

OBSERVATIONS ON THE THESIS

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Your argument poses two questions: the first refers to the role of the State, which you seem to minimize; the second poses the problem of cultural Westernization. On the whole, I rather agree with you, except that we do not approach the two questions from the same angle. I would like to bring rapidly into focus my views on the problem of the role of politics in Islam and on that of Westernization.

I. POLITICS IN ISLAM THROUGHOUT HISTORY

It is true that Islam was above all a religion, divine, ethical, and cultural in character; it is also true that Islam as a civilization asserted itself after the decomposition of the Empire, and therefore did not become universal until after the political exigencies had disappeared. But since the original period had succeeded in joining a passionate appeal for God to the self-affirmation of a community, there remained a tendency, a language, an accent. This was not a recourse on the part of politics to re-

Translated by Susan Scott Cesaritti.

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ligion as a form of positive organization of a State or a society, but a polemical sentiment whose power of appeal rested meanwhile on the positive emotional factors of brotherhood, community and unity. Islam's strength comes from the fact that it knew how to express the poetry of the collective: not the frenzy of modern demagogues, but the dramatic intensity of critical moments. Its other strength is that it was only this.

Politics in Islam is neither a concept of power, nor power itself, nor the search for an organizing principle of society as a political body. Rather it is pure nostalgia for the earlier epoch added to a defensive force which can be mobilized. The Umayyad Empire was at the same time an Arabic tribal state and an Oriental-type monarchy, the Abbasid state was a renewed Sassanid monarchy and a mild dictatorship, the inheritor states were purely and simply local monarchies, whose jurisdiction resided precisely in the monarchic principle itself. Some people have fallen prey to the illusion of a predominance of politics in the religious existence of Islam because religious ferment, not having an institutional frame like Western Christianity had the Church, often devoted itself, in the course of the first five centuries, to an unceasing search for the ideal government. In fact, the Abbasid Caliphate did nothing but oscillate between the current dominant ideologies, elitist mu'tazilism and populist traditionalism, to cite only those two. It did not create an ideology of State, no more than its predecessor was able to fuse the Arabic tribal structure into a new, untried political entity. On this point, I agree with you.

Unable to form a society, to define civilization and culture, the classic Islamic state was nevertheless a forceful reality in other domains. It did not create ideological forces or great cultural choices, but was vigilant and attentive to new trends. It was never indifferent to the pulsations of ideas as the type of under-politicized state could be: it permitted, encouraged, or on the other hand inhibited certain movements, neither setting the pace nor totally absent from the scene. In the economic-social domain, it acted in its double role of inheriting power of former structures and of an imperial state resulting from a conquest, but not as a pure Islamic state. From this comes its grip on the great part of the economic apparatus and the so-

cial body and, in this domain, its rather marked character of a strong state, nevertheless much less strong than the ancient hydraulic state (Pharaonic Egypt) or the one contemporary to its own existence (China). It is a fact that the Islamic state has been oppressive, but, on the other hand its absence from the scene or its unobtrusiveness brought about catastrophes of every sort, a drop in the tone of civilization; the formidable effects of the Turkish-Mongol invasions, such as the collapse of Iraq between the 13th and 19th centuries, as well as the fundamental cultural weakness of the central Maghreb, are there to testify to this.

With that said, if the political exigency was able to dominate the economic sphere, it could not do the same with the cultural or ideological sphere: a primary distinction to consider in order to appreciate the respective roles of the State and of society, and which you did not introduce. In China, the state came first, then it had a civilization and several religions. In Islam, what was first was the religion, then a civilization and a culture, these last deriving as much from the religion as from that accident which was the conquest and its corollary: the Empire. If the Chinese state was never called into question, it is because it was not born of a conquest, hence its current political cohesion. But China has discovered only today its universal mission. From this comes its other paradox: its culture is being shattered to pieces while China denies its essence and its past.

Now Islam knew a universal aim but it was never able to realize it in a durably integrated political organism, perhaps because two absolutely opposite poles are involved. It is idle to regret that the Ottoman state, the most organized of the Islamic states and the nearest to us, was bogged down in the conquest of Christian territories which it never tried to assimilate, instead of concentrating on the organization and the integration of territories that were properly Islamic. This means that the intuition of Jamal Eddine was profoundly correct: a vast political structure, established in history, existing as a fact, endowed with a strong unifying principle (Islam), was a chance which it was absurd to throw away. But the evil was already done: the temptation of Europe to which the Ottoman

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empire succumbed in different ways and at different stages in its history. The temptation of Europe provided the thrust toward the West, then came the Europeanization movement, and to finish, Ataturk.

II. ALIENATION AND WESTERNIZATION

It may be that an 'Abduh had been on the right path more than Ziya Gokälp or Lofti Sayyid. But Islamic reformism represented the extreme of the traditional intellectual current in the same way that the liberal or laical modernism of the colonial epoch represented the least advanced point of the modern intellectual current. "The organic intellectual" was singularly absent from the scene, because the world in which he evolved never had its own destiny in hand, living then under the shock of a challenge from outside, badly assimilated here and there, as well as an interior weight which seemed insurmountable. All this serves to point out the necessity of guarding against a double alienation: one within the past, another in the future.

There was a time when Islamic identity was experienced in an Islamic space, the *dar-al-islam*. It is lived today as a position in history and, to the degree to which the Islamic faith regresses in the social field, it will be felt as a belonging to a spiritual family which is placed in a polyvalent society. This is why the problem of alienation poses itself on a scale of historical conscience and in particular in the midst of that area which explicitly demands a continuity with ancient Islam: the Arab world. In fact here one sees the following paradox: the more the Arabs move away from the colonial phase, the more they turn to exterior cultural models. One could ask if despite appearances and subterraneanly, some definite links were not in the process of being forged with the ancient cities, if a vertical thread were not being woven from the north to the south of the planet, if therefore the fundamental articulation of tomorrow will not be that which projects the colonial countries of Europe toward their ancient domain and vice versa. In this case European, Arab, Islamic, African, all the great identities of these times find themselves disintegrating in the very mo-

ment in which they affirm themselves most strongly, in the same way that objective solidarity issued from resurgent colonial domination after it had been most violently denied.

Alienation or irresistible evolution of history? But isn't alienation the interiorization *par excellence* of the dominator, once the direct domination has ceased, that is after defenses are down? Let us remember the case of Islamic Iran after the loosening of the Arab hold and, at the level of its elites, Arabized for several centuries. It is true that colonization did not destroy compact empires and that, as domination, it was *consciously* rejected, in India as in Algeria. But it will have planted its seeds: modernity, nationalism, Marxism and concretely the linguistic or cultural character of the metropolis. Meanwhile there where profound forces are grasping a strong historical identity, after a first phase in which the most lively of cultural reactions showed itself to be incapable of erasing colonial culture, there are possibilities of producing a selection within the process of alienation: that which is a universal message will be conserved, while the topical will be rejected. Face to face with the Arabic language and Islam, Iran ended up refusing the first while interiorizing the second. Will the Maghreb, India, Africa, Indonesia, have the strength one day to repudiate the languages of Europe while at the same time accepting joyously the universal message of this same Europe? Technology is not a universal message; this is obvious. Humanism, rationalism, liberalism are, but they have never been formulated in a coherent manner. There remains the Marxist temptation, with the enormous question mark which it raises. "This is the Islam of modern times," Max Weber had declared after the Russian revolution, who was doubtless thinking of its total or egalitarian character, not of a dialectic of domination and identity within the history of peoples. But comparison is not sufficient reason and one finds besides that Europe has not adopted Marxism as an ideology nor has it consciously diffused it as it did with liberal values.

Can colonial cultural alienation be overcome, excluding the help of that other alienation, more widely Western, that is Marxism? The fact that colonization had, through European ethnocentrism, preserved non-European cultures, that it was

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voluntarily rejected, that the colonizer himself had refused the message of the conquered peoples, that finally there exists a conscious plan for the construction of national or cultural identities, all this leads one to believe that this cultural alienation is a transitory phenomenon. For the first time in history, a coherent and strong domination has been victoriously refused, perhaps because of its fundamental contradiction: it emanated in effect from a self-centered civilization but took on aspects of former barbarous conquests.

On the other hand, this purely cultural attraction will not know how to exercise itself except on the zones which have been profoundly affected by the colonial impact and which can always appeal, to counterbalance it, to the resources of the past as well as to the culture, still alive, of its sister countries whose identity is more strongly affirmed by having escaped from direct contamination. It remains that during this transitional phase, the cultureless intellectual, even more than the politician, would appear as one of the most curious phenomena of contemporary history. On first sight, one could compare him to the Hellenistic, Egyptian or Syrian intellectual, as you seem to hint, cut off from his ethnic world but looking toward a Hellenic cultural horizon. You recall in this connection the Spenglerian theory of pseudomorphology. But then, it was necessary, in order for this comparison to be valid, that European culture have disappeared from its original space and that the new Alexandrians take charge of its content as well as its languages. Now, they are aware of their ethnic identity and never cease referring to their world. Just as they are not the *mawâli* * of Europe, the modern intellectuals are not its Hellenistic Alexandrians.

But there exists, without doubt, a temptation in this sense which is not expressed on the creative level but on that of cultural experience and is painful precisely because it is a semi-alienation.

It remains that you also represent to yourself the alienation of the cultural consciousness of the West facing a modern technology as destructive as it is inhuman, and that, in a certain

* Clients of the Arabs, natives of the conquered peoples, who played a fundamental role in Islam.

way, you perceive in a mythical or real Islam the inverse of your suffering and a possible road to salvation. On the other hand, you postulate a capacity for renewal within Islam, which if it were carried out, would be done in a new way and in part against the past. In reality, the West exists and dominates with its rationality and its technology and it forces us, as a matter of life or death, to imitate it. The current and so crucial problem for us consists in doing so without losing ourselves and without abdicating our identity, precisely because there has not yet been a unification, on the scale of mankind, of the process of modernization. The day when the West will no longer claim modernity as its sole creation, these various identities will dissolve of their own accord and be abolished in the unification process. For now, in my opinion, we must guard against too great an insistence, for Islam, on an identity which is a total abdication of spiritual historicity. This ungrateful task has fallen to the generation which I represent, which is living through a crisis of passage, straddling two worlds and two temporalities, torn as it is between the future and its personality.