

The Prophet and the Proletariat

– Islamic Fundamentalism, Class & Revolution


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Chris Harman (1994)

This pamphlet was originally published in *International Socialism Journal*, 2:64, Autumn 1994 - This edition contains a selection of sections from this article and was published in 2021 by: **Iva Valley Books** 2nd Floor, Labour House Central Area-Abuja. 07037163465



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Introduction

The politics of the Middle East and beyond have been dominated by Islamist movements at least since the Iranian revolution of 1978-9. Variouslly described in the West as “Islamic fundamentalism”, “Islamicism”, “integrisim”, “political Islam” and “Islamic revivalism”, these movements stand for the “regeneration” of society through a return to the original teachings of the prophet Mohammed. They have become a major force in Iran and the Sudan (where they still hold power), Egypt, Algeria and Tajikistan (where they are involved in bitter armed struggles against the state), Afghanistan (where rival Islamist movements have been waging war with each other since the collapse of the pro-Russian government), the occupied West Bank of the Jordan (where their militancy is challenging the old PLO hegemony over the Palestinian resistance), Pakistan (where they make up a significant portion of the opposition) and most recently Turkey (where the Welfare Party has taken control of Istanbul, Ankara and many other municipalities)¹.

The rise of these movements has been an enormous shock to the liberal intelligentsia and has produced a wave of panic among people who believed that “modernisation”, coming on top of the victory of the anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, would inevitably lead to more enlightened and less repressive societies. [1]

Instead they witness the growth of forces which seem to look back to a more restricted society which forces women into purdah, uses terror to crush free thought and threatens the most barbaric punishments on those who defy its edicts. In countries like Egypt and Algeria the liberals are now lining up with the state, which has persecuted and imprisoned them in the past, in the war it is waging against Islamist parties.

But it has not only been liberals who have been thrown into disarray by the rise of Islamism. So too has the left. It has not known how to react to what it sees as an obscurantist doctrine, backed by traditionally reactionary forces, enjoying success among some of the poorest groups in society. Two opposed approaches have resulted.

The first has been to see Islamism as Reaction Incarnate, as a form of fascism. This was, for example, the position taken soon after the Iranian revolution by the then left wing academic Fred Halliday, who referred to the Iranian regime as

¹ Islamism in various forms has clearly been a significant political force in Nigeria from the Sharia movement in some northern states to Boko Haram and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (Shiites).

“Islam with a fascist face”. [2] It is an approach which much of the Iranian left came to adopt after the consolidation of the Khomeini regime in 1981-2. And it is accepted by much of the left in Egypt and Algeria today. Thus, for example, one Algerian revolutionary Marxist group has argued that the principles, ideology and political action of the Islamist FIS “are similar to those of the National Front in France”, and that it is “a fascist current”. [3]

Such an analysis easily leads to the practical conclusion of building political alliances to stop the fascists at all costs. Thus Halliday concluded that the left in Iran made the mistake of not allying with the “liberal bourgeoisie” in 1979-81 in opposition to “the reactionary ideas and policies of Khomeini”. [4] In Egypt today the left, influenced by the mainstream communist tradition, effectively supports the state in its war against the Islamists.

The opposite approach has been to see the Islamist movements as “progressive”, “anti-imperialist” movements of the oppressed. This was the position taken by the great bulk of the Iranian left in the first phase of the 1979 revolution, when the Soviet influenced Tudeh Party, the majority of the Fedayeen guerrilla organisation and the left Islamist People’s Mojahedin all characterised the forces behind Khomeini as “the progressive petty bourgeoisie”. The conclusion of this approach was that Khomeini deserved virtually uncritical support. [5] A quarter of a century before this the Egyptian Communists briefly took the same position towards the Muslim Brotherhood, calling on them to join in “a common struggle against the ‘fascist dictatorship’ of Nasser and his ‘Anglo-American props’”. [6]

I want to argue that both positions are wrong. They fail to locate the class character of modern Islamism or to see its relationship to capital, the state and imperialism.

Islam, religion and ideology

The confusion often starts with a confusion about the power of religion itself. Religious people see it as a historical force in its own right, whether for good or for evil. So too do most bourgeois anti-clerical and free thinkers. For them, fighting the influence of religious institutions and obscurantists ideas is in itself the way to human liberation.

But although religious institutions and ideas clearly play a role in history, this does not happen in separation from the rest of material reality. Religious institutions, with their layers of priests and teachers, arise in a certain society and interact with that society. They can only maintain themselves as society changes

if they find some way of changing their own base of support. So, for instance, one of the world's major religious institutions, the Roman Catholic Church, originated in the late ancient world and survived by adapting itself first to feudal society for 1,000 years and then, with much effort, to the capitalist society that replaced feudalism, changing much of the content of its own teaching in the process. People have always been capable of giving different interpretations to the religious ideas they hold, depending on their own material situation, their relations with other people and the conflicts they get involved in. History is full of examples of people who profess nearly identical religious beliefs ending up on opposite sides in great social conflicts. This happened with the social convulsions which swept Europe during the great crisis of feudalism in the 16th and 17th century, when Luther, Calvin, Munzer and many other "religious" leaders provided their followers with a new world view through a reinterpretation of biblical texts.

Islam is no different to any other religion in these respects. It arose in one context, among a trading community in the towns of 7th century Arabia, in the midst of a society still mainly organised on a tribal basis. It flourished within the succession of great empires carved out by some of those who accepted its doctrines. It persists today as the official ideology of numerous capitalist states (Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Pakistan, Iran etc), as well as the inspiration of many oppositional movements.

It has been able to survive in such different societies because it has been able to adapt to differing class interests. It has obtained the finance to build its mosques and employ its preachers in turn from the traders of Arabia, the bureaucrats, landowners and merchants of the great empires, and the industrialists of modern capitalism. But at the same time it has gained the allegiance of the mass of people by putting across a message offering consolation to the poor and oppressed. At every point its message has balanced between promising a degree of protection to the oppressed and providing the exploiting classes with protection against any revolutionary overthrow.

So Islam stresses that the rich have to pay a 2.5 percent Islamic tax (the *zakat*) for the relief of the poor, that rulers have to govern in a just way, that husbands must not mistreat their wives. But it also treats the expropriation of the rich by the poor as theft, insists disobedience to a "just" government is a crime to be punished with all the vigour of the law and provides women with fewer rights than men within marriage, over inheritance, or over the children in the event of divorce. It appeals to the wealthy and the poor alike by offering regulation of

oppression, both as a bulwark against still harsher oppression and as a bulwark against revolution. It is, like Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, both the heart of the heartless world and the opium of the people.

But no set of ideas can have such an appeal to different classes, especially when society is shaken by social convulsions, unless it is full of ambiguities. It has to be open to differing interpretations, even if these set its adherents at each other's throats.

This has been true of Islam virtually from its inception. After Mohammed's death in 632 AD, just two years after Islam had conquered Mecca, dissension broke out between the followers of Abu Bakr, who became the first Caliph (successor to Mohammed as leader of Islam), and Ali, husband of the prophet's daughter Fatima. Ali claimed that some of Abu Bakr's rulings were oppressive.

Dissension grew until rival Muslim armies fought each other at the battle of the Camel resulting in 10,000 deaths. It was out of this dissension that the separation of the Sunni and Shia versions of Islam arose. This was but the first of many splits. Groups repeatedly arose who insisted that the oppressed were suffering at the hands of the godless and demanded a return to the original "pure" Islam of the prophet's time. As Akbar S. Ahmed says:

Throughout Islamic history, Muslim leaders would preach a move to the ideal ... They gave expression to often vague ethnic, social or political movements ... The basis was laid for the entire schismatic gamut in Islamic thought from the Shia, with its offshoots like the Ismailis, to more temporary movements ... Muslim history is replete with Mahdis leading revolts against established authority and often dying for their efforts ... Leaders have often been poor peasants and from deprived ethnic groups. Using Islamic idiom has reinforced their sense of deprivation and consolidated the movement. [7]

But even mainstream Islam is not, in its popular forms at least, a homogenous set of beliefs. The spread of the religion to cover the whole region from the Atlantic coast of north west Africa to the Bay of Bengal involved the incorporation into Islamic society of peoples who fitted into Islam many of their old religious practices, even if these contradicted some of Islam's original tenets. So popular Islam often includes cults of local saints or of holy relics even though orthodox Islam regards such practices as sacrilegious idolatry. And *Sufi* brotherhoods flourish which, while not constituting a formal rival to mainstream Islam, put an emphasis on mystical and magical experience which many fundamentalists find objectionable. [8]

In such a situation, any call for a return to the practices of the prophet's time is not in reality about conserving the past but about reshaping people's behaviour into something quite new.

This has been true of Islamic revivalism over the last century. It arose as an attempt to come to terms with the material conquest and cultural transformation of Asia and North Africa by capitalist Europe. The revivalists argued this had only been possible because the original Islamic values had been corrupted by the worldly pursuits of the great medieval empires. Regeneration was only possible by reviving the founding spirit of Islam as expressed by the first four Caliphs (or, for Shiites, by Ali). It was in this spirit that Khomeini, for instance, could denounce virtually the whole history of Islam for the last 1,300 years:

Unfortunately, true Islam lasted for only a brief period after its inception. First the *Umayyids* [the first Arab dynasty after Ali] and then the *Abbasids* [who conquered them in 750 AD] inflicted all kinds of damage on Islam. Later the monarchs ruling Iran continued in the same path; they completely distorted Islam and established something quite different in its place. [9]

So, although Islamism can be presented by both defenders and opponents as a traditionalist doctrine, based on a rejection of the modern world, in reality things are more complicated than this. The aspiration to recreate a mythical past involves not leaving existing society intact, but recasting it. What is more, the recasting cannot aim to produce a carbon copy of 7th century Islam, since the Islamists do not reject every feature of existing society. By and large they accept modern industry, modern technology and much of the science on which it is based – indeed, they argue that Islam, as a more rational and less superstitious doctrine than Christianity, is more in tune with modern science. And so the “revivalists” are, in fact, trying to bring about something which has never existed before, which fuses ancient traditions and the forms of modern social life.

This means it is wrong simply to refer to all Islamists as “reactionary”, or to equate “Islamic fundamentalism” as a whole with the sort of Christian fundamentalism which is the bastion of the right wing of the Republican Party in the US. Figures like Khomeini, the heads of the rival Mujahedin groups in Afghanistan or the leaders of the Algerian FIS may use traditionalist themes and appeal to the nostalgia of disappearing social groups, but they also appeal to radical currents produced as society is transformed by capitalism. Olivier Roy, referring to the Afghan Islamists, argues that:

Fundamentalism is quite different (to traditionalism): for fundamentalism it is of paramount importance to get back to the scriptures, clearing away the obfuscation of tradition. It always seeks a return to a former state: it is characterised by the practice of re-reading texts and a search for origins. The enemy is not modernity but tradition, or rather, in the context of Islam, of everything which is not the Tradition of the Prophet. This is true reform ... [10]

Traditionalist Islam is an ideology which seeks to perpetuate a social order which is being undermined by the development of capitalism – or at least, as with the version promoted by the ruling family in Saudi Arabia, to hark back to this order in order to conceal the transformation of an old ruling class into modern capitalists. Islamism is an ideology which, although it appeals to some of the same themes, seeks to transform society, not to conserve it in the old way. For this reason, even the term “fundamentalism” is not really appropriate. As Abrahamian has observed:

The label “fundamentalism” implies religious inflexibility, intellectual purity, political traditionalism, even social conservatism and the centrality of scriptural-doctrinal principles. “Fundamentalism” implies rejection of the modern world. [11]

But, in fact, movements like that of Khomeini in Iran have been based on “ideological adaptability and intellectual flexibility, with political protests against the established order, and with socio-economic issues that fuel mass opposition to the status quo”. [12]

Yet there is often a blurring of the differences between Islamism and traditionalism. Precisely because the notion of social regeneration is wrapped in religious language, it is open to different interpretations. It can mean simply ending “degenerate practices” through a return to the forms of behaviour which allegedly preceded the “corruption” of Islam” by “cultural imperialism”. The stress then is on female “modesty” and the wearing of the veil, an end to “promiscuous” mixing of the sexes in schools and workplaces, opposition to Western popular music and so on. Thus one of the most popular leaders of the Algerian FIS, Ali Belhadj, can denounce the “violence” against Muslims that comes from “cultural invasion”:

We Muslims believe that the most serious form of violence we have suffered is not physical violence, for which we are ready ... It is the violence which

represents a challenge to the Muslim community by the imposition of diabolical legislation instead of the *sharia* ...

Is there any violence worse than that which consists in encouraging that which God has forbidden? They open wine making enterprises, the work of the demon, and they are protected by the police ...

Can you conceive of any violence greater than that of this woman who burns the scarf in a public place, in the eyes of everyone, saying the Family Code penalises women and finding support from the effeminated, the halfmen and the transsexuals ...

It is not violence to demand that woman stays at home, in an atmosphere of chastity, reserve and humility and that she only goes out in cases of necessity defined by the legislator ... to demand the segregation of sexes among school students and the absence of that stinking mixing that causes sexual violence ... [13]

But regeneration can also mean challenging the state and elements of imperialism's political domination. Thus the Iranian Islamists did close down the biggest US "listening" station in Asia and seize control of the US embassy. The Hezbollah in the southern Lebanon and Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza have played a key role in the armed struggle against Israel. The Algerian FIS did organise huge demonstrations against the US war against Iraq – even though these lost them their Saudi funding. Regeneration can even mean, in certain instances, giving support to the material struggles against exploitation of workers and peasants, as with the Iranian Mujahedin in 1979-82.

The different interpretations of regeneration naturally appeal to those from different social classes. But the religious phraseology can prevent those involved recognising their differences with one another. In the heat of the struggle individuals can mix the meanings together, so that the fight against the unveiling of women is seen as the fight against the Western oil companies and the abysmal poverty of the mass of people. Thus in Algeria in the late 1980s, Belhadj,

made himself the voice of all those with nothing to lose ... Conceiving Islam in its most pure scriptural form, he preached strict application of its commandments ... Every Friday Belhadj made war against the entire world, Jews and Christians, Zionists, communists and secularists, liberals and agnostics, governments of the

East and the West, Arab or Muslim heads of state, Westernised party leaders and intellectuals, were the favourite targets of his weekly preaching. [14]

Yet beneath this confusion of ideas there were real class interests at work.

The class base of Islamism

Islamism has arisen in societies traumatised by the impact of capitalism – first in the form of external conquest by imperialism and then, increasingly, by the transformation of internal social relations accompanying the rise of a local capitalist class and the formation of an independent capitalist state.

Old social classes have been replaced by new ones, although not instantaneously or in a clear cut manner. What Trotsky described as “combined and uneven development” has occurred. Externally, colonialism has retreated, but the great imperialist powers – especially the US – continue to use their military forces as a bargaining tool to influence the production of the Middle East’s single major resource, oil. Internally, state encouragement – and often ownership – has led to the development of some large scale modern industry, but large sectors of “traditional” industry remain, based on vast numbers of small workshops where the owner works with a couple of workers, often from his own family. Land reform has turned some peasants into modern capitalist farmers – but displaced many more, leaving them with little or no land, so forcing them to eke out a livelihood from casual labour in the workshops or markets of sprawling urban slums. A massive expansion of the education system is turning out vast numbers of high school and college graduates, but these then find insufficient job opportunities in the modern sectors of the economy and place their hopes on getting into the state bureaucracy, while eking out a living with scraps of work around the informal sector – touting for custom from shopkeepers, acting as guides for tourists, selling lottery tickets, driving taxis and so on.

The crises of the world economy over the last 20 years have aggravated all these contradictions. The modern industries have found the national economy too small for them to operate efficiently, but the world economy too competitive for them to survive without state protection. The traditional industries have not generally been able to modernise without state support and they cannot compensate for the failure of modern industry to provide jobs for the burgeoning urban population. But a few sectors have managed to establish links of their own with international capital and increasingly resent the state’s domination of the economy. The urban rich increasingly lap up the luxury goods available on the world market, creating growing resentment among the casual workers and the unemployed.

Islamism represents an attempt to come to terms with these contradictions by people who have been brought up to respect traditional Islamic ideas. But it does not find its support equally in all sections of society. For some sections embrace a modern secular bourgeois or nationalist ideology, while other sections gravitate towards some form of secular working class response. The Islamic revival gets sustenance from four different social groupings – each of which interprets Islam in its own way.

i. The Islamism of the old exploiters: First there are those members of the traditional privileged classes who fear losing out in the capitalist modernisation of society – particularly landowners (including clergy dependent on incomes from land belonging to religious foundations), traditional merchant capitalists, the owners of the mass of small shops and workshops. Such groups have often been the traditional sources of finance for the mosques and see Islam as a way of defending their established way of life and of making those who oversee change listen to their voices. Thus in Iran and Algeria it was this group which provided the resources to the clergy to oppose the state's land reform programme in the 1960s and 1970s.

ii. The Islamism of the new exploiters: Second, often emerging from among this first group, are some of the capitalists who have enjoyed success despite hostility from those groups linked to the state. In Egypt, for instance, the present day Muslim Brotherhood “wormed their way into the economic fabric of Sadat's Egypt at a time when whole sections of it had been turned over to unregulated capitalism. Uthman Ahmad Uthman, the Egyptian Rockefeller, made no secret of this sympathy for the Brethren”. [15]

In Turkey the Welfare Party, which is led by a former member of the main conservative party, enjoys the support of much of middle sized capital. In Iran among the *bazaaris* who gave support to Khomeini against the Shah were substantial capitalists resentful at the way economic policies favoured those close to the crown.

iii. The Islamism of the poor: The third group are the rural poor who have suffered under the advance of capitalist farming and who have been forced into the cities as they desperately look for work. Thus in Algeria out of a total rural population of 8.2 million only 2 million gained anything from the land reform. The other 6 million were faced with the choice between increased poverty in the countryside and going to the cities to seek work. [16] But in the cities: “The

lowest group are the hard core jobless made up of displaced former peasants who have flooded the cities in search of work and social opportunity ... detached from rural society without being truly integrated into urban society”. [17]

They lost the certainties associated with an old way of life – certainties which they identify with traditional Muslim culture – without gaining a secure material existence or a stable way of life: “Clear guidelines for behaviour and belief no longer exist for millions of Algerians caught between a tradition that no longer commands their total loyalty and a modernism that cannot satisfy the psychological and spiritual needs of young people in particular”. [18]

But it is not only hostility to the state that makes ex-peasants receptive to the message of the Islamists. The mosques provide a social focus for people lost in a new and strange city, the Islamic charities the rudiments of welfare services (clinics, schooling, etc) which are lacking from the state.

iv. The Islamism of the new middle class: However, neither the “traditional” exploiting classes nor the impoverished masses provide the vital element which sustains revivalist, political Islam – the cadre of activists who propagate its doctrines and risk injury, imprisonment and death in confrontation with their enemies.

The traditional exploiting classes are by their very nature conservative. They are prepared to donate money so that others can fight – especially in defence of their material interests. But they are wary of putting their own businesses, let alone their own lives, at risk. And so they can hardly be the force that has torn societies like Algeria and Egypt apart, caused a whole town, Hama, to rise in revolt in Syria, used suicide bombs against the Americans and Israelis in Lebanon – and which caused the Iranian Revolution to take a turn much more radical than any section of the Iranian bourgeoisie expected.

This force, in fact, comes from a fourth, very different stratum – from a section of the new middle class that has arisen as a result of capitalist modernisation right across the Third World.

Writing of the People’s Mojahedin of Iran, Abrahamian comments that many studies of the first years of the Iranian Revolution have talked of the appeal of radical Islam to the “oppressed”, but that it was not the oppressed in general who formed the basis of the Mojahedin; rather it was that very large section of the new middle class whose parents had been part of the traditional petty

bourgeoisie. He gives breakdowns of the occupations of Mojahedin arrested under the Shah and subject to repression under Khomeini to support his argument. [26]

Although the third Islamist force, the ultimately victorious Islamic Republican Party of Khomeini, is usually thought of as run by the clergy linked to the traditional *bazaari* merchant capitalists, Moaddel has shown that more than half its MPs were from the professions, teachers, government employees or students – even if a quarter came from *bazaari* families. [27] And Bayat has noted that in their struggle to defeat the workers’ organisations in the factories, the regime could rely on the professional engineers who worked there. [28]

Azar Tabari notes that after the downfall of the Shah very large numbers of women in the Iranian cities opted to wear the veil and lined up with the followers of Khomeini against the left. She claims these women came from that section of the middle class that was the first generation to undergo a process of “social integration”. Often from traditional petty bourgeois families – with fathers who were bazaar merchants, tradesmen and so on – they were forced into higher education as traditional opportunities for their families to make money declined with industrialisation. There were openings for them in professions like teaching and nursing. But “these women had to go through the often painful and traumatic experience of first generation adjustment”:

As the young women from such families began to go to universities or work in hospitals, all these traditional concepts came under daily attack from “alien” surroundings, where women mixed with men, wore no veils, and sometimes dressed according to the latest European fashions. Women were often torn between accepted family norms and the pressure of the new environment. They could not be veiled at work, nor could they leave home unveiled.

One widespread response to these contradictory pressures was “a retreat into Islam”, “symbolised by deliberately veiled women demonstrators during large mobilisations”. Tabari claims this response stood in marked contrast to that of women whose families had been part of the new middle class for two or three generations, and who refused to wear the veil and identified with the liberals or the left. [29] In Afghanistan, Roy notes:

The Islamist movement was born in the modern sectors of society and developed from a critique of the popular movements that preceded it ... The Islamists are intellectuals, the products of modernist enclaves within traditional society; their

social origins are what we have termed the state bourgeoisie – products of the government education system which only leads to employment in the state machine ... The Islamists are products of the state educational system. Very few of them have an education in the arts. On the campus they mostly mix with the Communists, with whom they are violently opposed, rather than with the *ulama* [religious scholars] towards whom they have an ambivalent attitude. They share many beliefs in common with the *ulama*, but Islamist thought has developed from contact with the great western ideologies, which they see as holding the key to the west's technical development. For them, the problem is to develop a modern political ideology based upon Islam, which they see as the only way to come to terms with the modern world and the best means of confronting foreign imperialism. [30]

In Algeria the most important recruitment ground for the FIS has been among Arabic speaking (as opposed to French speaking) high school and university students, and that wide section of youth that would like to be students but cannot get college places:

The FIS draws its membership from three sections of the population: the commercial middle classes, including some who are quite rich, a mass of young people who are unemployed and excluded from higher education, forming the new lumpen proletariat of the streets, and a layer of upwardly mobile Arab speaking intellectuals. These last two groups are the most numerous and important. [31]

The Islamic intellectuals have made careers for themselves through their domination of the theological and Arab language faculties of the universities, using these to gain control of many of the positions as imams in the mosques and teachers in the *lycees* (high schools). They form a network that ensures the recruitment of more Islamists to such positions and the inculcation of Islamist ideas into the new generation of students. This in turn has enabled them to exert influence over vast numbers of young people.

Ahmed Rouadia writes that the Islamist groups began to grow from the mid-1970s onwards, receiving support in the universities from Arab speaking students who found their lack of fluency in French kept them from getting jobs in administration, areas of advanced technology and higher management. [32] Thus, there was, for instance, a bitter conflict with the principal of Constantine university in the mid-1980s, who was accused of impugning the “dignity of Arab

language” and “being loyal to French colonialism” for allowing French to remain the predominant language in the science and technology faculties [33]:

The qualified Arab speakers find access blocked to all the key sectors, above all in industries requiring technical knowledge and foreign languages ... The Arab speakers, even if they have diplomas, cannot get a place in modern industry. For the most part they end by turning towards the mosque. [34]

The students, the recent Arab speaking graduates and, above all, the unemployed ex-students form a bridge to the very large numbers of discontented youth outside the colleges who find they cannot get college places despite years spent in an inefficient and underfunded educational system. Thus, although there are now nearly a million students in secondary education, up to four fifths of them can expect to fail the baccalauriate – the key to entry into university – and to face a life of insecurity on the margins of employment: [35]

Integrism [Islamism] gets its strength from the social frustrations which afflict a large part of the youth, those left out of account by the social and economic system. Its message is simple: If there is poverty, hardship and frustration, it is because those who have power do not base themselves on the legitimacy of *shorah* [consultation], but simply on force ... The restoration of the Islam of the first years would make the inequalities disappear. [36]

And through its influence over a wide layer of students, graduates and the intellectual unemployed, Islamism is able to spread out to dominate the propagation of ideas in the slums and shanty towns where the expeasants live. Such a movement cannot be described as a “conservative” movement. The educated, Arab speaking youth do not turn to Islam because they want things to stay as they are, but because they believe it offers massive social change. [37]

The Islamist student associations which became a dominant force in Egyptian universities during Sadat’s presidency “constituted the Islamicist movement’s only genuine mass organisations”. [44] They grew in reaction to conditions in the universities and to the dismal prospects facing students if they succeeded in graduating:

The number of students rose from slightly less than 200,000 in 1970 to more than half a million in 1977 ... In the absence of the necessary resources, providing free high education for the greatest possible number of the country’s youth has produced a system of cut rate education. [45]

Overcrowding represents a particular problem for female students, who find themselves subject to all sorts of harassment in the lecture theatres and overcrowded buses. In response to this situation,

The *jamaa al islamiyya* [Islamic associations] drew their considerable strength from their ability to identify [these problems] and to pose immediate solutions – for instance, using student unions funds to run minibuses for female students [giving priority to those who wore the veil], calling for separate rows in the lecture theatres for women and men, organising course revision groups which met in the mosques, turning out cheap editions of essential textbooks. [46]

Graduating students do not escape the endemic poverty of much of Egyptian society:

Every graduate has the right to public employment. This measure is actually the purveyor of massive disguised unemployment in the offices of a swollen administration in which employees are badly paid ... He can still manage to feed himself by buying the state subsidised products, but he is unlikely to rise above the bare level of subsistence ... Almost every state employee has a second or a third job ... Innumerable employees who sit all morning at desks in one or other of the countless ministry offices spend the afternoon working as plumbers or taxi drivers, jobs they perform so inadequately they might as well be filled by illiterates ... An illiterate peasant woman who arrives in the city to land a job as a foreigner's maid will be paid more or less double the salary of a university assistant lecturer. [47]

The only way to get out of this morass for most graduates is to get a job abroad, especially in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states. And this is not just the only way out of poverty, it is, for most people, the precondition for getting married in a society where pre-marital sexual relations are rare.

The Islamists were able to articulate these problems in religious language. As Kepel writes of one of the leaders of one of the early Islamist sects, his position does not involve “acting as a fanatic for a bygone century ... He is putting his finger – in his own way – on a crucial problem of contemporary Egyptian society”. [48]

As in Algeria, once the Islamists had established a mass base in the universities, they were then in a situation to spread out into a wider milieu – the milieu of the

impoverished streets of the cities where the students and ex-students mixed with a mass of other people scrabbling for a livelihood. This began to happen after the regime clamped down hard on the Islamist movement in the universities following the negotiation of the peace agreement with Israel in the late 1970s. “Far from halting the *jamaa*, however, this harassment gave them a second wind ... the message of the *jamaa* now began to spread beyond the world of students. Islamicist cadres and agitators went to preach in the poor neighbourhoods”. [49]

Radical Islam as a social movement

The class base of Islamism is similar to that of classical fascism and of the Hindu fundamentalism of the BJP, Shiv Sena and RSS in India. All these movements have recruited from the white collar middle class and students, as well as from the traditional commercial and professional petty bourgeoisie. This, together with the hostility of most Islamist movements to the left, women’s rights and secularism has led many socialist and liberals to designate the movements as fascist. But this is a mistake.

The petty bourgeois class base has not only been a characteristic of fascism, it has also been a feature of Jacobinism, of Third World nationalisms, of Maoist Stalinism, and Peronism. Petty bourgeois movements only become fascist when they arise at a specific point in the class struggle and play a particular role. This role is not just to mobilise the petty bourgeoisie, but to exploit the bitterness they feel at what an acute crisis of the system has done to them and so turn them into organised thugs prepared to work for capital to tear workers’ organisations apart.

That is why Mussolini’s and Hitler’s movements were fascist while, say, Peron’s movement in Argentina was not. Even though Peron borrowed some of the imagery of fascism, he took power in exceptional circumstances which allowed him to buy off workers’ organisations while using state intervention to divert the profits of the large agrarian capitalists into industrial expansion. During his first six years in office a specific set of circumstances allowed real wages to rise by about 60 percent. This was the complete opposite to what would have happened under a genuinely fascist regime. Yet the liberal intelligentsia and the Argentine Communist Party were still capable of referring to the regime as “Nazi Peronism”, in much the same way that much of the left internationally refers to Islamism today. [50]

The Islamist mass movements in countries like Algeria and Egypt likewise play a different role to that of fascism. They are not primarily directed against workers’ organisations and do not offer themselves to the main sectors of capital as a way

of solving its problems at workers' expense. They are often involved in direct, armed confrontation with the forces of the state in a way in which fascist parties rarely have been. And, far from being direct agents of imperialism, these movements have taken up anti-imperialist slogans and some anti-imperialist actions which have embarrassed very important national and international capitalist interests (e.g. in Algeria over the second Gulf War, in Egypt against "peace" with Israel, in Iran against the American presence in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Shah).

Those on the left who see the Islamists simply as "fascists" fail to take into account the destabilising effect of the movements on capital's interests right across the Middle East, and end up siding with states that are the strongest backers both of imperialism and of local capital. This has, for instance, happened to those sections of the left influenced by the remnants of Stalinism in Egypt. It happened to much of the Iranian left during the closing stages of the first Gulf War, when American imperialism sent in its fleet to fight on the same side as Iraq against Iran. And it is in danger of happening to the secular left in Algeria, faced with a near civil war between the Islamists and the state.

But if it is wrong to see the Islamist movements as "fascist", it is just as wrong to simply see them as "anti-imperialist" or "anti-state". They do not just fight against those classes and states that exploit and dominate the mass of people. They also fight against secularism, against women who refuse to abide by Islamic notions of "modesty", against the left and, in important cases, against ethnic or religious minorities. The Algerian Islamists established their hold on the universities in the late 1970s and early 1980s by organising "punitive raids" against the left with the connivance of the police, and the first person killed by them was not a state official but a member of a Trotskyist organisation; another of their actions was to denounce **Hard Rock Magazine**, homosexuality, drugs and punk at the Islamic book fair in 1985; in the Algerian towns where they are strongest, they do organise attacks on women who dare to show a little of their skin; the first public demonstration of the FIS in 1989 was in response to "feminist" and "secularist" demonstrations against Islamist violence, of which women were the main victims. [51] Its hostility is directed not just against the state and foreign capital, but also against the more than 1 million Algerian citizens who, through no fault of their own, have been brought up with French as their first language, and the 10 percent of the population who are Berber rather than Arabic speakers.

Similarly, in Egypt, the armed Islamic groups do murder secularists and Islamists who disagree strongly with them; they do encourage communal hatred by Muslims, including pogroms, against the 10 percent of the population who happen to be Coptic Christians. In Iran the Khomeini wing of Islamism did execute some 100 people for “sexual offences” like homosexuality and adultery in 1979-81; they did sack women from the legal system and organise gangs of thugs, the Iranian Hezbollah, to attack unveiled women and to assault left wingers; and they did kill thousands in the repression of the left Islamist People’s Mujahedin. In Afghanistan the Islamist organisations which waged a long and bloody war against the Russian occupation of their country did turn their heavy weaponry on each other once the Russians had left, reducing whole areas of Kabul to rubble.

In fact, even when Islamists put the stress on “anti-imperialism”, they more often than not let imperialism off the hook. For imperialism today is not usually the direct rule of Western states over parts of the Third World, but rather a world system of independent capitalist classes (“private” and state), integrated into a single world market. Some ruling classes have greater power than others and so are able to impose their own bargaining terms through their control over access to trade, the banking system or on occasions crude force. These ruling classes stand at the top of a pinnacle of exploitation, but those just below are the ruling classes of poorer countries, rooted in the individual national economies, also gaining from the system, increasingly linking themselves into the dominant multinational networks and buying into the economies of the advanced world, even if on occasion they lash out at those above them.

The suffering of the great mass of people cannot *simply* be blamed on the great imperialist powers and their agencies like the World Bank and the IMF. It is also a result of the enthusiastic participation in their exploitation by the lesser capitalists and their local states. It is these who actually implement the policies that impoverish people and wreck their lives. And it is these who use the police and the prisons to crush those who try to resist. The local capitalists and governments in the Global South benefit hugely from this exploitation. So they are more than happy (most of the time) to play the role of junior partners to the global companies and the major imperialist powers.

There is an important difference here with what happened under the classic imperialism of the colonial empires, where Western colonists manned the state and directed repression. The local exploiting classes would be pulled two ways, between resisting a state when it trampled on their interests, and collaborating

with it as a bulwark against those they themselves exploited. But they were not necessarily in the front line of defending the whole system of exploitation against revolt. They are today. They are part of the system, even if they sometimes quarrel with it. They are no longer its inconsistent opponents. [52]

In this situation any ideology which restricts itself to targeting foreign imperialism as the enemy evades any serious confrontation with the system. It expresses people's bitterness and frustration, but evades focusing it on real enemies. This is true of most versions of Islamism, just as it is true these days of most Third World nationalisms. They point to a real enemy, the world system, and on occasions they clash bitterly with the state. But they absolve from responsibility most of the local bourgeoisie – imperialism's most important long term partner.

A recent study of Khomeinism in Iran by Abrahamian compares it with Peronism and similar forms of "populism":

Khomeini adopted radical themes ... At times he sounded more radical than the Marxists. But while adopting radical themes he remained staunchly committed to the preservation of middle class property. This form of middle class radicalism made him akin to Latin American populists, especially the Peronists. [53]

And Abrahamian goes on to say:

By "populism" I mean a movement of the propertied middle class that mobilises the lower classes, especially the urban poor, with radical rhetoric directed against imperialism, foreign capitalism, and the political establishment ... Populist movements promise to drastically raise the standard of living and make the country fully independent of outside powers. Even more important in attacking the status quo with radical rhetoric, they intentionally stop short of threatening the petty bourgeoisie and the whole principle of private property. Populist movements thus, inevitably, emphasise the importance, not of economic social revolution, but of cultural, national and political reconstruction. [54]

Such movements tend to confuse matters by moving from any real struggle against imperialism to a purely ideological struggle against what they see as its cultural effects. "Cultural imperialism", rather than material exploitation, is identified as the source of everything that is wrong. The fight is then not directed against forces really involved in impoverishing people, but rather against those who speak "foreign" languages, accept "alien" religions or reject allegedly

“traditional” lifestyles. This is very convenient for certain sections of local capital who find it easy to practice the “indigenous culture”, at least in public. It is also of direct material interest to sections of the middle class who can advance their own careers by purging others from their jobs.

But it limits the dangers such movements present to imperialism as a system.

Islamism, then, both mobilises popular bitterness and paralyses it; both builds up people’s feelings that something must be done and directs those feelings into blind alleys; both destabilises the state and limits the real struggle against the state.

The contradictory character of Islamism follows from the class base of its core cadres. The petty bourgeoisie as a class cannot follow a consistent, independent policy of its own. This has always been true of the traditional petty bourgeoisie – the small shopkeepers, traders and self employed professionals. They have always been caught between a conservative hankering for security that looks to the past and a hope that they individually will gain from radical change. It is just as true of the impoverished new middle class – or the even more impoverished would-be new middle class of unemployed ex-students – in the less economically advanced countries today. They can hanker after an allegedly golden past. They can see their futures as tied up with general social advance through revolutionary change. Or they can blame the frustration of their aspirations on other sections of the population who have got an “unfair” grip on middle class jobs: the religious and ethnic minorities, those with a different language, women working in an “untraditional” way.

Which direction they turn in does not just depend on immediate material factors. It also depends on the struggles that occur on a national and international scale. Thus in the 1950s and 1960s the struggles against colonialism and imperialism did inspire much of the aspirant middle class of the Third World, and there was a general feeling that state controlled economic development represented the way forward. The secular left, or at least its Stalinist or nationalist mainstream, was seen as embodying this vision, and it exercised a degree of hegemony in the universities. At that stage even those who began with a religious orientation were attracted by what was seen as the left – by the example of the Vietnamese War against America or by the so called cultural revolution in China – and began to reject traditional religious thinking over, for instance, the women’s question. This happened with the Catholic liberation theologians in Latin America and the People’s Mojahedin in Iran. And even in Afghanistan the Islamist students

demonstrated against Zionism during the six-day war, against American policies in Vietnam and the privileges of the establishment. They were violently opposed to important figures on the traditionalist side, to the King and especially his cousin Daoud ... They protested against foreign influences in Afghanistan, both from the Soviet Union and the West, and against the speculators during the famine of 1972, by demanding there should be curbs on personal wealth. [55]

In the late 1970s and 1980s the mood changed. On the one hand there was the beginning of a global wave of disillusionment with the so called “socialist” model presented by the Eastern European states as a result of the killing fields of Cambodia, the mini-war between Vietnam and China, and the move of China towards the American camp. This disillusionment grew in intensity in the later 1980s as a result of the changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the USSR.

It was even more intense in certain Middle Eastern countries than elsewhere in the world because the illusions had not merely been a question of foreign policy. The local regimes had claimed to be implementing nationalist versions of “socialism”, based to a greater or lesser extent on the East European model. Even those on the left who were critical of their governments tended to accept and identify with these claims. Thus in Algeria the left in the universities volunteered in the early 1970s to go to the countryside to assist in the “land reform”, even though the regime had already repressed the left student organisation and was maintaining police control over the universities. And in Egypt the Communists continued to proclaim Nasser as a socialist, even after he had thrown them into prison. So disillusionment with the regime became also, for many people, disillusionment with the left.

On the other hand, there was the emergence of certain Islamic states as a political force – the seizure of power by Gaddafi in Libya, the Saudi-led oil embargo against the West at the time of the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, and then, most dramatically, the revolutionary establishment of the Iranian Islamic Republic in 1979.

Islamism began to dominate among the very layers of students and young people who had once looked to the left: in Algeria, for instance, “Khomeini began to be regarded by layers of young people as Mao and Guevara once had been”. [56] Support for the Islamist movements went from strength to strength as they seemed to offer immanent and radical change. The leaders of the Islamist movements were triumphant.

Yet the contradictions in Islamism did not go away, and expressed themselves forcefully in the decade that followed. Far from being an unstoppable force, Islamism has, in fact, been subject to its own internal pressures which, repeatedly, have made its followers turn on one another. Just as the history of Stalinism in the Middle East in the 1940s and 1950s was one of failure, betrayals, splits and repression, so has the history of Islamism been in the 1980s and 1990s [and in to the 21st century].

Conclusions

It has been a mistake on the part of socialists to see Islamist movements either as automatically reactionary and “fascist” or as automatically “anti-imperialist” and “progressive”. Radical Islamism, with its project of reconstituting society on the model established by Mohammed in 7th century Arabia, is, in fact, a “utopia” emanating from an impoverished section of the new middle class. As with any “petty bourgeois utopia” [128], its supporters are, in practice, faced with a choice between heroic but futile attempts to impose it in opposition to those who run existing society, or compromising with them, providing an ideological veneer to continuing oppression and exploitation. It is this which leads inevitably to splits between a radical, terrorist wing of Islamism on the one hand, and a reformist wing on the others. It is also this which leads some of the radicals to switch from using arms to try to bring about a society without “oppressors” to using them to impose “Islamic” forms of behaviour on individuals.

Socialists cannot regard petty bourgeois utopians as our prime enemies. They are not responsible for the system of international capitalism, the subjection of thousands of millions of people to the blind drive to accumulate, the pillaging of whole continents by the banks, or the machinations that have produced a succession of horrific wars since the proclamation of the “new world order”. They were not responsible for the horrors of the first Gulf War, which began with an attempt by Saddam Hussein to do a favour for the US and the Gulf sheikdoms, and ended with direct US intervention on Iraq’s side. They were not to blame for the carnage in Lebanon, where the Falangist onslaught, the Syrian intervention against the left and the Israeli invasion created the conditions which bred militant Shiism. They were not to blame for the second Gulf War, with the “precision bombing” of Baghdad hospitals and the slaughter of 80,000 people as they fled from Kuwait to Basra. Poverty, misery, persecution, suppression of human rights, would exist in countries like Egypt and Algeria even if the Islamists disappeared tomorrow.

For these reasons socialists cannot support the state against the Islamists. Those who do so, on the grounds that the Islamists threaten secular values, merely make it easier for the Islamists to portray the left as part of an “infidel”, “secularist” conspiracy of the “oppressors” against the most impoverished sections of society. They repeat the mistakes made by the left in Algeria and Egypt when they praised regimes that were doing nothing for the mass of people as “progressive” – mistakes that enabled the Islamists to grow. And they forget that any support the state gives to secularist values is only contingent: when it suits it, it will do a deal with the more conservative of the Islamists to impose bits of the *shariah* – especially the bits which inflict harsh punishment on people – in return for ditching the radicals with their belief in challenging oppression. This is what happened in Pakistan under Zia and the Sudan under Nimeiry, and it is apparently what the Clinton administration has been advising the Algerian generals to do.

But socialists cannot give support to the Islamists either. That would be to call for the swapping of one form of oppression for another, to react to the violence of the state by abandoning the defence of ethnic and religious minorities, women and gays, to collude in scapegoating that makes it possible for capitalist exploitation to continue unchecked providing it takes “Islamic” forms. It would be to abandon the goal of independent socialist politics, based on workers in struggle organising all the oppressed and exploited behind them, for a tail-ending of a petty bourgeois utopianism which cannot even succeed in its own terms.

The Islamists are not our allies. They are representatives of a class which seeks to influence the working class, and which, in so far as it succeeds, pulls workers either in the direction of futile and disastrous adventurism or in the direction of a reactionary capitulation to the existing system – or often to the first followed by the second.

But this does not mean we can simply take an abstentionist, dismissive attitude to the Islamists. They grow on the soil of very large social groups that suffer under existing society, and whose feeling of revolt could be tapped for progressive purposes, providing a lead came from a rising level of workers’ struggle. And even short of such a rise in the struggle, many of the individuals attracted to radical versions of Islamism can be influenced by socialists – provided socialists combine complete political independence from all forms of Islamism with a willingness to seize opportunities to draw individual Islamists into genuinely radical forms of struggle alongside them.

Radical Islamism *is* full of contradictions. The petty bourgeoisie is always pulled in two directions – towards radical rebellion against existing society and towards compromise with it. And so Islamism is always caught between rebelling in order to bring about a complete resurrection of the Islamic community, and compromising in order to impose Islamic “reforms”. These contradictions inevitably express themselves in the most bitter, often violent, conflicts within and between Islamist groups.

Those who treat Islamism as a uniquely reactionary monolith forget that there were conflicts between the different Islamists over the attitude they should take when Saudi Arabia and Iran were on opposite sides during the first Gulf War. There were the arguments that led the FIS in Algeria to break with its Saudi backers, or Islamists in Turkey to organise pro-Iraqi demonstrations from Saudi financed mosques during the second Gulf War. There are the bitter armed battles which wage between the rival Islamist armies in Afghanistan. Today there are arguments within the Hamas organisation among Palestinians about whether or not they should compromise with Arafat’s rump Palestinian administration – and therefore indirectly with Israel – in return for its implementing Islamic laws. Such differences in the attitude necessarily arise once “reformist” Islam does deals with existing states that are integrated into the world system. For each of these states is in rivalry with the others, and each of them strikes its own deals with the dominant imperialisms.

Similar differences are bound to arise every time there is a rise in the level of workers’ struggle. Those who finance the Islamist organisations will want to end such struggle, if not break it. Some of the radical young Islamists will instinctively support the struggle. The leaders of the organisations will be stuck in the middle, muttering about the need of the employers to show charity and the workers forbearance.

Finally, the very development of capitalism itself forces the Islamist leaders to do ideological somersaults whenever they get close to power. They counterpose “Islamic” to “Western values”. But most so called Western values are not rooted in some mythical European culture, but arise out of the development of capitalism over the last two centuries. Thus a century and a half ago the dominant attitude among the English middle class to sexuality was remarkably similar to that preached by the Islamic revivalists today (sex outside of marriage was forbidden, women were not supposed to bare even their ankles, illegitimacy was a taint people could not live down), and women had fewer rights in some respects than most versions of Islam grant them today (inheritance was to the eldest son

only, while Islam gives the daughter half the son's portion; there was no right at all to divorce, while Islam grants women that right in very restricted circumstances). What changed English attitudes was not something inbuilt into the Western psyche or any alleged "Judeo-Christian values", but the impact of developing capitalism – the way in which its need for women's labour power forced it to change certain attitudes and, more importantly, put women in a situation where they could demand even greater changes.

That is why even in countries where the Catholic church used to be immensely strong, like Ireland, Italy, Poland and Spain, it has had to accept, reluctantly, a diminution in its influence. The countries where Islam is the state religion cannot immunise themselves from the pressure for similar changes, however hard they try.

This is shown by the experience of Iranian Islamic Republic. Despite all the propaganda about women's main role being as mothers and wives and all the pressure to drive them out of certain professions like the law, the proportion of women in the workforce has grown slightly and they continue to make up 28 percent of government employees, the same as at the time of the revolution. [129] Against this background, the regime has had to shift its stance on birth control, with 23 percent of women using contraceptives [130], and on occasions to relax the strict enforcement of the veil. Although women are denied equal rights with men when it comes to divorce and family law, they retain the vote (there are two women MPs), attend school, get a quota of places in university in all disciplines and are encouraged to study medicine and to receive military training. [131] As Abrahamian notes of Khomeini:

His closest disciples often mocked the "traditionalists" for being "old fashioned". They accused them of obsessing over ritual purity; preventing their daughters from going to school; insisting that young girls should be veiled even when no men were present; denouncing such intellectual pursuits as art, music and chess playing; and, worst of all, refusing to take advantage of newspapers, radios and televisions. [132]

None of this should really be surprising. Those who run Iranian capitalism and the Iranian state cannot dispense with female labour power in key sections of the economy. And those sections of the petty bourgeoisie who have formed the backbone of the IRP started sending their daughters to university and to seek employment in the 1970s precisely because they wanted the extra salaries – to enlarge the family income and to make their daughters more marriageable. They

have not been willing in the 1980s to write these off in the interests of religious piety.

Islamism cannot freeze economic and therefore social development any more than any other ideology can. And therefore again and again tensions will arise within it and find expression in bitter ideological disputes between its proponents.

The Islamist youth are usually intelligent and articulate products of modern society. They read books and newspapers and watch televisions, and so know all the divisions and clashes within their own movements. However much they may close ranks when faced with “secularists”, whether from the left or from the bourgeoisie, they will argue furiously with each other – just as the pro-Russian and pro-Chinese wings of the apparently monolithic world Stalinist movement did 30 years ago. And these arguments will begin to create secret doubts in the minds of at least some of them.

Socialists can take advantage of these contradictions to begin to make some of the more radical Islamists question their allegiance to its ideas and organisations – but only if we can establish independent organisations of our own, which are not identified with either the Islamists or the state.

On some issues we will find ourselves on the same side as the Islamists against imperialism and the state. This was true, for instance, in many countries during the second Gulf War. It should be true in countries like France or Britain when it comes to combating racism. Where the Islamists are in opposition, our rule should be, “with the Islamists sometimes, with the state never”.

But even then we continue to disagree with the Islamists on basic issues. We are for the right to criticise religion as well as the right to practise it. We are for the right not to wear the veil as well as the right of young women in racist countries like France to wear it if they so wish. We are against discrimination against Arab speakers by big business in countries like Algeria – but we are also against discrimination against the Berber speakers and those sections of workers and the lower middle class who have grown up speaking French. Above all, we are against any action which sets one section of the exploited and oppressed against another section on the grounds of religion or ethnic origin. And that means that as well as defending Islamists against the state we will also be involved in defending women, gays, Berbers or Copts against some Islamists.

When we do find ourselves on the same side as the Islamists, part of our job is to argue strongly with them, to challenge them – and not just on their organisations’ attitude to women and minorities, but also on the fundamental question of whether what is needed is charity from the rich or an overthrow of existing class relations.

The left has made two mistakes in relation to the Islamists in the past. The first has been to write them off as fascists, with whom we have nothing in common. The second has been to see them as “progressives” who must not be criticised. These mistakes have jointly played a part in helping the Islamists to grow at the expense of the left in much of the Middle East. The need is for a different approach that sees Islamism as the product of a deep social crisis which it can do nothing to resolve, and which fights to win some of the young people who support it to a very different, independent, revolutionary socialist perspective.

Notes

This pamphlet is an extract of the full booklet that was written by Chris Harman in 1994. The full booklet is available for free download from:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1994/xx/islam.html>

1. Thus a perceptive study of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood could conclude in 1969 that the attempt at the revival of the movement in the mid-1960s “was the predictable eruption of the continuing tensions caused by an ever dwindling activist fringe of individuals dedicated to an increasingly less relevant Muslim ‘position’ about society.”

R.P. Mitchell, **The Society of the Muslim Brothers** (London, 1969), p.vii.

2. Article in the **New Statesman** in 1979, quoted by Fred Halliday himself in *The Iranian Revolution and its Implications*, **New Left Review**, 166 (November December 1987), p.36.

3. Interview with the Communist Movement of Algeria (MCA) in **Socialisme Internationale** (Paris, June 1990). The MCA itself no longer exists.

4. F. Halliday, **op. cit.**, p.57.

5. For an account of the support given by different left organisations to the Islamists see P. Marshall, **Revolution and Counter Revolution in Iran** (London, 1988), pp.60-68 and pp.89-92; M. Moaddel, **Class, Politics and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution** (New York, 1993), pp.215-218; V. Moghadan, *False Roads in Iran*, **New Left Review**, p.166.

6. Pamphlet quoted in R.P. Mitchell, **op. cit.**, p.127.

7. A.S. Ahmed, **Discovering Islam** (New Delhi, 1990), pp.61-64.

8. For an account of Afghan Sufism, see O. Roy, **Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan** (Cambridge, 1990), pp.38-44. For Sufism in India and Pakistan, see A.S. Ahmed, **op. cit.**, pp.90-98.

9. I. Khomeini, **Islam and Revolution** (Berkeley, 1981), quoted in A.S. Ahmed, **op. cit.** p.31.

10. O. Roy, **op. cit.**, p5. A leading Islamist, Hassan al-Turabi, leader of the Sudanese Islamic Brotherhood, argues exactly the same, calling for an Islamicisation of society because “religion can become the most powerful motor of development”, in *Le nouveau reveil de l’Islam*, **Liberation** (Paris), 5 August, 1994.

11. E. Abrahamian, **Khomeinism** (London, 1993), p.2.

12. **Ibid.**

13. *Who is responsible for violence?* in **l’Algerie par les Islamistes**, edited by M. Al Ahnaf, B. Botivewau and F. Fregosi (Paris, 1990), pp.132ff.

14. **Ibid.**, p.31.

15. G. Kepel, **The Prophet and the Pharaoh, Muslim Extremism in Egypt** (London, 1985), p.109.

16. See, for example, K. Pfeifer, **Agrarian Reform Under State Capitalism in Algeria** (Boulder, 1985), p.59; C Andersson, **Peasant or Proletarian?** (Stockholm, 1986), p.67; M. Raffinot and P. Jacquemot, **Le Capitalisme d’état Algerien** (Paris, 1977).

17. J.P. Entelis, **Algeria, the Institutionalised Revolution** (Boulder, 1986), p.76.

18. **Ibid.**

26. E. Abrahamian, **The Iranian Mojahedin** (London, 1989), pp.107, 201, 214, 225-226.

27. M. Moaddel, **op. cit.**, pp.224-238.

28. A. Bayat, **Workers and Revolution in Iran** (London, 1987), p.57.

29. A. Tabari, *Islam and the Struggle for Emancipation of Iranian Women*, in A. Tabari and N. Yeganeh, **In the Shadow of Islam: the Women's Movement in Iran**.

30. O. Roy, **op. cit.**, pp.68-69.

31. M. Al-Ahnaf, B Botivewau and F. Fregosi, **op. cit.**

32. A. Rouadia, **op. cit.**.

33. **Ibid.**

34. **Ibid.**

35. In 1989, of 250,000 who took exams, only 54,000 obtained the bac, **Ibid.**, p.137.

44. G. Kepel, **op. cit.**, p.129.

45. **Ibid.**, p.137.

46. **Ibid.**, pp.143-44.

47. **Ibid.**, p.85.

48. **Ibid.**, p.95-96.

49. **Ibid.**, p.149.

50. For an account of this period see, for example, A. Dabat and L. Lorenzano, **Conflicto Malvinense y Crisis Nacional** (Mexico, 1982), pp.46-8.

51. M. Al-Ahnaf, B. Botivewau and F. Fregosi, **op. cit.**, p.34.

52. Phil Marshall's otherwise useful article, *Islamic Fundamentalism – Oppression and Revolution*, in **International Socialism** 40, falls down precisely because it fails to distinguish between the anti-imperialism of bourgeois movements faced with colonialism and that of petty bourgeois movements facing independent capitalist states integrated into the world system. All his stress is on the role these movements can play as they "express the struggle against imperialism". This is to forget that the local state and the local bourgeoisie are usually the immediate agent of exploitation and oppression in the Third World today-something which some strands of radical Islamism do at least half recognise (as when Qutb describes states like Egypt as "non-Islamic").

It also fails to see that the petty bourgeoisie limitations of Islamist movements mean that their leaders, like those of movements like Peronism before them, often use rhetoric about "imperialism" to justify an eventual deal with the local state and ruling class while deflecting bitterness into attacks on those minorities they identify as local agents of "cultural imperialism". Marshall is therefore mistaken to argue that revolutionary Marxists can follow the same approach to Islamism as that developed by the early, pre-Stalinist Comintern in relation to the rising anti-colonial movements of the early 1920s. We must certainly learn from the early Comintern that you can be on the same side as a certain movement (or even state) in so far as it fights imperialism, while at the same time you strive to overthrow its leadership and disagree with its politics, its strategy and its tactics. But that is not at all the same as saying that the bourgeois and petty bourgeois Islamism of the 1990s is the same as the bourgeois and petty bourgeois anti-colonialism of the 1920s.

Otherwise we can fall into the same mistake the left in countries like Argentina did during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when they supported the nationalism of their own bourgeoisie on the grounds that they lived in "semi-colonial states".

As A. Dabat and L. Lorenzano have quite rightly noted, "The Argentine nationalist and Marxist left confused ... the association (of their own rulers) with the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie and their diplomatic servility in the face of the US army and state with political dependency ('semi-colonialism', 'colonialism'), which led to its most radical and determined forces to decide to call for an amid struggle for 'the second independence'. In reality, they were faced with something quite different. The behaviour of any government of a relatively weak capitalist country (however independent its state structure is) is necessary 'conciliatory', 'capitulationist' when it comes to meeting its own interests ... in getting concessions from imperialist governments or firms ... or consolidating alliances ... with these states. These types of action are in essence the same for all bourgeois governments, however nationalist they consider themselves. This does not affect the structure of the state and its relationship with the process of self-expansion and reproduction of capital on the national scale (the character of the state as a direct expression of the national dominant classes and not as an expression of the imperialist states and bourgeoisies of other countries)." **Conflicto Malvinense y Crisis Nacional, op. cit.**, p.70.

53. E. Abrahamian, **Khomeinism, op. cit.**, p.3.

54. **Ibid.**, p.17.

55. O. Roy, **op. cit.**, p.71.

56. M. Al-Ahnaf, B. Botivewau and F. Fregosi, **op. cit.**, pp.26-27.

128. This was the quite correct description of the ideas of the People's Mojahedin provided by the section of the leadership and membership who split away in the mid-1970s to form the organisation that later took the name Paykar. Unfortunately, this organisation continued to base itself on guerrillaism and Maoism rather than genuine revolutionary Marxism.

129. V. Moghadam, *Women, Work and Ideology in the Islamic Republic*, **International Journal of Middle East Studies**, 1988, p.230.

130. **Ibid.**, p.227.

131. **Ibid.**

132. E. Abrahamian, **Khomeinism, op. cit.**, p.16.