

First draft

Not for quotation

**THE RISE OF ISLAMISM IN THE LIGHT OF EUROPEAN
TOTALITARIANISM**

MEHDI MOZAFFARI

Mehdi@ps.au.dk

University of Aarhus

ABSTRACT

This article is an account of the origins of Islamism in the context of the rise of European totalitarian movements. The study aims to demonstrate that Islamism arose in the same temporal space and nearly in the same geographical area as European totalitarian movements: Bolshevism, Fascism and Nazism. A comparative analysis of general reactions to World War I shows remarkable similarities between the anomie experienced by some Europeans and Muslims which gave rise to attempts to create an alternative politico-cultural order to existing modernity. .

INTRODUCTION

Empires rise, flourish and then perish. This has been the rule in history.¹ That several empires fall simultaneously is an unusual phenomenon. Nevertheless, this is what happened in the aftermath of

of World War I, when four empires, located almost on the same continent (Europe), collapsed simultaneously: the German, the Austria-Hungarian, the Russian, and the Ottoman Empires. It significantly weakened two other empires (the French and the British), and caused a deep crisis in recently united Italy.

An empire represents the core and a centre of an entire politico-cultural system. The demise of an empire is thus always a highly dramatic event. It puts an end to a particular form of macro-political organisation - a state – which has often enjoyed a period of sustained power and cultural hegemony. When an imperial regime is defeated in one way or another, it affects directly and often dramatically changes the destiny of a huge number of people as well as the fate of a significant number of regions, provinces and territories. In general, the fall of an empire is a violent event and provokes general chaos in the former empire as well as uncertainty and instability among its neighbours. One of the important functions of empires is to provide their subjects with an identity. Consequently, the demise of an empire creates a crisis of identity and hence a general state of what Émile Durkheim described as anomie. The more powerful an empire is, the more dramatically its fall is experienced, and the deeper the resultant crisis of identity is among the ethnic and confessional groupings whose existence it once underpinned.

It is true that the crisis of Europe prior to World War I started as early as in the second half of the 19th century. When Nietzsche said ‘Europe is sick’ and ‘God is dead’, many Europeans began to clearly perceive a ‘sign of the expiration of their planetary centrality which they could understand only in terms of a modern mysticism’.² World War I made the crisis irreversible, and the decline was no longer a future destiny but the present reality of Europe.³

A careful study of the historical facts does not leave any doubt that after the war, two different but closely related feelings dominated the spirit of the European intellectuals, particularly in the defeated empires. On one side, there was a feeling of ‘disenchantment’ and on the other side a

strong will to 'restore' the empire or recreate the socio-political and anomic certainties bound up with the previous system. Translated into political terms this led to a wave of ultra-conservative (restorationist) and totalitarian (revolutionary) politic-cultural movements. Roger Griffin observes that 'the unprecedented depth that disenchantment had reached created a vast potential constituency of post-war individuals eager to re-erect the sacred canopy, "rebuild the house" on the rubble of the nineteenth-century world devastated by the war, and 'start time anew'.⁴

Post-war extremism moves in two diametrically opposed directions. The conservative right wing followed a 'nostalgic' path, the ultimate goal of which remained the restoration of past stability and nomic certainties within a new imperial order, albeit in a modernised form. In contrast, the revolutionary right and left wing chose a 'tragic' path of adventurism by struggling for the realisation of a new revolutionary project at any price, which in the case of Fascism and Bolshevism ultimately led to inner collapse and of Nazism self-destruction as the result of the cataclysmic war it had unleashed.

The disenchantment was broad and expressed at great length, especially among German intellectuals. It was at this epoch that Oswald Spengler wrote his famous book *The Decline of the West*, first published in 1918. Disappointment at the unsatisfactory output of the war had a decisive impact on sociologists such as Max Weber. The same year in which *The Decline of the West* was published, Weber spoke of the future in his two celebrated parallel lectures 'Politics as a Vocation' and 'Science as a Vocation' as something far from 'the flowering of summer but a polar night of icy darkness and hardness.'⁵ In the second lecture, he noted that 'the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and *above all* by the 'disenchantment of the world' (my emphasis).⁶ Though he was overtly referring to the impact of rationalisation on traditional society, the subtext was an observation of the anomic conditions of post-1918 modernity.

The 'disenchantment' was also felt by French and Russian intellectuals. In 1919, the French author Paul Valéry announced the beginning of a new Age of Anxiety and wrote an article with the title "The Crisis of the Mind", which was first published in a British review. According to Valéry, the crisis had deep roots in the European civilisation itself. However, he saw World War I as a moment of revelation to Europe.⁷ In Paris, a group of writers and artists launched a protest against everything (Dadaism). Everything is nonsense: literature, art, morality, civilisation. Act is vain, art is vain, and everything is absurd. In 1923, the Russian writer Nicolay Berdayev published a successful book entitled *The New Middle Ages*. Like Spengler, Berdayev combined all miseries of modernity: individualisation, the atomisation of culture, limitless desire, the growth of populations and needs, the decline of faith, and the growing sterility of spiritual life into an image of decline.⁸ At the same time, it is noteworthy that while Spengler, a German historian, talked about the decline of the West, his British colleague Arnold Toynbee claimed that the West was well-equipped to resist the temptation of despair in his monumental work *A Study of History* (1934-61).⁹ It should be noted that Hasan al-Banna, the founder of *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* [the Muslim Brotherhood], had studied Spengler, Spencer and Toynbee. He obviously was unconcerned by the decline of the West. Neither did he differentiate between the European victorious and defeated countries. To him, the West represented a compact block without any possible differentiation. In his opinion, the most important aspects were, of course, the decline of Islam and the dispersion of Muslims under the domination of western powers.

The prevalence of disenchantment led to the rise of various types of extremism in Europe. This is what Hannah Arendt calls 'Pan-Movements'. In her view, 'Nazism and Bolshevism owe more to Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism (respectively) than to any other ideology or political movement'.¹⁰ The same goes for Pan-Islam which, from the end of the 19th century onwards, was thought to be an invariable claim and a fixed project of each and every Islamist movement. The

primary goal of the Pan-Islamist movement was to unify Muslims against the colonial rule, indeed a necessary phase in the process of reconstructing of a new, powerful Islamic empire.

The European extremist movements took power, first in Russia in 1917, then in Italy in 1922 and finally in Germany in 1933. However, the flourishing of extremism was not limited to these countries; other countries were witnessing the same phenomenon: in Austria (*Heimwehr*), in Spain (*Juntas*, later *Falange Espanola*), in France (*Action Française*, among others), in Hungary, in Romania and elsewhere.¹¹ In this context we may claim that the rise of extremism clearly indicated that the war marked an end to an era dominated by the striving for gradual progress, rationalism and moderation born of the Enlightenment project. The crisis of the West was no longer a subjective matter for the intelligentsia, but an objective, concrete reality manifesting itself in every sphere of society. Totalitarian ideologues soon found their own explanation for the breakdown of history. To Hitler, the collapse of the German nation in the years following 1918 was bitter and manifest. He blamed the defeat on the German politicians and on Marxists and Jews in particular.

According to Italian Fascists, the war was a national necessity ‘in order to finally unite the nation through the shedding of blood’.¹² To Giovanni Gentile, one of the most famous ideologue of Fascism, the Great War was vital in order to bring the nation together –to turn it into a true nation, real, alive, capable of acting, and ready to make itself valued and important in the world, and in order for Italy to enter into history with its own originality, never again to live on the borrowed culture of others.¹³ He positively evaluated the consequence of war for Italy, because the war gave birth to the new Italy of *Risorgimento*. However, he was not content to witness that the ‘Italian victory in the Great War was transformed into defeat’, not so much because of Italy’s military defeat, but because of the Italians’ increasing attraction to the democratic ideology, especially after the United States’ intervention in 1917, which ‘brought with it the acceptance of a democratic ideology of the worst kind, that of Woodrow Wilson’.¹⁴

Renzo De Felice once considered fascism an exclusively European phenomenon (which can easily be extended to other forms of European totalitarianism), asserting that ‘no comparison can be made with situations outside Europe, whether of the same period or later, because of radical differences in historical contexts developed within the time span encompassed by two World Wars’.¹⁵ He also stresses that, though Fascism had pre-1914 ‘roots and preconditions’, these were ‘marginal’ and that ‘nothing indicates that they would have developed without the direct and indirect trauma of World War I’.¹⁶

Yet while some post-1945 scholars have insisted on the uniqueness of Fascism, there were Fascist writers who, on the contrary, saw it as having profound historical parallels with other revolutionary movements in history. While some compared it to Bolshevism, Gino Cerbella, propagandist and assistant consul under Mussolini, in his book *Fascismo e Islamismo* (1938/XVI of the Fascist calendar), intriguingly argued that ‘Fascism can in a certain sense be called the Islam of the twentieth century’.¹⁷ In the first chapter, the author puts forth a series of arguments to underpin the claim that the action of Mussolini in the 20th century was comparable to the mission of Muhammad in the 7th century. The fusion of religion and politics in one single ideology constitutes the focal point of the comparison:

Like Muhammad, Mussolini is the founder of an empire and a religion. The first-mentioned gave his people the privilege of a superior religious faith; the second, the benefit of a superior political faith: both of them, while designing and carrying out territorial conquests, aimed above all at worldly and spiritual domination. Muhammad laid the foundation of a theocratic State; Mussolini the foundation of the State’s theocracy; thus, the first mentioned created the religious State; the second, the religion of the State. (p. 14)

Cerbella moreover insists on the process of elimination of all other convictions than this religious-political ideology:

The Arab prophet denied asylum for religious fetishism, the Italian one did not concede it to political idolatry. The Meccan preached to the Pagans the faith of a single religion; the Italian, the religion of

a single faith. Muhammad transformed the worshippers of all the gods into believers in one and only God; Mussolini reduced the devotees of all the ideas into followers of one and only Party. (p. 14)

Gino Cerbella moreover believes the methods of expanding both faiths present the following analogy: 'The masses (...) knock down and destroy, with blood and in blood, the ancient faiths.' (p. 13). Although violence is seen as a legitimate means in expanding the new ideology, one remarkable exception crowns the experience of the two leaders: 'The March on Mecca was like the March on Rome: the march of liberation. The two war captains conquered the mother-city of their own lineage, without shedding the fraternal veins' blood.' (p. 17). The return to what Cerbella names the 'mother-city', respectively Roma and Mecca, also implies the symbolic transformation of a place:

The Ka'ba, which had hosted all the idols, became in one stroke the most venerated temple of Islam; just like Montecitorio, which had witnessed the triumph of all faiths and the adoration of all the believers, became the sanctuary of the reborn Word of Rome. (p. 17)

Cerbella also sees a similarity between the lives of the founders of the ideologies, as well in their childhood: 'They both were born and lived in the misery which was their parent, even before their own mother', and during the first steps of their mission: 'The day of their first mission had more enemies than followers. Calumny and aversion, derision and insult of the majority, who in life are of minor worth, were for them the highest consecration.' (p.16). But the spiritual strength of the founder assured the final victory of the minority he was leading: 'They kindled in the first kernel of believers the spark of Truth, which with the powerful blow of their passion became fire of the masses' (p. 16). Cerbella considers the missions of both Muhammad and Mussolini to be of a universal character: 'Their life and their works do not only belong to the story of their country, but to the story of humanity' (p. 16).

It is important to stress that the nostalgia for a metaphysical home or ‘nomos’ experienced so keenly by fascists after WW1, did not express itself in the bid to restore a lost golden age, but to realize a utopian future which often *drew* on the mythicized memories of a glorious past, whether Aryan, Roman, Elizabethan, Dacian, Turinian or whatever else fitted the narrative of national rebirth. Roger Griffin in his new book, *Modernism and Fascism*, argues that European fascism was born of an overwhelming sense of the unviability of civilization in its present form: To him,

it was not despair, or ‘cultural pessimism’ – except in the ‘strong’, Nietzschean, *Dionysian* sense of ‘active’ nihilism – that shaped and misshaped post-WW1 Europe. Instead, it was the confluence and sometimes violent interaction between a proliferation of utopian projects, revitalization movements, and ideological communities called into being by the urgent need of many millions of human beings who....risked in their own way becoming ‘outcasts from Time’ and ‘flung back into an overwhelming loneliness’”.¹⁸

Griffin extends his argumentation to the Bolshevik Revolution, considering it “a *modernist* experiment in designing and building a new society carried out on an unprecedented scale of social, economic, cultural, and political transformation and regenerative zeal”, to proactively ‘make history’ by completing the transition of modernity to a ‘new era’.¹⁹

Griffin’s argument has important implications for the difference between European nostalgian conservatism and totalitarian utopianism on the one hand and Islamist nostalgia and utopianism on the other. Whereas the European totalitarian utopia is oriented towards the future which needs to be realized, the Islamist ‘utopia’ has already been realized as the Medina Model under the Prophet Muhammad. So, the future is nothing else than the *reproduction* in modern conditions of the sublime model which must be re-constructed as close to the original model as possible. In this respect, Karl Mannheim’s double definition of ‘utopia’ satisfies both positions. On the one hand, ‘because the concrete determination of what is utopian proceeds always from a certain stage of existence, it is possible that the utopias of to-day may become the realities of to-morrow’. On the other hand, ‘whenever an idea is labelled utopian it is usually by a representative of an epoch that has already passed’.²⁰

MUSLIM REACTIONS

With this important distinction in mind, it can be asserted that a significant constituency of Muslims –reacted in the same way as Europeans to the cataclysmic events of 1918-1914 and their aftermath: with nostalgia, melancholia (*hüzün*) as the Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk, the winner of

the Nobel Prize in Literature, describes Istanbul's state of mind, and a strong wish for the restoration of nomos to modernity, though in their case it was to be achieved through the restoration of the former power and glory of Islam. ²¹

The fall of the Ottoman Empire came as a shock to Muslims and particularly to the Sunnis, who make up the great majority of Muslims. Up till then and since the death of Muhammad in 632, Muslims had had an empire and a metropolis with considerable political power and somehow religious authority. Islam had enjoyed an impressive expansion, having conquered, among others, the Persian Empire, Byzantine, Syria and Egypt under the Rightly-Guided Caliphs [*Khulafâ al-Rashidûn*] from 632 to 661. The rule of the Umayyads from 661 turned the Caliphate into an empire, with Damascus as its metropolis. Islam reached its zenith under the ruling of the Abbasids (750-1258). Baghdad had become the centre of the Muslim world under this dynasty, if not the centre of the world at that age. Under the rule of the Fatimids (937-1171), Cairo became the great rival of the Abbasid capital for almost 200 years. In 1258, Baghdad was eclipsed as a cultural metropolis following the devastating blows of Hülegü (Hulagu) , the Mongol Khan. Then the Ottoman Empire came into existence (approx. 1299) remaining officially intact until 1924. Constantinople was Islamised and became Islampol/Istanbul.²² Despite the fact that Ottoman sultans, especially from the middle of the 19th century, were Caliphs of Muslims only by name without any real religious or even moral authority, Istanbul represented, after all, the metropolis of Islam and the Sublime Porte (*Bâb-i'Âlî*) of the then most powerful Muslim state. Atatürk brought the Ottoman reign to an end, and the Islamic world lost its unique centre. It should be noted that in those days, a great majority of Muslim countries were either colonised or linked to Europe under a protectorate (with the exception of Persia). A number of them were, at least formally, part of the Ottoman Empire.

After the fall of the Ottomans, Muslims suddenly found themselves facing hard realities. Not only was there no longer an Islamic empire or a Muslim metropolis, but the state replacing it (Turkey) became secular, and Islamic law was replaced by European (non-Muslim) law. The reaction of a segment of the Muslim population to this new reality was similar to that of the German Nazis and Italian Fascists. At that time, revenge and the restoration of greatness were two key words for Nazis and Islamists alike: revenge on the Allies (France and Great Britain in particular) and the creation of a new Reich and *Gross-Deutschland* for the Germans and a renewed *Khalâfat* [Caliphate] for the Muslims, not to mention a Soviet empire in a version similar to the one Peter the Great dreamed of. Meanwhile, though Italy had been on the winning side in the conflict, the emulation of the greatness of Rome (*Romanità*) became a major theme of the Fascist project of national renewal.

Rashid Rida of Syria (1865-1935) is perhaps the first Islamist ideologue to advance the thesis of restoration of the institution of the Caliphate. His book, *Al-Khalâfat aw al-Imâmat al-Uzma* [the Caliphate or the Supreme Imamate] was published on the eve of the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate (approx. 1922-23). In Rida's view, the remedy to the 'decadence of Islam' is to 'restore the dignity of the *Imamate* [Muslim Leadership], to re-establish the authority of the *ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd* [Muslim decision-makers], (...) thus to restore the true Islamic state which is the best of states, not only for the Muslims, but for the entire mankind'.²³ Rida's theory is summed up by Hamid Enayat in the following terms:

'Rida brings up the subject of the Islamic state after dealing with the problems of the Caliphate. He does this in three stages: (1) first he traces the foundations of the Caliphate in Islamic political theory; (2) then he demonstrates the cleavage between that theory and the political practice of Sunni Muslims; (3) finally he advances his own idea of what an Islamic state should be'.²⁴

Rida's ideal 'new' Caliphate is the return to the 'Arab' Caliphate instead of the 'Turkish' version.

Thus, it was in a time of ‘Pan Movements’ that Islamism as a political movement and organisation *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* [Muslim Brotherhood] was founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928, four years after the official dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate by Mustafa Pasha (later Atatürk), four years after the publishing of *Mein Kampf* by Hitler, six years after Mussolini’s March on Rome and less than 11 years after Lenin’s coming to power. Hasan al-Banna, the most influential ideologue of the Muslim intelligentsia at the time, was convinced that the defeat of the Ottoman Caliphate was the result of a conspiracy formed by the European powers. He writes:

Europe began to work earnestly at dismembering the powerful, far-flung Islamic state [Ottomans] and to lay numerous plans toward this end, referring to them at times as “the Eastern question” and others as “dividing up the inheritance of the Sick Man of Europe”. Every state proceeded to seize the opportunity as it arose, to adopt the flimsiest excuses, to attack the peaceful, negligent Islamic state, and to reduce its periphery or break off portions of its integral fabric. This onslaught continued over a long period of time, during which the Ottoman Empire was stripped of many an Islamic territory which then fell under European domination... Although these steps led to the concept of local nationalism, with each nation demanding its right to freedom as an independent entity, and while many of those who worked for this revival purposely ignored the idea of unity, nevertheless the outcome of these steps will be, without a doubt, consolidation and resurrection of the Islamic empire as a unified state embracing the scattered peoples of the Islamic world, raising the banner of Islam and bearing its message.²⁵

What is particularly striking in this account is that an Egyptian citizen deplors the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate; the same Caliphate which annexed Egypt and dominated it for centuries. A variety of factors explain why the first Islamist movement was formed in Egypt and not in Turkey. First, the transformation of the Ottoman Caliphate into the new Turkey was in fact the result of successive modernisation waves during the 19th century. *Tanzimat* [Re-adjustment/Restructuring] ‘had made possible the emergence of a well-educated bureaucracy, trained as civil servants at the *Mulkiye* [civil administration], and a highly professional officer corps, graduates of the war college, the *Harbiye* [military academy]’.²⁶ In contrast to Turkey, Egypt was colonised by the British Empire at that time, without enough room for manoeuvre to produce a civil and military elite equivalent to that of Turkey. Muhammad Ali (r. 1805-48), the modernist ruler of Egypt, had sought to introduce new forms of education and social organisation in Egypt, but his secular reforms were

not particularly successful because of the opposition from the caste of *Ulama*, whose interests were threatened by the modernisation of the Egyptian society. Furthermore, Egypt did not have a charismatic and decisive leader such as Atatürk. The organisation that arose to work for Islam's renewal was made up of army officers led by Urabi Pasha, a young and dynamic colonel in the 1880s. This group arose with the slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians', speaking in the name of the people, asking for a constitution and a change of government, in the sense not of secular reform, but of the restoration of the Islamic state. Thus, Urabi, different from Atatürk, was not a lay officer; he couched his call for reform in terms of Islamic renewal. Urabi's army (approx. 10,000 men) did not have the same military success as that of Atatürk, and it was crushed by the British occupying forces in 1882. One important factor in the rise of Islamism in Egypt was the location of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. This university is the oldest (created in 970 AD) and the most important Islamic university in the world. The presence of Al-Azhar on Egyptian soil has turned this country into the religious and spiritual centre of the Muslim world, making it more likely that an appeal to the people to adhere to the Islamic creed and return to Islam's golden age would be heard and positively answered in Egypt than in Turkey.

Apart from these factors, the most powerful explanatory element lies in the highly profiled *Nahda* [Movement] and the *Salafi* [Returning to the Fundamentals] movements in Egypt in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. In this connection, two leaders played a major role not only in Egypt but also in the rest of the Muslim world: Jamal al-Din Al-Afghani (1838-97) and his disciple Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). In our days, they continue to be considered the most authentic references for reform movement in Islam, and Islamists of different denominations acknowledge them as sources of inspiration. Since then, these trends have been clearly visible in all Islamist movements from the Muslim Brotherhood to Khomeinism. The salient points of their thinking which were to leave their stamp on present-day Islamism are:

1) the idea of Pan-Islam, which can only be realised after the liberation of Muslim territories from the yoke of colonialism and domination; 2) return to the purest sources of the first age of Islam; and 3) the selective appropriation of western technology and social institutions.

There is still another explanation and justification of the centrality of Egypt. 'Egypt', wrote al-Banna to King Faruq, is 'at the crossroads', facing two directions: 'the way of the West' and 'the way of Islam'. 'The Muslim Brothers, true to the faith, plead that the nation be restored to Islam. Egypt's role is unique, for just as Egyptian reform begins with Islam, so the regeneration of Islam must begin in Egypt, for the rebirth of "international Islam".²⁷ All these factors explain why Islamism arose in Egypt in the first place. Yet the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood did not attract much attention from the Europeans, presumably because the Muslim Brotherhood, in contrast to Fascism, Nazism and Bolshevism, did not succeed in gaining power as fast as other extremist movements. After remaining a radical protest movement for almost 50 years, Islamists first came to power in 1979. Moreover, they did so not in Egypt but in Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, and 17 years later in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

The assertion that Islamism did not come to power until 1979 needs to be qualified, however. In 1932 Saudi Arabia was founded as an independent state, and adopted Wahhabism as its official religious ideology. There is no doubt that Wahhabism, both in terms of its foundational principles and its theoretical genealogy (Ibn Taymiyya: 1263-1328 and Muhammad Abdul Wahhab: 1703-92), contains a number of elements that are representative of contemporary Islamism.²⁸ However, when we look at the temporal circumstances as well as the external behaviour of Saudi Arabia between 1932 and 1979, it can be seen that Wahhabism has been primarily an expression of Saudi 'national' identity and an instrument for creating/consolidating cohesion among ethnically and tribally diverse peoples of the peninsula. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood is an ideology proposing the returning to power of the Caliphate as a militant

institution and the Islamisation of the world. Later on, while Khomeini pursued an aggressive policy both against the United States and a majority of Muslim states which he held to be corrupt, Saudi Arabia chose an almost quietist foreign policy line and proclaimed an alliance with the United States. It was only with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 that a gradual change in the traditional policy of Saudi Arabia took place with regard to the propagation of Wahhabism, leading to vast financial support being given to pro-Wahhabi movements (Afghans, Pakistanis, Chechens, Bosniacs, etc.). The appearance of Usama bin Laden, Wahhabi and a Saudi, as the leader of *al-Qaeda* dramatically changed Wahhabism's image.

Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the Islamist revolution in Iran in 1979 marked the first establishment of an Islamist regime. As a further substantiation of this claim, it should be noted that the independence of Saudi Arabia in 1932 was, at that time, a rather minor event in its scope compared to the complexities and the range of national and international implications brought about by the revolution of Khomeini in 1979. In this context, a significant collateral consequence of the fall of the Sunni Caliphate of Istanbul should be noted, a consequence which has profoundly transformed the Sunni-Shi'a relations in the 21st century. As long as a Sunni-central Caliphate existed, the Sunni community enjoyed a broad monopoly in the Islamic legitimacy of power. It is true that Shi'a Persia also existed as a relatively strong state, in parallel with and often in antagonistic relations with the neighbouring Ottoman Empire. But the basis of Persian legitimacy diverged significantly from the Ottoman one. While the latter clearly derived its legitimacy from the Caliphate principle, the foundation of the former was not religious. Being a Shi'a country, Persia had a Shi'a king, but the legitimacy of the political regime emanated from the traditional sovereignty of the monarchy rather than from Shi'a political theory (the Imamate). The end of the Sunni Caliphate in 1924 introduced a radical, qualitative change in the concept of Sunni political legitimacy. In other words, once the Sunni Caliphate disappeared, the monopoly, or at least the

supremacy, of the Sunni political legitimacy disappeared too. The transformation of the vertical, hierarchical Sunni-Shi'a relations into dynamic, horizontal relations represents a historical and political *rupture* in Islamic history. From this moment, the road to 'sectarian relativism' was opened, and the Sunni and the Shi'a political legitimacy became –for the first time in history– potentially equal. It is in the alteration of the Sunni political doctrine that the Shi'a Islamic revolution of 1979 must be understood. Similarly, the Shi'a Revival²⁹ at the beginning of the 21st century, especially in connexion with the civil war in Iraq and the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, at the same time represents the 'Revenge of the Shi'a' after a millennium of Sunni domination.

Islamism as an *ideology* and as a *movement* became hegemonic in 1960s. Until then, authoritarianism, liberalism, nationalism and socialism represented the main political streams in the Muslim societies. The first blow to the above trends happened with the unrest in Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini (June 1963). This unrest was directed against the Shah's reform program, consisting, among others, of a land reform and women's right to vote. It was at that time that Ayatollah Khomeini became the undisputable political figure against the Shah. As the consequence of this event, the liberal and democratic movements under the moral leadership of Mohammad Mosaddeq lost their position as alternatives to the Shah's authoritarian regime. The second and far more devastating blow, especially for the Sunni Muslims, occurred in 1967 with the Six Days War, which put an end to Pan-Arabism of President Nasser of Egypt. From this date, the highly profiled discourse on Arabism changed into being only an illusion without a political future. Arabism was quickly replaced with the discourse of Islamism, especially in its most radical version, namely the version propagated by Sayyid Qutb before his execution in 1966. So, it is no exaggeration to say that Khomeini's rebellion in Iran and the fiasco of Nasser in Egypt which dealt such a hard blow to Arab self-confidence, were turning points which put an end to one era and started a new era dominated by Islamism.

CONCLUSION

The historical sketch we have given here leads to the conclusion that the eruption of contemporary Islamism has parallels with the genesis of Bolshevism, Fascism and Nazism in that it can be traced back to World War I and the profound structural crisis it precipitated, particularly, in the context of Islamism, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Disenchantment, anomie, and the desire for radical restoration or radical renewal are common trends in all extremist and totalitarian movements, although they are expressed in profoundly different ways. The time that elapsed between the formation of contemporary Islamism in 1928 and its access to government in 1979 helps explain why the affinities in the origins of Islamism and European totalitarianism have been generally overlooked. Two other major factors for this are that both as a movement (in various forms) and as a political regime, Islamism was established outside the European continent, and that totalitarianism is widely associated with secular forms of politics.

It appears evident that while Fascism, Nazism and Bolshevism are the bitter fruits of western civilisation, Islamism is a poisonous product of Islamic civilisation. This particular difference between them has resulted in confusion with regard to the inherent and invariable anti-western character of Islamism. No doubt contemporary Islamism is profoundly anti-western. But if the 'West' is characterised by capitalism, liberalism and democracy, then Fascism, Nazism and Bolshevism are - in this sense - profoundly 'anti-western' too. Each of these four totalitarian ideologies has its own specificities which make it different from the others. For example, Fascists emphasise a strong 'state', Nazis believe in the superiority of one 'race' over others, Bolsheviks focus on a specific 'class'³⁰, while the Islamists' ideal is the realisation of *Umma* under a worldwide Caliphate. Nevertheless, their common denominators are at least as substantial as their

differences with regard to their origins, in a sense of historical crisis, their utopian aspirations, their forms of leadership, and their cult of violent action.

Once the genesis of Islamism, in the form of both as movement and as political regimes, is seen mainly as a consequence of World War I, it is easier to understand the frustrations of some contemporary Muslims. In fact, the violent reaction of Islamism against liberal democracy today resembles the violence of European totalitarian movements directed at parliamentary democracy immediately after World War I. It is as if Islamists were mentally living not in the 21st century but still in the period between 1918 and 1945. In contrast to Bolshevism, Fascism and Nazism, whose final destinies are known, the fate of Islamism still remains one of the great unresolved questions of our time and, consequently, a subject of preoccupation. We may know much about how extremism rises, but we do not know how it ends.

Notes

-
- ¹ Jean-Baptist Duroselle, *Tout Empire Périra* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992).
- ² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 373.
- ³ Ibid, p. 380.
- ⁴ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2007), p. 162.
- ⁵ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation”, in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 128, and in Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (eds.), *Weber Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 368.
- ⁶ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation”, in Peter Lassman & Irving Velody (eds.), *Max Weber’s ‘Science as a Vocation’* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp 13-14, and in Gerth and Wright Mills *From Max Weber* (note 7), p. 139.
- ⁷ Jan Iversen, “The Crisis of European Civilization”, in Mehdi Mozaffari (ed.), *Globalization and Civilizations* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.152-54.
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 160.
- ⁹ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press & Thames and Hudson, 1995).
- ¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975), chapter eight, p. 222. In the same chapter, the reader will find Arendt’s brilliant analyses on differences between Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism, pp. 222-302.

¹¹ Walter Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (London: Penguin Books, 1982); George L. Moss, *Masses and Man* (New York: H. Fertig, 1980); Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-45* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹² Giovanni Gentile, *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism* (London: Transaction, 2002), p.2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁵ Renzo De Felice, *Interpretation of Fascism* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 175.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gino Cerbella, *Fascismo E Islamismo* (Tripoli: Maggi, Stampatore Editore, 1938-XVI).

Quotations are translated from Italian into English by Tina Maggaard.

¹⁸ Roger Griffin (note 7).

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 167-68.

²⁰ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harvest Book, 1936), p. 203.

²¹ At the end of World War I, only few Muslim countries were independent, and many of them were still colonised. Therefore, the word 'Muslims' refers to those Muslims, primarily of Sunni obedience, who took an active part in political activities, often with religious convictions and motivations.

²² It is also likely that *Istanbul* is derived from *eis tên polin*, which means 'going to the City'.

²³ Rashid Rida, *Al-Khalâfat aw al-Imaâmat al-Uzma*, translated by Henri Laoust into French; see *Le Califat dans la doctrine de Rashid Rida* (Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1986), p.116.

²⁴ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp.70-1.

²⁵ Hasan al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasâ'I al-Imam al-Shahid: Hasan al-Banna* (Cairo: Dâr al-Tawzi' wal Nashr el-Islâmiyya, 1992), pp.99-100. / *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna*, translated by Charles Wendel (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), pp.22-4.

²⁶ Alan Palmer, *The Decline and the Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (London: John Murray, 1992), p. 266.

²⁷ Quoted by Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 232.

²⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, a front figure of the Hanbali School, is a prolific author whose main political ideas are formulated in his work: *Siyâsa al-Shar'îyya* [Religious Politics]. This book has been translated into French by Henri Laoust, see *Le Traité de droit public d'Ibn Taimîya* (Beirut: Institut Français de Damas, 1948). Muhammad Abdul Wahhab, also from the Hanbali School, is the founder of the Wahhabiyya-movement. His treaty: *Kitâb al-Tawhid* [The Book of Unicity] (Paris:Al-Qalam, 2001) represents the leading theoretical work of Wahhabiyya.

²⁹ See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006) and Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

³⁰ Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 116-28. Also see Bassam Tibi, "The Totalitarianism of jihadist Islamism and its Challenge to Europe and to Islam", pp. 35-54 as well as Hendrik Hansen and Peter Kainz, 'Radical Islamism and Totalitarian ideology: A Comparaison of Sayyid Qutb's Islamism with Marxism and national Socialism', both in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion*, Vol. 8, issue 1, March 2007, pp.55-76.