

THE PLACE OF THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN THE WESTERN REPRESENTATION OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

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AN ANALOGICAL CONSTRUCTION OF "THE THREE
FUNDAMENTALISMS" FUELS AN EMOTIONAL DETRACTION OF
THE ISLAMIC ACTORS

Islamic movements as political actors are a major component of the dominant western representation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The (French and Western) dominant analogical construction of " three fundamentalisms" (Christian, Jew and Muslim) often fuels an " over-ideologization " of the reading of the conflict as well as that of most internal political dynamics in the region.

- Islamic actors are only apprehended in the frame of a sweeping denunciation of "all fundamentalisms " allowing Western opinion to refuse acknowledging the " plain " nationalist dimension of the Palestinian demands whenever it is expressed in the Islamic idioms. Speaking out in an undifferentiated way against " fundamentalisms" conceals the refusal to take into account claims and resistances far more legitimate than their reading through a religious lens may suggest. Used for the three monoteistic religions, this constructed analogy masks the major impact of the conflictual imbalance between the " Judeo-Christian " North and the " Muslim " South and the various domination effects that result of it. It also hides the structural differences between the political settings of the "Muslim", "Christian " and " Jewish " protagonists ; it thereby masks the whole secular dimension of an " islamist " mobilization that is too quickly locked up in its sole religious dimension while it actually serves to carry more widely cultural but also political (nationalist or even democratic) claims ; The so called " competition between the two (Jewish and Muslim) fundamentalism is thus put forward to " explain " the failures of the Israeli-Palestinian peace protest, at the expense of the essential political factor that isthe continuation of the military occupation of one side by the other ". Thus the rise of the "fundamentalist danger" remains the only factor used to explain the Algerian civil war, at the expense of any other

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secular explanation to the origin of violence and to the means to put an end to it.

The "competition between the two fundamentalism", both the Jewish and the Muslim one, is still put forth to "explain" the failures of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, at the expense of the essential political factor that is... the continuation of the military occupation of one side by the other. The near similarity in the means of action between these two "extremes" thus allows to elude the question of their respective causes. In Algiers, it allows at best to put in the same category instigators and victims of a military coup and of the large-scale repression and manipulation of information that followed, and at worst to purely and simply invert the blame. The Islamist generation, which's scope of activities is much wider than violence, plays a role within the internal (Arab) and regional (Israeli-Arab conflict) order that is not only larger but also very different from that of the "re-Christianization" or "re-Judaization" movements. It does so in national and regional settings that are very different from those of the actors of the North, differences which are denied by the "three fundamentalisms". The common factor among the political contexts where islamists are found is the absence of any possibility for political elite change by institutional means or even only for serious parliamentary participation; also, the islamists are part of a geopolitical block that, within the "new order" at the regional and world level is on the losing side; on the opposite, "new born Christians" and other Jewish Orthodox "men in black" are active within democratic and liberal political systems, and at the regional and world level are on the "winning side". After closer examination, it is not surprising to observe that today most of the Mediterranean State leaders are brandishing the "fundamentalist threat". The outlawing of those who - in every Arab country as well as in the regional or world political order - are often on the front line of protest movements serves as a means to reduce to the emotional and irrational realm all oppositions and resistances, as legitimate as they may be, to those wielding power in the national, regional, and international political order. If you're the Arab leader of a military junta that has mastered the art of manipulation through terror, you may present yourself as a "bulwark against fundamentalism". You will thereby immediately gain the unbounded trust of international financial institutions, and you will be able to fill your jails and your ballot boxes and to run down durably any alternative to your own autocratic rule, even if it is made up of a very wide front including secular forces, in the way of the Algerian signatories to the Treaty of Rome. If you can make your opponent appear as a fundamentalist", and if you're an Israeli, you will be able to delegitimize the large number of Palestinians disappointed with the Oslo Agreement (٦) and to further strengthen your arrogant military and media supremacy.

Finally, if you're a Western (i.e. French) "republican" leader or thinking of becoming one, you know that, as the present and future National Front supporters

are there to periodically remind you, using the "fundamentalist threat" can turn your fellow citizens' distress in the face of (the general powerlessness regarding) the economic crisis into valuable electoral gains. We are here definitely far from a universal "return of God".

III THE SHARM AL SHEIKH SYNDROM : THE "EMOTIONAL" DETRACTION OF POLITICAL ISLAM IS ALSO THE RESULT OF A NORTH-SOUTH STATES MEN COOPERATION

In Western public opinion the first reason for " automatical " and emotional detraction of the role of islamist movements stems from fears intensified by a long conflictual history - At times, Arabs regimes themselves will amplify this dangerous reaction whenever it serves their interest. The difficulty of rationally assessing the role of the Islamic movements thus stems partly from the joint (media and political) battle that the southern as well as the northern State leaders (The Arab regimes as well as the Israeli leadership and its western supporters) are waging against this new generation of their protesters.

At Sharm al Cheikh in March ١٩٩٦, under the label of " the struggle against terrorism ", the Arab, Israeli and Western political establishments, uniting their discourses to denounce the last (islamist) generation of their common opponents, have institutionalized this new brand of North-South cooperation. In a very significant way, the most media-covered Algerian proponent of "eradication" had come a few days earlier to Israel sending out a "call to the free world" to "fight" the sole enemy of the day : terrorism, a term referring at once to : -all forms of armed resistance to the repressive campaign launched in Algeria in January ١٩٩٢ against the party that won the ١٩٩٠ and ١٩٩١ elections; -those from the Palestinian resistance movement who used violence to counter the Israeli occupier's use of violence against the population of the (more than ever) occupied territories.

The Sharm-el-Cheikh meeting has somehow cristallized a very reductionist view which tends to put the blame for political tensions on the (Islamic) "vocabulary " of the new generation of opponents (to both the Arab leadership and the American-Israeli new " international order ") mainly to avoid taking their demands into consideration.

