

coherence within and across the various local communities throughout the urban cultural centers of Islam.

This civilization went into eclipse with the steady degeneration of society. More particularly, its fate was bonded to the polity in more ways than one. It suffered its decline before the dramatic oscillation in fortune that overtook the successive dynastic states and the imperial mentors who had sustained its edifice through various points in time. Yet, Islamic civilization retains an essential validity that survives its historicity. To the extent that we encounter in it a model where a dominant order came to accommodate in principle the differences among its constituents and where in practice it protected the autonomy of its communities, there is something to be learned from it in any future attempt to restructure the contemporary regional order.

4. The State: Power and Polity ***Marginalizing the Center***

This is another facet of the Muslim historical reality which needs to be seen within its socio-cultural context. It carries direct implications for the contemporary political setting in the region. By now it is clear that Islam prescribes more than an ethical code for individuals to observe in their daily conduct. It is incumbent on a Muslim to strive to set up an equitable order where justice and goodness may be practiced. At the same time, Islam requires a public order that can assure the community the conditions necessary to fulfilling its religious obligations. The understanding of political obligation in the community is a function of the legitimacy of this order.

The basis of the legitimately conceived public order is the shar'i'ah, which constitutes the constitutional framework for a Muslim polity and provides the criteria for legitimacy in the system.³¹ The fundamental relationship between the ruler and the ruled is essentially of the contractual variety, embodied in an oath of allegiance, or a *bay'ah*,

31. For an overview of current scholarship and future prospects in Islamic political theory see the introduction by Mumtaz Ahmad in his edited volume on *State, Politics and Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986). The authors discuss different concepts and aspects of conventional political thought in a comparative context and attempt to relate them to issues facing modern Muslim polities.

which delegates power from the community to its leaders.³² In this *bay'ah* the community pledges its support, and obedience, as long as its political leadership, its *imarah*, observes the spirit of its founding 'constitution'. In this way, the ruler was vested with executive powers to implement the public order over which he presided and to represent the *ummah* as political community. In a world of diverse political entities, a form of "sovereign statehood" conceived as the *khilāfah*, was the ultimate symbol of the historical and political unity of the *ummah*. Meanwhile, the *sharī'ah*, as the foundation of that public order and the *raison d'être* of the polity had its qualified and publicly acknowledged experts, the *'ulamā'*, whose task it was to develop a derivative legislative corpus, a *fiqh tashrī'ī*, that would be contingent on the evolution and needs of society. Ideally, the spirit of the Islamic polity combined elements

32. Some key concepts are formally defined in a more typical legalistic format as in Manzooruddin Ahmed, *Islamic Political System in the Modern Age* (Saad, Karachi, 1966) Ch. 2 & 3. Systematic work on Muslim political thought from a political science perspective is more limited. Hamid Enayat's *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London & Basingstoke: the Macmillan Press, 1982) was one of the better known attempts in this line and Kalim Siddiqui's attempts at interpreting the Islamic movement and world order—eg. *Beyond the Muslim Nation-States* (London: The Open Press, 1982)—are original but less well known. Certain areas have traditionally received more attention than others, like contract theory and the *khilāfah* in a field that was traditionally the preserve of scholars with a background in constitutional law or Islamic jurisprudence: eg. Muhammad S. el 'Awa, *The Islamic Political System* (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1980) or for an even more succinct and refreshing statement see Hassan al Turabi, "The Islamic State" in J. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Standard Arabic works on Islamic political thought include Muhammad Diyā' al Dīn al Rayes, *Al Naẓariyāt al Siyāsīyah al Islāmīyah* (Cairo: n.p. 1967) and M. Fathi Osman, *Min Usūl al Fikr al Siyāsī al Islāmī* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al Risala, 1984); Outside the academy there is also the ideological approach which has influenced a generation of writers and activists beyond the *jama'at* in Pakistan. This is best represented in the writings of Sayyid Abu 'A'la al Maududi which have contributed to reshaping the politicised consciousness of the "modernists" through popularizing such concepts as *Hākimiyyah* and *Inqilāb Islāmī* among others; and even more incisive and influential, has been Sayyid Qutb's contribution to elaborating a political thought, eg. *Khaṣā'iṣ al Taṣawwur al Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuhu*. Examples of a new category of scholarship combining classical Muslim and contemporary approaches in original and critical perspectives may be found in some recently submitted dissertations. Eg. Nasr M. 'Arif, "*Al Tanmīyah al Siyāsīyah min Manẓūr Islāmī*" [*Islamic Perspectives on Political Development*], M.Sc. dissertation, Cairo University, 1988) and Seifeddin A. F. Ismail, "*Al Tajdīd al Siyāsī fī al Nuẓum al 'Arabīyah*" (Renewal in Arab Politics, Ph.D. dissertation, Cairo University, 1987).

of the authoritative and the consensual.³³ It drew its authoritativeness from the principles enunciated in *wahy* - (Qur'ān and Sunnah), its divinely inspired moorings; its consensuality was itself contingent on the authority mandated its community by these very principles.

The State in the Islamic tradition has no separate and corporate existence apart from, or above, its constituent community. Its authority, as well as its rationality, are derived, not original. In this way, the state that has been central to the historical experience of Islam has little to do with the conception of the sovereign and autonomous territorial entity that provides the foundation of the modern European experience. Despite however the coherence of the ideal and the norm of governance in the Islamic tradition, its institutional expression was rarely perfected and periodically the community paid the price of the excesses and aberrations of its power politics. This involved it in many compromises for the sake of maintaining the essentials of the sharī'ah-based public order it cherished and for assuring the continuity of the historical agency of its protection and representation. It was not until the colonial episode, and its aftermath, that these foundations were eventually undermined and that an attempt was made to supplant them in a controlled and simulated setting that went beyond the indigenous capabilities for resistance.

While the political governance of the Community has been central to the Islamic historical experience, it has also constituted one of its weakest links. Typical of this ambiguity is its position at the forefront of the historical counter-offensive in the modern imperialist onslaught of a steadily aggrandizing Europe, and its persistence to the very end as a last line of defense for the political community. By the middle of the 19th century, the sources, the direction and pace of the faltering state-induced reforms attempted in the shadows of the rising civilizational

33. These justly contribute to the distinctiveness of an Islamic political theory which could be developed around core concepts like *marjī'iyah* (ultimate referent), *hākīmīyah* (ultimate arbitrating authority), *ijmā'* (beyond judicial consensus), *shūrā*, *ta'āf* (concord), etc. Most work on Islamic political theory brings up these concepts whether in addressing contract theory, or *ummah*, or *khilāfah*. The area is admittedly underdeveloped and bound to juridical, historical or descriptive perspectives – with little attempt at systematically synthesizing and relating these concepts. Currently the author is developing a paradigm of the Muslim polity (*al dawlah al sharī'ah*) – originally conceived and printed in course-work format. See *Mudhakkirāt fī dirāsāt al nuzum al siyāsīyah al 'arabīyah: madkhal minhājī* (Faculty of Economics and Politics, Cairo University, 1983).

hegemony of the West, were a witness to the receding, rather than to the staying power of the Muslim polity. By then, the *ummah* community had seen its civilization well into eclipse, its society in stagnation and its polity in utter decadence. The final spectacle of this ebbing tide was dramatized in the formal abrogation of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924.

As an effective power political institution in the international context of the times, the Caliphate may hardly have been very compelling. It should be remembered however that the Ottoman State had endured for nearly six centuries, and that it was heir to a tradition that went beyond it to the imperial Muslim polities that had preceded it. To the very last, the sultanate, the Ottoman State, had remained an effective symbol of the political unity of the *ummah*, and of its existence as a realizable historical entity. If in the last decades of the century it had become the "sick man of Europe" and was thoroughly vulnerable to all the surreptitious and sapping influences that went with disease, it still provided a structure and reference point for the impending anarchy in the region that was brought on by the scramble for power among its voracious European claimants in what was euphemistically dubbed the 'Eastern Question'.³⁴ In modern annals this is presented as a chapter in European diplomacy. From an Islamic perspective, and viewed in retrospect, this constitutes the record of an internal disintegration marking the collapse of the historical frame of reference of the political community. Henceforth, a new political idiom would emerge that would necessarily consecrate the dissolution and fragmentation of a historically familiar community in the name of a new myth of authority and identity.³⁵

34. In addition to the classical sources on the subject, see Langer, W. *The Diplomacy of Imperialism 1890-1902* (New York, 1951) and Anderson, M. S. see references for *The Eastern Question 1774-1923*: M.S. Anderson; more recently L. Carl Brown has reinterpreted the politics of the region in modern times in terms of the durability of the systemic dynamics of the Eastern Question. See *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

35. The idea of the Islamic Congresses conceived in the latter part of the nineteenth century and peaking in the thirties was an original attempt to forestall the disintegration of the community but according to Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), it was foredoomed in the circumstances.

Today, well into the third cycle³⁶ of the epoch of the new politics of the region, the polity remains the most vulnerable component and the most visible sore in Muslim society. The periodic tensions that may have arisen in the past between polity and society, had always been institutionally mediated in a setting where in principle polity and society were of the same world. Today, the same language between the rulers and the people does not go beyond its formal expression, the lines and the dots, but not the meaning which the symbols stand for. There is no consensus on the ultimate values in this socio-cultural setting and no acknowledged or trusted mediators that can bridge the divide between the one entity and the other. The balance of power may fluctuate from one part of the region to the other, and there is no question about the crushing weight and potential of the new state there. The exceptions to this rule are an expedient reminder of the ultimate fragility of the post-colonial order and testify to the folly of identifying Leviathan with political community.

The general estrangement between polity and society in the modern era will perhaps be remembered by future generations as one of the most conspicuous and least savory of its landmarks.³⁷ It certainly sets the

36. This tripartite classification is particularly popular in contemporary scholarship on the Maghreb and North Africa and has been used in distinguishing moments in the political and cultural evolution of the region. Abdallah Laroui, *L'ideologie Arabe Contemporaine* (Paris: Maspero, 1970); Elbaki Hermassi in *Leadership and National Development in North Africa* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972, California); Paul Balta, *L'Islam dans le Monde* (Paris: La Decouverte, Le Monde, 1986), p. 146. This classification is used here to distinguish between the colonial moment as it verged onto the struggle for independence—the first cycle—and the subsequent post-colonialist phases ushered in by an early “liberal moment” that was terminated by a military coup inaugurating a more “radical moment”—the second and third cycles respectively. Egypt provides the classic case to this pattern typical of the Arab constituency in the region. Variations naturally exist in the Ottoman metropole and in Iran owing to the differential impact of the colonial episode which is the index demarcating the postulated cycles.

37. While the confrontation between the ruling regime in Damascus and the popular Islamic movement there may not be unique in the region, yet it took a dramatic turn in the early eighties which publicized the cleavage when a historical section of Hama was razed to the ground, and according to conservative estimates, 10,000-15,000 of its inhabitants perished. One of the first media reactions, in an otherwise muted affair, appeared in a feature article by Paul Maler, “Ls société Syrienne contre son état,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (April, 1980), documenting the early moments of a brutal climax. Retrospective accounts of the balance of power in the regime are found by Raymond Hinnebusch in Shireen Hunter, ed., *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism* (Bloomington:

limits and constraints on evolving an order to match the precedent of the *pax islamica* in history. The repercussions of this discrepancy are practical. The fragility of the political set-up in the Middle East, the acuteness of the problem of legitimacy in most regimes, the pervasiveness of the elements of coercion and repression embedded in the precarious stability, and general volatility throughout the region are merely some poignant reflections of this aspect. How this state of affairs came about, what it has given rise to, and where it may be leading, provides us with a turning point away from the structural premises to the evolutionary dynamic in reconstructing the political parameters of the region. In short, the focus will shift from Islam as the founding and organizing principle of a historical order in the region, to the colonial episode as the watershed and the catalyst to events and consequences that have become symptomatic of the contemporary order.

5. The Colonial Episode: A Historical Rupture

The Implosion of a Prism

The colonial experience essentially represents a fissure in the temporal continuum of the socio-cultural entity. The latter part of the 18th century witnessed the unfolding of the practical consequences of a fateful event a century earlier. In retrospect, the abortion of the second siege of Vienna in 1683, and the retreat of the Ottomans, had signaled an epochal reversal in the balance of power to the disadvantage of Muslim political history. Henceforth, the Muslims would come to experience the weight of the encounter with the modern West in an immediate and fateful manner. Their history would become mediated, second hand, history modulated to a pace and tune conducted by the Other.

From then on Muslim societies were beset with a complex of tensions arising from a dissonant encounter between two sets of realities reacting upon one another in a colliding trajectory. One reality runs a course-track that is truncated, without being fully exhausted, nor being adequately supplanted or supplantable. The other reality is superimposed

Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 39-56; Michael Hudson, "The Islamic Factor in Syrian and Iraqi Politics," in J. P. Piscatori, ed., *Islam in the Political Process* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983); Henry Munson, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1988). In contrast to the secular sociological perspectives of a detached academia inside accounts are few: Umar Abdullah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1983).