RELIGION AND IDEOLOGY

*Dr. FILALI Salah**

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the interrelation between religion and ideology in general and Islam and ideology in particular, focusing on the role of religion in the ideological sphere of society. To this end it evaluates the circumstances under which religion serves alternatively to maintain or oppose an existing social order and assesses the extent to which Islam has in practice affected the political and economic choices of the ruling elites in Muslim societies.

ملخص

يتناول هذا المقال العلاقة بين الدين والايديولوجية بصفة عامـة والإسلام والايديولوجية بصفة خاصة مع مناقشة الظروف التي تجعل من الدين بديلا لتدعيم أو معارضة النظام الإجتماعي السائد، وفـي نفس الوقت يقيم مدى تأثير الإسلام عمليا علـى الإختيارات السياسية والإقتصادية للنخبة الحاكمـة فـي المجتمعات الإسلامية .

1- RELIGION: CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

Religion may be said to be a system of belief about the individual's place in the world, providing an order to that world and a reason for existence within it. As such it has an important influence in societies through its impact on non-religious institutions such as the family, as well as on the general life of human beings. The major religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism comprise beliefs and values about this world, whatever they may say about an after world.

According to John Plamenatz, it was not until the eighteenth century that philosophers and political theorists in the west began seriously to investigate how it comes about that people have religious beliefs. Until then they had limited themselves to analysing the theologians, especially in respect of their proofs of the existence of God, accepting some and rectifying or rejecting others. " They had deplored religious fanaticism". (J. Plamenatz, 1970, P. 84). They thought that people require religion to give them a sense of place in the world, a sense which makes them differ from other animals, and therefore, an awareness of themselves as finite beings in an infinite world According to Pascal, this is a need that science cannot satisfy .He himself believed only the Christian religion in its catholic form could satisfy this need. As plamenatz notes, there are also traces of this idea of religion in the writing

Maitre Assistant, Institut de Sociologie Université de Constantine.

of Rousseau. For him religion not only provides people with additional motives for behaving well, or being brought closer together in a community of faith, or for consoling them when they suffer. It also provides them with a conception of their place in the world which makes life worth living. Rousseau spoke of religion in such a may as to suggest that human need for it is deeper than the need for science. (Ibid, P. 87). It is the influence of religious beliefs upon the social, economic, political and cultural activities of various groups of people, especially classes and ethnic groups, which is of concern to sociologists and social theorists.

In this respect religion can be seen as a part of the ideological sphere of a society whenever it operates in a way which helps to maintain the political, cultural and economic arrangements of that society over time. As R. Bocock argues, the way in which a religion does this may be either by directly teaching that the social, political and economic order is right and God-given and that it is sinful to try to change it, or in a more indirect fashion. For example, religions often hope for a better future in this life, or in another life, for those oppressed groups who suffer in the present. By doing this a religion may indirectly help to maintain the social structure (R. Bocock, 1985. P.207). That is to say, religion frequently operates in such a way as to support the status quo. This occurs, for example, when a social system comes under internal or external ideological invasion which threatens its very continuation. A case in point is the indirect role which the church plays in the capitalist society against the spread of Marxist thought. It can also be seen in many Islamic countries where Islam plays a similar role in opposing both Marxism and Marxists. But it should be noted that religion does not always legitimate the existing power. For example, what has occurred in both Iran and Afghanistan in the 1980's shows that religion can be used for the destruction as well as the preservation of an existing social order in this context S. Hall argues that religion as an ideology is not independent of the socio-economic and political contexts in which it operates. It expresses and advances certain interests and is used to legitimate a particular structure of power and to defend a particular order of society. But it may also be used to oppose these. Hall adds that it becomes linked with certain groups and classes and, as such, either helps to preserve their position of privilege and domination or is used by others to contest that position (Ibid, P.274). This is a very crucial point which locates the importance of religion in respect of the broader issues of official or dominant ideology.

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According to Marx, " religion is an illusion which eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression. It is a series of myths which justify and legitimate the subordination of a subject class and the domination and privilege of the ruling class". (Cited in M. Haralambos and R.M. Heald, 1985. P. 460). therefore, from a Marxist perspective, religion acts as a mechanism of social control maintaining an existing system of exploitation and reinforcing class relations. It keeps people in their place by offering an illusion of hope in a hopeless situation. It may also promote a false class consciousness which blinds members of the subject class to their true situation and their real interests. "However, conflicting evidence suggests that Marxian views must be limited to the operation of religion at certain time and in certain places", (Ibid, PP.460-2) because religion does not always support the existing order. The Marxist viewpoint on religion does not reflect the situation in Iran and other Islamic countries, including Algeria.

Given that Islam has had so great an influence in the formation of the ideologies of the dominant classes in the Muslim countries, it is important that it be given special consideration. We turn to this in the next section.

2- ISLAM AND IDEOLOGY

According to E. Gellner:

> Islam is the blueprint of a social order. It holds that a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men... Judaism and Christianism are also blueprints of social order, but rather less so than Islam. Islam is the religion which has most completely confounded and intermixed the two powers... so that all the acts of civil and political life are regulated more or less by religious law. (Ernest Gellner, 1981, P.I).

It is the Islamic religion which in our era appears to have the greatest political ability to mobilise the masses against the existing social order or for the purpose of sustaining it. Islam as a powerful ideology has been used by many politicians in the Middle East and North Africa to control the social upheaval in their societies. At the same time it has been used by fundamentalists to overthrow the existing social order. In the fundamentalist view, Islam is a faith and a way of life, a religion and a social order, a doctrine and a code of conduct, with its own framework of ideals, values and foundations.

For Muslims, Islam does not sunder life into domains of the spiritual and the secular. It spiritualizes the whole existence of humanity and produces a social movement to restore human life in the light of principals revealed by God. Islam aims at changing life and producing a new society, both committed to God and to the welfare of humanity. That is why Islam is not a religion in the limited sense of the word, rather it is a complete code of life and a culture-producing factor. (A. Khurshid, 1980, PP. 7-8).

For Muslims, belief in the unity and sovereignty of Allah (God) is the foundation of the social and moral system propounded by the prophets. It is the very starting-point of Islamic political philosophy. The fundamental principle of Islam is that human beings must, individually and collectively, surrender all rights of overlordship, legislation and the exercise of authority over others. In the original Islamic texts, the Quran and the Sayings of the Prophet it is emphasised that no one should be allowed to pass orders or to make commands in their own right and no one ought to accept the obligation to carry out such commands and obey such orders. No one is entitled to make laws on their own authority nor obliged to abide by laws so made. This right is vested in Allah alone. Even the Prophet himself is subjected to God's commands. " I do not follow anything except what is revealed to me" (Ibid,P.158). That is to say, Islam guides individuals according to the dictates of Allah as received through his Prophet Mohammed.

As a doctrine relating to social life as a whole, including its political dimensions, Islam may appropriately be understood as an ideology. According to Begum Aishar, the major tenets of this ideology are as follows:

I. Islam is a complete way of life: it does not limit its sphere only to the private life of a person, it extends to all the fields of human existence.
2. Islam is a balance between individualism and collectivism: it believes in the individual personality of man and holds every one responsible and accountable to God.
3. It assumes a unity of matter and spirit: Islam does not divide life into material and spiritual.
4. It affirms the principles of Universalism and Humanism: the message of Islam is for the whole human race. In Islam all are equal, whatever their colour, language, race, or nationality.

5. It is based on notions of permanence and change: for Islam it is through ijtihad (interpretation) that those of every age try to apply divine guidance to the problems of their time. That is why Islam always remains fresh and modern.

6. It is revealed religion: the fundamental characteristic of Islamic ideology is that it is not a man-made system, but the one revealed by the creator himself.

That is why it is altogether different and dissimilar from other ideologies which are the result of human thinking and human efforts and hence full of weaknesses. (Begum Aishar, 1982, PP. 1-6).

3- THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT

Islamic political though reflects some fourteen centuries of Islamic philosophical and theoretical inquiry into the nature and role of government and its relationship to religious and temporal affairs, to social change and to social revolution both within the Islamic world and beyond. (Tareq Y. Ismael, 1985, P.3).

In his article "on the Islamic Theory of the state", H. Ringgren argued that, "from the very beginning Islam has devoted more interest to politics and political theory than most other religions. If it can be said with some right that Jesus was unpolitical, Mohammed was certainly not. Islam makes no distinction between religion and politics, but the two are intimately connected and political theory has a religious and theoretical motivation" (H. Ringgner, 1972, P. 103).

If the social and political movements in the western societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served to reduce the church's intervention in political affairs and thereby affected the separation of religion from the state, religion in the Islamic world continues to dominate the social, economic and cultural life of the masses to the extent that it deeply affects political life. It is rare to speak of politics without mentioning religion.
It is this which gives Islamic political thought its own distinctive character.

As Tareq Y. Ismael argues, "the natures of the political state and the spiritual state, of political legitimacy and religious legitimacy, of ideology and doctrine are not conceptualised and analysed distinctly, but are highly interrelated in Islamic thought". Tareq Y. Ismael, op.cit P.4). Islam was in this

sense founded on an image of the state that presupposed religion as the source of power and the Caliphate(1) as a political system.

It should be noted that, however, while there is significant continuity of political thought within Islam there is also a plurality of specific traditions. After the fourth Caliph (successor) of Prophet Mohammed, the question of succession was a source of conflict between two of the major sects in Islam, the Sunnites(2) and the Shiites(3). Although both were agreed that the state was essential as a means of preventing anarchy, they disagreed fundamentally aver the nature of political legitimacy, specifically whether the political system should be based on the Caliphate or the Imamah. The Shiites maintain that political leadership of the Muslim community is primarily a religious function that belongs to the descendant of the Prophet and that Ali is the first Imam. For the Sunnites, in contrast, it is not necessary for the successor to be a descendant of the Prophet. (Ibid, P.8). In other words, for the Sunnites, the successor must be elected according to the principle of Shura (consultation). The structure of politics from this perspective is based on the Caliphate rather than the Imamah. Within the former tradition, the Caliphates of Umayyad and Abbasis prevailed over a period of some one hundred years(4). By the time of the collapse of Abbasis' Caliphate the broad coherence of Islam at a political level had been largely dissipated. However, the unity of the Islamic state was re-established under the Ottoman Caliphate. But by the seventeenth century, the power of the Ottoman Caliphate was fundamentally checked and challenged by the emerging West. Furthermore, effective government administration within the Empire was being dissipated by the excesses of luxury and abuses of power. Ironically in the midst of this atmosphere of the intensification of external challenge and of internal decay, Islamic political though was revitalized. The Salafiyah movement (from salaf meaning forerunners) emerged in the eighteenth century. Reformers of the nineteenth century and nationalists of the twentieth century trace their intellectual roots to the classical paradigm of politics of this time. A common element of the salafiyah movements was their dedication to the puritanical reform of Muslim society and their philosophical foundation in the work of Ibn Taymiyah. Over time the movements crystallized into significant political forces: the wahhabi movement of the Arabian peninsula, the Shawkani movement of Yemen, the Sanusi movement of Lybia, and the Mahdi movement of the Sudan. According to T.Y. Ismael, all of these arose as conservative religious reactions to a perceived corruption of the Islamic faith. In con-

trast, the Islamic intellectual reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were motivated by the expansion of European influence in the Islamic world. This while the former movements emerged in areas where Islamic traditionalism was strong and European influence relatively weak, the latter arose in areas such as Egypt and Algeria where European influence was particularly entrenched. (Ibid, PP.25-6).

Over the last two centuries, political thought has been the most active area of Muslim intellectual life. This can be explained primarily by the continuous struggle of various Muslim societies throughout this period for independence from the Western power. According to H. Enayat, traditionally, Muslims rarely studied politics in isolation from related disciplines. Problems such as the nature of the state, the varieties of governments, the qualifications of rulers, the limitations of their power and the rights of the ruled were discussed as a part of the comprehensive treaties on jurisprudence and theology. It was only under the wound of European military, political, economic and cultural encroachments, subsequent to the end of the eighteenth century that Muslim elites started to write separate works on specifically political topics. While the majority of the literate and the learned remained loyal to Islamic ideals and values, a small but increasingly influential group had come to praise Western culture and civilisation as being superior to everything else humanity had created. (Hamid Enayat, 1982, P. 3). Together these two tendencies may be identified with the major movements of the Islamic political ideology in the twentieth century: Fundamentalism and Reformism.

3-1- THE REFORMIST MOVEMENT

As Tareq Y. Ismael had noted, internal and external pressures for the modernisation of the Islamic world continued to build up during the first half of the twentieth century. Many Muslim intellectuals, having received their education in Europe, returned to their countries advising the emulation of European civilisation as a remedy of the poverty and underdevelopment of the Islamic countries. Such a call for modernisation-in the Western may-generally assumed one or more tree basic positions.

I. Modernisation in the broadest sense of the term, whereby the advance of the East was sought through copying the social, political, economic and technological institutions and structures of the West.

2. Liberalism, which implied that minds should be liberated from the bondage of preconceived beliefs and traditions in order to examine empirically and

independently all issues relevant to knowledge and society.

3. Secularism, which called for a constitution based on civil law and the establishment of a state on "modern Western foundation" in which religion would be separated from the state. This was actually implemented in Turkey by Kamal Attaturk in 1924 (T.Y. Ismael, op. cit. P. 36). The tide of Westernisation did not, however, go unchecked. There was a strong opposition to the liberal-secular attack on Islamic and Arabic culture. Mansoor Fahmy, for example, criticized Taha Hussein for what he saw as a blind commitment to Westernisation:

> There is a big difference between he who takes
> from others and uses their means, and he who takes
> from others in order to depend on them, thus limiting
> his own potentialities and intrinsic activity. (bid, P.37).

For his part Muhammad H. Heikal (1924-1980), a distinguished Egyptian author and statesman, saw the devaluation of the Arab world's Islamic heritage as a part of European efforts to encourage dependence on the West and thereby facilitate political domination. (Ibid, PP. 37-8).

3-2- THE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT

As Sami Zubaida notes, the term -fundamentalism- has in recent years acquired wide currency. It is assumed to imply a clear reference to a form of Islam which is -orthodox-, scripture based and traditional, and which in its political and social applications makes no compromise with -modern- or Western conditions and ideas (Sami Zubaida, 1982, P.138). S. Zubaida also notes that -fundamentalist- most commonly refers to those movements and ideologies which affirm the importance of an Islamic state. This is reflected in the saying -al Islam dinun wa dawlah- (Islam is a religion and state). For the fundamentalist, the state must apply Islamic doctrine, and above all -sharia- law to all aspects of social, political and economic life. This poses an explicit opposition to most states in the Muslim countries, which characteristically operate on a secular basis with only a nominal commitment to Ismam. (Ibid, P. 139).

However, the movement of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, an important example of the fundamentalist tendency, by no means presents a homogeneous front. Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran the strongest appeal for an Islamic state came from Pakistan, where the notion has always exerted a compelling attraction, for the simple reason that it was Islam that brought Pakistan into existence as a state. As Enayat argues, the drive in Egypt and Iran was no less vigorous, but was often distracted by the powerful competition of secular ideologies-nationalism, socialism, liberalism and communism. (Hamid Enayat, op. cit. p. 84).

But it must be said that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 served as a prodigious stimulant to Islamic movements and political aspirations the throughout the world- particularly the Islamic world, from Morocco to Indonesia. Most observers of the Middle East and North Africa would agree that after the Iranian revolution, Islam has played a more active role in political life. It affects the political values and policy choices of the ruling elites in many Islamic countries, including Algeria. it can be said that Islam may influence political choices as well as political behaviour on three levels:
(a) as a symbol of cultural identity, (b) as a religion strictly speaking and (c) as an ideology. It is the interaction of these three dimensions which produces a distinctive religio-political orientation (R. Stephen Humphreys, 1979, p.2).

CONCLUSION

To conclude this article one can argue that religion is a part of the ideological sphere of society. It can be used for the destruction as well as the preservation of an existing social order. As a powerful ideology Islam has always been used by politicians in the Islamic world to maintain their power and to implement their policies. It has also been used by the fundamentalist groups to overthrow existing regimes. If religion in the Western society has relatively little influence in the social and political life of the masses, in the Islamic world it has much greater influence in the spheres of economic, social, cultural and political life to the extent that it affect the very formation of the dominant ideologies of the ruling elites.

NOTES

1. The term -Caliphate- (succession) is derived from the word -Caliph- (successor): it was applied to the first four successors of the prophet Mo-

hammad. All of them were elected by Majliss al shura (a Consultative Council) according to the Prophet's saying "your own affairs must be treated on the base of consultation among you".

2. The term -sunnites- is derived from the word -sunna- which means habitual practice, customary procedure or action, norm, usage sanctioned by tradition.

The sunna of the prophet means his sayings and doings, later established as legally binding precedents (in addition to the law established by the Quran). The sunnites then are the orthodox Muslims.

3. The term -shiites- is derived from the word -shiah- which means followers, adherents, faction, sect. The shiites then are that branch of the Muslims who recognise Ali, the prophet's son-in-law, as his rightful successor.

4. But the Caliphate after fourth Caliph (successor) of prophet Mohammed took another form which was established on a family or kinship base.

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