

Globalization and Islamisation

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**GLOBALIZATION AND AUTONOMY
MONDIALISATION ET AUTONOMIE**



Preface

Professor Yassine Essid lives and teaches medieval history in Tunisia. He is also head of an interdisciplinary research group, the *Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur la Méditerranée* (GERIM). GERIM is a participant group in the MCRI Project on Globalization and Autonomy and Professor Essid is a co-investigator in this project as a result of his leadership of GERIM. After attending the third annual meeting of the Globalization and Autonomy project, he gave a public lecture at McMaster University on Globalization and Islamisation. This Working Paper is an edited and revised version of that lecture.

Within the MCRI, Professor Essid is doing research on the relationship between globalization and Islamisation, particularly as it occurs in the Middle East and North Africa. In this paper, he traces the gradual growth of religious fundamentalism in the Arab world, taking particular note of the changes it is fostering in his own country of Tunisia. He notes that the fundamentalists have made effective use of the information and communication technologies, often seen to be a crucial infrastructure for contemporary globalization. He does not blame globalization, however, for the rise of fundamentalism. Rather he sees its roots in the growing economic and social misery of wide sections of the population in Arab Muslim countries. He also notes that the repressive actions of political leaders in most of these states lead to the disappearance of civil society organizations, leaving the field open for the one group that is organized, the Islamists or fundamentalists. Where globalization comes in is in permitting the movement to become more easily transnational, with important links between fundamentalists in OECD countries and those in developing countries. At the end of the paper, he also wonders whether the better integration of Arab Muslim countries into the global economy might provide a counterweight to fundamentalism.

William D. Coleman
Editor, Working Paper Series

Globalization and Islamisation

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In the eyes of many, 'Islam' has become a problem for the whole world, at times verging on a kind of obsession. But the Islam that I discuss in this paper is at the other extreme of a concept based on received ideas, ideas of an Islam that has been reduced to a conceptual totality, a system of thoughts, and a set of practices, forever identical to themselves, that reflect public and private behaviors of the Muslim world. In short, I am referring to a kind of Islam that has been narrowed down to the notions of practices and ideas common to all so-called Muslim societies from Morocco to Pakistan. It is indeed more convenient, when we are unable to understand a civilization, to reduce a whole nation and its people, despite their diversity and particularities, to a faith, a doctrine, and a set of rituals. In this field, the Islamists show a kind of perfect solidarity with the intellectuals of the West.

In choosing this theme, which has nothing original you may say, I have given deep thought to the way it might be tackled. We are indeed faced with two types of approaches:

1. We can condemn Islam. For me, that would be undermining completely a religion to which I belong personally, were it only by tradition and culture;
2. We can exonerate it entirely. This approach would also be difficult because I then would have to join those who seethe **with** indignation every time Islam is incriminated based on the deadly mad deeds perpetrated in its name.

If we move to exonerate Islam from accusations related to violence and barbaric acts, we will end up by:

- supporting an amalgam that involves a faith and the barbaric behavior of some people who act under the cover of one religion and in the name of one religion;
- we will also absolve the Arab-Muslim political regimes of any wrong-doing and in particular, Saudi Arabia. Although this country supports the Western alliance, it has never ceased to fund and support all salafist¹ sects across the globe by pressurising them through State blackmail to implement the Wahhabite² ideology.
- We would also be ignoring the present social and political conditions in some Arab countries that create the conditions for protest behavior and which find their full expression at present by means and in the name of religion.

If we were to read the hundreds of works on Islam, we would be far from being able to bring clarity and satisfactory answers to the troubles of the world. Rather, we would simply add to the confusion. The Muslim intellectuals who argue most emphatically that Islam is a tolerant religion are in a situation where they are, in fact, prisoners of the Qur'anic corpus: they denounce a text by using another excerpted from the same corpus:

- If they want to refute the allegation that Islam is a totalitarian religion against democracy, they are forced to refer to the concept of *shûra*.³
- If they want to prove that Islam supports the emancipation of women contrary to what Islamists

pretend, then they need to quote a verse which shows how much Islam is respectful of women and that it recognizes their full rights.

Instead of falling into this trap, those thinkers should be able, without the slightest risk of denying their faith, to stand firm and say with great courage that it is high time to turn the page once and for all of this holy book as far as daily and practical life is concerned. They should be able to say that when it comes to the practices of everyday, it belongs to other times, other places, and that it fits another rationale for society. It should only be used as an accessory for living and as a means for ritual.

In order then to avoid the two kinds of risks noted above, I have decided to focus upon the following questions.

1. How is that within fifty years, we have moved from a religion experienced in peace and tranquility to a religion which is now perverted, betrayed and that has become the very negation of spirituality?
2. How have a faith, a doctrine, a cult and a way of thinking been transformed through the discourse and deeds of Islamist movements into an ideology? This ideology demands a religious character for the state and the enforcement of a Muslim legal system in all its rigor, in every field and through the use of all means that were mostly established by men two centuries after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.
3. In short, how is it possible that we have gone from a traditional and conventional seed to a plant that has been so genetically engineered and modified that it is not only difficult to recognize, but also it is impossible to predict the scope of its potential for contamination of human living?

To provide answers to these questions, I will try to give a view from the inside, being myself a witness of this radical change affecting a faith that is practiced, lived and subverted. I stand as an eye-witness from an Arab-Muslim country, Tunisia, one of a few to be homogeneous ethnically, linguistically and in doctrinal terms. Tunisia also has the reputation of being moderate in the practice of its faith, peaceful in its relations with other states, and very cautious when it comes to the defense of the great causes that have shaken the Arab world in the last fifty years.

At the outset there was nothing to anticipate the Islamist reversal in the practice of the Muslim faith. Shortly after independence, the major concern in the newly independent North African countries was to face the numerous challenges of the century: modernity; social and economic development; liberation of men and women through the affirmation of freedom of conscience, emancipation of women, education for all, opening-up to the world, family planning, and so on. These are objectives which are now completely alien to the Islamists' discourse and language. Tunisia and some other countries in the Near East have addressed these challenges in various ways. They must acknowledge that they are responsible for the seriousness of the difficulties that they currently face because of the options they chose to follow in seeking to meet these challenges.

In Tunisia, despite all the handicaps, it had not entered our minds that one day we would see movements that militate in favor of imposing so-called Islamic rule through the implementation of its coercive norms, which might negate basic human rights. Similarly, we would have never thought or feared that Islam would one day stand as a staunch adversary to modernity. In those days, it was unthinkable that the pure and severe Islam taught in religious instruction classes would one day serve as an alternative. We rejected it wholesale and without qualification because it made no allowance for social reality and opposed any thought of progress. We simply could not conceive that it might impose itself as a feared and dominant interlocutor in the social debate.

In that epoch, we experienced an Islam which was serene, rid of its cheap and warlike finery,

ultimately restricted to the sphere of personal practice and which remained after all deeply humane. This experience and practice did not make us less as believers than other Muslims across the globe because Islam continued to permeate all our moves and filter through each word we used in our dialect. But we never created a disease of fanaticism out of it.

We should have been more grateful to past generations for having dropped most of the *Sharia* law⁴ while keeping the essential: the belief in God and His prophet Muhammad. A popular kind of Islam therefore developed that completely disregarded much of the Muslim criminal law now being restored by Islamists in many places. There was no stoning, no crimes of honor, no flogging, no execution for blasphemy, no hand amputation for thieves, no polygamy, no servitude, no segregation of the sexes, no censorship for morals and manners (commanding right and forbidding wrong), no *jihād* on the way of God.

In urban areas, the presence of several important communities of foreigners with their respective neighbourhoods and places of worship were familiar signs of the tolerant coexistence of Muslims with Christians, Jews, French, Italians, Maltese, Greeks, and others. At that time, it would never cross the mind of a person to accuse a neighbour of: “following foreign, pagan customs, Christian or Jewish, imposed by foreign imperialists and indigenous reformers at the expense of following the only and unique true Law, the *Sharia*.” The Catholics in religious life — the kind nuns in their winged habits — who used to manage colleges, run day care centers and kindergartens were part and parcel of our universe. We never saw in their dedication a kind of proselytism in the expression of their monastic wishes. Nor did we see the presence of churches and synagogues as an insult to our religion. In the eyes of those who uphold the fundamentalist doctrine, however, there is no room in the land of Islam for places of worship and for faiths other than Muslim.

Even more distressing is the fact that such Islamist rhetoric is often developed by Muslim religious leaders living in predominantly Christian countries and enjoying the rights to practice their faith in total freedom! In the eyes of these same religious leaders, the building of churches, synagogues and temples in the land of Islam is incompatible with their fundamentalist views even in countries where a Christian minority lives as in the case of Coptic Christians in Egypt. In this respect, one of the doctrinarians of the Egyptian fundamentalist Muslim Brothers, Abd Allah al-Khatīb, authored a *fatwa*⁵ issued in 1976 regarding the building of churches in the land of Islam. He based his argument on a tradition of the caliph Ummar⁶ who ordered that churches should remain in the state where they were at the time of the conquest, and that if they were demolished for a reason like decay or decrepitude, they would not be rebuilt. In his *fatwa*, he concluded that the building of churches in the land of Islam was not allowed and that those who authorized such building would be in contravention of the Law of God. This *fatwa* has never been cancelled or denounced by its own authors despite their conciliating remarks on the necessary dialogue between religions. Accordingly, one is left to believe that these fundamentalists still adopt the principle of dissimulation *taqiyya*,⁷ while waiting for better days.

At the level of practices, we used to experience a flexible religiosity, both for prayers and the observance of the fast in Ramadan. It was, for many of us, a kind of arranged Islam, one day with and another without, and that was no cause of disapproval or dissent as far as our parents were concerned. Even the bearded hypocrites, the faith keepers of the day, would show no outburst of anger at our behavior. As you may know, secularity is defined, amongst other things, as the commitment to allow individuals the possibility of emancipation through the logical relationship between them and the class to which they belong as well as their roots. Without carrying this matter to extremes, we were simply liberated

from the obligations that would be imposed through the practice of religion.

Our family life would raise no suspicion or doubt as to any sign of discrimination against women: be it a wife, mother, sister or daughter. Women would gradually have to find and conquer their spaces in the city in ways similar to men, surpassing them at times when it came to higher achievement at school and in the professions. One must acknowledge here the audacious decisions of Tunisia's first President, Bourguiba, in his determination and his will to build a secular, laicized society. As early as 1957, he promulgated the code of civil status. He was modernist and secular in his beliefs, unique and special in the Muslim world and very revolutionary at the time through the abolition of polygamy and of the repudiation of women through the rewriting of laws on divorce. At that time he was the only leader of an Arab country to be declared apostate in 1974, and therefore subject to capital punishment according to a *fatwa* by Shaykh Abdelaziz Ibn 'Abdallah al-Bâz, president of the Islamic University of Medina. Ironically, perhaps, the same al-Bâz issued a *fatwa* in 1991 during the Desert Storm War authorizing "the armies of the infidels to remain on the Saudi soil..."

In the eyes of Islamists, the emancipation of women is considered as an incitement to immorality and debauchery and as an attack on the family which is seen as a cornerstone of an Islamic society. Presently we find in the Islamic discourse the same indignant statements about the shamelessness of women, their indocility, and their depraved morals as in the accounts of oriental travelers in Europe in the 17th century!

Naturally the first thing that comes to mind in this regard is the debate on the "veil". I am not going to elaborate on the issue of the "Islamic scarf" "*hijâb*" controversy. This issue has been widely discussed in recent months from Paris to Montreal (all we need is to remember the case of Irene Wassim, 16, who was expelled from Collège Charlemagne in Montreal for wearing the *hijâb* on her first day back to school). The question is how the scarf became a religious symbol for all the women in the Islamic countries despite their origin and cultural traditions and how it became for the fundamentalists the sixth pillar of Islam!

Let us review the Qur'anic verses on the veil. We read in Sûrah 35/59:

"O Prophet, Tell
Thy wives and daughters,
And the believing women,
That they should cast
Their outer garments over
Their persons (when abroad):
That is most convenient,
That they should be known
(As such) and not molested.
And Allah is Oft-forgiving,
Most merciful."

The Qur'anic obligation for women to wear the veil cannot be understood literally or out of context – a context which is both historical and geographical in an ancient Middle East where most women used to wear veils. In Afghanistan, the veil is called *burqa* (a piece of cloth that covers the whole body with an embroidered grid at the level of the eyes). In Saudi Arabia, it is *hijâb* (covering the hair, the neck, and the shoulders), In Iran, it is called *tchador* (a piece of black fabric which covers all parts except the face). The *niqâb*, which is used by the people of the Gulf states, hides everything except the eyes. We can also

mention the **khimâr** (hiding the head and the bust) or the '**abâya** a long black coat which at times covers the head, and the **safsârî** (a deformation of *nîsf sâri*, half *sâri*), a large silk linen in which a Tunisian woman wraps herself before going out and which would give her a significant freedom of movement and sometimes an erotic look. All these veils in their wide variety bring to mind the clothing traditions of the given localities rather than a religious relationship. They are the female counterpart of the men's **Djellaba**: a customary item of clothing. They were and still are part of the traditions favouring the separation of the sexes, since the traditional practice was that men and women would not meet for reasons of morality rather than because of religious proscription.

The struggle led by Tunisians against wearing the *safsârî* was a way of seeking freedom from the patriarchal iron collar and the conditional liberty women went through until they were wed. It was also a fight for financial autonomy that had little to do with religion. In the countryside, peasant morals and manners ignored the severe restrictions of the *Sharia*. Bedouin women, who would work side by side with men when tilling the field and cultivating the land, were not compelled to wear the veil. Nor were they hidden away. This difference between country and city was characteristic of Muslim jurisprudence: in the real world, Islamic law would apply only to urban dwellers, while rural residents were not under the compulsion either to wear the veil or to be secluded.

Whole regions, like the *Kabylie*,⁸ have only known and lived by customary law. In towns, the law was more severe but not excessive. The wearing of the traditional veil (and not the Islamic one) continued after the emancipation of women, without any clashes or friction. In contrast, the current fundamentalist mobilization in favor of the veil allows them to invade all individual spaces so that they can control women in a collective way. In short, the issue of the woman's veil is not a religious matter. Nothing in Islam supports making such a covering an obligation and certainly not a pillar of the faith like daily prayers or legal begging. Rather this promotion of the veil is part of an ideology. Even if such texts had existed, we should have changed them, because religion should serve all human beings, not just men. Human beings are not the servants of religion.

In Tunisia as anywhere else, formerly as it is now, some husbands would beat their wives. All you need is to consider the number of associations in defense of abused women; they exist in Europe and in America as well. Their existence certainly gives you an idea about the ubiquity of this plague. Yet marital violence was not committed in the name of Islam and the husbands would not see their moves as an exercise of a license granted to them by religion (as recommended by the Imam of Vénissieux). They would not base their argument on the famous verse *Sûrah* 4/34-35 which is so controversial. It is a verse which the fundamentalists interpret at present as the power given to man to punish his wife, an interpretation that involves a confusion of meaning:

“Men are the protectors
And maintainers of women,
Because Allah has given
The one more (strength) “

And further down:
“As to those women
On whose part ye fear
Disloyalty and ill-conduct,
Admonish them (first),

(Next) refuse to share their beds,
(And last) beat them (lightly);
But if they return to obedience,
Seek not against them
Means (of annoyance):
For Allah is Most High,
Great (above you all)”

Clearly, this verse is not about obedient women being submissive to the discriminating authority of men. Nor does the Qur’an assume that only women will create difficulties or be rebellious. Sûrah 4/128 reads:

“If a wife fears
Cruelty or desertion
On her husband’s part,
There is no blame on them
If they arrange
An amicable settlement
Between themselves;
And such settlement is best;”

In short, beating a woman is not an obligation (*fardh*) and everything that is not *fardh* can be abolished. Rather it fits the category of something that is permitted (*halâl*) and everything that is permitted can be abolished if the public interest requires it. Thus it is perfectly acceptable to prohibit men from beating their wives without having to consult the imams. It is also permissible to forbid any propaganda that contravenes the public interest.

Finally, and above all other considerations, one must put things in their historical context. Beating a wife was historically-speaking dictated by custom and circumstances. The Qur’anic verse was a timely and contingent concession to custom but one fitted as well with a strong reprobation. In this respect, wife-beating was doomed eventually to prohibition as was the case at the outset, and then to disappearing. Polygamy provides a similar example. It is only authorized when a husband runs no risk of being unfair to his existing spouses, which is in the real world almost impossible. So the whole spirit of the text amounts to a kind of nuanced prohibition. At that time, completely forbidding such a custom would have led to a direct confrontation with the popular belief. Therefore, it was much wiser to proceed through education and exhortation. The rules, the laws, the standards that Muhammad put in place or those that a particular community has observed throughout the ages can be seen as social and historical phenomena more or less relevant to one period or another and in one context or another. They should not be seen as obligations to which all societies must imperatively submit throughout history.

Amongst the various distinctive features of our own Islam in Tunisia, there was the cult of sainthood or the veneration at the graves of “marabouts”, Muslim holy men, who were mystics and ascetics. This practice earned the condemnation of both the Wahhabites and the modernists of the era. It was considered by the former as alien to primitive Islam, and therefore an innovation to fault (*bid’a*) as un-Islamic (in this respect, Saudi Arabia has dismantled all local cultures) and by the latter as a sign of backwardness and a contributing factor leading to it. This cult of sainthood is characterized in North African Islam by a ritual

that most Tunisian families faithfully followed. The faithful would visit the mausoleum or sanctuary of the saint (*ziyâra*) to secure his/her *baraca*, a kind of blessing, seeking in the process a favor, while leaving a fragment of clothing or a tuft of hair or by knotting a scarf. The believer would then wait for the power of the saint to resolve the crisis. In compensation, believers would give the saint an offering or would burn a candle. When the wish is fulfilled, they offer an animal in sacrifice. Some saints had a universal reputation; others were from a popular or local origin endowed with some prestige among the locals for their miracles and the extraordinary feats they performed. Many saints were seen by the faithful as having more weight and importance, in all respects, than God and His messenger. These saints were more or less specialized in one field or another. Some were known to heal an illness better than others.

Another aspect of our relationship with Islam is our **identity**. We saw ourselves first and foremost as Tunisians, the people of a nation-state defined by its territory but belonging to a larger entity which made us an integral part of both North Africa and the Arab-Muslim world. For us, the world was divided into countries, into nation-states and the religious component of identity was never perceived as the foundation of a political adherence. Because of our colonial past as well as the various secular reforms and without dethroning God (for whatever we do, Muslim people remain the most pious on earth), we used to feel completely liberated from the hegemonic stray impulse of the fanatic.

Presently, this identity has become an issue because some seek to apply it to the whole Arab-Muslim world. Their wish to unite one day under the same political flag countries as different and remote from each other as Mauritania and the Philippines sounds more like a chimera. Islam can never be a country, nor an identity. Any project aiming at achieving an Arab-Muslim unity along such religious lines is equally doomed to failure.

Until shortly after independence, this religious life style was followed by most Tunisians. The state remained faithful to Islam and the population always attached to its religion. But it is an Islam that was different from the one taught in the scriptures. Admittedly, the ideas that there exist beings, activities or aspects of human life beyond the grasp of the Muslim religion and the divine law is completely strange to Muslim thought. There is supposed to be one single law that governs all the legal domains. Yet, through a slow and real evolution, never fully conceptualized, we ended up by including elements of religious practice that mitigated the results of this requirements: no fiery *fatwas*, no excessive rigor in the implementation of legal sentences, the *hadd*, in its entire rigor for some transgressions such as wine consumption for example. After all and in order to by-pass the strict observance of the norm, the judges (*qadis*) used to adopt the famous *hadîth*: “**skip the hadd⁹ by the doubt**”.

It is in this spirit that we lived and experienced an Islam highly appreciated for its egalitarian principles, its tolerance, and its simplicity. It gave us full satisfaction because it embraced full respect of the individual. As a historian colleague put it: “It was a customary Islam, deeply rooted in the folds of Tunisian society, which is itself a social ethic characterized by mutual help, hospitality, tolerance, generosity, moderation and piety”. Brought up in this milieu, we had for one moment thought and believed in the intrinsic and now irreversible nature of the non-interference of the religious domain in matters related to the State. It escaped perhaps our thought that in Islam the religious would always spring up to life and confront the political. Unlike Christianity and Jesus, who never sought to govern, Muhammad had, from the outset, founded a politico-religious community, triumphed over his enemies during his life, set up his own state, promulgated laws, administered justice, levied taxes, led armies, waged wars and signed peace. Following his death all these prerogatives were transferred to his successors, the caliphs, the *shadow of God on earth*.

Our fight against colonialism was equally free from any reference to Islam; otherwise we would have

declared *jihâd* instead of a national resistance movement against the invader to secure the freedom and independence of the country. In making wide use of this term *jihâd*, the Islamists demonstrate that it is now for them a matter of a struggle between civilizations, if not a religious war. Etymologically, *jihâd* means “an effort towards the attainment of a specific goal”. And *mujâhadatu al-nafs* is an effort made by the individual in order to achieve moral and religious betterment. The *jihâd* is also the work of a jurist to find legal solution to a problem. As you can see, there is nothing at the beginning to suggest something particularly aggressive in this concept. It is rather the word *qitâl*, which is to fight on the path of God by threatening to kill and taking the risk to be killed, which occurs more often in the Qur’an. This concept of *qitâl* is well explained in Sûrah 9/12:

“But if they violate their oaths

After their covenant,

And taunt you for your Faith

Then fight ye the chiefs of Unfaith:

For their oaths are nothing to them:

Thus they may be restrained.”

The usage of the word *jihâd*, which has superseded *qitâl*, has therefore come to signify armed action for the expansion of Islam and eventually its defense. It originates in the fundamental principle of the universal nature of Islam, the idea that the religion must spread worldwide, through force if need be. Often forgotten is the fact that this principle is combined with another that tolerates the existence within an Islamic community of the followers of the book, Christians and Jews. For those, *jihâd* ceases if they accept to submit to the political authority of Islam and pay the poll tax tribute *jizya* and the fiscal tax *kharaj*. This principle is no longer acceptable for the Islamists. Moreover, they intend to extend this idea of *jihâd* to include Muslims suspected or declared guilty for collaborating or being friendly with those who are recognized as enemies. In their view, the *jihâd*, which is an obligation and an action of pure devotion, should continue as long as the universality of Islam is not achieved: “until the end of the world”, which implies that any peace with non-Muslim nations is temporary. We are dealing here with the perfect rationale for a radical Islam which refuses any relent in the struggle for the Islamisation of the world.

The difference between the fight for national liberation and the *jihâd* is that fighters of *jihâd* or *mujâhid* are not concerned about the liberation of a country, a territory. Rather the fighters are focused on their rewards in the Garden of Eden where rivers of milk and honey flow for ever and where the martyr is greeted with waves of paradise virgins. Thus, at present, the concept of *jihâd* has inevitably eliminated the concept of citizenship, of a relationship with a native land, a country, because the *mujâhid* does not fight for his country but for his own salvation through obedience to God Almighty. Contrary to the concept of a national struggle which opens up to the idea of creating citizenship, the concept of *jihâd* imprisons the self in a racist, discriminatory attitude which excludes all those, in the same country, who happen to be non-Muslims. It gives preference to the defense of God rather than a homeland. Consequently, the Islamists show very little concern for the national interest and become thereby a social element that contributes to internal division, racism and strife.

When some people establish themselves as caliphs and declare *jihâd* in some countries, one must consider it an act of pure terrorism, a criminal offense because under international law, war falls within the competence of the state not individuals. As such, war is subject to rules and conventions. The abuse occurring today in the anarchic resort to this notion of *jihâd* is one more example of the confusion which

reigns on the Islamist stage between the real and the mythical. The *jihâd* on the path of God belongs to an era when a conquering religion wanted to submit the world to its new faith. It was a view implying that all non-Muslims are from the outset enemies whom one should fight on the basis of faith only. It is no longer relevant in a system of states and international law. One should also note that accompanying *jihâd* in this thinking are notions of pillage, incursions, holding women and children captives – something again in total conflict with the global legal conventions on these matters.

The *fatwa* is issued by those with a certain specialized authority and endowed with the power to do so by a specific set of norms. The *fatwa* is part of state authority and it has always depended on the will of the Prince throughout history since the days of the Prophet. It is only to be proclaimed with the consent of the Prince and in this respect becomes a law which is based first and foremost on justice. However, in current circumstances, we find that anyone can proclaim himself internet-imâm; issue a *fatwa*; declare war against a country, a government, a group of people or a person inside *dâr al-islam* (the house of Islam); accuse others, individuals and peoples of lack of piety *takfîr*; justify a kidnapping and the holding of hostages and carry out a death sentence. The real jurists, as we see in Iraq, have lost their authority in favor of a djihadist inflation whose evolution and dire consequences no one can any longer predict.

The Iranian revolution renewed its ties with this principle and was indeed the first political revolution in modern times to claim openly and without any shade of doubt its religious obedience, at a time when countries of the Third-World started to lose hope in any socialist or liberal revolution. It was also the first sign of a clash of civilizations, a religious combat, a *jihâd*. We still wonder how it happens that a religious trend, presented in its sacred scriptures as essentially initiatory, esoteric, mystical and quietist would give birth from within to a political ideology justifying the seizure of power by the doctors of the Law. It is illustrated in the end by the central thesis of Khomeyni-ism and the Iranian Islamic revolution, better known as the doctrine of the ‘power of the jurist *wilâyat al-fakîh*’, which gives the imam an absolute power in the management of the affairs of city and the community.

Once the first shock was over, Islamist Iran became accepted very quickly within the international legal system and the world accommodated itself to the existence of an Islamic republic whose constitution is governed by a scrupulous observance of Shiite Islam. This surely gave hope to millions of Muslims around the Arab world¹⁰. At this point in time, an Islamic state, run according to the Law of God, became a possibility. The rest of the story is familiar: many crimes perpetrated in the name of Islam in a number of Muslim and Arab countries; the assassination of President Sadat; the GIA massacres in Algeria (100,000 dead). These criminal acts committed in an number of Arab states caused no great shock as long as they were taking place in peripheral countries. For Europe and America at that time, the islamists seemed far away, if not simply exotic. With the September 11th attacks, the world came to realize that Islamism in its multiple forms has now secured the right of existence within the very cities of Europe and America. I refer her to “Salafists”, members of different sects inspired by Wahhabism constituting the hard liners working with certain Islamist intellectuals, who provide a more polished prose and who constitute the “softer” side of the movement.

In order to avoid the devastating effects of such a struggle and the risk of bringing about a scenario similar to the Iranian revolution in their own land, the Arab countries have opted for strong regimes rather than a democratization of the institutions that would allow the fundamentalists to seize power. In Morocco, Algeria, Jordan and Egypt, militant Islam is powerful, but it remains contained outside the spheres of power. At the social and cultural levels, however, half of the work is already done. For example, family codes subject women and make the inequality of sexes a ruling guideline. Crimes of honor in Jordan,

crimes of apostasy in Egypt, stoning, and oppression and repression spring to life at every attempt in the direction of women's emancipation. The Algerian government had to wait 40 years before it could adopt in August 2004, a bill, largely contested, one must admit, seeking the abolition of guardianship for the marriage of young girls. Polygamy is still in force despite this bill, but mitigated with conditions (the spouses must agree to it and the husband must have sufficient means to provide for the needs of the two households). It is therefore obvious that Islamists still have bright days ahead!

The presence of a radical Islamic opposition in some Arab countries allows the authorities in place to take measures in compliance with the interpretation of the most archaic religious laws or to neutralize all reform attempts. In other countries, giving satisfaction to some Islamists' claims seems the best way to pull the rug from under their feet. Turkey is a special case; the victory of the conservative, non-fundamentalist Muslims is kept under strict control by the army. Nonetheless, this control has not prevented Turkey at the social and cultural levels, and despite its European claims, from being in the same boat as its Arab neighbors.

Islamism as an alternative

"Islam is a solution!" All those who utter this slogan not only bet on the future but also deceive their public by causing confusion between religion as a management model and the glorious past of the Muslim empire. This argument has led them to think that if Muslims are now in a state of decadence, it is the natural consequence of Islam not being sufficiently present in their lives.

Let us stop for a moment to consider this conception of Islam transformed into a myth to the extent that it becomes the solution to all problems. Let us begin by taking a look at the plan to exercise power. In the eyes of most Islamists, there is no need for democracy because they rejoice at presenting the *shûra* as a Muslim model that can equal, if not improve upon, any western form of democracy.

Despite the constructive image they portray of Islam — an egalitarian religion preaching tolerance and fighting privilege and discrimination — the Islamists keep silent about the established fact that following the death of Muhammad who had been the artisan of an immense revolution in Arabia, the history of Islam, just like all political histories, was then marked by tragedies, internal quarrels and deadly fights. Yet, if we consider what the revelation stated in relation to the practices of the societies of these days, we realize that it was a message of equality and justice. But Islam (and I refer to the Islam of the guardian of the dogma) did also forge inequalities: between men and women, the master and slave, the believer and the non-believer. Some of these inequalities have disappeared only very recently. For example, in Saudi Arabia, slavery was only abolished in 1962. In many other countries, the status of women is still below satisfactory levels. And in the inner self of every Muslim, the world is still divided between Muslims and infidels.

The founding myths are hard to erase. After the death of the prophet, the ruling corps rapidly deviated from the message left by Muhammad with its focus on the need for consensus. A caliph like Umar, known to be an example of piety and justice, had from the very outset discarded common people from the political government. He granted the *shûra* six members with the conviction that if four came to an agreement and two opposed it, the latter had to be killed. And if three agreed on an issue and three were against, one should take the side of the group of Abd al-Rahmân Ibn 'Awf and if they persisted in their refusal, they had to be executed. Why did he say "execute them" and not "exclude them"? This happened in an era that was considered by most Muslims as the golden age, an epoch that witnessed the violent deaths of three caliphs and the fourth, Abu Bakr, was probably poisoned to death. Then came the

era of the Umayyad which transformed that so called *shûra* into a hereditary monarchy. The Abbasids followed, who also usurped power.

Some might say that things have not changed all that much even in the present day. Take the example of Arab governments. If we exclude the monarchies for a moment, not a single regime is an instance of democracy. They have leaders who have been in power for 35, 23, 14, etc. years. In the name of the “party” or the person of the leader, authorities tighten controls, limit intellectual discussions, abolish a free press, and make other efforts to control the thinking of citizens.

The failure to come to power through violence led the Islamists to rethink their policies and their strategies. They have thus started with proposals, like the one called “initiative for democratic reforms” of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. They pretend to adhere to democracy in accepting the electoral principle and in introducing civil society through the setting-up of associations, leagues and unions. In some countries, like Egypt, this has started to bear fruit since Islamists are now represented in the union of journalists, that of lawyers, and that of medical doctors. Their presence in these bodies has turned out to be a destabilizing factor. When present, they argue that there is no room but for an Islamist discourse, no opinions acceptable than that of their own fundamentalist ones.

For example, one of the first decisions made when they took control of the doctors council was to modify Hippocrates’s oath. From the beginning of Islam to the present, this oath has been the same everywhere in the Arab countries paying respect to all faiths of the book without excluding Christian or Jewish doctors. At the end of the oath, there is this phrase: “towards God and his prophets”. The first change introduced by the Islamists was to revise the phrase as follows: “Towards God and *his* prophet”, thereby forcing Christian doctors to swear by the name of the prophet of Islam. It is no longer a symbolic oath that goes back to the early days of medicine. It has become a means for the Islamists to oppress the Coptic doctors who represent 35 per cent of the total number of Egyptian general practitioners.

The globalization of Islam does not only touch upon *jihâd*, it spreads to other aspects of life. Islamism has in fact found a tremendous instrument in the global information and communication technologies. A transnational Islam is developing that goes far beyond the Islam of the traditional law schools and seeks to speak to all Muslims from Morocco to Pakistan. It utilizes satellite TV channels like Iqra’, Almanar and websites such as Islamonline. This globalization of the media has favored the multiplication of TV preachers, some of whom have gained reputations well beyond their country of origin. A preacher like Amru Khaled (Khaled al-Jundi) is a young man, with a congenial intellectual and modern bearing that stands in total contrast with the bearded old sheikhs with stern countenances, the preachers of the 1970s. He calls himself *ustâth* (professor), gives talks, *words emanating from the heart*, similar in style to American Evangelists. He appeals very much to women to the extent that those ones in doubt, on listening and seeing him, lose their last hesitations and take up the wearing of the veil. In his speeches, there is nothing subversive: no threats coming from hell, no petty arguments about what is permitted legally, just advice. One must work hard in life to attain success, one must set objectives, one can be a good Muslim but at the same time become comfortable in life and get rich. He does not hesitate, however, to bring to the fore the importance of wearing the veil, the regular reading of the Qur’an, the respect of prayer times. All these points are supported by the use of anecdotes that tell the life of the Prophet and his close companions, a kind of ‘chat’, however, that falls outside any historical truth!

Currently, there are preachers in all areas of specialization. In fact, everything can be dealt with from an Islamic angle: nutrition, marital relationships, education of children and adolescents, medical matters, and so on. These practices come close to the merchandizing of religion because private businesses hire

these very preachers to boost their marketing campaigns as to the sale of their goods and products. (For some TV channels, the income earned from such telephone marketing is far higher than the money they get from advertising!) In the field of medicine, for instance, it is now the so-called medicine of the Prophet that serves as a reference. Ahmad Hanafi, who is no doctor, states that the use of medication is blasphemy and preaches in favor of a return to the practice of cupping people¹¹ as a way of healing any ailment. He justifies this argument by referring to a tradition that the prophet will use cupping on the day of final judgment. In the field of diet, Abd al-Basit Muhammad owns a care center called *markaz al-tibb al-nabawî*, the centre of the prophet's medicine, where the so-called prophet medicine is practiced as an alternative and substitute for non-Muslim medicine. As another example, because the prophet lived on dates, Muslims should look for what that fruit has in terms of virtues and merits and then we can base all our diet on that fruit. Akram Ridha is a psychotherapist and has defined love as the "relationship between a boy and a girl which inevitably leads to sin". Islamonline website contains a databank of *fatwas* that are supposed to provide answers to all the questions and issues related to daily life.

Changes in religious practice

Practices which have been periodic and occasional have now intensified and regularized. These practices denote a conjunction of Islamization with the surge of mass-consumption goods. New practices have been created especially through the modern broadcasting techniques in the field of mass consumption and mass communication: audio-tapes, video-tapes. The large scale broadcast of the Qur'an has distanced it from the feeling of mourning with which it has long been associated. Now people listen to the Qur'an in the car in the same way as they listen to music and songs. Similarly, Qur'anic slogans are found on bumper stickers printed at the rear of cars and taxi cabs. These catch-phrases from the Qur'an have become a common currency. People use the "besmallah" (in the name of Allah) at the beginning of all sorts of speeches and in any move or gesture they make. More and more, they associate their acts with the eternal phrases "God willing" and "Thank God". In aeroplanes, before take-off and after landing, such utterances are made, and the same is done on the radio when presenting the weather broadcast. In the same innovative spirit, the melodies used as ring tones in cellular phones emulate the tune of the minaret caller. The religious field, so far limited to the private sphere, has then greatly influenced demographic, economic and social areas.

To have a clear idea about Islamism, we must first explain how the modernization, now in disgrace and rejected in the name of Islamic values, has been achieved, especially in relation to the western model. Maybe we will find within its mode of achievement a kind of hidden fragility at its present state.

In the West, the movement induced by the philosophy of the enlightenment was translated into the secularization of the institutions, and also led to the gradual rejection of all principles that transcend integration and control of social life. It involved the disenchantment of the world, its secularization, the separation of heaven and earth, the laicization of power, the need to dissociate faith from rational thinking and religious belief from scientific knowledge. All of these ideas have contributed to the vast transformation of European societies beginning as early as the 15th century. These societies have seen the reconstruction of a world in which the individual becomes the central reference, in which liberty is the pre-requisite of success, where natural and practical reason serve as the corner-stone for the development of justice and institutions, where social conflict is used to consolidate and reinforce democratic representation of the general will, and ultimately where sovereignty lies within the people and for the people.

The basic principle of this western model stipulates that modernization **has come from within** and

is not the result of pressures or interventions from foreign sources. In general the secularity of the Western world has taken shape as a result of a prolonged dialogue between the State and civil society and consequently has become anchored in a deeply seated way within the social fabric.

In contrast, for the Turkey of Ataturk, the Iran of the Pahlavi, and the Tunisia of Bourguiba, modernization came from without in that the state itself became the main vector of modernization and of the destruction of old social and cultural structures. Because of the relatively poor state of commerce and industry and the presence of a different political culture, modernization coming from internal factors was improbable. In the Arab Muslim countries, secularity which is written in the constitution as in Turkey or which is practiced in an informal way as in Tunisia, has, in fact, been imposed by the state authorities and is subject to their control. In the meantime, Islam has remained hidden and latent, either waiting for the state to loosen its grip or for the economic crisis to worsen, opening thereby the door to its revival.

Amongst all imaginable factors, there is one that is irreversible and which could explain this fundamentalist surge: the political, social, cultural, and demographic change that has occurred in the last 30 years in Arab Muslim societies. These changes have been followed with a significant decline in their incomes, degradation in living conditions, limitations on political liberties, and a decline at the cultural level. Such changes occurred even though education has witnessed an important increase through an expansion of learning at primary, secondary and university levels. Rural life is characterized by poverty and piety, whereas city life displays ostentatious consumption but harbors difficulties for the under privileged. Urbanization in the West was synonymous with industrialization throughout the 19th century while in the Arab countries, towns are the result of a massive flow of waves and waves of country people into urban areas following changes to the agricultural sector and the growing attraction of urban living.

On the political level we cannot separate the Islamist surge from the political situation of the Arab regimes. With the exception of Lebanon and Algeria, the common denominator of all Arab presidential regimes is that the president of the republic has constitutionally speaking legislative, executive and judiciary powers that exceed by far all the powers held by monarchs and princes in the Arab World. Similarly the consecration of these presidents by their people-flatterers outshines the devotion of subjects to their princes in Arab monarchies. Moreover, democracy as political pluralism, the right of information, and respect for liberties and human rights, has made more steps forward in monarchies such as Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar than in republics which have been for the last half century 'genuine presidential monarchies'. Without exception, these presidents are the focus of adulation, uncontested, omnipotent, omniscient; they have been elevated by their flatterers to the rank of monarchs with divine right. They are also eternal: more than 35 years for Khadafi, 22 Years for Mubarak. And then there are those who died after more than 30 years of rule but only after transforming their political power into a hereditary presidency like al-Assad (and perhaps soon Mubarak). Ironically, the question that comes to mind is how these nations with such good/ideal leaders happen to be in such a terrible state of underdevelopment?

This state of development in the Arab world today contains all the ingredients necessary for promoting the expansion and strengthening of the grip of the Islamists on the peoples of the region. For that matter one should refer to the United Nations Report on the Arab World Development. What does it say in substance? The development of the region, when compared to other regions in the world, is rated second last, with the last being sub-Saharan Africa. Development is impeded by three essential deficits considered as typical:

- a deficit in terms of personal liberties
- a deficit in terms of giving autonomy to women
- a deficit in terms of human potential and knowledge in relation to income.

The serious consequences of the continuation of the present trends mean that all Arabs face one of three irreversible strategic choices.

1. **Either** keep a dependent relationship with the communities that dominate the production of knowledge **or** adopt a position of force with the global society of knowledge through the construction of adequate dynamic and effective systems to acquire, nurture and develop knowledge;
2. **Either** continue to affront and confront regional and global challenges in an individualistic mode, each country on its own, and by the same token remain weak and marginal **or** work toward a common understanding amongst Arab countries to take the institutional measures that are likely to realize the value from the enormous potential that would come from higher levels of integration among Arab countries. In the current globalizing circumstances, more successful societies, including the most advanced, are seeking to belong to larger regional entities in order to be competitive and influential in the global system.
3. **Either** remain on the margins of the modern world **or** develop new societal devices, both at the national and pan-Arab levels, that will make it more possible to open up to the new world which is taking shape as a result of globalization.

Conclusion

In summary, the world has seen a movement from a popular and devout religion into a re-invented faith where interdictions and prohibitions reign supreme and from a religious doctrine to an ideology called Islamism. At a time when many ideologies have been declared bankrupt, Muslims are faced with the task of re-thinking the spiritual future of their civilization, renewing religious discourse, adapting it to the contemporary world, redistributing the new message and initiating dialogue. All of these and more will be required if we wish to avoid imminent derailment of our societies through the institutionalization of fundamentalism and fanaticism. These steps are large and demanding ones. But who is to undertake and lead such reforms? The official state institutions, or the Islamic parties, or the foreign powers like the US of George W. Bush with his “Great Middle East Project”? The same person whose policy in Iraq has “radicalized” the Islamist movements, alienated Muslims by the hundreds of thousands rallying militants to the terrorist cause and has ultimately given the enemies of peace more followers and sympathizers than any previous time? Alas, no clear answers to this leadership deficit appear available.

NOTES

¹ Salafism is an ideology that posits that Islam has strayed from its origins. The word “salaf” is Arabic for “ancient one” and refers to the companions of the Prophet Mohammed. Arguing that the faith has become decadent over the centuries, Salafists call for the restoration of authentic Islam as expressed by an adherence to its original teachings and texts.

² Wahhabism is the particularly virulent strain of fundamentalism found in Saudi Arabia and closely related to the monarchy since the founding of the Kingdom.

³ This term means consultation. The Islamists consider that the idea of democratic political practice is well rooted in the concept of *shûra*. Certainly, the abandonment of the *shûra* has harmed Islamic nations. In fact taking counsel from his companions or members of his tribe was an ordinary thing to do in the tribal structure of Arabia before Islam where the chief of the tribe was no more than a *primus inter pares* (first among equals). The chief ruled the tribe by taking counsel from fellow tribe members.

This concept is derived from certain verses: (Arthur J. Arberry: *The Koran interpreted*. London, Oxford UP, 1964).

- Koran 3-159: So pardon them, and pray forgiveness for them, and take counsel with them in the affair.

- Koran 42. 38: And those who answer the lord, and perform the prayer, the affair being counsel between them...

⁴ The source of legislation to regulate human behaviour, deriving from the divine injunctions of Qura'n and the confirmed provisions of prophetic traditions (*sunnah*). The *fiqh*, the Islamic law, is the application of these injunctions.

⁵ A religious opinion expressed by a religious scholar on a question of law.

⁶ Caliph means successor and came to indicate who succeeds the prophet Muhammad. Ummar was the second after Abu Bak and came before Uthman and Ali. These four companions of Muhammad were then called *rashîdûn* (the well oriented).

⁷ It is a strategy consisting, usually for a religious minority, of hiding its opinions to escape from the repression. Using *taqiyya* could even lead someone to behave in a way totally against one's principles like drinking wine and so on...

⁸ In Algeria.

⁹ *Hadd* (pl. *hudûd*) a distinct and definite sanction.

¹⁰ Founded in 1958, the Da'awa of Mohamed Baqer Sadr is to the Shiites what the Muslim Brothers Association of the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna is to the Sunnis: an organization which advocates a reislamization of society in order to create the appropriate conditions for a return to the sources of Islam and a reinstatement of the authority of the Imam or caliph.

¹¹ It is a return to the practice of drawing blood from a patient into a cup. The healer concerned usually had a reputation for taking care of problems like severe headaches or hypertension. An incision would be made and then a suction cup would be applied, which would draw the blood out of a person, thus serving the function of a leech. The therapy was based on the idea that the individual suffered from 'humeurs malsains' or morbid moods to use Hippocrates's language and that a return to health would come if some of these moods were extracted. This practice remained common in Tunisia until the 1960s and was usually carried out by those who cut hair.

Institute on Globalization and the HUMAN CONDITION

The Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition was created in January 1998 following the designation of globalization and the human condition as a strategic area of research by the Senate of McMaster University. Subsequently, it was approved as an official research center by the University Planning Committee. The Institute brings together a group of approximately 30 scholars from both the social sciences and humanities. Its mandate includes the following responsibilities:

- a facilitator of research and interdisciplinary discussion with the view to building an intellectual community focused on globalization issues.

- a centre for dialogue between the university and the community on globalization issues

- a promoter and administrator of new graduate programming

In January 2002, the Institute also became the host for a Major Collaborative Research Initiatives Project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada where a group of over 40 researchers from across Canada and abroad are examining the relationships between globalization and autonomy.

<http://globalization.mcmaster.ca>

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Objectives:

To foster dialogue and awareness of research among scholars at McMaster and elsewhere whose work focuses upon globalization, its impact on economic, social, political and cultural relations, and the response of individuals, groups and societies to these impacts. Given the complexity of the globalization phenomenon and the diverse reactions to it, it is helpful to focus upon these issues from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

To assist scholars at McMaster and elsewhere to clarify and refine their research on globalization in preparation for eventual publication.

“Globalisation and Islamisation”

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