of some essential feature of Islam (or a lack in it, as some would argue), each has been formed in distinctive ways by the history which has given rise to it. This applies even to the contentious notion of 'fundamentalism' itself. Even if we were to grant, for arguments' sake, that the term 'fundamentalist' applies to

them all, which is doubtful, one would still have to radically distinguish between one fundamentalism and another. This is where the elementary tasks of a comparative sociology of Islamisms – not of religions, but of various Islamisms – begins. I shall again proceed not with generalizations but with just one contrast, which should illustrate the whole point: the ‘fundamentalisms’ of Afghanistan and Iran respectively, two adjacent countries which experienced revolutions (communist in one case, and Islamicist in the other) at roughly the same time.

Islam in 20th century Afghanistan, after it had been sundered from its historical linkages with what is now Pakistan (thanks to British colonialism) and Central Asia (thanks to Czarist expansionism), grew in a geographical environment of largely arid mountain fastnesses and plateaus, with scant agricultural resources, hardly any industrial development, largely tribal social solidarities and hierarchies, and small clusters of the modern middle class in the main cities. This was all held together by a mildly Muslim monarchy in Kabul with limited direct control over the outlying regions which made up the bulk of the country and were dominated by regional satraps. At the time of the communist coup in 1978, there was one mullah for every 60 people, an overall nine per cent literacy rate (one per cent among women), and a general rural populace that was often tied to their overlords both by debt bondage as well as by primordial loyalties of tribe and sect, especially in the Pashtun areas. As most of the overlords and the urban elite fled after the coup, primarily to Pakistan (the case of the refugees in Iran is again different), inciting the dependent peasants to flee with them, the Islamism that grew in exile – in luxurious bungalows for the rich, in miserable camps for the poor – had all the features of a society in which tribal custom was taken to be the authentic Islamic practice; the clientelist relationship survived in its tribal form, as did the mullah-laity relation. Indeed, the lack of a centralized state and the conditions of exile in a foreign country, Pakistan, where they eked out their meagre existence, served to intensify relations of overlordship and dependence among the poor refugees. Such were the conditions in which the actual Afghan nucleus for the anti-communist jihad was assembled (as distinguished from the tens of thousands of the foreign jihadi mercenaries who were assembled by the CIA and associated agencies).

A population of hundreds of thousands who were poor, lacking in modern education, prey to feudal and clerical domination, and frightened by the fact of exile and the misery of refugee camps, was thus the social mass that was mobilized by the American decision to launch an Islamic jihad against the godless communists who had taken over that country – and against the Soviet Union which subsequently intervened militarily; and by the deci-

sion of the Pakistani Islamicist parties, which until then had been fringe elements in their own country, to create the ideological apparatuses for this jihad. That was the first edition of Afghan Islamism which came to fruition with the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the defeat of the communists, and the creation of the government of the mujahideen, the first Islamist government in the history of Afghanistan – an Islamism of warlords and the urban elite, who now went about making money in all sorts of ways, ranging from poppy cultivation to the sale of US-supplied weapons in the regional and global arms bazaars.

The second edition of Islamism came in the form of the Taliban. The word means ‘students’ and they had indeed been students in the rudimentary Islamic seminaries (medressas) which had been funded by the Americans, the Saudi and other Gulf rulers, NGOs, etc., and were effectively run by the Pakistani Islamicist parties, for children of the destitute Afghan refugees – children who had never known any settled life, but were products of their tribalist ancestry and their war-torn present: the mudhouses that were their homes, their continuing semi-literacy, their indoctrination into the most rabid kinds of fanaticism, their utter ignorance of Islamic theology or jurisprudence or hermeneutics, their gun-toting adolescence that was devoted to training as soldiers in an eternal jihad. In the midst of it all they grew up into young men and came eventually to be joined by some other fractions that were less illiterate and somewhat more urbanized and worldly. As the US-foisted government of the warlord mujahideen collapsed in cesspools of corruption, orgies of rape and murder and mutual elimination, the Pakistan government, overseen by the Americans, decided to organize these former students (now history’s timeless ‘Taliban’) into an intervention force. They swept into Afghanistan with the force of a hurricane (although it is said that most of the fighting was done by the Pakistan army, on their behalf) and swiftly occupied it.

They created the only kind of Islamic regime their own lives had prepared them for: puritanical, illiterate, rigid, medievalist. Their predecessors had raped tens of thousands of women; Taliban did nothing of the kind but turned the whole of Afghanistan into a vast prison of pure domesticity for the country’s women, with no rights to public life, and in conditions of mass destitution and starvation. As they fell from America’s grace, their social severities against women became legend, but the mass rapes of Afghan women that were perpetrated by men of the Northern Alliance went unmentioned because the rapists of that Alliance had been part of the ruling coalition that the US foisted upon the country after the communist defeat, and again part of the coalition that emerged after the US invasion and the anointing of the

Karzai government. Taliban rule was hideous but it was also the only time in post-communist Afghanistan when no women were raped by the ruling elite, no rulers took bribes, no poppy was grown or heroin manufactured.

Compare, then, these brands of 'fundamentalism' with the Iranian variant. Rich in all kinds of natural resources including water and fertility of soil, home to a splendid pre-Islamic civilization, home also to one of the great Muslim cultures for many centuries, Iran has been for the cultural complexes of southwest Asia, in the majesty of its literary and artistic achievements, what Italy has been to Europe. Of the two poets generally regarded the greatest in Farsi literature, Rumi (literally, Roman) is buried in Konea, a small pilgrimage town in eastern Anatolia, and has followers in countless Sufi Tariqas (guilds) across the Muslim world; the other, Hafiz, was once invited, in his old age, to grace with his presence the provincial court in Bengal.

Modernist reform first came to Iran in the first quarter of the 20th century, almost a century later than in Ottoman Turkey, and that left a mark in the lesser development and density in its bourgeois culture. The monarchical form was retained when the Pahlevis took over in the 1920s (just when monarchy was getting abolished in Turkey by a secular-nationalist, statist republic) and in due course was greatly intensified. No bourgeoisie could grow that was not connected to the throne, a phenomenon for which Ervand Abrahamian, a superb historian of modern Iran, has invented the apt term 'monarcho-bourgeoisie', a corporate class comprised of roughly two thousand families, assimilated into the monarchical system and detached from the rest of society.¹⁰ The rentier state and its beneficiaries, grown excessively rich from the influx of oil income, were politically aligned with and dependent on Western powers (mainly the US, which after the Second World War had eliminated Britain as the main power in the region), and were excessively Westernized in what they took to be their culture. Unlike the upstart sheikhdoms of the Gulf, however, Iran was not just oil. Earlier forms of accumulation had also given rise to a much older, remarkably powerful traditional bourgeoisie of the bazaars, much less wealthy than the monarcho-bourgeoisie, wider in its social base, resentful of the monarcho-bourgeoisie's claims and connections, including its dependent economic and cultural connections with the West. Post-Second World War Iran also had a substantial professional, urban middle class, a vibrant literary intelligentsia and a growing working class. The lack of organic correlation between the rentier state and civil society also left for the clerical establishment a vast arena in which much of it could distance itself from the court and its associates and yet have vast influence among the populace through a very elaborate marriage network which associated it with the mercantile and landowning

elites and connected it with the general populace through the well organized, hierarchical religious institutions. Communist, secular nationalist and even mildly Islamicist oppositions to the monarchical regime also grew in this milieu, in an intricate web of competitions and collaborations.

The first post-war opposition gathered around communists and secular nationalists, formed a government headed by the National Front, and led to the first oil nationalization in Middle Eastern history, under Mossadegh, a patrician prime minister who had nothing to do with the left as such but was heading a coalition which wished to restrict foreign control over its key natural resource and, *inter alia*, also pave the way for bringing the monarchy more under parliamentary control, more or less on the British model. The US reacted with a CIA-executed coup, restored the Shah to his throne, and set about erecting for the monarchy the most ferocious intelligence service in the region, the SAVAK, which also served essentially as a paramilitary police. The extreme repression of the leftists and secular nationalists which the SAVAK conducted after the coup created a situation in which the widespread anti-monarchical and anti-American sentiment remained in place and was greatly strengthened, but no secular institution in civil society was left intact – or, at least, strong enough – to give expression to that sentiment, while the religious elite was left almost wholly untouched. The Shah, his supporters, even his foreign sponsors were misled by the powerfully secular history of 20th century Iran into greatly underestimating the expanding power of the clergy in this situation where it no longer faced any substantial rivals; no one believed that a movement led by the mullahs could overthrow the monarchy.

This is not the place to rehearse details of that revolution. The main point here is that there were substantial secular and leftist forces involved in the making of that revolution, and it was only after Khomeini had consolidated his power that those forces were methodically eliminated, often by very violent means. Furthermore, the Islamicist forces were themselves by no means uniform. Aside from the dominant clerical element, there were also Islamicists drawn from the professional middle class or the more traditional bourgeoisie of the bazaar who were socially conservative but by no means inclined toward extreme forms of Islamization; younger people who were drawn from the student movements of the modern universities; powerful intellectuals who had been disenchanted by leftist movements but were also deeply influenced by leftist ideas. Even the higher echelons of the clergy were deeply divided along ideologico-theological lines; aside from Khomeini, there were other Ayatollahs powerful in their own right, such as Ayatollah Taleqani whose version of the political economy of Islam was closer to

that of the left wing of modern social democracy; or Shariatmadari, who had a great following of his own, and whose views were much more patriarchal and traditionalist but who also did not subscribe to Khomeini's version of things. The first government was headed by Mehdi Bazargan and Beni Sadr, neither of whom was a member of the clergy. The parliament was deeply divided over the extent of the radicalism of the projected land reforms, and the ensuing vision of the economic structure resembled the Nasserist model where heights of the economy were to remain in the public sector.

There were compromises all along the line. Iran was to be Islamic but also a republic armed with a constitution: the Islamic Republic of Iran, even though nothing in the history of early or medieval Islam could possibly yield a *republican* constitution. Only individuals approved by the clerical Supreme Council could run for elections but the elections themselves were to be free and fair. The most senior clerics are known to have been unhappy with the candidacy of Ahmadinejad, the current prime minister, but he won a clear vote and no one tried to prevent him from winning those elections – the Iranian clerics thus displaying rather more respect for constitutional and electoral processes than the secular FLN in Algeria. Western social and philosophical sciences are now taught in the seminaries of Qom, where libraries are organized and computerized on perfectly modern lines, and no one blinks when a new translation of Kant or Hegel appears. Islamic feminists trained in California have excellent chances of getting positions in government, even as the moral police punish other women for allowing strands of their hair to be seen in public, from under the hijab. Indeed, women of the popular classes have made much greater strides in higher education and the professions under the Islamic regime than was conceivable for their mothers during the secular and Westernizing rule of the Shah in pre-revolutionary Iran. The whole political fabric is a peculiar mix of democracy and theology, authoritarianism and populism, developmentalism and extreme social conservatism. One could also plausibly argue that internal forces struggling for democratization and secularization would have far greater chances of success if the West and Israel did not constantly allow the most extreme factions within the regime to cite the palpable threat from the West so as to unite the populace behind the national government and ward off criticism.

The point, again, is not to defend the Iranian clerics but to simply illustrate the difference in the respective contexts in which the 'fundamentalisms' of Afghanistan and Iran have grown. One could go further and cite the case of contemporary Turkey, where the ruling Islamicist party which governs with a comfortable majority initially grew in the milieu of small capitalists of the regional towns, especially towns on the eastern coast, who were angry with

the dominance of Istanbul-based capital but are now strong enough even in Istanbul itself to challenge that earlier hegemony most profoundly; in the process, their Islamism has come to be quite comparable to the Christianity of the German Christian Democrats.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SECULARISM EAST AND WEST

Any careful examination of the map of Muslim-majority countries during the years immediately after the Second World War – between 1945 and 1965, let us say – will show that most Muslim societies, from Indonesia to Algeria, with notable exceptions such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf sheikhdoms – were extraordinarily hospitable to communist, Marxist and more generally secular ideas. Between the mid-60s (the coup in Indonesia; the fatal destruction of secular Arab armies in 1967, and so on) and the late 1970s (the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1978, the beginning of Afghan jihad in 1979-80), that earlier world of predominant secularity and leftwing offensives entered into deep crisis, while that whole state system came to be under siege from the competing fundamentalisms of Iran and Saudi Arabia. The dramatic shift in Iran, from three quarters of a century of modernizing, secularizing anti-monarchical movements of the communist left and the secular nationalists, to a fully clerical revolutionary elite, was in reality perhaps less dramatic than the march of Saudi Arabia from a precarious existence on the margins of Arab history, under siege by modernist impulses across the Arab world, to the commanding centre of that world. When Israel destroyed Nasser's forces in 1967, it also defeated Nasserism as the dominant secular-nationalist, authoritarian-socialist current in the Arab world, and thereby changed drastically the balance of forces between a defeated, traumatized Egypt – at the centre of urbane, Mediterranean Islam – and the oil-rich, monarchical, Wahhabi-puritanical, desert kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For the first time in perhaps a millennium, the Islam of the desert and the oases came to dominate the cosmopolitan Islam of the great cities (Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Beirut, Aleppo, and the cities of Occupied Palestine as well), the coasts, and the fertile valleys (the Nile, Tigris and the Euphrates).

By 1990 (the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan and its systemic collapse; the collapse of the communist government in Kabul, and the advent of the first Islamicist regime in the modern history of that country, under American tutelage) that same map of the Muslim-majority countries was to be gripped overwhelmingly by what Bernard Lewis was to call 'the resurgence of Islam', and what Huntington portrays as a civilizational clash between Islam and the Judeo-Christian West. It may be helpful to clarify all this – the historic and fatal shift from the great secular-leftist of-

fensives to the rapid rise of Islamism as the dominating force – with quick reference to particular events.

- In 1948, the British Resident in Tehran writes to the Foreign Office in a secret communication that the Tudeh need make no revolution because it is poised to come to power through peaceful means. Now, Tudeh was, for all its much broader trappings, the communist party of Iran; in the over-heated imagination of the British Resident, it was about to take power. In the event, it was the secular, liberal National Front, led by Mossadegh, which formed the government, sought to nationalize oil and clashed with the monarchy on the issue. The point here is that as of the early 1950s the political field in Iran was dominated entirely by the communists and liberal/secular democrats who opposed each other on many issues but were united in a certain kind of radical economic nationalism. The coup that the CIA engineered in 1953 to defeat that economic nationalism restored the monarchy and created the bloodthirsty internal security force of the SAVAK. The communists and the liberal democrats were eliminated, creating the wide political vacuum within which the clerical opposition came to dominate. The clergy – itself comprised of such ‘left-wingers’ as Ayatollah Taleghani and ‘rightwingers’ as Ayatollah Shariatmadari, but also backed by such ‘radical’ voices as those of Ali Shariati and (the formerly Tudeh intellectual) Jalal Aal-e-Ahmed – walked into the breach. Eventually, and led now by Ayatollah Khomeini, they made the Islamic Revolution of 1978. There are all sorts of complications involved here, and the specific hierarchical structure of the Shiite clerical institution is itself a factor – but, on the whole, one can say that as of 1953, the time of the CIA-led coup, no one could have possibly foreseen or predicted that Iran would have an Islamic Revolution a quarter century later.
- As of 1965, Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, had the distinction of also having the largest communist party outside China and the USSR, and the country was led by Sukarno, a leader of the anti-colonial movement and one of the key architects of the Non-Aligned Movement. Sukarno was as fond of lacing his speeches with references to Islam as Nehru in India was keen on invoking the Hindu or Buddhist achievements of classical India, but Indonesian politics were almost wholly secular, in a country where Muslim

culture itself was highly ecumenical, with Hindu and even Buddhist elements embedded in it even more deeply than has been the case with Indian Islam. Then came the anti-communist, anti-nationalist coup of 1965, with the single biggest bloodbath of communists in post-Second World War history and half a million or more dead, leading to the Suharto dictatorship. The kind of Indonesia we now have – with a distinctly devout but politically mild Islam at the apex and a variety of millenarian, absolutist currents running through the lower echelons of society – is a direct consequence of what the military destroyed in the first place, and what it then allowed to flourish subsequently.

- As of 1948-52 in Egypt, there were essentially four centres of power, existing or emergent: the Palace itself, the mildly liberal-nationalist centre that may be symbolized in the broad sense by the word ‘Wafd’, the communists, and the Ikhwan al-Muslimun (the Muslim Brotherhood). The coup of Neguib and Nasser, out of which the authoritarian secular-nationalist Nasserist regime arose, destroyed all these centres of power and tamed whatever remained of them. The high point of the new regime was the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 and Egypt’s successful defiance of the British-French-Israeli aggression. Between that high point and the terminal decline of the regime after the defeat of 1967, Sayyid Qutb, the purported hero of today’s politically absolutist currents in Sunni Islam, was hanged, with little immediate effect in Egyptian society. Then came the Israeli invasion of 1967, the destruction of the Egyptian armed forces, the occupation of the Sinai, the humiliation of Nasser, the fundamental shift in the balance of power within the Arab world from Nasser’s Egypt to the Wahhabi’ite monarchy of Saudi Arabia, and the rise, out of that crucible, of the famous Jama’at-i-Islamiya (the ‘Islamic Societies’, such as Takfir wa al-Hijra) who were responsible for the assassination of Sadat and who now dominate the more radical end of the religio-political field in Egypt, alongside the rejuvenated Ikhwan, the ‘moderate’ party of the pious, which now dominates the field of electoral politics – notwithstanding the extreme cruelties and electoral frauds of the Mubarak regime, America’s favourite ally in the non-monarchical part of the Arab world.

These are stark examples, starkly condensed; many more could be added. Each could be enriched with nuance, detail, sense of complexity and con-

tradition; each has been the object of book-length studies, some of them very good. At this point, though, let us allow ourselves the risky indulgence of playing with the counterfactual: the useless, melancholy history of what did not happen but could have. Suppose, for an instant, that the CIA had not made the coup in Iran and the communists and the liberal-nationalists had been allowed their role in Iranian politics, in which case the monarchy would have been overthrown by either a communist-liberal alliance, or by one of those secular forces, but not by the clerical ones; what sort of Iran would you then have? Suppose, further, that there had been no successful coup in Indonesia, no bloodbath of the secular political forces, communists as well as anti-imperialist nationalists, no Suharto regime; might there not have been a more liberal or leftwing but certainly a secular and enlightened Indonesia, entirely at peace with its religious ecumenism – and perhaps no branches of al-Qaeda there, no massacres in Bali, and so on?

Suppose, also, an Egypt in, say, 1954, that was allowed to find its own way into the world through its own internal dynamics. We know from what actually happened that the Nasserist regime claimed to be socialist but was at best a caricature of it, and that its nationalism was deeply scarred by its authoritarianism. But, suppose, then, in a counterfactual accounting, a Nasserist Egypt that was not constantly traumatized by the very real possibility of invasion or at least radical subversion from abroad, a Nasserist Egypt not forced to spend much of its national income on military buildup, not constantly on a war footing, not facing the war of 1967, not having been defeated so decisively in it. The Islamism that arose in the wake of that defeat levelled one unanswerable charge against Nasser: that he entirely failed to lead the Arabs to victory against Israel, to protect Egyptian honour and Egyptian territory, to prevent Israel from occupying the rest of Palestine. The charge was unanswerable because it was true. And, having filed an unanswerable charge of guilt, the Islamicists held out a millenarian promise of redemption: we shall deliver unto you – you the Egyptians, the Arabs, the Muslims everywhere – what Nasser could not; and we shall succeed because God is on our side, while He, the Lord, was not on Nasser's side because he was secular, in short heathen. In conditions of extreme social disorientation produced by the defeat of 1967 that millenarian promise held, and numerous among the young were swept by that kind of eschatology. When Sadat's assassins were put on trial a decade later, an impressive number of them said that they had been Nasserists in their youth and had come into the Islamicist political world after 1967.

In the meantime, by 1970, Nasser himself had travelled to Khartoum and made his peace with the Saudi king, and was in no position to offer any sort

of protection to the Palestinians from the massacres of September 1971 in Jordan, in a contest of strength between a West-oriented monarchy and a secular PLO. Islamism among the Palestinians went from strength to strength after those massacres, after the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in the course of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and especially after the US-sponsored Oslo Accords of 1993. In the process, the PLO was first emasculated and then became a mere caricature of itself, endemic corruptions eroding it from within. That vacuum was then filled by Hamas.

But in order to imagine, in our counterfactual history, an Egypt in which so many of the secularists of yesteryear did not flee into the camp of the Islamicists thanks to the defeat of 1967, we shall also have to imagine a different kind of Israel; the kind that, say, Martin Buber had at times advocated. Buber seems to have believed that the sheer magnitude of the Holocaust in Europe required that the surviving Jews find for themselves a homeland in which they could guarantee for themselves a life free from those kinds of pogroms. But unlike Ben Gurion he also seemed to have believed that the Jews would never find enduring peace and safety in Palestine if they did not recognize that they had come to occupy other people's land, that those other people had legitimate rights of their own which predated the rights of the later Jewish immigrants, and that justice therefore demanded that Jews live in peace with their neighbours in a state where those neighbours had absolutely the same rights as themselves. Many Jews of that time were deeply sceptical of a certain sort of modular European nationalism which sought ethnically pure nation-states, and even of that majoritarian nationalism which sought special privileges for an ethno-religious majority within a territorial state; Zionism was precisely that kind of modular European nationalism. Many anti-Zionist Jews of that time certainly envisioned a community of Jews in Israel/Palestine but as a people who would consider themselves not as Westerners having to live corporeally outside Europe, but as a people who needed to learn a new ethic of belonging, as a new/old Middle Eastern people living among old inhabitants of the land.

In short, Jewish-Arab co-existence required great moderation in the purifying Zionist nationalism itself, for these newcomers in an ancient land. Not an attachment and self-definition in terms of a primordialist ethno-religious identity, an impermeable Jewishness, but a modern existence which is freely chosen and which arises out of a past European suffering and a present West Asian belonging. What follows from that is the vision of a multi-ethnic, secular democratic state comprised of Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, in a polity that grants no privilege to race or religion – an eternally open house, as it were. What Israel is, and what it ought to be – what it *can* be: much of

the problem lies there, and hence, also, much of the solution.

Suppose, then, that the consideration of Islam and Islamism starts not from primordial and ageless belongings but from the precariousness of a *present* so bereft of secular justice that one finds no meaningful way of belonging to it, or in it; the sheer multiplicity of malignant contexts within which all sorts of cancerous growths become possible. Another way of putting this is that when human beings took upon themselves the task of managing the affairs of the material world, they also made the claim that they were capable of dispensing justice, a justice more whole than what the various monopolists of the holy books offer. The secular world has to be just twice over: in terms of what it has defined for itself, *and* also to ward off the claim that God would have given better justice. That is to say, the secular world has to have enough justice in it for one not to have to constantly invoke God's justice against the injustices of the profane. A politics of radical equalities, so to speak.

NOTES

- 1 In *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 15–21 January 1998, Brzezinski said: 'The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter: We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war... What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?'
- 2 For an early and incisive reflection on this connection of Islamic identity and conditions of immigration to advanced capitalist societies – in this case Britain – see 'Prologue: Muslim "Culture" and the European Tribe', in Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, London: Verso, 1992.
- 3 The Vatican's translation of the original speech, 'Three Stages in the Program of De-Hellenization' is available at <http://www.zenit.org>.
- 4 Ibid. The Qur'an's injunction 'There is no compulsion in the faith' (Surah 2:256) was frequently invoked by eminent Islamic jurists in deciding what rights and protections a Muslim ruler ought to offer to his subjects of other faiths.
- 5 Quoted in 'Ratzinger on Turkey in EU, European Secularism', *Catholic World News*, 11 August 2004, available from <http://www.cwnews.com>.
- 6 'Three Stages in the Program of De-Hellenization'.
- 7 Quoted in Paul Kokoski, 'Avoid "Challenge the Church"', *Catholic New Times*, 1 December 2002.
- 8 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, pp, 20–21.
- 9 Ibid., p. 28; see also pp. 36, 46.
- 10 See especially Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.