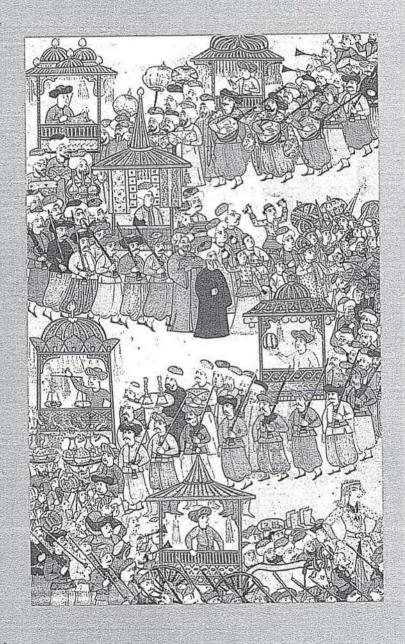# CIVIL SOCIETY
DEMOCRACY AND
THE MUSLIM WORLD

CIVIL SOCIETY DEMOCRACY AND THE MUSLIM WORLD

Papers Read at a Conference Held
at the Swedish Research Institute
in Istanbul, 28-30 October, 1996

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From Taliban to Erbakan:
The Case of Islam, Civil Society and Democracy

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I

Religion is a system of beliefs, rituals, and practices which deal with the "sacred," the "metaphysical," the "eternal," the "otherworldly," and the "absolute." Even when a religion deals with the "this worldly," it is for the ultimate service of the "other-worldly." Religions, of course, vary in many ways and in many aspects, but they nearly all have the above features in common. Being "sacred" and "absolute" is what made it difficult in the past for a religion to tolerate or coexist with another in the same community or polity. One's sacred and absolute truth set a real or symbolic boundary with the other's sacred and absolute truth. If taken too seriously and passionately, such boundaries could become flaming and bloody. History is full of tragic tales of religious wars and sectarian strife, especially in Europe - the last examples of which can still be seen in Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

By the same token, being sacred and absolute makes it equally difficult for people who take religion too seriously and passionately to tolerate another worldly system of ideas or beliefs which claims similar qualities to their own - i.e. other man-made dogmatic ideologies such as Marxism. Again, modern history is replete with tragic tales of conflict among religious and non-religious, but equally dogmatic ideologies. It is the exclusive nature of such belief systems which implies the negation of the different Other.

Democracy, on the other hand, starts off from the very exact opposite pole, i.e. inclusion of all human beings of the community as equals regardless of their religion, race or creed. Whatever definition of democracy one opts for, it ultimately revolves around the peaceful management of "differences." Accepting the different Other - i.e. religious-wise, class-wise, interest-wise, gender-wise, ethnic-wise - is what political and legal equality is all about. Equality before the law is a necessary condition for democracy. Democracy may be looked at as a system of managing differences among legal-political equals, to attain their optimum well-being. Such differences are managed in accordance with a set of rules agreed upon by those different equals. Though not as sacred as religious commandments, the rules of the democratic game are to be respected by all players. Unlike religious commandments, the rules of the democratic game (constitutions and laws) can be changed and/or amended. Thus all the fundamentals of democracy are both "worldly" (i.e. formulated by humans for humans on earth) and "relativistic" (time, culturally and politically bound).

The inclusive worldly and relativistic nature of democracy places it in potential conflict with any dogma which claims monopoly of an absolute Truth, including religious dogma. This actual or potential conflict is what led to the separation between the "state" and the "church" in the early democracies of the West. Later democracies

have followed suit. Such a separation is neither a total divorce nor a hostile coexistence. Rather it has been a mutual respect for the autonomy of each other's sphere in regulating human affairs. Depending on a given society's pre-democratic history, the relationship between religion and politics is classifiable into modalities - ranging from working harmoniously together to being totally oblivious of each other. In either case, the religious dogma is toned down and the passions accompanying them are cooled off. One way of doing so is through the re-interpretation, selection or reformulation of sacred texts. The famous saying attributed to Jesus Christ, "What is to Caesar must go to Caesar, and what is to God must remain to God," is a case in point. The "what" was never defined by Jesus; and has remained open-ended ever since! It is the epitome of such a selective reinterpretation which backs up the principle of separation of state and religion.

II

As usual, the problematic of such separation is more complex and dramatic during periods of socio-political transition. In this respect non-Western societies are going through transitions similar to or more severe than those their Western counterparts went through a few centuries earlier. During such a transition one encounters spokesmen of a certain religion giving their own idealized, simplistic but often attractive interpretation of sacred texts to suit the needs, deprivations and aspirations of the marginalized and powerless - e.g. the "Pie-in-the-sky or restoring the Paradise Lost" idioms. We shall demonstrate that all religions, especially Islam, lend themselves to diverse interpretations when it comes to politics and governance. Prevailing socio- economic conditions make one of these interpretations more acceptable than the others. As an illustration, let us start with a page of Western history.

On February 25, 1534, in the German town of Munster, Anabaptist zealots staged an armed uprising and installed a radical dictatorship. All who refused to undergo re-baptism into the new faith were driven from the city without food or belongings during a snowstorm. The new regime impounded all food, money, valuables and cancelled all debts. Mobs burned the financial records of all local merchants. The houses of the fleeing well-to-do were assigned to the poor. Former beggars capered in the streets, decked in plundered finery. The religious positions of the new regime were equally radical. Under the new moral order it imposed, all books other than the Bible were burned. All "sins," including swearing, backbiting, complaining, and disobedience, were to be punished by instant execution. Soon the regime instituted polygamy. Unmarried women were ordered to marry the first man who asked them - and forty-nine women were executed and their bodies hacked into quarters for failing to comply. Before long, however, the outside world reacted. Munster was soon besieged by an army of mercenaries recruited by its bishop, who had escaped . Surrounded and cut off, the city was thrown into growing confusion.

Then, out of the rebel ranks, there arose a new and absolute leader - John Bockelson, who assumed the name of John of Leyden and claimed to have been appointed by God to be king of the last days. A "this-worldly" rebellion now became firmly "other-worldly." The rebels did not need to win victory over their temporal rulers, for all was now in the hands of God in these days before the Last Judgment, announced by John of Leyden to be coming before Easter 1535. Anyone in Munster who opposed or expressed doubt on this prophecy was executed. On June 24, 1535, the bishop's troops made a surprise assault in the night and took the city. John of Leyden was arrested. Over the next few months, he was led in chains from town to town, and in January 1536 taken back to Munster, where he was tor-

tured to death with hot red irons in front of a large crowd. His body was put in an iron cage and suspended from the church tower. The cage still hangs there today.[1]

At the time, there was nothing very unusual about the rebellion in Munster, or its taking the form of a religious movement. Similar events were commonplace in Europe, especially in the growing commercial towns. The few decades preceding and following the Munster episode were replete with intense "worldly" discontent, shrouded in religious discourse and conflict. A quick glance at the annals of the first half of the sixteenth century would substantiate this proposition. Eighteen years before the Munster uprising Sir Thomas More had written his *Utopia* (1516). A year later (1517), in protest against the sale of "indulgences," Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of Palast Church in Wittenberg, beginning the famous Reformation. Actually, by the time of the Munster rebellion, Martin Luther had completed the first translation of the Bible into German, and two years later he completed his *Table Talks* (1536). Two years after the execution of John of Leyden, Calvin was expelled from Geneva and settled in Strasbourg (1538). In 1542, Pope Paul III established the Inquisition in Rome, and a year later the first Protestants were burned at the stake in Spain (1543). In 1544, Pope Paul III called a general council at Trent. The Council met a year later (1545), to discuss Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

This was a period of great transformations ushered in by dramatic geographic explorations, scientific discoveries, and sprouting capitalism. By the time of the Munster uprising, the Americas had been discovered (1492). Some 25 universities had been founded all over Europe. The printing press had already turned out some 10 million copies of published books in various European languages. Before the mid-sixteenth century, Religious Reformation and Counter-Reformation would sweep over Germany, France, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

An examination of sixteenth century Europe in retrospect is very helpful in understanding what is happening in the Arab Muslim world in the late twentieth century. The so-called Islamic revival is as much an expression of "worldly" concern as it is a religious quest for "other-worldly" salvation.

The seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca at the end of 1979 by a group of Muslim zealots led by a young man, Juhiman al-Outiabi, resembles in many ways the Munster rebellion. The leader and his followers were all in their twenties and early thirties. They were of Bedouin tribal origin, newcomers to the rapid urbanizing centers of Saudi Arabia. In their youthful life time they had already witnessed the profound, but confusing socio-economic transformation of their country, resulting from the oil boom. In the ten years preceding their rebellion, Saudi Arabia had doubled its total population, tripled its urban population, and increased its financial wealth tenfold. There were as many expatriates as native Saudis in the country. The expatriates poured into the country in unprecedented numbers, especially after 1973. They came from many lands as distant as Korea, Australia, Scandinavia, and America. While the Saudis may have become accustomed to Arabs and Muslims coming in for the pilgrimage, the oil-boom's waves of expatriates had nothing or very little in common with the native Saudis. Different in language, religion and life-style, the expatriates were running much of the economic life of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the sudden wealth from skyrocketing oil prices was not being equitably distributed, nor was political power equitably shared. In those years estrangement or alienation of the Saudis in their own country was growing as rapidly as the oil wealth. Like youth everywhere, young Saudis, especially those with some education, felt the brunt of such estrangement more than others. With restricted participation in socio-economic life because of their limited skills and lack of training for the modern institutions then

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1 Abridged from a full account in, Stark, Rodney and Williams Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985.

being built; and with no opportunity of political participation under the autocratic Saudi regime, long allied with the religious monopoly of the Wahabbi establishment, young Juhiman al-Outiabi and his fellow zealots must have felt the same way as John of Leyden had done four and a half centuries earlier. The end results were much the same. The Grand Mosque of Mecca was soon besieged by Saudi government troops. The required pronouncements of condemnation were quickly issued by Sheikh Ben-Baz, the head of the Wahabbi religious establishment. However, unable to dissuade the rebels to surrender and with the Saudi troops unable to storm the Grand Mosque, the Saudi regime called on French mercenaries to do the job. Several of the zealot Brothers were killed in the process. The others were arrested, quickly tried and beheaded. Ultimately the uprising was crushed and the whole incident ended in three weeks.

Although somewhat different in detail, similar episodes took place in Egypt in 1974 and 1977, in Tunisia just a few months prior to the Grand Mosque seizure (1979), and in Tehran at nearly the same time.

The latest of such episodes is still unfolding in Afghanistan at the time of writing (Nov. 1996). Young zealots under the name of Taliban, led by Mulla Mohammed Omar, swept across most of Afghanistan earlier in the year; and finally captured the capital Kabul in September 1996. Literally for students of Islamic studies, Taliban have risen from the ashes of the devastation caused by the ten-year protracted war waged by the Afghani Mujahideen against Soviet occupation and its client Communist government (1980-1990) and the five years of bitter civil war between the various factions of the victorious Mujahideen themselves, in their struggle for power.

Initially, most war-weary Afghanis welcomed the Taliban, who looked young, self-denying and idealistic. Their swift early victories over some Mujahideen "war-lords" was a welcome sign that God (Allah) must be blessing these new "Cinderella-like" heroes. Many Afghanis thought that at long last their country was soon to be saved and civil peace would be restored, but as soon as the Taliban seized the Capital, declared themselves the "legitimate" government and obtained recognition from their big neighbour Pakistan, they began to show a different face. To many Afghanis, especially women, it was an ugly and horrifying face. In a manner not too dissimilar from John of Leyden's Annapabtists in 1534, the Taliban's Mulla Omar ordered all women to stay at home, forbade them to work or go to school outside their homes, and if they ventured into any public space ordered them to be completely covered from "head to toe" . The Taliban ordered all males above 15 years of age to grow full beards within one month and to wear "Islamic attire." All of these and other commandments were issued in the name of "Islam;" and violators were to be punished on the spot. To show that they meant "business," upon capturing the Capital, Taliban disregarded the sanctity of the UN compound, forced their way in, arrested a former president of Afghanistan (Najeebullah) who had taken refuge there, hanged him in the main public square and left his body hanging for two days.

The zealots in all the above and similar episodes in history have more points of resemblance than of difference, despite their religious affiliations (e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.). The zealots in all of them were not the poorest of the poor, nor were they misfits or the scum of the earth. They were all young and among the relatively better educated in their societies. They were all new-comers to the big city who had come from tribal and rural origins. Like their counterparts in Munster, their tocsin was against "king and pope". In the Arab-Muslim world, that means repressive political regimes and the allied religious establishment. The counter weapon of the discontented zealots is invariably a combination of the political and the religious.

More than Christianity and other religions, Islam has the character of a mobilizing political weapon. In its precepts and dicta, Islam is as much a "worldly" as an "other-worldly" religion. In the latter, it promises a glorious life on earth to the believers who adhere to its teachings in letter and spirit. Hence the battle cry of today's activists, "Islam is the Solution." The idealized history which Muslims learn in school and hear about in the mosque has a simple uni-dimensional message: Islam in the days of the Prophet Mohammed and the Guided Caliphs (610-661) enabled Muslims to be virtuous, just, prosperous, and strong. The true believers conquered the world and built the greatest civilization humanity had ever known.

Young Muslims are told in schools that the normative dimensions of Islamic teachings are second to none. Right from the start, Islam educated its adherents to accept differences among human beings. The Holy Qur'an addressed the believer unequivocally.

> O Mankind! We (God) created you from a single pair of a male and a female; and made you into peoples and tribes, that ye may be acquainted with each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous among you... (Hujurat or the Inner Apartments: 13)
>
> If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind One Nation: but they will still differ. (Hud or the Prophet Hud: 118).
>
> Among His (God's) Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages (tongues) and your colors... (Rum, or the Roman Empire: 22)

The above verses spoke about multi-culturalism more eloquently and unequivocally than any twentieth century UN or European document of a similar nature. In more than hundred places in the Holy Qur'an, we encounter clear and detailed verses teaching and preaching the norms, values and virtues that are now considered essential for civil society.

On freedom of religious belief, the Holy Qur'an is no less unequivocal. The following verses suffice.

> Ye may believe in it (the Qur'an) or not ... (Bani Israel: 107)
>
> Say, 'The Truth is From your Lord': Let him who will, Believe, and let him Who will reject (it). (Kahf: 29)
>
> Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out Clear from Error. (Baqara or the Heifer: 256)
>
> If it had been thy Lord's Will, They would all have believed, All who are on Earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, Against their will to believe! (Yunus, or Jonah: 99)
>
> Therefore do thou give Admonition, for thou art One to admonish. Thou art not one to manage (men's) affairs. But if any turn away And reject God, God will punish him With a mighty Punishment. For to Us will be Their return; Then it will be for Us To call them to account. (Gashiya, or the Overwhelming Event: 21-26).

This last verse lays down the Islamic principle of religious co-existence and tolerance. God freed the Prophet and all Muslims from the trap of fruitless debate on who has the monopoly over religious Truth. The duty of the Faithful is to advocate, but not to admonish or coerce. It is only God who can, and will hold people accountable in the thereafter in matters of belief (and deeds). This same belief is repeated over and over again. Addressing the Prophet God Commands,

> If they do wrangle with thee, Say: 'God Knows best What it is ye are doing.' God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment Concerning the matters in which Ye differ. (Hajj or The Pilgrimage: 68-69)

Equally, the Qur'an adjoins the Prophet and the Faithful to be always gentle in addressing, discussing, or arguing with others in general, and Peoples of the Book (Jews and Christians) in particular,

Speak fair to people (Baqara, or the Heifer: 83)

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them, In ways that are best And most gracious: For thy Lord knoweth best, Who have strayed from His Path, And who receive guidance. (Nahl, or the Bee: 125)

We can give a whole series of examples to illustrate this aspect of Islam's respect of differences and its advocacy of a peaceful and civilized manner of dealing with diversity. But this may in fact be said of nearly all great religions. The question remains: how seriously have Muslims taken their Glorious Commandments? For that we turn to some pages of Muslims socio-political history.

The first Muslim state of Medina set up by the Prophet Mohammed and his four Guided Caliphs (successors) lasted for only forty years (A.D. 622-661). For the following fourteen centuries, the imagination of successive generations of Muslims has been stirred by the purified and glorious tales of those four decades. The history of Muslims since A.D. 661 is full of religo-social movements in quest for the "paradise lost." Not all such movements have succeeded in seizing power; and none has managed to restore the "paradise lost." The political successes, the rise of dynasties, the religious failures and the fall of those dynasties, have always sown the seeds of new religo-social movements.

Ibn Khaldoun (1332/723 - 1406/808), the great Arab social thinker, noted the periodicity of such movements and the pre-requisites of success in seizing political power and establishing dynasties of their own. According to him, it is always a combination of an "asabiya" (esprit de corp) and a "religious mission". Asabiya, a primordial form of solidarity, often embodied in a strong tribe or a tribal coalition, provides the motive power of political-military success. The religious mission provides the spiritual raison d'être and legitimacy for success. To put it in other terms, every new movement has to provide an alternative "king and pope" for a decaying "king and pope". The last literal manifestations of the Khaldounian paradigm were to be seen the nineteenth century Saudi-Wahabbi movement in the Arabian Peninsula, the Sanusi movement in North Africa and the Mahadist movement in the Sudan.

In Khaldounian times (the 14th century), the would-be "tribe-religious movement" was often initiated in the hinterland, at a point inaccessible from the seat of political power. That hinterland was known in the times of Ibn Khaldoun as "bilad al-Siba" or the unruly country - in contrast to "bilad al-Maghzin" or the orderly and tax-paying country. As the central power weakened, the Siba country expanded and advanced closer to the capital until the right moment arrived for the coup de grace against a decaying ruling elite. A new "tribe-dynasty," legitimated and empowered by a religious vision, takes over the mission of restoring restoring the "Islamic paradise lost". The rest of the cycle unfolds over three to four generations (about 100 years), until another Siba hinterland tribe and another religious vision coalesce into a new movement.

IV

This elegant Khaldounian paradigm accounted for much, if not all, of medieval Arab-Muslim history. Since the late 18th century, with the various socio-cultural changes and growing integration into a world system, the paradigm no longer accounts for the march of modern Arab-Muslim history. But some of its internal logic may still be operative. The mobilizing power of an Islamic vision in quest of the "paradise lost" still appeals to the marginals, the relatively deprived, and the powerless.

In this century, the "tribe" alone may no longer be a viable organizational base for a religio-social movement. Although in the recent Yemeni elections (1993) and

civil war (1994) we note an alliance between the Hashid Tribe and the Islamic *Islah* (Reform) Party, a year later, the same alliance would march with modern North Yemeni army units to expel the South Yemeni ruling elite and consolidate their hold on the whole of Yemen. More often, however, it is now an "under-class" which substitutes for the tribe in fuelling religo-social movements in the Arab-Muslim world. Algeria and Egypt are striking cases in point. In both, one-party populist regimes ruled for thirty to forty years before they were forcefully challenged by sprouting Islamic movements.

Initially, the single-party populist regimes had attractive visions of their own. Their visions promised tremendous worldly rewards: consolidation of newly gained independence, rapid development, economic prosperity, social justice, and cultural authenticity. Though not quite a paradise on earth, the populist vision promised something very close to it. There were implicit conditions, however, for delivering on the populist promises: the "masses" were to work hard without demanding liberal political participation. With no previous firm traditions of participatory governance anyhow, this populist trade-off formula seemed acceptable to the vast majority. For the first decade or two, the populist social contract seemed to be working. Remarkable expansion in education, industrialization, health and other service provisions were effected. With these real gains, a new middle class (NMC) and a modern working class (MWC) grew steadily under state tutelage.

However, there were unintended adverse consequences of the populist policies: rapid growth of population, urbanization, and bureaucratization. In the first twenty years of Algeria's populist regime (1962-1982), its population had doubled, its urbanization tripled, and its bureaucracy quadrupled. In Egypt, it took slightly longer - about 27 to 30 years for all the above to occur. By the third decade of populist rule, the regimes in both countries were no longer able to effectively manage either their society or their state. A new socio-economic formation rapidly grew. For lack of a better term, this could be descried as the Marxist "urban lumpen proletariat" (ULP). With high expectations, but little or no employable skills, capital, or civic norms, the swarming millions of rural newcomers to the cities made up the ULP. They crowded the older city quarters or more often created their own new slum areas. Called "*bidonvilles*" in Algeria and "*ashwaiyat*" in Egypt, these densely overpopulated slum areas were to become the late twentieth century equivalent of the Khaldounian "*Siba*". Their human content is proving to be the most flammable materials in Arab-Muslim societies today. In Egypt and Algeria they constitute between 25 and 35% of the total population. Its youth is an easy prey to manipulation by demagogues, organized criminals, *agents provocateurs*, and Islamic activists.

Other compounding factors have made the situation even worse for the populist regimes. The lower rungs of the new middle class have been steadily alienated as a result of dwindling opportunities for employment or upward socio-political mobility. They began a mass desertion - in the 1970s in Egypt, and in the 1980s in Algeria. From their ranks, Islamic activists and other dissidents were to sprout. They were to manipulate the ULP of the new "*Siba*" in staging their challenge vis-a-vis the now aging and decaying populist ruling elite.

To use the Khaldounian analogy, a typical armed confrontation between an Islamic activists-led new "*Siba*" and the Egyptian state (new *maghazin*) took place in December 1992. According to official sources, some 700 shanty areas (*ashwaiyat*) had sprung up in or around Egypt's major urban centers over the previous two decades (1970-1990). At present (1995) their total population is estimated to be between 10 and 12 millions. Western Munira (WM) is one of them. Located on the north-western edge of Imbaba in Greater Cairo, it is less than three kilometers across the Nile from the aristocratic upper class district of Zamalek (the residential area of most *maghazin* elite). With an area of two square kilometers, i.e. less than one-fifth

of the territorial size of Zamalek, WM has nearly one million dwellers, ten times the population of Zamalek. With nearly fifty times the density of Zamalek, at the time of the 1992 confrontation, dwellers of WM had neither schools, hospitals, sewage system, public transportation nor police station within walking distance. For many years, WM represented a "Hobbesian world" run by thugs, criminals, drug dealers and infested with every known vice. With no state presence, WM was also used as a hide-out for many Islamic militants on the run. In the late 1980s, one of them, Sheikh Gaber felt safe enough to operate in the open. He preached and recruited several followers; and in a very short time, he emerged as a "community leader." He began to weed out the vice barons, impose order, veil women, arrange marriages, and collect "taxes." The Egyptian state took no note of him until a Reuters reporter filed a story with the provocative title, "Sheikh Gaber, the President of the Republic of Imbaba." Angered and embarrassed, the Egyptian authorities ordered the Reuters reporter out of the country and staged an armed expedition to arrest Sheikh Gaber. According to official sources, some 12,000 armed security forces laid siege to WM, then stormed the place. The operation lasted for three weeks before Sheikh Gaber and 600 of his followers were killed, wounded, or arrested.

Similar confrontations have been frequent in both Egypt and Algeria since 1991. The casualty toll has escalated in Egypt from 96 in 1991 to 322 in 1992, to 1106 in 1993 - i.e. a more than ten-fold increase in three years. In 1994 and 1995, however, the number of casualties decreased to about 700. In Algeria, the toll has rapidly been escalating: from less than 1,000 in 1992, to about 10,000 in 1993, to about 20,000 in 1994. In April 1995,[2] the Algerian Minister of the Interior (Mr. A. Mezian Sherif), announced that the total number of casualties had exceeded 30,000 and material losses had amounted to over US $2.2 billions in three years (January 1992 to January 1995). According to him, this amount of money, was more than enough to build 400,000 housing units - i.e. for more than 2.4 million people. A war of attrition has been the order of the day in both countries. It is a war between an Islamic-led new "*Siba*" and a semi-authoritarian state timidly trying to democratize.

The profile comparisons between typical challenger militants and the challenged populist rulers are stark. Of equal or superior formal education, an Islamic militant is at least forty years younger. Nearly 90 percent of those militants arrested or killed in armed confrontations with the Algerian state in the last four years (1992-1996) were born after independence (1962) - i.e. after the present populist regime came to power.

Some of Egypt's militants who were recently arrested, tried and sentenced to death were under 18 years old - i.e. they were born after President Mubarak came to power (as vice-president in 1975), and after the beginning of the uninterrupted tenure of at least four of his present cabinet members (i.e. since their appointment in 1977).

Not only did the populist authoritarian regimes fail to renew their ranks by an infusion of new blood and new ideas, but worse, for a long time they repressed other orderly social forces and prevented them from sharing the public space. The middle and upper rungs of the middle class, both men and women, have not been allowed a sufficient margin of freedom to create and participate in autonomous civil society organizations. Had such a civil society been in place during the period of withdrawal of the populist state (the 1970s and 1980s), both Egypt and Algeria could have withered the militant Islamic-led new *Siba* storm. Egypt has stood practically still in its process of timid democratization since the early 1980s. Algeria rushed clumsily into it in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, the situation in both countries could be markedly improved, as we shall shortly see.

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2 Quoted in *Al-Ahram* (Cairo Arabic Daily). April 8, 1995.

V

Surprisingly, what Michael Hudgson calls the "modernizing monarchies" of the Arab-Muslim world have been better able to wither the Islamic-led *Siba* storms. Though different in many ways from their populist neighbours, Arab modernizing monarchies in Morocco and Jordan faced similar socio-economic structural problems during the 1980s - e.g. growing population, urbanization, bureaucratization, huge external debt, and shrinking state resource base. They had their share of urban lumpen proletariat, ULP (new *Siba*) and food rioting in the 1980s, but instead of resorting to repression, the two monarchs have carefully engineered a gradual and orderly democratization. They initiated public debates on governance and constitutional issues in which all political forces participated. A "national pact" or a "new social contract" was implicitly or explicitly formulated. Municipal and parliamentary elections were held, with a marked degree of fairness. The secular opposition in Morocco and the Islamic forces in Jordan won an impressive number of seats. Women were elected for national parliaments for the first time in both countries.

Morocco and Jordan are not, and may not for some time to come, be constitutional monarchies. Nor are there any illusions about their participatory experiments of government soon becoming a Westminster-style democracy. But their socio-political march in the last decade has been far more orderly than that of Algeria and Egypt. There has been no politically motivated violence, killing, or rioting in either country. Islamic militancy hardly exists in Morocco, and is fairly tamed or under complete control in Jordan.

In Kuwait (1992), Lebanon (1992), and Yemen (1993) Islamists participated in parliamentary elections. They came second in Kuwait and Yemen; and had an impressive showing in winning several of the seats assigned to both Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Lebanon.

Even in Egypt, though not officially recognized as a legal party, the Muslim Brothers (MB) ran for parliamentary elections under the banner of other parties, in 1984 (with the *Wafd*) and 1987 (with the Labor Socialist Party). In both elections, the MB won several seats and came out in third place among nine contending parties.

Beyond the Arab world, Islamists have regularly run for elections in Pakistan (120 million), Bangladesh (120 million) and Turkey (60 million) since the 1980s. In Indonesia, Malaysia and the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union, Islamists have been peacefully engaging in local and municipal politics; and are petitioning for recognition and expansion of pluralistic politics on the national level. It is important to note that in three of the biggest Muslim countries (Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Turkey) women have recently been elected to the top executive office in the land, which dispels any illusion of a built-in anti-democratic or anti-feminist component. As a matter of fact, in Turkey the most religious Islamic Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) and the most secular True Path Party have recently (July 1996) formed a coalition government. It is also noteworthy that Islamically-based parties in both Pakistan and Bangladesh have appealed to no more than 10 per cent of the electorate. In the uncontestably fair and honest elections in Turkey, the religious RP won only slightly above one-fifth of the popular vote in the December 1995 parliamentary elections. The important thing in all these recent examples is that Islamic parties have accepted the rules of the democratic game and are playing it peacefully and in an orderly manner.

RP's leader Necmettin Erbakan is currently the prime minister of Turkey. His rise to the top executive position in Turkey must be noted as one of the most important developments in the Muslim World, which extends from Indonesia in the east to Morocco in the west. This vast geographic spread with a population of 1.2 billion in more than 60 Muslim countries was recently described as the "Arch of crisis."

Erbakan, however, holds out a promise of escape from such "crises." He has patiently and deliberately advocated the compatibility of Islam and Western-type democracy. Erbakan and his followers, in the Salvation Party of the 1970s and Welfare Party since the 1980s, have impressed the otherwise secularized Turks that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and secularism, if the latter is taken to mean separation of the state and the "religious establishment" (i.e. Islamic theologians or clergy). Erbakan himself is a modern educated engineer, who believes that Islam contains moral and social commandments which could be adapted and incorporated in the "body-politic" in order to provide better government. He asked fellow Turks to try Islamic RP first as executives in the municipalities. A sizable plurality responded by electing RP's to the mayorships of multi-million Istanbul, Ankara, and other major cities in 1994. A year later, after a decent performance in the municipal governments, more Turks voted for RP than for any other Turkish party. Erbakan contrasts sharply with the Taliban. They represent the extreme end of the Islamic continuum in the 1990s.

There are a number of lessons to be drawn from the contrasting cases of Afghanistan, Algeria and Egypt on one hand, and Turkey, Jordan, and Kuwait on the other, with the rest of the Muslim world somewhere in between. These lessons also serve to elucidate the intricate relations between religion and politics in general and that of Islam in particular.

First, political Islam has grown and spread in the last two decades as an idiom of protest against repression, social injustice, the hardening of the political arteries and the threat to collective identity. Its radicalism is commensurate with the degree to which these ills are felt or perceived by the young educated lower middle class Muslims. Political Islam has not been the only vision to appeal to these young Muslims. They have responded strongly to other secular visions in the course of this century - e.g. Arab nationalism, Turkish nationalism, inter-war liberalism and socialism.

Second, despite their initial radical messages and/or actions, Islamic militants are tamable through accommodative politics of inclusion. Running for office, or once in it, they recognize the complexities of the real world and the need for gradualism and toleration. "Worldly" concerns increasingly encroach upon the "other-worldly" in their consciousness, language, and actions. The Islamists of Iran are a case in point. Starting out as a "pro-natalist party", Iran's Islamic Revolution is now feverishly pursuing an "anti-natalist" population policy. In this respect, Islamic activists are no different from their Chinese Communist counterparts. Recognizing that their ideological rhetoric led to a rapid population increase which undermined their other socioeconomic policies, they were willing to alter course by one hundred and eighty degrees.

Third, people in Muslim societies, like people everywhere, may give new visions and promised solutions a chance when the old ones fail, but, at the end of the day, they judge the new ones by their concrete results. The Islamists in Jordan lost one-third of the number of seats between the 1989 and 1993 elections. Despite the majority of seats won in the last aborted parliamentary elections, Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) lost one million votes between 1990 and 1991. In both Jordan and Algeria, the initial flare of the "Islamic Alternative" lost some of its radiance once Islamists were tried in office. On the contrary, in Turkey the Islamic Welfare Party has been gaining steadily in national parliamentary elections, doubling its popular vote from less than 10 percent to more than 20 percent between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. This surge of popularity is due to its impressive performance in running large urban municipalities (e.g. Istanbul and Izmir). The slum areas around the major Turkish cities could have led to similar bloody confrontations as those of Algeria and Egypt.

Fourth, peoples of the Muslim world have increasingly been integrated in the international system. The radical Islamists among them can not ignore this fact. Even their anti-Western rhetoric is an idiom of protest against other worldly grievances. Once fairly or equitably addressed, cooperation becomes not only possible, but also desirable. In this respect, Islamic radicals are no different from their nationalist counterparts of an earlier generation. The problem of the Muslim peoples with the West resembles their problems with their own repressive corrupt regimes. Not only does the legacy of Western colonialism lurk in the Muslims' collective memory but it is easily invoked with every contemporary Western act or policy which smacks of double standards. Recently, the reaction of the West to the massacres of Muslims by non-Muslims in marketplaces in Bosnia, mosques in Palestine or civilian refugee camps in Lebanon (Qana, April 1996) seemed muted at best. The Western pressure on Arab and Muslim countries to agree to an unlimited Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) without asking their arch enemy Israel to do the same is to them a blatant example of double standards. Equally, Algeria's short-lived experiment with pluralistic politics was a test of whether Islam could be reconciled with democracy. But it was as much a test of whether the West could be reconciled with Muslim democracy. The West has long been on the best of terms with Muslim despots - e.g. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, Shah of Iran, and Pakistan's Zia'ul-Haq. Once these inconsistencies are seriously and credibly addressed, not only militant Islamists, but most of the Arab-Muslim people would have no legitimate misgivings vis-a-vis the West.

Fifth, as a thoughtful Western observer recently noted, Islamic societies now find themselves in the opening rounds of what the West went through in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in redefining both the relationship between God and Man, between individual human beings and between themselves and the state.[3] We believe that Muslim societies will emerge from this process more rational and more democratic. The process, however, could be much shorter and less costly if the West lent an honest hand on the side of democratic forces. The West has recently been interfering militarily in the affairs of Muslim societies - from Libya to Somalia, and from the Gulf to Kurdistan. It has been doing so as much economically - directly or through the IMF - World Bank prescribed structural adjustment policies. The West is yet to do the same politically for democracy. Even if it brings into office some radical Islamists, they would soon lose either their "radicalism" or "Islamism." Muslims everywhere have taken note that the Islamic Afghani Mujahideen are fighting each other for worldly gains (power); as their counterparts had previously done in post Shah Iran. Muslims recognize that the Islamists are not saints. But they may be less devilish than their present old repressive rulers.[4]

I conclude with a plea to continue to engage in a serious disaggregation of the complex processes now unfolding in various regions of the world, with religion and politics at its center.

It is a renewed plea for the rehabilitation of the concepts of cultural diversity and the practice of "cultural relativism" as a requisite for the "bridging" not the "clashing" of civilizations. Let's remember that for every John of Leyden there are more Christian Democrats; and for every Taliban militant there are more Erbakans, i.e. Muslim Democrats. Boundaries will exist as long as human groups continue to exist. But they need not be hostile boundaries. We neither need another "Great Wall of China" nor another "Berlin Wall." Neither stood the test of time. Their remnants in

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3 Wright, Robin. "Islam, Democracy, and the West." *Foreign Affairs.* Summer 1992, pp. 131-145, see p. 133.

4 See the results of a recent multi-country survey in the Muslim World, Pollock, David and Elaine El-Assal, eds.. *In the Eye of the Beholder: Muslim and Non-Muslim Views of Islam, Islamic Politics, and Each Other.* Washington D.C.. Office of Research and Media Reaction, U.S. Information Agency. August 1995.

China and Germany are now mere tourist attractions. Let us hope that Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations?" will turn out to be not a self-fulfilling prophecy but a mere intellectual tourist attraction.

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